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**The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Nature**

**Inaugural General Meeting and Nature and Mental Health Event**

**Minutes of the Meeting**

**24 February 2020 – 15:00-17:00 – Thatcher Room (Portcullis House)**

**Attendees**

Parliamentarians: Barry Gardiner MP, Baroness Young of Old Scone, Baroness Parminter, David Lammy MP (present for the election of Officers), Saqib Bhatti MP (present for the election of Officers)

Secretariat: Jason Reeves (CIEEM Head of Policy and Communications), Amber Connett (CIEEM Policy and Communications Officer)

Guest speakers: Becky Fisher and Dominic Higgins, The Wildlife Trusts; Dr Miles Richardson, University of Derby; Dr Birgitta Gatersleben, University of Sussex.

External organisations: The event was attended by a range of external stakeholders, including ecological consultancies, NGOs and professional bodies. A full list of attendees is available on request.

**Apologies**

Kerry McCarthy MP, Caroline Lucas MP, Steve Double MP

**Welcome**

Barry Gardiner welcomed all to the meeting and thanked attendees.

**Election of Chair and Officers**

Barry Gardiner confirmed the meeting was quorate and the election of Officers for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Nature was completed.

Barry Gardiner MP was elected as Chair of the APPG for Nature.

The following were elected as Officers of the APPG for Nature:

* Caroline Lucas MP
* Kerry McCarthy MP
* Baroness Young of Old Scone
* Steve Double MP

**Introduction**

Jason Reeves outlined the background to the APPG for Nature, noting the group had been formed in 2019 but was automatically dissolved as a result of the General Election. He also discussed the structure of the APPG for Nature’s activities, which will include site visits, producing briefings and statements, and asking questions in Parliament. The group will hold four events or meetings per year, and where appropriate, will work in partnership with other APPGs.

The aims for the APPG are to provide a forum for engaging and inspiring parliamentarians and others with the natural world, the major threats that it faces today, and the positives that come from a healthy natural environment.

The Group has a clear focus to be effective beyond individual meetings and events and will seek to extend its influence wherever possible for the benefit of nature and people.

Jason noted that the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management will provide the Secretariat for the group and he outlined the availability of Associate Membership for external organisations.

**Suggestions for Future Meetings**

Barry asked attendees if they would like to put forward ideas on what the APPG for Nature should be focusing on and suggest future meeting topics.

Murray Davison, ALGE, highlighted the importance of engaging Local Authorities in discussions regarding the implementation of the 25-Year Environment Plan. He added it would be helpful to put a meeting with the Association of Local Government Ecologists on the agenda. Barry agreed and added that he could ask the Minister to attend. Dave Morris, BYC, added that it would be essential to have youth voices feed into this discussion.

Mark Prina, Halcyon Ecology, suggested rewilding should be the focus of an event and noted the opportunities in lowland England for set-aside of land, for example on the Sussex border. He added that this could be implemented as an extension of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty model. Phillipa Goodwin, RSPB, added that this should be linked to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy outlined in the Environment Bill.

Mike Pienkowski, UK Overseas Territories Forum noted that getting local people to look after the environment is another important topic linked to rewilding. Barry agreed and suggested a separate meeting for UK Overseas Territories.

Claire Wansbury, Atkins, raised the Environment Bill as a focus topic as it is currently going through Parliament. Baroness Barbara Young agreed adding that the group should think about the biodiversity net gain concept.

Professor Will Pope, Society for the Environment and Academic Health Science Networks, suggested an extension of this event would be to look at valuing mental health, for example, the cost to the NHS and quality of peoples’ lives.

Olivia Nelson, Open University, raised the issue of sustainable flood plains and recognising the role of grasslands. She suggested an event which could focus on climate solutions and involve site visits.

Steve Oram, PTES, raised that the National Planning Policy Framework is a key area and it is difficult to get local governments to apply wildlife related issues. He asked whether the APPG for Nature could be a vehicle to influence this.

Kit Stoner, Bat Conservation Trust, agreed that the interaction between nature and planning is key. Barry agreed that it is a critical area. It was noted that that biodiversity net gain opens both risk and opportunities.

Matthew Reizenstein, Shell, added that it would be useful for the group to consider how individual businesses are interacting with biodiversity net gain and how they can use resources to help communities to boost biodiversity and reduce carbon. Barry noted that the Transition Pathway Initiative is a framework for companies who want to be invested in by capital investments, however, they need to meet criteria. It was agreed that there is a need for a smooth transition where financial risks associated with investment are managed.

Baroness Kate Parminter noted there has been a lot of work on how companies can reduce carbon emissions, but less work has been done on how companies are working on biodiversity impacts, resource efficiency and duty of care.

Adam Dyster, National Trust, highlighted the importance of access to, and engagement with, nature and suggested this could be a focus topic for the APPG.

Robert McIlveen, Mineral Products Association, agreed with the earlier point that biodiversity and wider environmental net gain should be a focus.

**Nature and Mental Health Event**

Barry thanked all for their ideas and handed over to the guest speakers for the Nature and Mental Health portion of the event.

***Nature Memories Café: Nature and Dementia- a view from the Wildlife Trusts and implications for future provision,* Becky Fisher and Dominic Higgins**

This talk began by explaining the Wildlife Trust’s aim to bring people closer to nature and recognising that there is a social justice side of this work in addition to the and intrinsic value of nature.

Becky added that it is very possible to connect groups of people where they live and provide benefits for those participating, neighbourhood health and wider ecosystem health.

Nature Memories Café:

Becky provided an overview of a project she was involved in which set up a weekly café for people living with dementia and their carers. The café was set next to a nature reserve and offered nature-based crafts, cake and company.

The café was extremely beneficial to those who attended, providing a break for carers, relaxing activities and an activity to look forward to for patients. Patients and carers said it offered comfort.

Nature has tangible benefits for mental health, even just providing a natural view was important. Many with dementia still live in their homes and so these projects provide access to nature.

The Wildlife Trusts also support a wide range projects such as woodland play, traditional crafts, cooking and outdoor skills. Nature therapy is also provided for young people on a waiting list for therapy. This offers them a safe space.

Becky added there is a need to develop range of ways to access nature as nature reserves and urban greenspace not always accessible. This access will have a knock-on effect on others e.g. carers. However, these projects need to be properly resourced and a long-term plan as stopping a programme could reverse impacts.

Partnerships with local authorities and local health services are key to making these projects work.

Dominic noted that a spatial approach to natures recovery, for example through the Nature Recovery Network, could do the most for mental health and this topic should be included in debates.

Public money for public goods also provides an opportunity to improve mental health by considering the valuing mental health and access as a public good.

Dominic stated there is a need to flatten disparities in access. The NHS personalisation approach could be joined to nature prescriptions, however there is a need to focus on prevention.

It was noted that visitor behaviour is skewed and the biggest gains for mental health can be achieved in deprived areas.

Dominic finished the talk by adding that we should be working towards:

1. **Every day access to nature.** Everyone must have easy access to high quality natural places near to where they live, grow, work, play and age.
2. **Natural Health Promotion.** Investment in and better join up with, health services on preventative approaches to benefit both participant and resident.
3. **Nature-connected children.** Embed nature-based play and learning in our education system
4. **Nature on Prescription.** Structured nature-related activity to be available to everyone who would benefit from its therapeutic qualities.

***Improving Wellbeing through Nature Connectedness*, Professor Miles Richardson**

Miles began by noting that human’s relationship with nature has broken down.

He then explained that nature connectedness is different to simply visiting nature, it is a psychological construct which related to a person’s sense of their relationship with nature. It is measurable and there are developed ways to change it.

Higher nature connectedness has benefits for well-being, feeling good and functioning well e.g. personal growth, lower anxiety and pro-social behaviour. It is also linked to pro-environmental behaviours.

Natural England coordinated a project on connectedness which found that the average connectedness index score in the UK is 61/100. 47/100 means they don’t do anything for the natural environment - even recycling, while those who volunteer in nature, for example, get 76. Research has also shown a sharp dip in nature connectedness at ages 12-15.

Research on benefits of nature often focussed on visits not connectedness. Nature connectedness has a strong relationship with the feeling of a worthwhile life, which has been shown to be four times more than socioeconomic status.

Pro environmental behaviours are different to pro-conservation behaviours (resource use vs habitat creation/garden solutions for nature). Connectedness important for developing pro-conservation behaviours.

Nature connectedness can be improved through simple interventions and reaearchers are developing a framework for people to improve their own nature connectedness.

A key pathway is by noticing the good things in nature. Improving Well-Being through Urban Nature (IWUN) developed a smartphone app to prompt people to notice the natural world. A chat bot appears when near greenspace and asks if the person has noticed anything good in nature.

A trial was run on 582 adults and 42 adults with mental health issues. Results showed significant increases in mental health, sustained for a month. A clinical significance was also measured for those with mental health issues, along with an increase in nature connectedness. Those who spent the least time in nature benefitted the most.

Miles added that urban biodiversity really matters – more biodiversity equates to stronger positive emotions. Research has also shown that humans are good at guessing biodiversity levels and the variety of nature matters for their well-being.

Go Jauntly will be released this year as a free app which will incorporate the above features. There is also work being completed to allow organisations to design a framework for their own nature connectedness interventions. This is currently in use by National Trust, Department of Conservation in New Zealand and The Wildlife Trusts.

For example, pathways to nature connectedness informed the activities for the Wildlife Trust’s 30 Days Wild. This showed improvements in nature connectedness and behaviours for tracked participants. However, schemes need to be made attractive to those starting with lower connection to the environment.

There is a need to bring everyday opportunities to people and bring opportunities into populated areas. The five pathways should be developed across society through education. Green ‘connection’ prescriptions could also be used.

***The Importance of School Breaks in Natural Environments*, Dr Birgitta Gatersleben**

Birgitta started by recognising schools have an important role to play in nature, however school playgrounds are often not green, they are concrete.

She then provided three case studies of research into the benefits of short breaks in nature and incorporation of green areas into schools.

A series of studies in Sweden assessed the level of greenness and link to wellbeing in nursery schools. An assessment was made of playground policy and amount of greenness. Results showed that integration of green space resulted in more steps, reduced inattentive behaviours, leaner bodies and better sleep.

A study in the Netherland examined the effects of playground greening on wellbeing in junior schools (ages 7-11). Schools were able to apply for funding to green playgrounds and five were successful. Researchers measured children over three-year period.

Greened playgrounds were linked to improved preference, social wellbeing and interactions and physical activity of girls. Significant impact on attention. There was no immediate effect, but a year later there was a significant positive effect.

Birgitta conducted a study in the UK examining effect of rest after stress indoors or outdoors, alone, with friend or with phone. Participants were teenagers (aged 16-18) in college.

Participants were given a stressful task (presentation) then they were asked to to sit outside on their own or in a room and both with a friend. They were then given an attention task.

Results showed the most important thing for this age group is socialising. Attention scores improved more when they went outdoors, while positive mood only improved when they went outside with a friend. Results showed being outside does have a positive effect even if they don’t really like it.

Other studies have shown that even very short time periods (40 seconds) looking at a green roof can have beneficial effects and resulted in less attention fatigue.

Birgitta concluded that short breaks in nature are needed in schools, and even short passive engagement is positive. She recommended a pot of funding for schools to apply to in order to green school and all schools should be provided with natural visuals.

**Questions**

1. Baroness Kate Parminter asked whether the evidence base for social prescribing of nature is strong enough to convince the Treasury and others to invest in it, and whether there is a need for a coalition of academics and environmentalists to develop the evidence base.

Dominic responded noting that the evidence that nature on prescription works is available and scalable, however direct evidence of cash savings is not currently complete. Dominic noted that personalisation is already going ahead and there is potential to combine it with the NHS Health Check.

1. Barry expressed concern over a lack of causality in the evidence presented, for example results showing higher activity levels in green schools may correlate with parental choice and children with higher activity.

Miles provided a response to this question stating that the research very expensive but promising. He added that the need for evidence is a sign of disconnection in that we do not question whether birds need their habitat. It was noted, however, that quantification is important for investment.

1. Caroline Jessel noted that nature connectedness is key and there is no time to wait for all the evidence on benefits. She also asked whether there is any research on how the paradox of people who are connected in daily lives but equally have negative impact can change?

Miles informed the meeting that the research on pathways looked at this issues, including utilitarian and dominionistic pathways which were found to not link to nature connectedness. There is a clear need to rebalance other types of relationship.

1. Craig Llewellyn noted that not enough young people are getting outdoors and asked the speakers what their opinion is on mobile phones and their impact.

Birgitta responded stating the creation of a distinction between technology and nature and trying to stop young people from using them has not been helpful. She added that there is a need to find ways to integrate them but teach young people that they don’t always have to go together. Miles added that taking pictures of natural world can lead to higher connectedness.

1. Professor Will Pope, Society for the Environment, agreed that there is a need to demonstrate return on investment. He added that he is keen to take forward a programme on return for investment in nature and that there could also be benefits for young people on the edge of care. Will also asked why Sheffield was chosen for the Improving Well-being through Urban Nature App project.

Miles confirmed that it was a joint project with University of Sheffield and that was the reason it was conducted in Sheffield.

It was also noted that NHS Trusts are keen for evidence of avoided health costs and that evidence will come from small groups of high-quality research. Feasibility studies are already beginning on the effects on care.

1. It was noted that we should show ambition and that saying a few seconds is enough to provide benefits may discourage action needed to provide widespread benefits to nature.

Birgitta clarified that a 30-second view provided a detectable difference but larger scale nature recovery through the 25-year Environment Plan is needed to increase access to all and address large scale problems for both health and biodiversity.

Barry added that it is important that we also consider benefits for nature in all these situations and look at the wider issues

1. Laura Davidson, Natural History Museum, asked whether the presentations from the event could be circulated and whether there are standardised questions to measure nature connectedness.

Miles noted that there are published scales and questionnaires, including research by Natural England. Becky recommended using the questionnaire Miles has used.

**Close**

Barry noted that the meeting was lacking Parliamentarians and encouraged attendees to write to MPs as constituents to ask them to attend these events and tell them what the APPG for Nature is about. These events can then give Parliamentarians insights that they can then feed into legislation.

Barry and Jason thanked the speakers, attendees and Secretariat for a successful launch event. The meeting closed at 17:00.