

**Written evidence submitted by The European Centre for Environment and Human Health,
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Prevention Inquiry Proposal: Green/blue infrastructure for prevention

The European Centre for Environment and Human Health conducts world-class research into the complex connections between the environment and health. Never before has the delicate balance between people's health and wellbeing and that of the planet come into such sharp focus. Our teams are pioneering interdisciplinary research to ensure local, national and global actions are better informed by the needs of both.

A primary research theme for the Centre is to develop our understanding of the benefits of green/blue infrastructure for public health and wellbeing, from parks to street trees to coastal paths. We are also the [WHO Collaborating Centre on Natural Environments and Health](#).

Note: we have purposefully selected below citations for work that we have led or been involved with.

Rationale for proposal

Evidence accumulated over the last 10-15 years shows that high quality green/blue infrastructure can be beneficial for multiple physical and mental health outcomes at population scale, particularly in terms of prevention.¹ This can take place through various mechanisms, including the promotion of physical activity,² psychological wellbeing³ and social connectedness.⁴ Additional preventive pathways arise through, for example, the mitigation of urban heat island and air pollution.⁵ There is also evidence that green/blue infrastructure is associated with the mitigation of socio-economic health inequalities.⁶

Timeliness

There are clear signals in the evidence for the preventive impacts of green/blue infrastructure, especially in urban areas. Linkages with other critical contemporary issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss mean that there are some substantial potential benefits and co-benefits for population health and the environment through protecting and improving green/blue infrastructure, in the UK and globally.

Why this area requires scrutiny

The evidence is accumulating rapidly, but is still relatively early-stage. And while there are clear opportunities, the robustness and extent of the evidence is quite variable. This has important implications for committing resources to future planning and management of blue/green infrastructure. Whilst the health benefits are to some extent intuitive, there is the potential for unintended consequences: for example, the exacerbation of health inequalities through implementation of environmental interventions where the benefits may accrue less for those with the greatest health needs.

Why the government needs to take action in this area

The need for preventive public health action and environmental protection has never been so great. Linking together issues related to our natural environments and population health presents an excellent opportunity for government action to deliver on multiple agendas simultaneously, in ways

that are likely to be cost-effective. This also gels with new and ongoing government work in this area, such as the new Green Infrastructure standards, Social Prescribing and the NHS Green Plan, which our evidence is helping to inform.

References

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3. White MP, Alcock I, Grellier J, et al. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Scientific Reports* 2019; **9**(1): 7730.
4. Cartwright BDS, White MP, Clitherow TJ. Nearby Nature 'Buffers' the Effect of Low Social Connectedness on Adult Subjective Wellbeing over the Last 7 Days. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2018; **15**(6).
5. Salmond JA, Tadaki M, Vardoulakis S, et al. Health and climate related ecosystem services provided by street trees in the urban environment. *Environ Health* 2016; **15**(1): S36.
6. Garrett JK, Clitherow TJ, White MP, Wheeler BW, Fleming LE. Coastal proximity and mental health among urban adults in England: The moderating effect of household income. *Health Place* 2019; **59**: 102200.

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