



ANNUAL REPORT YEAR 7

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
HIGHLAND GREEN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP
2024 - 2025



INTRODUCTION

Our Vision

‘By 2030, the natural environment will be valued as essential for the health & wellbeing of the people of Highland. We will work together to support individuals and communities to connect with and enjoy nature, while safeguarding our natural spaces and promoting inclusion’

Think Health Think Nature is the public-facing work programme of the multi-agency Highland Green Health Partnership. Our aim is to encourage more use of the outdoors to tackle physical inactivity, mental health issues and health inequalities. In September 2023, the Highland Green Health Partnership met to agree a new Sustainability Action Plan aimed at ensuring the integration and continuation of Green Health initiatives in Highland beyond the initial pilot period 2019-2023.

The plan sets out the priorities for the partnership in the years ahead across four main themes:

Theme 1 - Building Capacity, Skills and Understanding

Theme 2 - Adding Value Through Collaborative Working

Theme 3 - Embedding & Integrating

Theme 4 - Sustainable Funding

The following report presents progress in the period September 2024 to end September 2025. The action plan can be viewed [here](#)

BUILDING CAPACITY, SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING

Action: Build on the guidance and support available to community groups, link workers and health practitioners

Advice and Guidance Resources

As part of Public Health's Health Improvement Team, the Health Improvement Resource Service provide access to a range of health improvement-related materials to people living in Highland and for use by health professionals. Think Health Think Nature materials are available to order for free through this service. Below is the total number of resources accessed in the last year:

Our Natural Health Service Leaflet 87

Tree ID 120

Shells ID 110

Birds ID 118

Health Walk Journal 118

Nature Apps 80

THTN Postcard 120

Highland Nature Prescription 5

Caithness Nature Prescription 7

Almanac 230



Resources continue to be of value and are well used. Some printed material will be discontinued and funding will be sought for a re-run of those most popular resources.

Highland Nature Prescriptions Calendar

An RSPB Nature Prescription is a guided conversation between a healthcare professional and their client to encourage and support them to connect with the natural world to benefit their mental and physical wellbeing. Complementing other health interventions, this conversation is supported by a prescription leaflet and a seasonal calendar of ideas and suggestions to enable people to explore ways of connecting to nature that are personal and meaningful to them.

Following a successful trial in Caithness, Think Health Think Nature have worked in collaboration with RSPB in producing a Nature Prescription Calendar for all of Highland. These are available to order through the Health Improvement Resource Service. Online Seminars will be delivered early in 2026 and online training to support the role out of Nature Prescriptions is available on TURAS. You can access the [here](#).



TURAS Nature Prescription Training

Turas is available to non-NHS staff; anyone with an email address can access it.

- 103 learners accessed module in total
- 70 completed NHS Highland
- 22 In progress NHS Highland
- 1 completed NHS 24
- 1 In progress NHS Grampian

Of those that provided feedback, seventeen learners rated module 5 star, one learner 4 star and one learner 3 stars.

‘INTERESTING LOOK AT HOW NATURE CAN PLAY A ROLE IN YOUR WELLBEING’

‘EXCELLENT RESOURCE TO HELP OUR CLIENTS ENGAGE WITH NATURE’

Green Health Week 2025

Green Health Week took place 3rd -11th May 2025 with a theme of 'Nature is for Everyone' – celebrating diversity, and promoting equality of access by breaking down the barriers to participation.

70 events took place all across Highland and partners were encouraged to share the campaign through blogs, news articles and social media. The report can be found [here](#).



Case Studies

Qualitative case studies continue to be gathered and a selection of new case studies and personal stories have been added to our website [here](#)

The website

www.thinkhealththinknature.scot had 19248 views in period 2024 to 2025. This is an increase of 49% over the same period the previous year. The busiest month was June which received 3710 views.

Newsletter

The monthly e-newsletter has 271 subscribers; an increase of 48 subscribers (17%) over the same period last year and an average open rate of 79% each month.

Socials

Facebook has 1300 followers; an increase of 82 followers (6%); Instagram has 478 followers an of 36 followers (8%) increase over the previous year. Think Health Think Nature no longer has a presence on X.

GP Link Workers

A Community Link Worker is a member of the wider GP practice team that can provide support and advice on many social issues that may be affecting health and wellbeing. They have a wide range of knowledge on local services and community-based groups and activities. Think Health Think Nature have been working with Community Link workers to promote the use of our resources and to encourage consideration of referral into nature-based activities.

In 2024/2025 there were 1726 referrals into the service which is now available across 62 GP practices in Highland.

To read the annual progress report click [**here**](#)

Events and Presentations

Members of the Highland Green Health Partnership regularly present to groups, at public events and shared practice events throughout the year. Below is a summary of events attended in 2024/2025.

- New Craigs Summer Fete in August, highlighting the benefits of nature and the outdoors for positive mental health, reduced stress, relaxation and social connection.
- Mental Health Delivery Group
- Highland Biodiversity Conference
- Highland Climate Conference
- Highland Adapts
- Highland Community Partnership Conference
- Lochaber Community Partnership
- Ullapool High School Event



Highlife Highland Countryside Rangers

In-person engagements rose by 10% to a total of 13,031, reflecting sustained public interest in the work of our Ranger Service. Engagement with schools remained a core strength, with 3,775 children participating in curricular outdoor learning and nature experiences with the ranger service. Community learning saw particularly impressive growth, with engagement numbers rising from 5,382 to 8,109, a 51% increase, as more people accessed our workshops, events and outreach programmes focused on sustainability, climate action, and learning about nature and the environment. Volunteer involvement also rose significantly, with 861 engagements recorded, up 45% from the previous year's total of 593.

Our digital reach continued to expand through our "Nature Unveiled" online publication, which saw 91,653 digital engagements over the course of the year. This platform has provided a powerful tool for environmental education, storytelling, and widening public access to nature-based content relevant to the region. Two successful, grant-funded restoration projects were delivered with Highland Council support. 'Puddles to Ponds', a freshwater ecology project, gained international recognition at the 2024 International Freshwater Pond Conference. 'Food for Nature, Food for Life' (p12) focused on orchard tree planting and was well supported by schools and communities.

61% of customers reported that taking part in a ranger led activity improved their mental wellbeing and 57% said it improved physical activity.

Read the full annual report from the High Life Highland Rangers Service [here](#).

AWARD WINNING SERVICE



from L-R: John Orr, Countryside Ranger,, Imogen Furlong, Countryside Ranger Manager, Caroline Vawdry, Highland Environment Forum, and John West, Director of Culture and Learning, with the Green Apple Gold Award.

Wildflower Meadow Mosaic Project won the National Gold Award for Education and Training in Conservation and Wildlife at the 2024 Green Apple Environment Awards.

Cairngorms 2030 - People and Nature Thriving Together

2025 represents the 2nd of a 5-year delivery plan for the projects within this initiative. In the Public Health and the Outdoors strand of work, the Nature Prescriptions programme and Alzheimer Scotland's Outdoor Brain Health and Dementia Resource Centre, continue to deliver and expand their reach. Wider support for green health activities was provided in the form of bespoke training courses provided for local organisations around Fundraising and Risk Assessment. "Wee Wander" events for existing participants and new referrals were trialled during Green Health Week and 5 such events have been delivered since. An inclusive "Festival of Access" was held around Glenmore Lodge in September, featuring a range of taster sessions for outdoor and indoor nature activities.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

NHS Highland Environment and Sustainability Board

The Greenspace and Biodiversity strand of this work benefitted this year from some externally funded partnership work with SOLAS for Nature through the undertaking of additional biodiversity surveying. This will inform opportunities for strategic greenspace development to enhance biodiversity across our NHS sites.

NHS Highland partnered with Design HOPES and University of Strathclyde in an initiative to utilise NHS land for the growing of Flax to be harvested, processed and woven into linen for reusable medical gowns. An area of ground at New Craigs Hospital hosted this project which held dual aims of producing flax but also providing opportunities for staff to engage in a greenspace project for their health and wellbeing. The flax was harvested at the end of September, and transported for processing. Staff will be surveyed to explore reasons for engagement and non-engagement in the project.



Flax Growing at New Craigs Hospital, Inverness

Ullapool & Kinlochleven Stepping Stones Projects

Stepping Stones is a pilot project taking place in the communities of Ullapool & Kinlochleven. The project aims to trial community-led pathways into nature-based health & wellbeing activities to improve and maintain good mental health. With funding through the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme and the Adult Community Mental Health Fund, two Green Health Coordinators have been appointed to deliver the project, one in each of the areas. Ullapool focusing on families and young children while Kinlochleven focusing on those 18+. Kinlochleven commenced in May 2025, and Ullapool in August 2005.

Kinlochleven

The Stepping Stones project in Kinlochleven has been funded through the adult community mental health fund which allowed the appointment of a project officer (Lucy) for one year, 21 hours per week. Lucy started in May 2025 and in her time she has worked with over 70 participants on mental health and wellbeing projects in the village. She has also trained activity providers in mental health skills, suicide intervention, the use of nature in mental health; and generated 7 new health walk volunteers. Through collaboration with UHI, Lucy has been trained in interview skills. The research project has gone through ethics and she is about to start the evaluation part of the project.

The project is on track to meet its original aims which are:

- Improved mental wellbeing of participants
- Improved confidence and resilience of participants
- Improved knowledge and understanding of mental health
- Better community cohesion
- More effective identification of those in need
- Early identification of issues and signposting to support

You can follow the project newsletters [here](#).

Ullapool

Funding was secured through the Whole Family Wellbeing programme for a two year collaborative project between NHS Highland and the Lochbroom & Ullapool Community Trust (LUCT). Kirsten, Green Health Coordinator was employed and took up her post in August 2025.

A wide range of partners and green health providers were identified and engaged with the project during development including Highlife Highland Countryside Rangers, An Talla Solais, Kindercroft, West Edge, Highlife Highland Youth Service, Highlife Highland Active Schools and Seafu.

Since coming into post Kirsten has been working hard to connect with all partners, allied professionals and attending existing networks such as the Ullapool Youth Forum, Ullapool Wellbeing Forum, and has attended various community events and meetings to promote the project and establish key relationships.

In this reporting period the project has supported An Talla Solais with an Art Week Family Session and two local ranger events. Development of Forest Family sessions with Kinder Croft have included supporting referrals from both the health visitor and nursery staff, enabling families set to gain the most benefit from the sessions to participate, this shows the value of community pathways at an early stage in the project.

Kirsten has set up a project [Facebook page](#) where you can follow progress.

Work has begun with UHI and we are compiling a list of evaluation tools that local groups use currently to ascertain what we may include in our framework and tool kit for project evaluation that we can share with others. Kirsten has also been trained in interviews skills and will shortly commence evaluating project impact.



Families at Kinder Croft taking part in nature-based activities

Evaluation with UHI

Work has begun with UHI to develop suitable evaluation tools, to develop interview questions and techniques and to train the project staff in the delivery of interviews and write-up. It is envisaged that the findings from both projects will be used to develop guidance to empower other communities to deliver community-led pathways into nature based activity.

- The main focus of the research is to evaluate the community-led pathway and compare its effectiveness against existing healthcare led pathways. We also wish to find out if the project has:
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Improved confidence and resilience of the participants
- Improved community knowledge and understanding of mental health
- More effective identification of those in need and early intervention

Highlands & Islands Climate Hub

The Highlands & Islands Climate Hub supports a diverse range of members across Highland, Orkney and Shetland who are taking community led climate action. Invariably this community led work takes the form either directly or indirectly in supporting green health opportunities. In Highland specifically we have a membership of 383 community groups who are carrying out green health work in the form of community growing, managing community woodlands, active travel, nature and biodiversity conservation and taking care of the marine environment. These community organisations take a holistic approach with their communities, volunteers and staff benefiting from green and blue health opportunities.

Over 2025/26 the Hub has funded directly through our Climate Action Fund ten projects focused on green health through community growing, woodlands, active travel and marine environment. Through a partnership with Highland Council Community Regeneration Team and dispersing a higher grant level of up to £10,000 per project around the themes of sustainable and resilient communities the Hub was able to support a further 5 green health themed projects bringing a total of £46,275 additional funding for green health activities.

The Hub continues to support the Highland Charter for Climate, Nature and Health. Currently there are 51 individual signatories and 38 organisational signatories. The website <https://www.highlandcnh-charter.com> has received 2700 unique visitors in the last 12 months. Organisational signatories include The Highland Council and NHS Highland. Due to staff changes and changes in capacity the Hub has been unable to prioritise promotions of the Charter in 2025/26 however subject to business case approval by our Funders, Scottish Government in 2026/27 plans to increase promotion of the Charter through various outreach incentives and also provide follow up case studies to those organisations who have already signed.

Highland Environment Forum

The core work of the Forum is with Forum members. There are now more than 750 people who have joined, and get an e newsletter every 10 days. There is also social media promotion of this and other environmental action happening across Highland on two facebook pages, instagram and linkedin.

Correspondence with Forum members and others is both to promote their work, and to signpost people to information and opportunities.

During this year, the Forum has worked with the Highland Council to begin to look at establishing Local Nature Conservation Sites and Nature Networks across the Highlands, and it is anticipated that this work will continue and expand.

Work with the 45 Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) partners has been quieter during this year, but will increase when the Forum works with the Highland Council and Forum steering group members on coordinating and creating the next BAP during 2026.

On 7 March 2026 the Forum, in partnership with the Forum steering group (Highland Council, Scottish Forestry, High Life Highland, Cairngorms National Park and NatureScot) is holding the Highland Biodiversity Conference.

The Forum has been involved in several partnerships including the Highland Green Health Partnership. The Forum is often the only organisation dedicated to Nature action on these groups and so can play an important role in promoting the importance of Highland biodiversity - and the many valuable contributions made by forestry and woodland.

The Highland Environment forum focus is on the following activities, on behalf of its 45 BAP partners and membership of over 750, to:

- Foster and coordinate activity on environmental matters.
- Coordinate reporting on actions in the Highland BAP
- Take forward relevant actions identified in the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and be a valuable source of practical advice
- Identify, and respond to, emerging environmental agendas
- Provide a link between local groups and national strategies, action plans and reporting
- Raise awareness and promote good practice on environmental issues

Walking Scotland

After funding ended for the Think Nature Health Walks project in summer 2024, there was a loss in regional support and coordination for 32 groups delivering Health Walks across Highland. In January 2025, Walking Scotland (previously Paths for All) worked with partners within the Highland Green Health Partnership to reach out and reconnect with the Health Walk groups and offer support. As a result, five groups rejoined as members of the Scottish Health Walk Network to receive direct support from Walking Scotland. Alongside these, three other new Highland members joined, including one offering closed Health Walks for people recovering from drug or alcohol addictions, and another mental health charity.

Partnerships for Wellbeing, who coordinate a Health Walk project across the Inner Moray Firth, delivered 13 regular Health Walks in the region, including a newly established Health Walk at the Inverness campus suitable for all abilities. Walking Scotland and the Highland Green Health Partnership continued to reestablish links with groups running Health Walks in 25-26 to formalise support.

Partnership for Wellbeing



All Ability Walking Group

Working with Students

The Think Health Think Nature Team continue to engage with 3rd Year Medical Students from Aberdeen University taking part in Sustainable Medicine courses. This can be in the form of presentations, invitations to students to attend the partnership meetings and opportunities for short-term research projects.

Collaborative Research

Enabling Connections through Green and Creative Spaces

This project launched this year, with £98,200 of funding awarded from NHS Charities together 'Innovation Challenge' fund and is supported with £37,050 in match funding from Highland Health Board Endowment Funds Charity (SC016791). This work is being led by NHS Highland Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to deliver community-based interventions alongside third-sector partners, working in the Inverness and Lochaber localities. The aim is to support young people's mental health while addressing the growing health and healthcare inequalities that shape both their present and future wellbeing. The project focuses on helping young people connect with local green and creative spaces as a way of nurturing their wellbeing and building a sense of belonging. Nature-rich environments and creative communities will offer powerful opportunities for expression, exploration, and relational resilience. The project seeks to create opportunities for young people to build trusting, positive connections with peers, staff, and their wider community. Space2Be and Room 13, Nature4Health, The Ledge, and the Clay Studio are key partners and Katy Duncan is employed as a youth participation and engagement worker. Evaluation for the project is being led by Aberdeen University.

Guidance for Greenspace programmes supporting people with poor mental health and substance use

Wendy Masterton from Stirling University, who together with her team has developed best practice guidance on working with those with addiction and substance use issues on nature-based interventions for recovery. This is the culmination of several years of work and research funded by the Chief Scientist Office (CSO), and members of the Highland Green Health Partnership have been a part of the advisory panels together with several Green Health Service providers in Highland.

The team, largely based in the University of Stirling's Salvation Army Centre for Addiction Services and Research, but including representatives from UHIs Centre for Rural Health Sciences, is currently sharing the new resources with health and social care practitioners, through in-person and online events, one of which took place at UHI Centre for Physical Health in May 2025.



For more information about the project and to access the guidance documents click [here](#)

EMBEDDING & INTEGRATING

Mental Health Delivery Group (MHDG)

The MHDG is one of 5 thematic sub-groups of the Highland Community Planning Partnership (HCPP). The Highland Community Planning Partnership brings together public agencies, third sector organisations and other key community groups to work collaboratively with the people of Highland to deliver better outcomes. The overarching aim of this group is that all people in Highland will benefit from good health and wellbeing. The Highland Green Health Partnership provide feedback on progress to the Highland Community Partnership via this group, including indicators on the increased accessibility and engagement with greenspace activity. The rationale behind this includes the understanding that being in the natural environment is shown to have a positive impact on our mental health and wellbeing. More information on the MHDG can be found [here](#).

NHS Greenspace & Biodiversity Sub-Group

This group aims to bring together NHS colleagues and relevant community partners to explore ways of improving NHS greenspaces for people and nature. The objectives of the group include mapping NHS Highland greenspaces and current activity and identifying short and long term objectives for improvements.

Green Health Learning Network

Nationally a new Green Health Learning Network was formed and meets quarterly to provide an opportunity for shared learning across the different health board areas around Green Health. It is led by Public Health Scotland. If you or your organisation would like more information on the Green Health Learning Network or would like to join, please email PHS.healthyenvironments@phs.scot

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

In prior years the Highland Green Health Partnership has been supported through Our Natural Health Service a national programme of work delivered by NatureScot and supporting four partnerships across Scotland. This funding is no longer available. The role of coordinating officer has been integrated into NHS Highland Public Health Team and who continue to chair the partnership.

New avenues for funding have therefore had to be sought to continue the delivery of the work and those included in the report are:

- Whole Family Wellbeing Programme
- Adult Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund
- Chief Scientist Office
- NHS Charities Together Innovation Challenge
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- SOLAS for Nature
- Highland Council

In 2025/26 one of the key priorities for the partnership will be to secure private funding in the form of corporate social responsibility funds and a sub-group of the partnership will be working towards this.

ABOUT

The Highland Green Health Partnership partnership meets quarterly, and is chaired by the Head of Health Improvement within the NHS Highland Public Health Team. The workplan is coordinated by the Senior Development Officer for Green Health, employed through NHS Highland. The work has been funded through the Our Natural Health Service programme, led by NatureScot for an initial period of 5 years from 2018 – 2023. Although centralised funding has ceased, the partnership continues to meet with dedicated support from NHS Highland staff and is made up of the following organisations:

NHS Highland

NatureScot

High Life Highland

Highland Third Sector Interface

Walking Scotland (formerly Paths for All)

The University of the Highlands and Islands

The Cairngorms National Park Authority

Forestry and Land Scotland

The Highland Council

The Highland Environment Forum

The Highlands & Islands Climate Hub

For more information please visit:

www.thinkhealththiknature.scot