

The IGNITION Project: Nature-Based Solutions for Health



**GREATER
MANCHESTER**
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

How nature can improve our health and wellbeing

Exposure to nature is scientifically proven to improve human health and wellbeing. Studies show that people living in greener areas are 24% more likely to achieve recommended levels of physical activity, and spending time in outdoor green spaces can reduce instances of depression by 7%.¹

The inclusion of nature-based solutions (NBS) in our built environment can increase accessibility to green spaces and create happier, healthier communities. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 re-emphasised the vital importance of good-quality green space for health and wellbeing, particularly in urban areas where these spaces are rarer. Those living in areas with less greenery are disproportionately represented by minority ethnic groups and those living in poverty, meaning these people will be the first to feel the negative effects of climate change.

As part of the IGNITION project, our team has created a **nature-based solutions evidence base**, collecting scientific and academic research to show how NBS can positively affect the health, biodiversity, climate and prosperity of our urban places.

Green space for physical exercise



Green space was shown to have a huge improvement on general physical health including diabetes, cholesterol and obesity levels, putting less strain on NHS services. Those that live within a mile of green space are 38% more likely to exercise than those living further away.

Green spaces such as parks, gardens and allotments were shown to:

- remove air pollution
- provide a space for physical exercise
- positively impact employees leading to a reduction in sick leave and greater employee retention

¹ IGNITION Nature-Based Solutions Evidence Base

Air quality

The UK regularly breaches legal limits for outdoor air quality which causes up to 36,000 deaths a year. Around 67% of the UK population are exposed to these high levels of pollution from road traffic and industrial emissions that exceed World Health Organisations guidelines. Poor air quality can induce minor symptoms such as headaches, colds, eye irritation or fatigue. In more serious cases, poor air quality leads to heart disease, strokes, respiratory disease, cancer and the exacerbation of asthma.

Vegetation is widely acknowledged to improve air quality by trapping pollutants on the plant's surface, absorbing pollutants and, in some cases, acting as a barrier to the spread of pollutants.

Improving mental health

Approximately one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. The IGNITION project evidence base showed that:

- green façades enhance human relaxation compared to normal building walls
- for every 1% increase in the proportion of green space near to the home, there is a 4% reduction in the number of anxiety/mood disorder treatment cases
- bird and plant diversity increases the wellbeing benefits from visiting green space and can lead to a reduction in anxiety, stress and depression



What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing is a way for GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services to benefit their health. Examples of social prescribing include volunteering, cookery classes, healthy eating advice, arts activities and befriending, but also spending time in nature, gardening and outdoor sports activities.

By recognising that health is determined by many different social, economic and environmental factors, social prescribing aims to address people's needs in a holistic way to improve their mental and physical wellbeing. It also allows medical professionals to empower individuals to take greater control of their own health.

Having access to green space in and around communities, schools, homes and workplaces makes it more likely that a person will exercise and benefit from the range of benefits that NBS can provide.

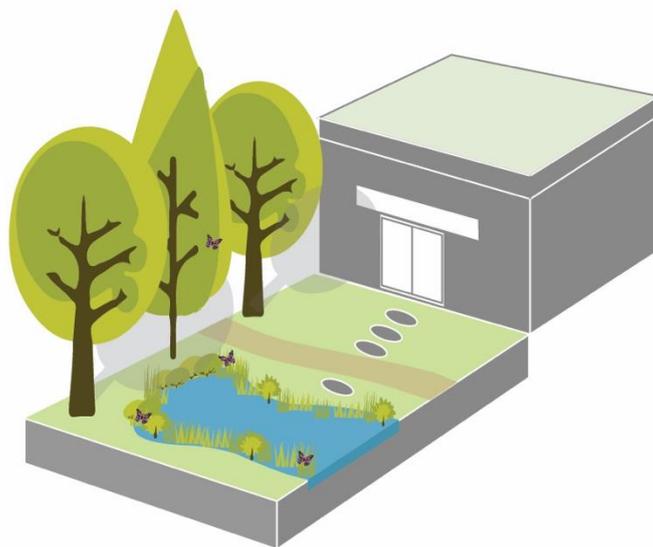


Diagram of building with a rain garden

