

Our Environment, Our Health

How connecting to nature benefits health and wellbeing



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The NEAR Health project, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Health Service Executive under Grant Award No. 2015-HW-MS-2, supports the implementation of the EPA Strategic Plan 2016-2020 – ‘Our Environment, Our wellbeing’ and Healthy Ireland, the national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland.



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Overview

Context



Healthy Places



Nature benefits health and wellbeing



Stakeholders

Values, barriers, bridges



Co-creating futures



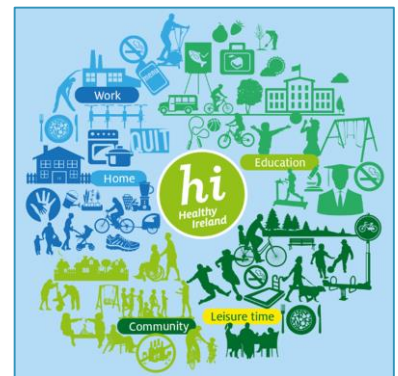
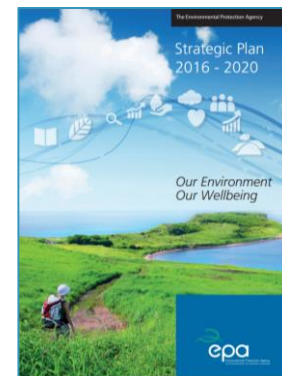
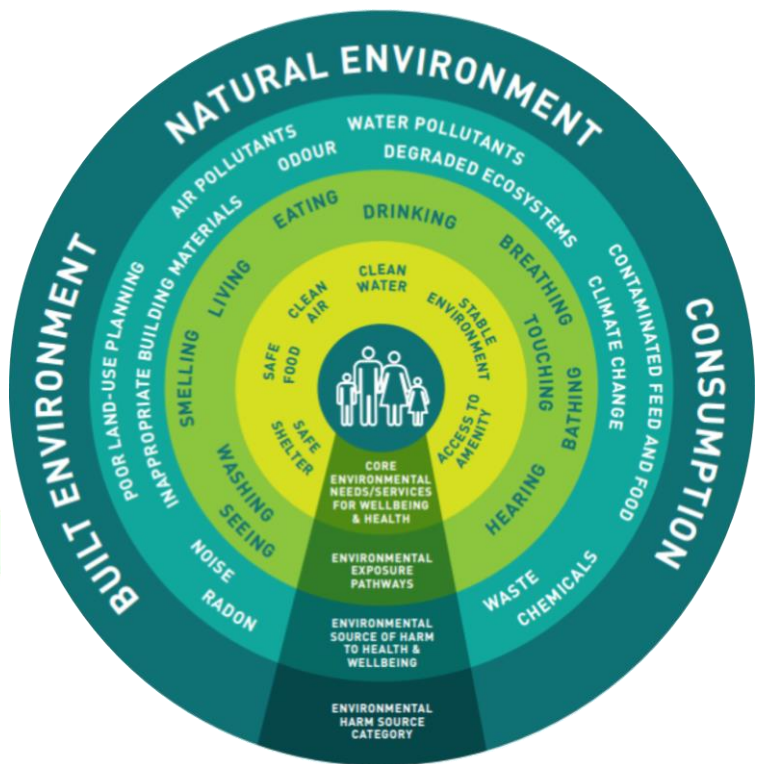
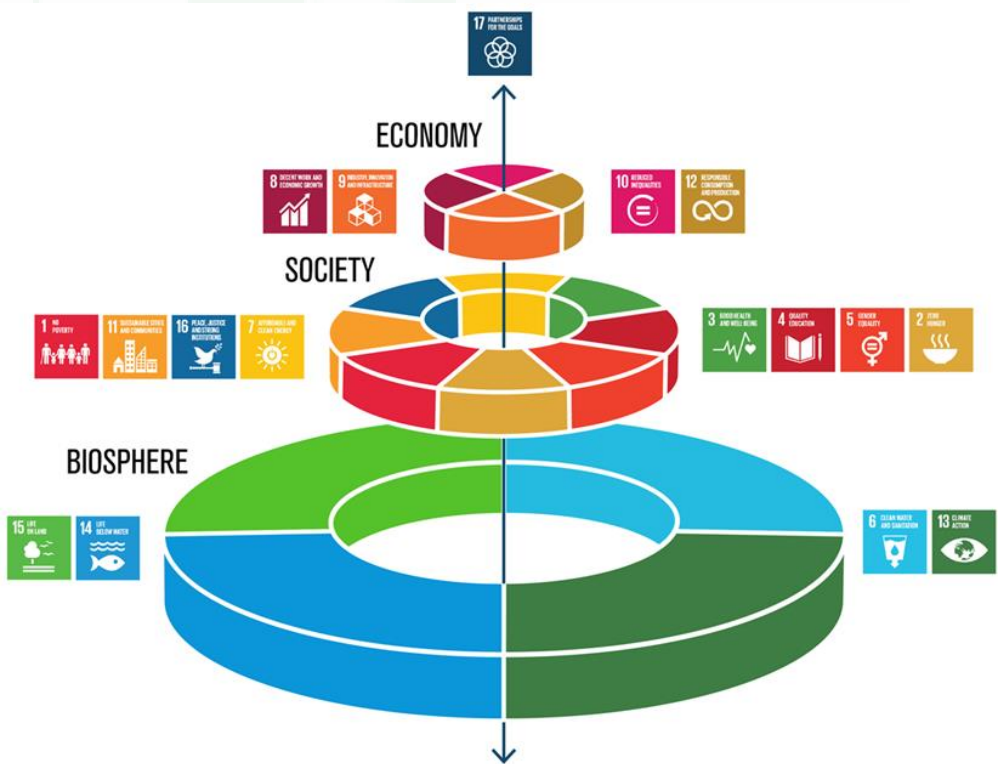
Nature Based Programmes: Co-designed assessments



Next steps



How are Environment and Health linked?



What is health?



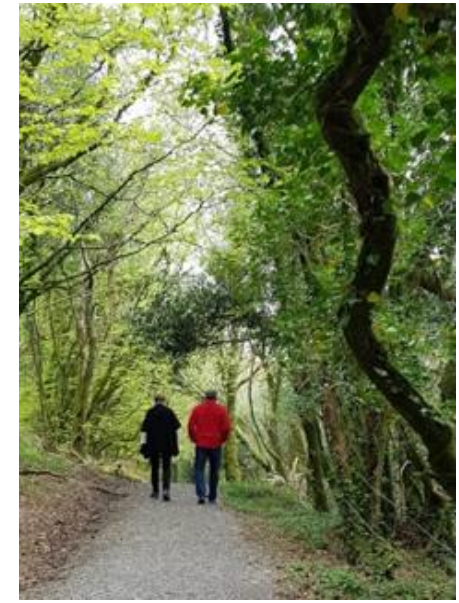
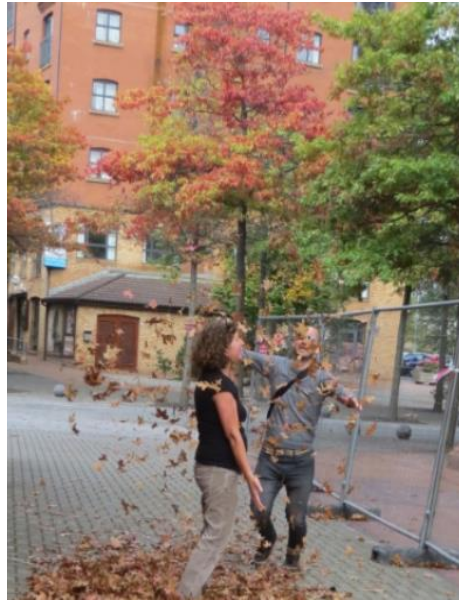
Complete
state of
physical,
mental
& social
wellbeing

DEFINED BY:
WORLD HEALTH
ORGANISATION

But defining what is nature is much harder..

What benefits do we get when we connect with Nature?





**How
and
where
do we
connect
with
nature?**

How we use outdoors and connect with nature changes as we progress through our life



How do we know nature benefits mental and physical health?



Reduced levels of obesity
in Spanish children
People feel better.



Healthier heart rates
Lower risk of poor mental
health. Improved stress
management.



Lower blood pressure
Reduced stress levels
Improved immune system (Japan)
Less type2 diabetes (UK, Australia)

Experimental studies demonstrate benefits of nature for mental and physical health



How do we know nearby nature promotes health throughout our lifespan?

Outcomes

- increased birth weight
- improved cognition
- reduced allergies in teens
- increased kindness
- restorative e.g dementia

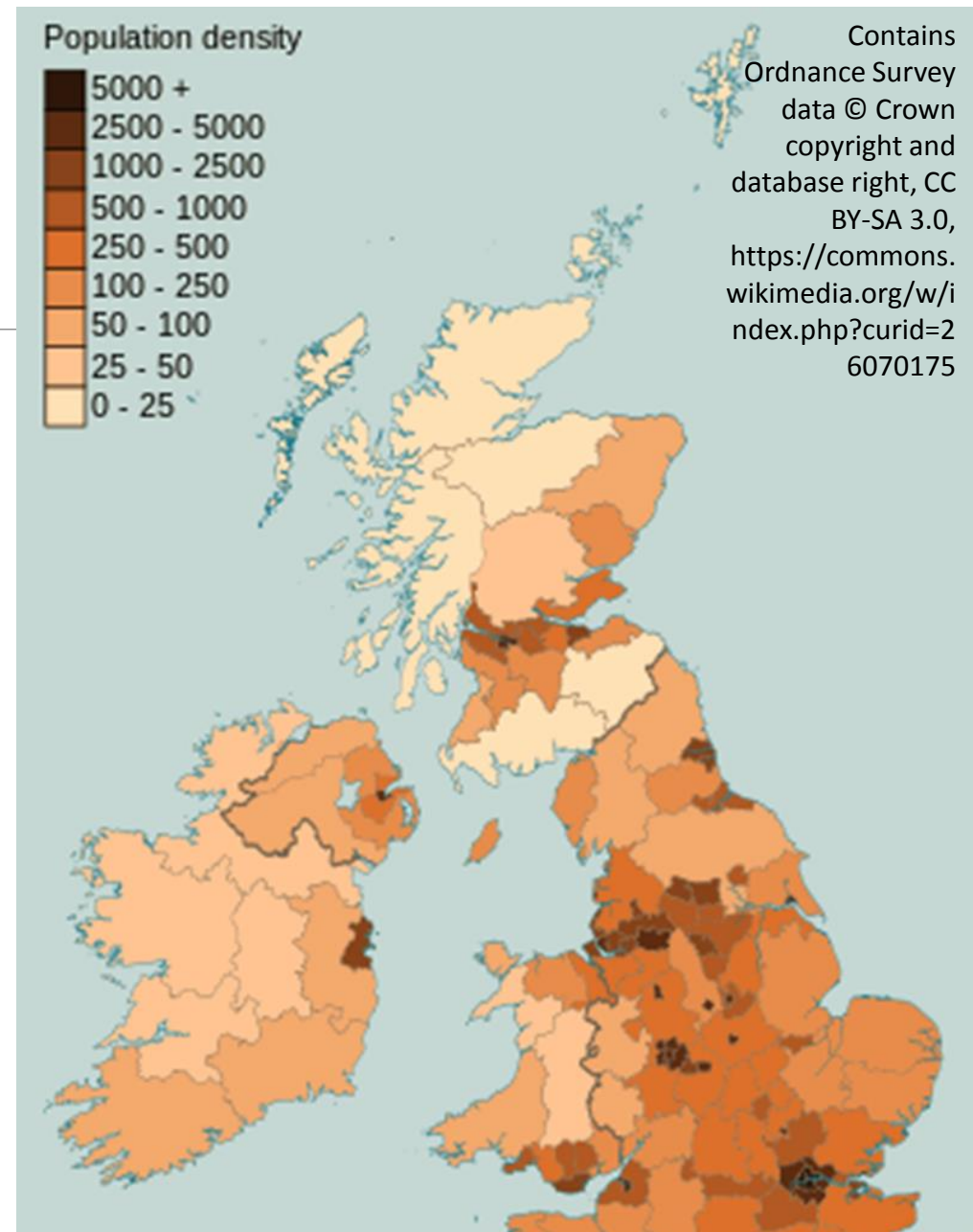


Influential factors

- proximity of spaces
- size and quality e.g. open spaces with old trees
- time/duration outside
- extent of vegetation around school, home, hospital
- safety (perceptions)

Irish pressures?

- Living longer but not always healthier lives
 - sedentary lifestyles
 - Increased risks of physical and mental health problems
- 60% population live within 10km of coast
- 13% Healthy Ireland survey respondents highlighted lack of open public space
- Increasing urbanisation
- Increasing rural and urban social isolation?





How does NEAR Health fit in?

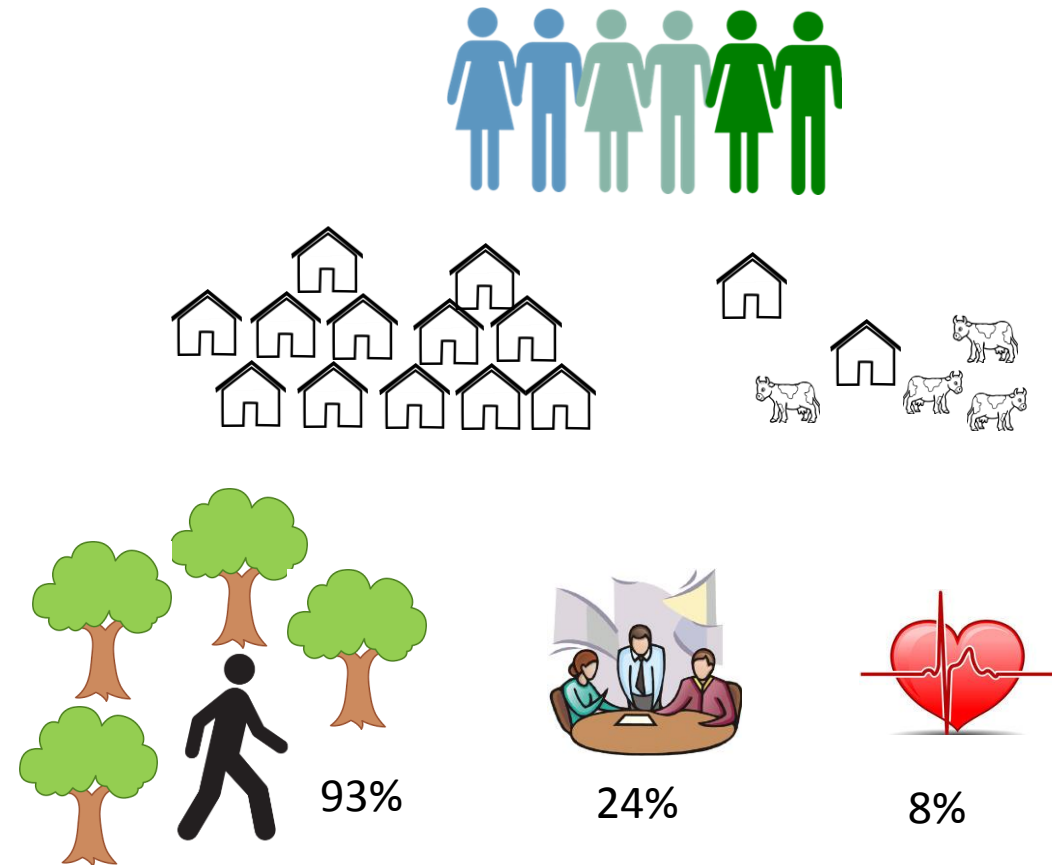
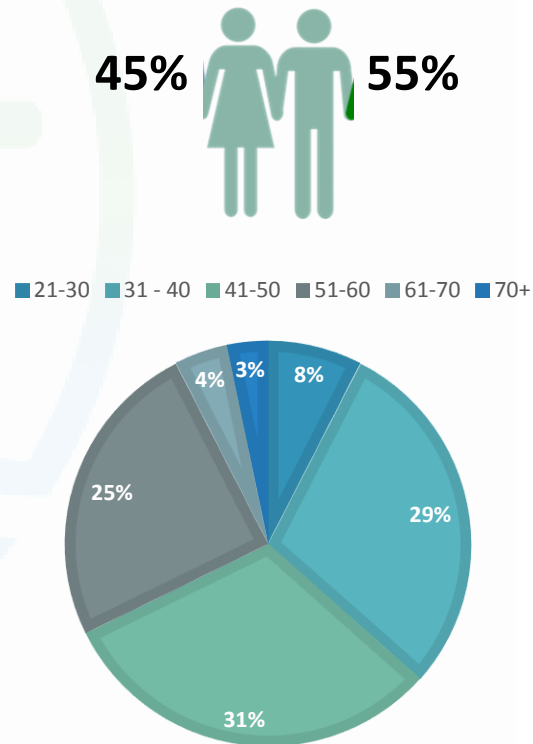
- combine elements of nature
- support us to live a life full of health and to contribute to society.





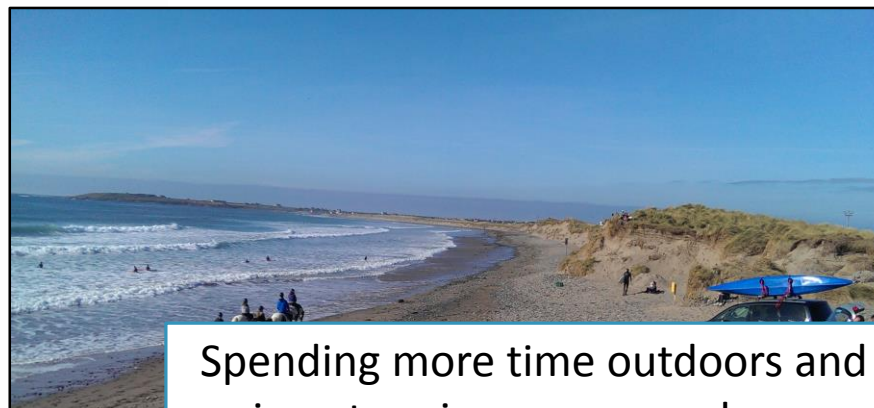
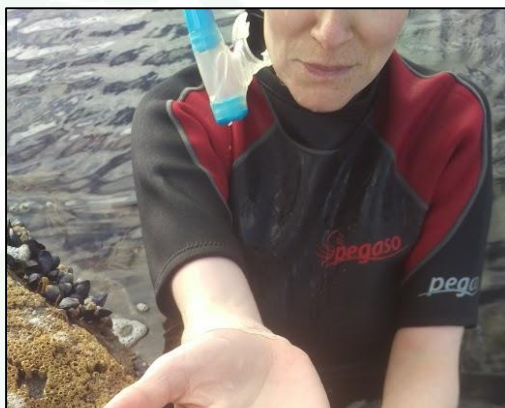
Who talked to us?

93 Semi-structured Interviews





What are their values & motivations?



The sound of the sea has a calming effect.

Spending more time outdoors and in nature improves my sleep.

I am aware that my mental health and wellbeing is tied to spending time in nature

I am happiest when I am outside.



I have a sense of belonging and attachment when I'm in nature.



Barriers?



Access to land can be a barrier in Ireland.



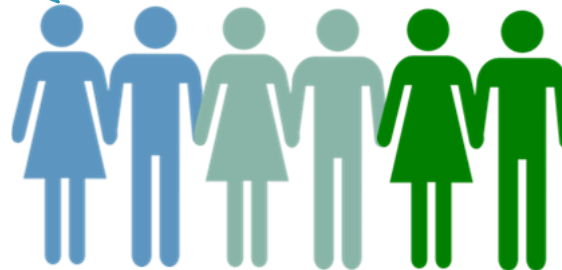
Weather can be a big deterrent for people to go outside.



Lack of time is always a big barrier.

Availability of transport can be a real problem for some to access nature.

People think that if you live in the city there is no nature.



People have become disconnected from nature

People can be afraid of nature

Not knowing how nature can be incorporated into daily life can be a barrier to engaging with it.



Bridges?



We need to show people what nature is around them and then they are more likely to want to keep and conserve it

Community events are key to engaging people in nature

It should be compulsory for children to take part in an outdoor activity

It is easy to access nature if you are in the city.

Having a group leader to lead an activity is really important to get people engaged with the outdoors

Peer support is key to engaging people in nature



We need more facilities for people to access nature

What would you like to do? Backcasting process



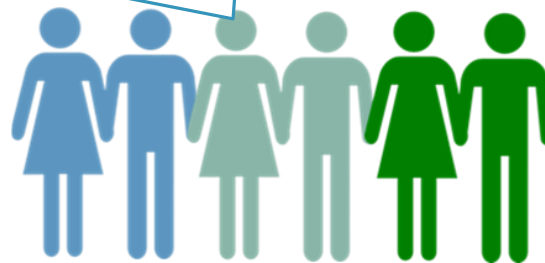
Envisage a healthy future space which attracts people to spend time and be healthy there



Prioritise the most essential features of the healthy future space



Identify drivers, events and timeline. Create action plan





What do communities identify as the strongest motivators to achieve their vision?



Education- community level



Policy or legislation change



Engagement- Individual level

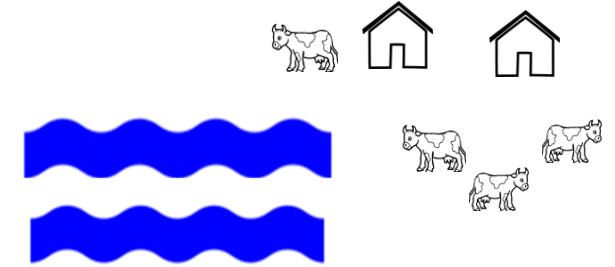




Piloting Nature based activities & assessments



Community based
Locally led
Varying duration





Beach Cleans: Doing good, feeling good



● Before
● After

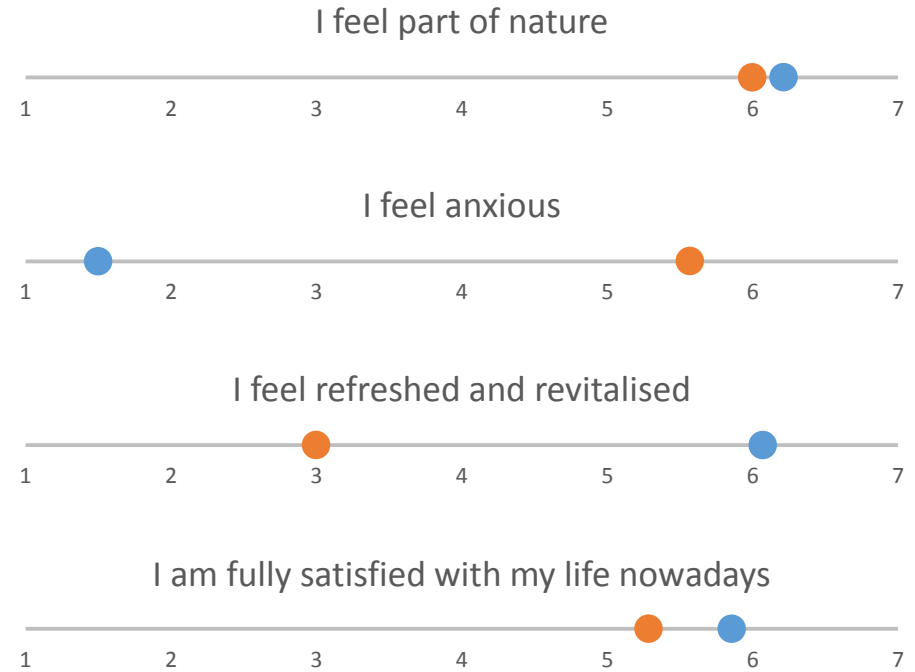
N = 30, Location: Multiple 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree



Rock Climbing: Exercise in Nature



NevSail: <https://www.nevsailwatersports.ie>



● Before ● After

N = 12 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree



Promoting bats, promoting health



'at this moment I feel happy.'



'at this moment I feel anxious.'



'overall, the things I do in my life are worthwhile'



'overall, I am satisfied with my life nowadays.'





Next steps... co-creating change



Thank you for listening.

Thanks to the EPA and HSE for funding the project, all the stakeholders for telling us what they value and how they engage with nature.



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