



Fairness in Green Health

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 There is a direct link between people's good health and their level of interaction with the natural environment. Green and blue spaces, including parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, wetlands, heathlands, coastlands, street trees, road verges, rivers, canals, allotments and private gardens not only define and shape the character of a place but also deliver multiple benefits for biodiversity ecosystem services, climate change, resilience, improving air and water quality, local food production, social interaction, cohesion and creative play and mental and physical health and well-being.
- 1.2 Epidemiological studies have shown that access to greenspace encourages increased physical activity, lowers rates of obesity and morbidity, lowers stress and blood pressure, helps concentration and cognitive development in children and patient recuperation is reported to be improved when vegetation is visible (Swansea Central Area – Regenerating Our City for Wellbeing and Wildlife).
- 1.3 A Healthier Wales' is a policy developed by Welsh Government in June 2018. It is the Welsh Government's response to a Parliamentary Review of the 'Long-Term Future of Health and Social Care, A Revolution from Within: Transforming Health and Care in Wales'. The Review's remit was to make recommendations on how Health and Social Care services might be realigned to manage current and future demands. It seeks to shift services out of hospital and into communities and support people to live healthy, happy lives, ensuring they stay well at home.
- 1.4 The concept of Green Health within this context is supported by organisations such as Green Health Wales – launched in June 2021 to equip people working in the Health and Social Care sector in Wales with the tools and knowledge to transform health care to be climate smart and environmentally

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sustainable. Greenspace projects include assisting patients and the wider community with their local greenspace to benefit their health

- 1.5 Swansea has high levels of health inequality. Public Health Wales have estimated that the gap in the life expectancy of males between the most and least deprived fifth is about 12 years. The gap in healthy life expectancy is even greater, at nearly 23 years. People living in deprived areas not only die sooner, but are also more likely to have a poorer quality of life and are more likely to live with disability or a life limiting condition.
- 1.6 Deprived communities often have less, or more barriers to accessing good quality green space. People on lower incomes may not have a garden or may struggle to access the countryside, coastline or other natural spaces due to barriers such as lack or cost of transport. Studies such as Urban Green Space Interventions and Health: A Review of Impacts and Effectiveness, WHO (2017) and research commissioned by the Wildlife Trusts have shown that interventions to increase or improve urban green space can deliver positive health, social and environmental outcomes for all population groups but particularly among lower socioeconomic status groups.

Existing Policies to support Green Health – Why have a Fairness in Green Health Policy ?

- 1.6. A Fairness in Green Health Policy is needed is to bring together existing Council policies and activities under a single policy statement and to provide greater clarity and focus in order to improve and increase opportunities for people to benefit from contact with nature and reduce health inequalities. The Policy will aim to bring together the Council's approach to tackling the climate and nature emergency with the Council's approach to tackling poverty.

The Council has recently adopted a new corporate priority for maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural environment and biodiversity. This includes an ambition for everyone in Swansea to have access to and to benefit from an ecologically diverse, attractive, well managed and resilient natural environment. One of the longer-term challenges this well-being objective will help address is to:

'Reduce inequalities in health and well-being by maintaining and enhancing a high quality and accessible natural environment across the whole county, and encouraging greater use of public access land such as parks, nature reserves, commons and forests'

- 1.7 The Council has committed to a number of actions including;
 - Working with partners to develop and deliver a Green Infrastructure Strategy for Swansea,
 - Developing and adopting a Council tree policy,

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- Beginning to map existing Green Infrastructure assets and ecosystem service provision and identify areas which provide the best opportunities for improvement,
- Working with partners to develop and implement opportunities to enhance biodiversity and improve ecological connectivity,
- Supporting initiatives that will increase Swansea's urban tree cover,
- Improving awareness and understanding of our natural environment through provision of information, training and events,
- Providing opportunities for schoolchildren to access and learn about their natural environment,
- Working towards improving access to and maintaining the quality of our parks and greenspaces,
- Continuing to deliver a programme of wildflower planting and management,
- Engaging with local communities to encourage volunteering and to support them taking action to enhance and maintain their local greenspaces and wildlife sites,
- Undertaking (selected or targeted) enhancements to greenspace as part of an environmental works programme to meet our commitment to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard,
- Undertaking a range of actions to improve air and water quality.

1.8 In addition to this new Corporate Objective there are a number of other emerging policies and strategies that will contribute to delivering the Fairness in Green Health Policy. These include the Nature Recovery Action Plan, Swansea Central Area: Regenerating Our City for Wellbeing and Wildlife, , , Supplementary Planning Guidance on Biodiversity, and the Residential Developers Guide, and the development of a County Wide GI Strategy..

1.9 Tackling Poverty is one of the priorities in the Corporate Plan. The Swansea Tackling Poverty Policy states that in delivering this objective:

“The Council will work towards ensuring that people are supported to live healthy lives.” Swansea Council's Prevention Strategy aims to intervene earlier in order to support people at greatest risk, change behaviours and prevent the need for costly specialist services, often with a long-term support programme.”

1.10 The Council also has a community leadership role to develop green health fairness through the implementation of Swansea's Local Well-Being Plan and participation in Phase VII of the Healthy Cities programme. The Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 also provides a framework and impetus to develop a green fairness policy

1.11 One of the key anticipated outcomes of Swansea's Local Well-Being Plan is to ensure that people are healthy, safe and independent. The assessment of well-being identified the following as a primary driver:

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- to ensure that people live well and age well is to ensure that people have the greatest possible level of health and well-being

and a number of secondary drivers:

- key health and well-being messages are identified, targeted and promoted,
- every citizen has access to health and well-being opportunities,
- that environments that encourage health and well-being are created and sustained.

1.12 Another key anticipated outcome of Swansea's Local Well-Being Plan is to improve health, enhance biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint. The assessment of well-being identified the following as a primary driver:

- the natural environment is managed to support health and well-being

and a number of secondary drivers:

- air quality is improved,
- everyone has access to green space,
- the water environment is managed and improved and flood risk is managed.

1.13 The Council approved a resolution to participate in Phase VII of the Healthy Cities programme at full Council in August 2019. One of the overarching goals for Phase VII is to:

- foster health and well-being for all and reducing health inequities.

One of the core themes for Phase VII of the programme is to:

- design urban places that improve health and well-being

It is anticipated that the Healthy City designation would be used to support the Public Service Board in its implementation of the agreed Local Well Being Plan through:

- Improving and embedding the relationship of access to green space and health, emphasising and equalising access to quality green environments.

1.14 The Well Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 brings together health and equality goals including;

- A healthier Wales. A society in which people's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood,

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- A more equal Wales. A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances,
- A more resilient Wales. A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience.

1.15 The Environment Act (Wales) 2016 is designed to ensure Wales's long term well-being and to enable current and future generations to benefit from a prosperous economy, a healthy and resilient environment and vibrant, cohesive communities. It positions Wales as a low carbon, green economy ready to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Under the Act the Council has an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the S6 duty). In meeting this duty the Council must also have regard to Section 7 which list of habitats and species of principal importance for Wales:

- State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR), published by Natural Resources Wales,
- South West Wales Area Statement covering all or part of the area in which the authority exercises its functions, published by Natural Resources Wales,
- Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales (NRAP).

1.16 A Fairness in Green Health Policy is not only needed to bring together existing policies and provide a single focal point, but also to inform and add value to existing Council policies and activities in order to reduce long term social, economic and health inequalities.

2. Definitions

2.1 Fairness in Green Health is about the provision of high quality green infrastructure and natural greenspace in deprived neighbourhoods to help improve well-being, increase biodiversity and resilience to climate change and reduce health inequalities.

Examples of activities to promote green fairness in areas of high deprivation include:

- Planting trees in streets and green spaces where feasible,
- Improving the quality of and access to nearby parks and wildlife areas/nature reserves,
- Encouraging soft instead of hard landscaping e.g. native hedgerows instead of fencing and maintaining verges (avoiding loss to parking spaces),
- Supporting Community Orchards,
- Using sustainable urban drainage systems reducing the urban heat island effect by using vegetation to create summer shading and cooling Lowering levels of air pollution,

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- Increasing the availability of community growing space,
- Developing more spaces, infrastructure and opportunities for natural play,
- Supporting outdoor activities and learning eg nature walks, forest school, wildlife volunteering,
- Increasing biodiversity and ecological connectivity through habitat enhancement and creation.

2.2 Areas of High Deprivation are defined in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, which ranks Swansea LSOAs according to domains such as low income, poor health outcomes and poor physical environment. The WIMD will be used to prioritise neighbourhoods for interventions under this policy.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Swansea Council aims to:

- 1) Develop high quality multifunctional green infrastructure and natural greenspace in deprived areas,
- 2) Develop resilience to climate change and its impact in deprived areas through nature based solutions and interventions,
- 3) Promote improved access to green space to equalise access to high quality green environments in deprived communities to reduce health inequalities,
- 4) Assess all relevant incoming resources (e.g. tree donations; GI funding, etc) for its ability to be deployed to benefit deprived areas, and do so unless demonstrably impossible,
- 5) Further the aims of this policy by seeking collaboration with partners such as Welsh Water, developers or others whose work necessitating alterations to local infrastructure may offer opportunities to do so,
- 6) Apply a green fairness lens to strategic Council policy developments and decisions,
- 7) Collaborate with other stakeholders to develop and deliver an action plan to achieve the aims of the policy,
- 8) Use the WIMD and local knowledge to identify the locations across Swansea where health inequality, income and other forms of deprivation can be shown to co-exist with an absence of accessible and biodiverse green space,
- 9) To identify and map opportunities for improvement.

4. Action Plan and Monitoring

4.1 This policy will be implemented through a three year Action Plan, reviewed annually.