

# Nature as Cure - Using the Natural Environment to Improve Health and Well-being

**Professor Dan Osborn**

**UCL, Earth Sciences**

**- with advice from Caroline Jessel**

# This presentation is about:



- Value of Green and Blue spaces

- Health and Well-being

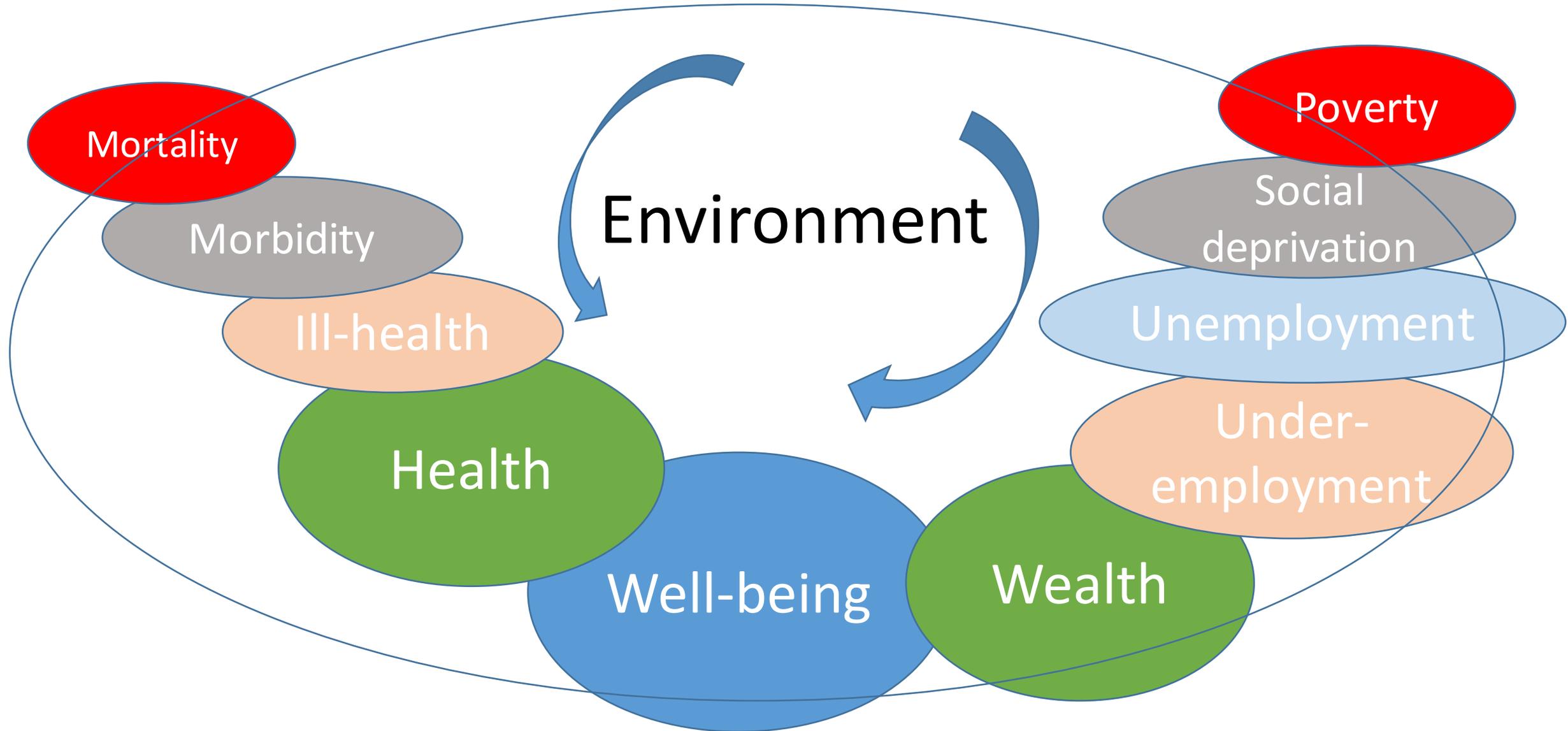


- Community-based approaches to deliver health and well-being through better use of green and blue spaces

# Well-being: a rising tide

- Health well-established in public policy, concerns and actions
- Health being joined by Well-being (Legatum Institute report March 2014 ) <http://www.li.com/programmes/the-commission-on-wellbeing-and-policy>
- Two perspectives: Pounds (£) and Pleasures vs Place and Purpose
- Well-being means different things to different groups of stakeholders
  - OECD: Part of a new vision of progress
  - UK: One new component of the national accounts (in near future)
  - ONS: Standard questions <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/well-being/index.html>

# Iterations: health, wealth and well-being



# Increasing Evidence on the Value of Nature

- **Green and blue spaces are highly valued**
  - Public reaction to proposed woodland sell-off
  - UK national ecosystem assessment (UK NEA) – coasts, woods, gardens
  - Systematic reviews from Depledge and Co (Exeter) et al
- **Green and blue space: a range of health benefits**
  - Many benefits similar to exercise but additional benefits to mental health and well-being – so more benefits than exercise alone
  - Benefits across age ranges
  - May be particular benefits associated with water (in other cultures sources of water are revered)

# What is already known to work – 1

## Sources of evidence – mostly health related

- Review by Exeter University for Natural Environment Research Council  
“A Dose of Nature”
- Review by Hartig T, Mitchell R, de Vries S and Frumkin H (2014)  
Nature and health. *Annual Review of Public Health* 35, 207-228
- A bridge between health and well-being: Felicity Thomas, Clive E. Sabel, Katherine Morton, Rosemary Hiscock, Michael H. Depledge (in press) Extended impacts of climate change on health and wellbeing  
*Environmental Science and Policy*

# What is already known to work – 2

## Limitations of existing knowledge and practice

- Green Prescription - physiological and psychological benefits for patients, **BUT** mechanisms not understood (findings not inconsistent with theories of well-being)
- Doctors are ready and willing to give such prescriptions, **BUT** effective partnership with other providers is required
- Ways in which different social groups and communities react to interactions with natural environment
- Green spaces in urban communities or the wider green spaces of the SDNP may have quite different effects on different communities
- In the UK NEA gardens had a not dissimilar value to coasts and woodlands and there are quite complex considerations of shared values needed when dealing with communities

# What works already – 3

## Findings and Knowledge needs

- Some good evidence from New Zealand – enduring effects over 12 month period
- Cost-effective in randomised controlled trial; reduces mortality, hypertension, pain (range of studies)
- Public health findings: communities closer to nature do better; evidence of improvements for those with mental health or chronic physical conditions ... proximity to water and to coasts may be especially valuable
- **BUT** more knowledge needed: dose-response, cause-effect and environmental quality information PLUS patient or community group follow-up for both well-being and health measures
- **More to discuss at workshop.....**

# Emerging findings on well-being – economic or hedonic view by itself is not enough

Carol D Ryff (2014) - Psychological Well-Being Revisited:  
Advances in the Science and Practice of Eudaimonia  
*Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 83, 10–28

- 6 factors: Purpose; Autonomy; Personal growth; Environmental mastery; Positive relationships; Self-acceptance
- Thus, a person's Well-being will struggle in abusive or violent situations or in the presence of poverty or social deprivation
- Emerging biosciences evidence that well-being fosters reductions in stress functions and balances immune responses.

# Emerging trends in UK evidence

- Urban Green Space: reduce stress, enhance social well-being, community cohesion -- Positive reasons outweigh negative ones
- Natural England/Lottery: Access to Nature programme – enhanced well-being in those engaged
- Mental health – oft reported improvements
- Challenges: Findings are often qualitative and non-clinical – underlines the importance of the physiological information Ryff has reviewed



# Common Themes in Health and Conservation practice

- Clear need for schemes that deliver on the ground good conservation and good health and well-being
- Plenty of approaches and methods
- Increasing evidence that nature as either “cure” or “improvement” works: some **systematic reviews**; some **randomised controlled trials**
- Still some lack of systematic approaches to understanding what is being achieved and how others can take up good practice

# Kent green space projects

As elsewhere, wide range of relatively small projects, all good in themselves

Figure 3: Types of activity provided by projects / services

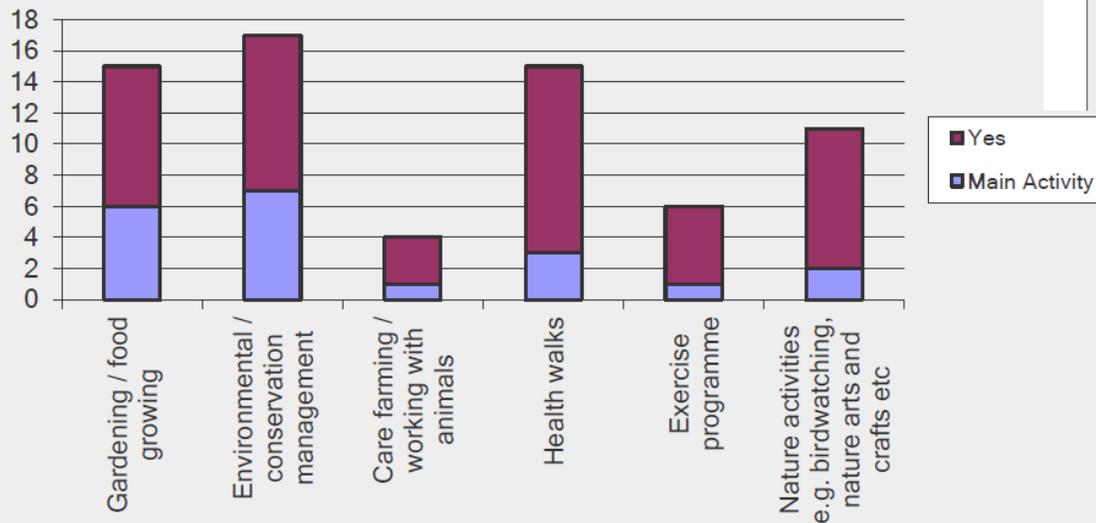
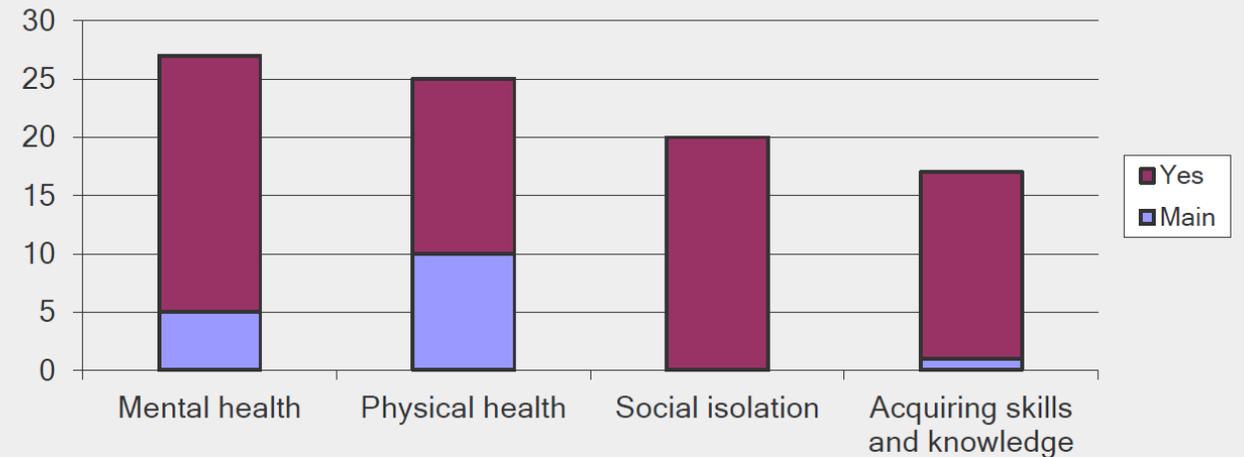


Figure 2: Main issues targeted by projects / services

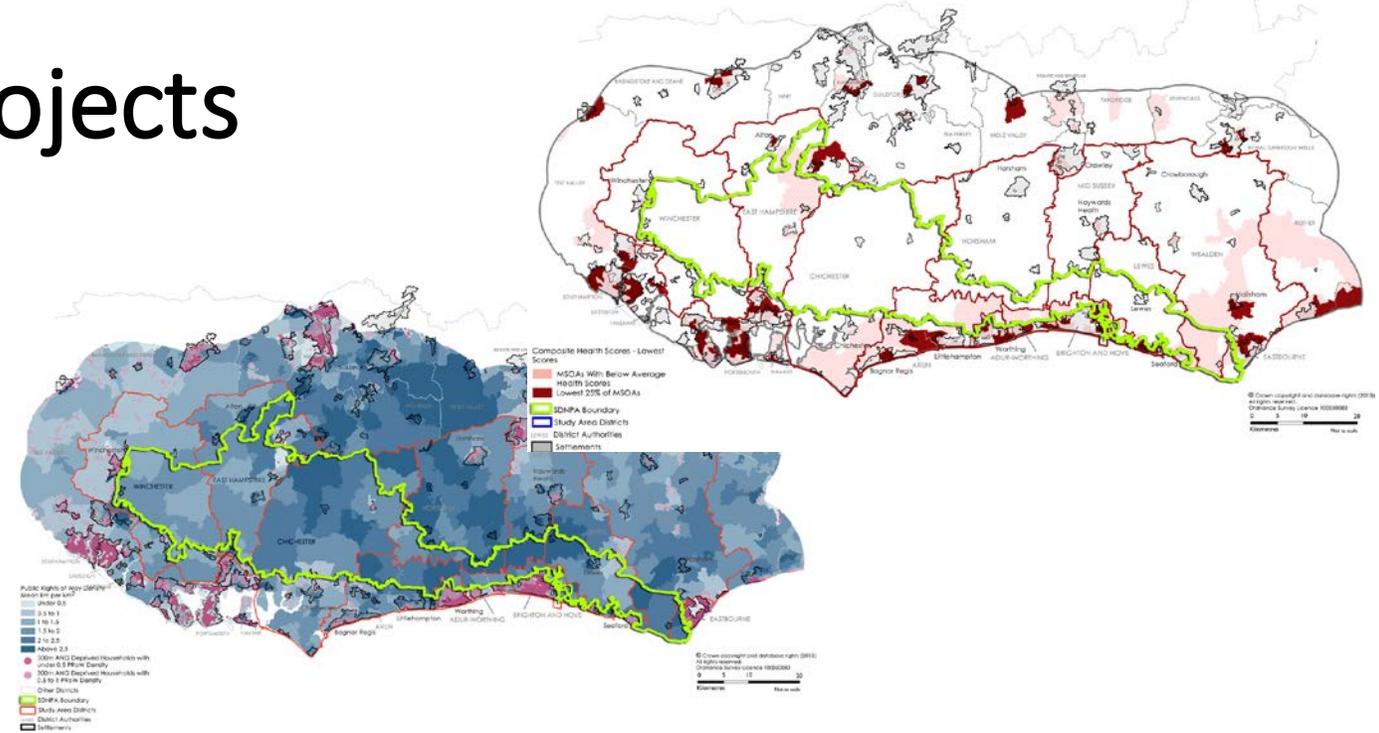


More consolidated analysis needed to help strengthen design, delivery and longer-term impact – so that funders provide and users benefit as much as possible!

# Sussex green space projects

## Sussex Towns and Villages – many small scale activities

Lewes as a Transition Town;  
Burgess Hill Green Circle;  
Brighton urban green spaces



## SDNPA and green spaces for health and well-being

Partners: South Downs National Park (main funders); Sussex Community Development Association; Action in Rural Sussex; Universities (Sussex; Brighton; UCL)

Activity: 2 pilots completed with different community groups; follow-up focus groups; Pilots in planning: East Sussex (14); West Sussex (2); East Brighton (1); Hampshire (1)

# Overall suggestions for NHS/PHE?

- NHS and PHE areas of responsibility are both involved
- Maximise patient, staff and visitor interaction with green and blue spaces
- Form partnerships between health groups, community groups, local authorities (including planners) and groups managing the available green space ( [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCPG019.pdf/\\$FILE/FCPG019.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCPG019.pdf/$FILE/FCPG019.pdf) )
- Engage developers to “green” new urban areas
- Engage LAs in greening of existing urban space (reverse the decline!)
- Embed interaction with nature in education to benefit young people (e.g. OPAL)
- Work to operationalise the links between green/blue space, health and well-being
- Help synthesise knowledge and best practice!

# Legatum Institute report (2014)

Final recommendation from Lord O'Donnell et al:

“We should measure wellbeing more often and do so comprehensively, making the data accessible. This would help governments improve policies, companies raise productivity, and people live more satisfying lives.”