Developing Scotland’s Natural Health Service – an example of innovative collaboration between the environment and health sectors in Scotland

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Since 2013 the Green Exercise Partnership has worked with a number of regional health boards across Scotland to demonstrate how to realise the health-promoting potential of the greenspace surrounding hospitals and other healthcare settings. The project has identified a set of key principles to guide site development and a range of issues that need to be addressed to mainstream the provision/improvement of accessible greenspace for a range of treatment and therapeutic purposes. Greenspace also has value for staff, visitors and the wider community and local partnerships have involved public and voluntary sector collaboration.

Building on the growing evidence base on the positive links between environment and public health, and the cross-sectoral links established through the NHS Greenspace project, Our Natural Health Service action programme aims to embed nature-based solutions into health sector policy and practice. Supported by both the health and environment portfolios in Scottish Government, the action programme seeks to achieve:

- increased public awareness and uptake of the benefits and opportunities to use the outdoors as part of their everyday lives

- use of nature-based health promotion initiatives and structured interventions routinely embraced by the Public Health and Health and Social Care sectors for prevention, care and supported self-management; and

- stronger recognition across key sectors of the shared responsibility for improving public health through prevention and early intervention.

A strong focus of activity will be on the areas of urban and rural Scotland that have low levels of physical activity and suffer from health inequalities and other aspects of disadvantage.