

PE1812/J

Rachel McLean submission of 20 November 2020

The petition references: The National Planning Framework 4 which has six high level outcomes:

Including improving the health & wellbeing of people living in Scotland;

The protection of ancient woodland has a significant role to play in improving the health and wellbeing of people living in Scotland.

We are becoming increasingly aware that being outside in Green healthy spaces has a positive impact on wellbeing.

“A two-hour dose of nature a week significantly boosts health and wellbeing research suggests, even if you simply sit and enjoy the peace.....interviews with 20,000 people in England.....those who spent little or no time in nature, a quarter reported poor mental health and said they were not satisfied with their life” Guardian, June 13 2019

There is mounting empirical evidence to show how being in “nature” can promote well-being, increase physical activity and help us to be more spiritually connected. Scotland’s remaining ancient woodland represents an irreplaceable part of the natural world, one that allows us to connect with living organisms which have existed well beyond our lifespans. Being in the presence of ancient woodland provides an important connection for people to the lives of all creatures on earth, where established ecosystems can give us a glimpse of how the world can look with less human development. These small pockets of woodlands are assets that belong to all the people of Scotland to benefit from either through walking in them or in preserving the bio diversity vital for public health within them.

In Scotland we are facing mounting pressure on services in mental health, health and well-being with health inequalities blighting many communities. Two salient areas are suicide and obesity: issues no doubt to be exacerbated by the current Covid Crisis, itself directly linked to the destruction of nature.

There were [784 suicides in Scotland 2018](#).

My local paper the Greenock telegraph reported in Dec 2018 that Inverclyde has a rate of suicide above the national average. Inverclyde is surrounded by amazing greenspaces including the Muirshiel national park. However, we know that within Inverclyde:

“89% of people live within 10 mins walking distance to the nearest greenspace, but of residents living within our 20% most deprived communities half never access greenspace”.

Inverclyde Strategic Needs Assessment 2017

There is mounting evidence to support the positive impact that engaging with nature can have on our sense of selves, in a Scotland where suicide rates are rising not falling, the destruction of nature, of ancient habitats, the squeezing out of natural environments for development which may or may not include new greenspaces has the potential to deepen the mental health crisis in Scotland. Whilst the destruction of fragments of ancient woodland cannot be shown to be a direct cause of poor mental health in individuals across Scotland, their preservation; protection and restoration can be used as a tool to promote the health and well-being of all of us. These natural resources are extremely cost effective as a means of promoting mental health, with good planning communities can be supported to engage with areas of ancient woodland in ways that promote health and conserve and protect the environment.

Social isolation, loneliness, alienation and stress are common across the population many of these conditions are reflective of the ways that we are living our lives-we are cut off from each other but also from the natural world, when we are able to tap into the natural world it provides a mechanism to reflect on our own life-to attach meaning to it. The smaller these spaces become the more difficult it becomes for communities to connect.

Obesity levels in **Scotland** are among the highest of the OECD countries. ... The [most recent NHS statistics](#) show that 22.4% of primary one pupils in **Scotland** are at risk of **overweight** or **obesity**, this rate has remained fairly constant since 2001/02.

Across the population we are struggling to feed ourselves, access healthy food on the budgets we have and our lifestyles and working patterns mean we are becoming increasingly sedentary;

The [woodland trust](#) has a proven track record of showing how woods can be used by communities to improve health, urge policy makers to:

Recognise the savings to the public purse that can be achieved by using wooded green space as a preventative health care tool. This is particularly critical in the design of new built developments. This should be complemented by increased resources to encourage active and healthy lifestyles through visits to woods close to where people live.

Our ancient woodlands can be utilized to not only protect the mental health of the population but also to support people to improve their physical health. Ancient woodland needs to be a properly managed resource-protected and restored with Environmental

Impact Assessments being essential as means by which to support the public to use the spaces in harmony with the needs of the environment.

By legislating to protect ancient woodland ahead of COP 26 the Scottish parliament will be sending a strong message to the public that health and wellbeing is important, that ancient woodland should be preserved and protected because it is at the heart of a natural system which is essential for human health and survival. Where we allow ancient woodland to be destroyed on a whim, for development, no matter what the stated development need, it can be described as an act of collective self-harm, as with the theory that not replacing a broken window can lead a neighborhood to degenerate, so can allowing our precious natural resources to be destroyed seep into our national consciousness, that our land and ourselves are not worth protecting. When so much of our natural habitat is lost it is important to maintain and restore what is left to offer hope-to promote pride.