



# Discovering the Future of Green Health in Leven

Levenmouth Green Health Partnership Development Group Findings Report

# Contents

Foreword	2
Executive Summary	3
Development Phase Journey	4
What We Did	9
What We Learned	13
Key Themes for Development	15
What's Next	18
Conclusion	20
Resources	21
Partners	24



# Foreword

I first joined the public health team in NHS Fife in 2020 and was really excited to have the opportunity to be involved in the River Leven Programme and lead the Health and Wellbeing theme. Since then it has genuinely been such a pleasure to be involved in establishing a working group to develop a local Green Health Partnership. I have been humbled and inspired by the passion and commitment to the project of all the working group members. Aidan from Fife Coast and Countryside Trust and Annemarie from Fife Health and Social Care Partnership have done an amazing job in authoring this report. It is testament and acknowledgement to the efforts and enthusiasm of the whole group in driving forward the project to this point.

I have always had a strong connection with nature. As a child I remember spending hours playing by, and often in, a local burn. Barefoot paddling in the summer and wellies in the winter! I was fascinated by all the creatures living in and around the burn and by how the water changed course in wet weather and created new channels for itself. I regularly attempted to build little dams with twigs and leaves to see if I could get it to change course myself. Of course, even though it was quite a small burn, the flowing water was stronger than anything I could build as a child. It was one of many little lessons in understanding and respecting not just natural water courses but nature as a whole. It is an amazing source of energy that nurtures and sustains our health and well-being above and beyond any human interventions. I know how much my own personal health and well-being continues to benefit from time spent connecting with nature from growing veg in my garden to hiking with my dogs. I feel privileged to contribute to any opportunity to support public health initiatives to promote and facilitate connection with nature at any level and to work with and get to know such a dedicated and motivated group of people in doing so.

This report sets out why we are championing a green health agenda and why we believe in the benefits it will bring for our communities. It describes the journey we have been on so far. The richness of engagement there has been, the connections made, the learning, experience and expertise that continues to be shared. It is a fantastic example of the power of partnerships and the value of investing in them to make things happen. I recommend and hope you enjoy and find the report inspiring. We are all looking forward to progressing the pathways and we have confidence in being successful because 'it's in our nature'.

Lucy Denvir  
Consultant in Public Health  
NHS Fife

# 1. Executive Summary

In 2022 the working group came together to explore the feasibility of a Green Health Partnership in the River Leven catchment area. The goal was to understand local health needs, assess potential impact, identify barriers and enablers and promote access to our invaluable network of green and blue spaces in the community.

## It's in Our Nature

The positive links between our environment and our health and wellbeing are now well documented [1-4]\*, supported by research from around the world and echoed in powerful individual life stories of how contact with nature can help us with both physical and mental health, but also to acquire and maintain healthy behaviours [5].

Green health referral pathways represent an interaction between our health and social care services, voluntary sector services and people in our communities. An interaction that works to connect people with the health-promoting natural environment that surrounds us.

The recent Covid-19 Pandemic had a substantial impact on our relationship to our immediate environment, with lockdowns and travel restrictions encouraging a significant (up to 80%) increase in access to local parks and green spaces [6].

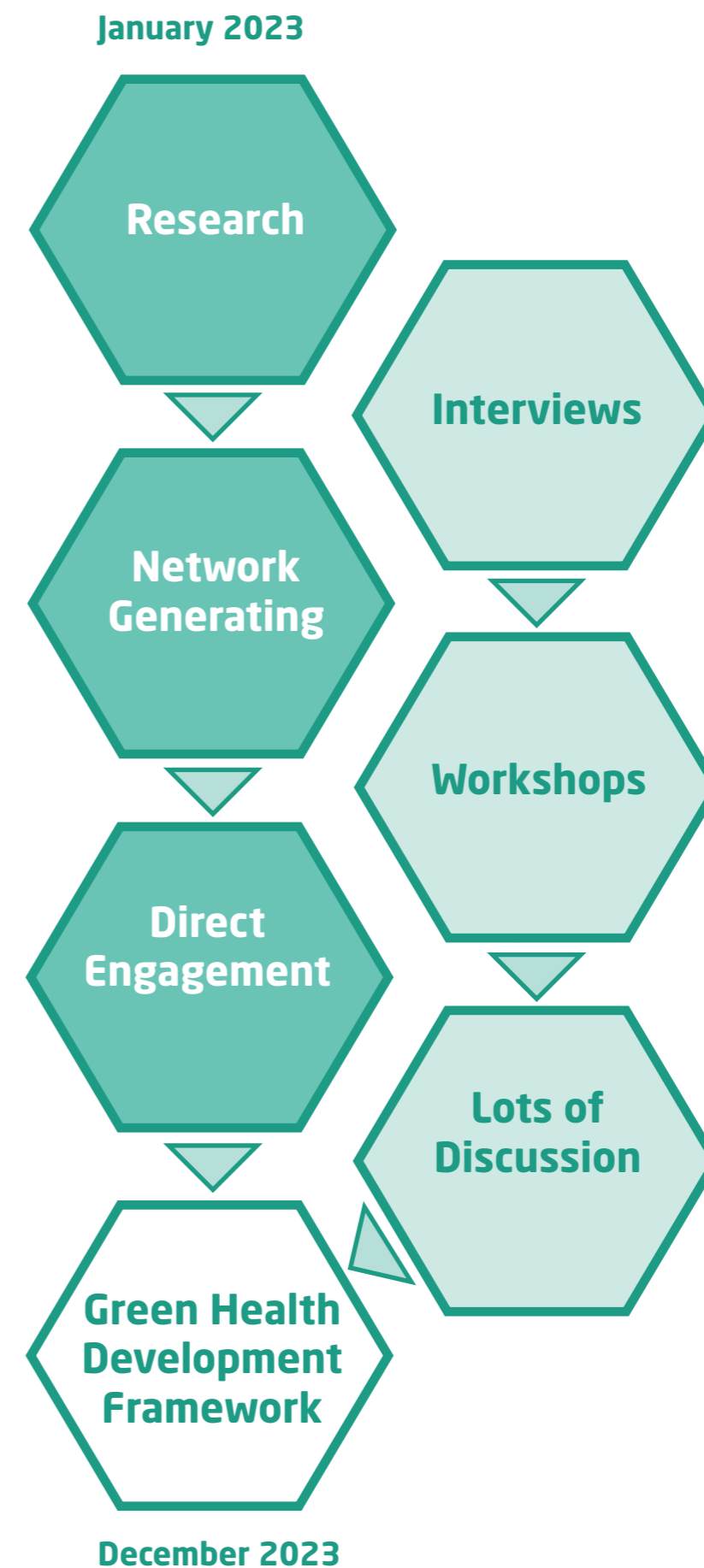
\* These numbers refer to links in the resources section of the report.

Access to quality greenspace however is not universal [6]. Inequalities in greenspace use were exacerbated by the pandemic and while nationwide access to local greenspace has dropped by over 60%. It is likely to be over 90% for the most deprived in our community [6]. While the work of the Levenmouth Green Health Partnership will build opportunity for all, there will be a particular focus on the most deprived and those with the highest level of health inequality.

## What We Did

In May 2022, the Leven Programme Health & Wellbeing Working Group ran a stakeholder engagement event to learn how we could support wellbeing in communities. Over the course of the last year and a half, we have consulted with an abundance of people from Leven, Fife and nationally. This was done via meetings, community engagement events, stakeholder engagement, consultations with enablers and a variety of interviews and workshops with green health providers.

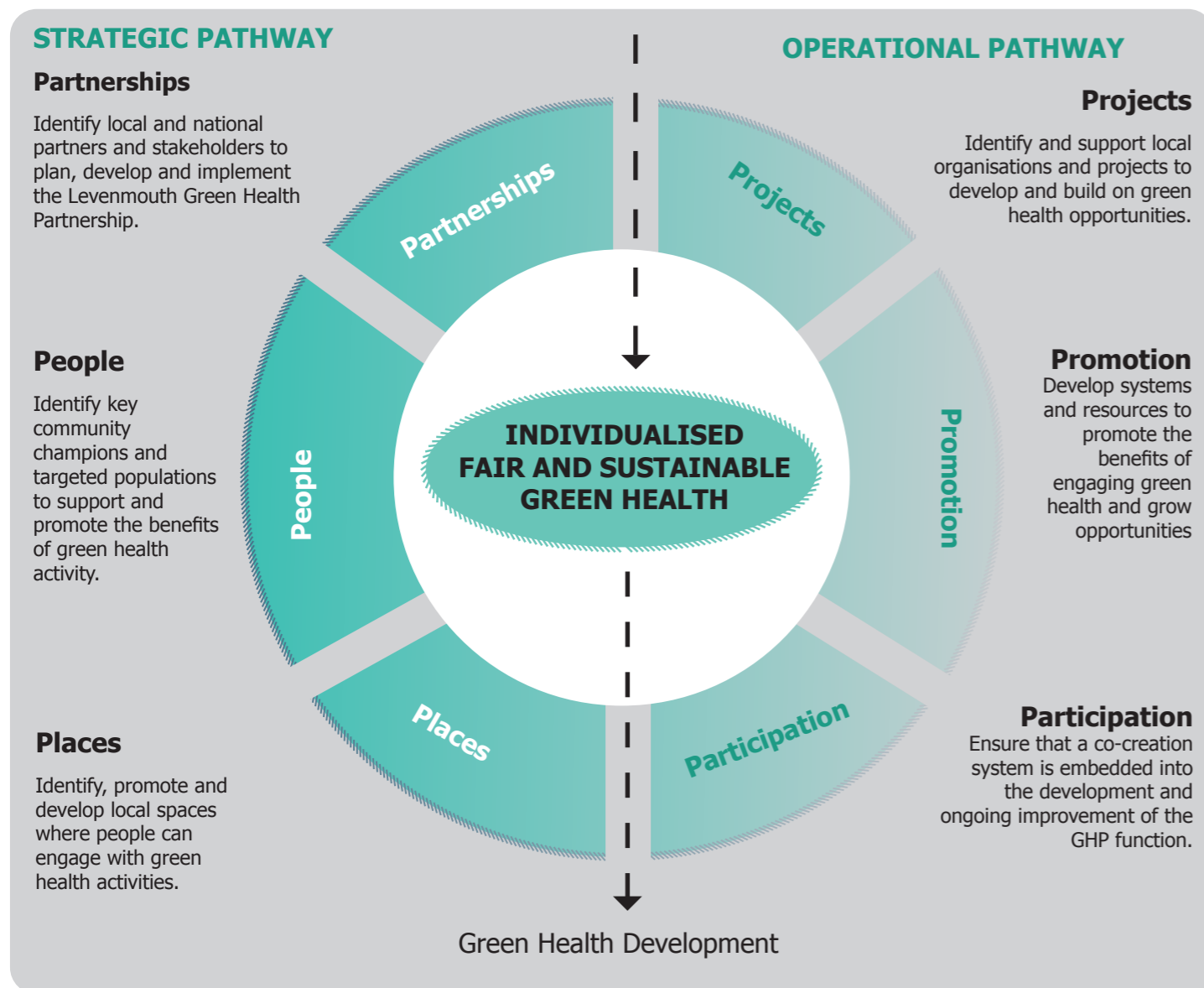
# Development Phase Journey





# Learning Summary

Not only was the response to our consultation and development period overwhelmingly positive [7], there was a strong consensus on the key themes to be prioritised. These priorities have been collated into our Development Pathways model that will inform both the Strategic and Operational work flows. Reflecting this consensus, these two pathways outline what needs to happen to achieve the vision of bringing voluntary and statutory services together to embed and make mainstream, robust green health referral pathways.



The pathways highlighted in our Development model above, introduce the 6 P's of green health development. This is our core framework that will underpin the activity that will be carried out in the delivery phase of this programme of work. These principles will be explored in more detail in section 4.

# Context for Green Health

In recent years, the climate emergency has been central to Scotland's evolving policy landscape, with developments across a diverse range of policy areas being underpinned by efforts to decarbonise and move towards a resourceful and renewable future [8-11].

This approach is reflected in Fife where many local strategies are being developed to improve lives within our communities.

The impact of the proposed Green Health Partnership could be seen directly by NHS Fife, Fife Health and Social Care Partnership, Fife Council community services and third-sector providers.

Successful implementation of the Green Health Partnership can have a widespread impact and will play a part in implementing a variety of policies, such as healthcare, planning, transport, biodiversity, sport, education, community empowerment, outdoor access, environment and more.

As an illustration of synergy with government policy, a number of 'Our Natural Health Service' related actions are included within Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan.

The aims of the programme are also supported in NHS Scotland's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy which includes the proposed action to:

**“Establish and embed Green Health Partnerships and similar approaches to increasing the use of nature-based solutions to deliver health outcomes as part of Sustainable Care”**

The strategy also emphasises the potential to improve and make more use of NHS greenspace within Sustainable Communities and includes the proposed action to:

**“Work with local authorities to ensure the NHS estate contributes to local open space strategies and that our green spaces are well linked to other local greenspace and active travel networks.”**



The Green Health Partnership development work, will make a significant contribution to the delivery of the following snapshot of national, regional and local strategies:

NHS Scotland climate emergency and sustainability strategy: 2022-2026 [8]

Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHS Scotland [13]

Local Transport Strategy for Fife 2023-2033 [14]

Fife Mental Health Strategy 2020 – 2024 [15]

Fife Health & Social Care Partnership – Strategic Plan for Fife 2019-2022 [16]

Fife Health & Social Care Partnership - Levenmouth Health & Social Care Locality Planning [17]

Plan for Fife 2017 - 2027 [18]

Recovery & Renewal Plan4Fife Update 2021 [19]

The Leven Connectivity Project – Behaviour Change Community Action Plan [20]

The Leven - Masterplan [21]

## *Vision*

**A Green Health Partnership that will support the local population to engage regularly and meaningfully with local green space, as part of their day-to-day lives and for lifelong health.**

## *Summary of Goals*

Our objective is to establish a Green Health Partnership network and framework, actively engaging local communities to gather data and collaborate on service planning.

We aim to develop referral pathways to green health programmes, advocate for and implement new green health initiatives, communicate benefits to healthcare practitioners and service users, collect relevant information for promotion, and ensure safe access to green spaces by removing barriers for all communities.





## 2. What We Did

In February 2023 at the beginning of the National Lottery Heritage Fund development year, we used an outcome mapping approach to structure the development of the learning we set out to accomplish. The approach we took to planning and analysing data has been collaborative, focused on outcomes and has allowed us to develop the following objectives for the development phase.

### Development Phase Objectives

1. Conduct a wide ranging and thorough consultation and research to understand and map out both the presenting needs within the community and the green health assets & referral pathways already in existence.
2. Agree on outcomes that show how we think that green health activity and referring can contribute to desired outcomes.
3. Develop a theory of change, to detail the activity required to contribute towards desired outcomes.
4. Develop a logic model that reflects our theory of change. This is made up of two distinct pathways: Strategic and Actionable.
5. Create an action plan to bring the logic model to life.
6. Create person specification and job description for Green Health Coordination role.

We conducted extensive consultations with experts and stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of green health and to determine what interventions, structured in what manner, would yield the desired outcomes for the community. Additionally, we collaborated with colleagues involved in existing Green Health Partnerships and Green Health referral programmes across Scotland to identify potential strategies that would enable us to make swift progress towards our objectives.

## Listening, Learning and Sharing Progress

All of our conversations were conducted around co-creation principles. Many of the conversations had, were about learning from stakeholders within the Leven community and beyond, for others the conversations were about raising awareness of and enthusiasm for the potential of green health within their community. These conversations took the forms shown below and a summary report of the May 2022 and June 2023 Stakeholder Engagement Events can be found online.

### Research

A literature review was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of green health development and partnership work in Scotland. The review identified existing approaches, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as recommendations for productive activities for new developments and ongoing provision. It also helped in identifying key individuals for direct engagement.

### Direct Engagement

We conducted an abundance of direct engagements through phone calls, video calls, and face-to-face meetings to build relationships and gather insights from individuals with a range of expertise. This approach widened our sphere of influence and ensured that we were influenced by a broad spectrum of interests from the community.

### Interviews

Some of the participants from direct engagements and stakeholder events were targeted for interview in relation to specific issues or expertise that they brought to the table.

### Workshops

Over 80 people from a diverse range of the community groups attended two stakeholder engagement events in May 2022 and June 2023 to discuss green health developments and offer their opinions and experiences.

**Learning from all of these methods combined to build a picture of the need, the existing services and the appetite for a green health partnership approach in the Leven catchment communities that we are working to build an offer for.**

# Engagement Event Feedback

There was widespread consensus that a Green Health Partnership could improve health outcomes for the River Leven Community and potentially reduce pressure on front-line services for the NHS Scotland and Health and Social Care Partnership, as well as develop opportunity for the Third and Voluntary Sectors.

As an example of the kind of work we conducted, the table below has collated responses that event participants had given to the following question:

## In what ways could a GHP be helpful to you, your work and the community?

Nature-based Organisations	Social Prescribers	Local People
<p><b>Direct notes captured</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referrals</li> <li>Buiding up members of group</li> <li>Perception</li> <li>Small funding</li> <li>Integration</li> <li>Opportunities to volunteer</li> <li>Helping others to care for land</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>GHP co-ordinator</li> <li>Assistance with specific needs</li> <li>Training</li> <li>Access to funding</li> <li>Buddy system</li> <li>Ownership of outdoor space</li> <li>Being part of a partnership</li> </ul>	<p><b>Direct notes captured</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social prescribing</li> <li>Breakdown barriers</li> <li>Acceptability</li> <li>Not one size fits all</li> <li>Link life Fife</li> <li>More options for GHP Fife</li> <li>Levenmouth first</li> <li>Direction</li> <li>Support system</li> <li>Diversity</li> <li>Easier said what is going on at a local level</li> <li>Able to signpost to the right activity</li> <li>Needs to be supported by someone with contacts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Direct notes captured</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local people benefiting</li> <li>Mental health</li> <li>Physical health</li> <li>Personalisation</li> <li>Wider community engagement</li> <li>Get out of social isolation</li> <li>Training rural skills</li> <li>Access to potential issue</li> <li>Connecting people</li> <li>Improve health</li> <li>Know what's connected in their community</li> <li>Social aspect</li> <li>Connected to environment</li> </ul>
<p>These notes indicate that a GHP network could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase the resilience of local nature-based organisations through opportunities to access small funds, having partners (and additional resource) to support and be supported.</li> <li>● Increasing awareness of the org locally and what they do</li> <li>● Increasing skills and certification of the members of the org.</li> </ul> <p>This could all result in improved condition of our outdoor spaces through ownership, maintenance and human connection with nature.</p>	<p>These notes indicate that a GHP network could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Help address negative perceptions around social prescribing resulting in more people getting the support they need via social prescribers.</li> <li>● Increase the options available meaning people get the care most suitable to them.</li> <li>● Increase understanding of what options there are at a local level and set an example for a Fife\ GHP.</li> </ul> <p>This would increase demand for social prescribers and, if facilitated by a coordinator with contacts, build up a strong support system.</p>	<p>These notes indicate that a GHP network could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Help local people engage more in their community, addressing social isolation and be better connected to their environment.</li> <li>● Provide more options via a joined up network means they'd get the care most suited to them and they can also increase their skills, therefore employability.</li> </ul> <p>Overall, this would help improve people's mental health and physical outcomes.</p>

**"As a GP, on a daily basis I see ill health caused by lack of opportunity and access to basic healthy food and exercise"**

## Who Took Part? Hearing the views of a wide range of stakeholders

**BENEFICIARIES**

Participants of some green health interventions, and with lived experience of health poverty were asked to contribute their thoughts on their experience of green health.

Service managers from wellbeing initiatives were asked to relay the needs of their service users.

**PROVIDERS**

We heard from over 20 people who work for organisations that can be defined in the following way.

- Green health intervention providers.
- Other interventions who use some outdoors as part of their work
- Interventions that currently don't offer outdoor activity, whom are interested in the potential.

**REFERRERS**

We heard from over 30

- Workers in the statutory care sector, some who already refer to green health activity and some who are interested.
- Workers in the care sector and are responsible for service development.
- Voluntary sector services who would like to refer to green activity.

**ENABLERS**

We engaged with over 30 potential enablers of green health prescribing from those responsible for greenspace policy, to NHS estate policy, to Public Health delivery. Councillors and strategic leads from various local authority community development work flows also made contributions.

**SPECIALISTS**

Key people from existing green health approaches were invited to work with us to share their experience of developing and running coordinated green health approaches across Scotland, including:

- Dundee GHP
- Dundee University
- Lanarkshire GHP
- Highlands GHP
- NatureScot
- Lothian Green Health Prescribing network.

## 3. What We Learned

## Making Connections

### A Shared Understanding

One key theme that appeared time and time again was the need for a shared understanding of both the green health opportunity, and the terms used to define and discuss them. Definitions of the terms used are crucial to making sure that all stakeholders are on the same page.

There were a few examples of conversations where people were using interchangeable language to discuss some quite distinct themes.

For example, the terms referrals and prescription have been used interchangeably within many of the conversations and also within the papers and articles examined during our literature review. In Dundee a green health prescription is a specific referral route, that, much like a medical prescription, comes from primary medical care and is a direct referral to a green health hub. In the Lothians, prescription is the term used to discuss all referral pathways into their green health infrastructure.

To circumvent this issue, we will publish clear definitions within any publications or promotional material that help others understand the details of the work that we are undertaking and how this relates to them.

With Green Health provision being such a broad brush approach, it's understandable that another concern raised was that of ensuring the suitability of referrals for specific interventions and people with defined needs.

Many interventions are set up in order to support people who have specific presenting needs. Some providers noted a concern that a widening of referral pathways could lead to unsuitable candidates being referred onto their programmes. Or concerns that they would not be able to support those with complex needs.

Equally, some referrers reported a concern that although they are aware of some of the potential activities available, they are concerned that they are not fully appraised of suitability criteria.

This finding is not new and has been something that each of the four existing Green Health Partnerships across Scotland has experienced.

In 2018 NatureScot researched a proposed kite marking system for quality assurance of interventions [22]. They found that although quality assurance is desirable, the system needs to be simple, understandable and user-friendly.

Since then however, the Institute for Outdoor Learning have published a Statement of Good Practice for outdoor therapy and outdoor mental health interventions [23]. This document provides a simple zoned framework that can be used to map and understand interventions based on therapeutic content and outdoor instructor competence.

Highlands Green Health Partnership has also published a useful matrix that can be used to categorise green health interventions from 1=Easy to 13=Hard, based on the duration of the activity and its mental and physical demands [24].

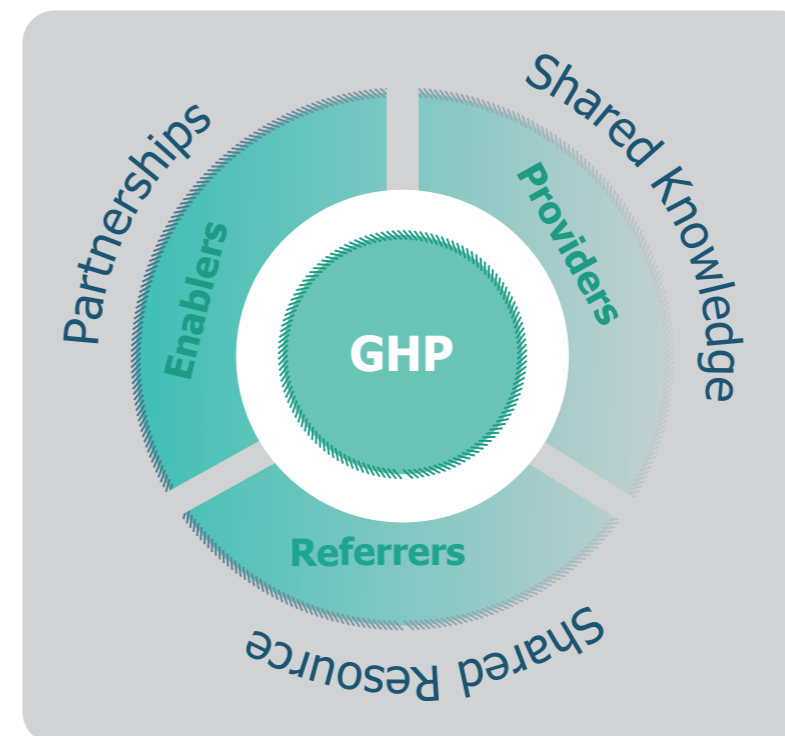
The common thread to these approaches is clarification and simplification of communication between referrer/prescriber and provider. These models can also be useful for providers in identifying the aims and objectives of their operation and communicating them to stakeholders outside of their existing network.

The Levenmouth Green Health Partnership will make definitions widely available and seek transparency and intelligibility in all correspondence and communications.

From the outset of this working group, we were aware that social referrals are not a new concept and that implementations have been working to great effect across Scottish communities for years.

One of the first activities we did as a group was to map the local provision and to examine the associated referral networks. Our findings showed that although there are fantastic examples of existing practice, the picture across River Leven communities is both patchy and dependent upon existing relationships between referrer and provider. Providers unanimously confirmed that the number and suitability of referrals is also a patchwork affair, and referrers said that they are always looking for more options for participants on their case-loads, so as to improve the chances of finding an intervention that is the best fit.

The lesson for the Green Health Partnership is that we need to use our development framework to make robust and sustainable links between the existing patches of provision, facilitate relationship-building opportunities, so as to ensure a wide range of prescribers and support the development of further provision in River Leven communities, addressing the variety of needs and abilities that the partnership aims to work with. This means ongoing work to really understand the intricacies of, and join the dots in, the referral and network landscape



### Lived Experience

We have learned that we need to increase the number of direct engagements we have had with people from the community with lived experience of the health care system and who face barriers to accessing green health. It's vital that their experience and views contribute to the development of the partnership approach.



# 4. Key Themes for Development

# Strategic Pathway

During the initial development stage, key themes emerged from conversations that significantly impacted thinking, and subsequently the project's direction.

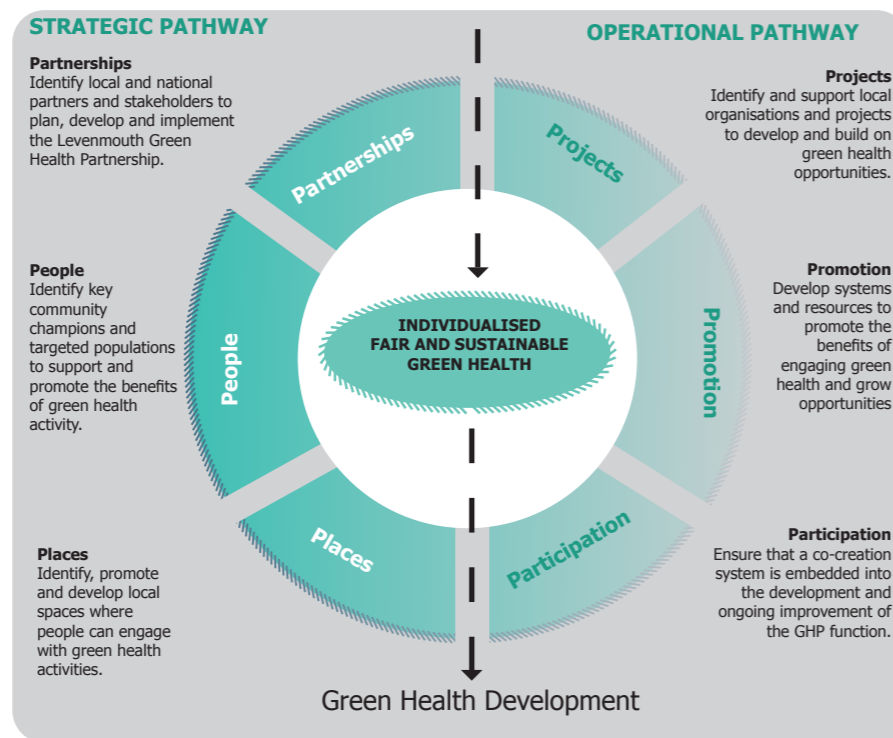
The health and well-being of communities along the River Leven is at the very heart of the Green Health Development Framework

These themes were processed, analysed, and summarised in our Green Health Development Framework.

This model encompasses two distinct pathways, the Strategic Pathway and the Operational Pathways.

The strategic approach makes the case for and builds the foundations for sustainable development activity.

The Operational Pathway supports the actions taken by the GHP to 'mainstream' green health opportunities.



Green Health Partnership developments will be built from the ground up with Leven catchment communities at their heart. To reflect this, our development framework has **Person centred, Fair and Sustainable** at the core of the model. This statement reflects the following central themes.

**Person Centred** - Putting individuals at the centre of decisions that affect their lives, treating them with dignity and promoting agency.

**Fair** - Being impartial and working hard to remove barriers that contribute to health inequality.

**Sustainable** - It's important for the future of the green health movement that our GHP is politically relevant and has an inherent ability to be maintained over a sustained period of time.

This work stream is about engaging the wider community with our natural health service approach and making the case for a Green Health Partnership.

The green health approach is gaining momentum, and we want to ensure that everyone is on board with the mission. Our goal is to build a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of the Green Health Partnership, which will allow us to expand our conversations beyond our current network.

While we've made progress engaging with those who support our agenda, there's much more to be done. In order to broaden the scope and impact of our partnerships, we need to bring the conversation to policy makers and strategic leaders who can help fund our future endeavours.

The "Strategic Pathway" breaks down our approach into three key areas. By focusing on promotion, we can raise awareness of green health and its potential to improve health, eliminate health disparities, and promote well-being.

By prioritising people, we can build a community of support around our mission.

Finally, by establishing strategic partnerships, we can leverage resources and expertise to further our goals.

*People* Identify key community champions and targeted populations to support and promote the benefits of green health activity.

*Partnership* Identify local and national partners and stakeholders to plan, develop and implement the Levenmouth Green Health Partnership.

*Promote* Develop resources to promote the benefits of engaging with green health and the opportunities to participate.

# Operational Pathway

Our Operational Pathway is designed to happen in parallel with the Strategic Pathway, adding the “actions” aspect to development work.

The community engagement process has highlighted the need to build a partnership that makes active connections, shares resources, promotes the wide variety of green health opportunities and supports the development of new opportunities that are linked to specific presenting needs within the community.

The partnership needs to actively work towards cross sectoral collaborations where projects can be developed that consider the barriers and what needs to be done to remove them, that will address need and begin to bring the green health service vision to life.

## Improving Community Resilience and Wellbeing through the “Main streaming” of Green Health

The concept of “main streaming” green health is to provide widespread access to green health opportunities for all. This requires robust referral systems and processes that are regularly and routinely used by front line health service practitioners, with a particular focus on opening up accessible opportunities for those who would benefit the most from it.

This approach would enhance community resilience and promote overall health and wellbeing. By making green health opportunities more accessible, more people will begin to value the activities and wonderful natural environment around the River Leven.

Projects

Identify and support local organisations and projects to develop and build on green health opportunities.

Places

Identify, promote and develop local spaces where people can engage with green health activities.

Participation

Ensure that a co-creation system is embedded into the development and ongoing improvement of the GHP function.

# 5. What's Next

Our work to this stage has highlighted the importance of a Green Health Partnership in Leven and surrounding areas and the community's eagerness for such an initiative.

Through community engagement, we have been able to determine what is needed and the challenges we may encounter. We've shared inspirational stories and collectively agreed on two broad-reaching pathways to establish a system-wide green health approach.

Our co-created pathways provide a clear and structured plan to achieve our vision of making a Green Health Partnership mainstream in Leven. By mapping out the necessary stepping stones, we have targeted our efforts towards the workstreams that will bring the most impact in the shortest space of time. Building sustainable collaborations that maximise effectiveness and put those who could benefit the most at the heart of the initiative.

To ensure the success of the Levenmouth Green Health Partnership, learning from existing GHPs consistently points to the requirement for centralised coordination of activity. One overarching role is to act as a consistent enabler for all of the required activity and outputs that will facilitate the building of productive relationships, create robust referral pathways, promote the green health agenda and specific local activity, enable new projects and contribute towards successful green health development.

A work plan for the Levenmouth Green Health Partnership's Coordinator role can be found in the supporting documentation. This document details the specific actions required in order to maximise progress over the four year delivery phase and beyond. The work plan's actions are categorised under the 6 P's from our Green Health Development Framework to give clarity on which work flows are contributing to our strategic, or operational pathways.

The work plan is designed as a well-informed starting point, however, as much of the initial work will continue to inform our understanding of what needs are arising on the ground, it is anticipated that adjustments to the required actions and specific projects undertaken by the coordinator will occur over time. This is another example of where the Green Health Partnership steering group can give strategic oversight to the progress of ongoing developments, setting the coordinators priorities, providing direct links to health policy, community planning, third sector trends etc.



# 6. Conclusion

## Expanding on our Green Health Initiative

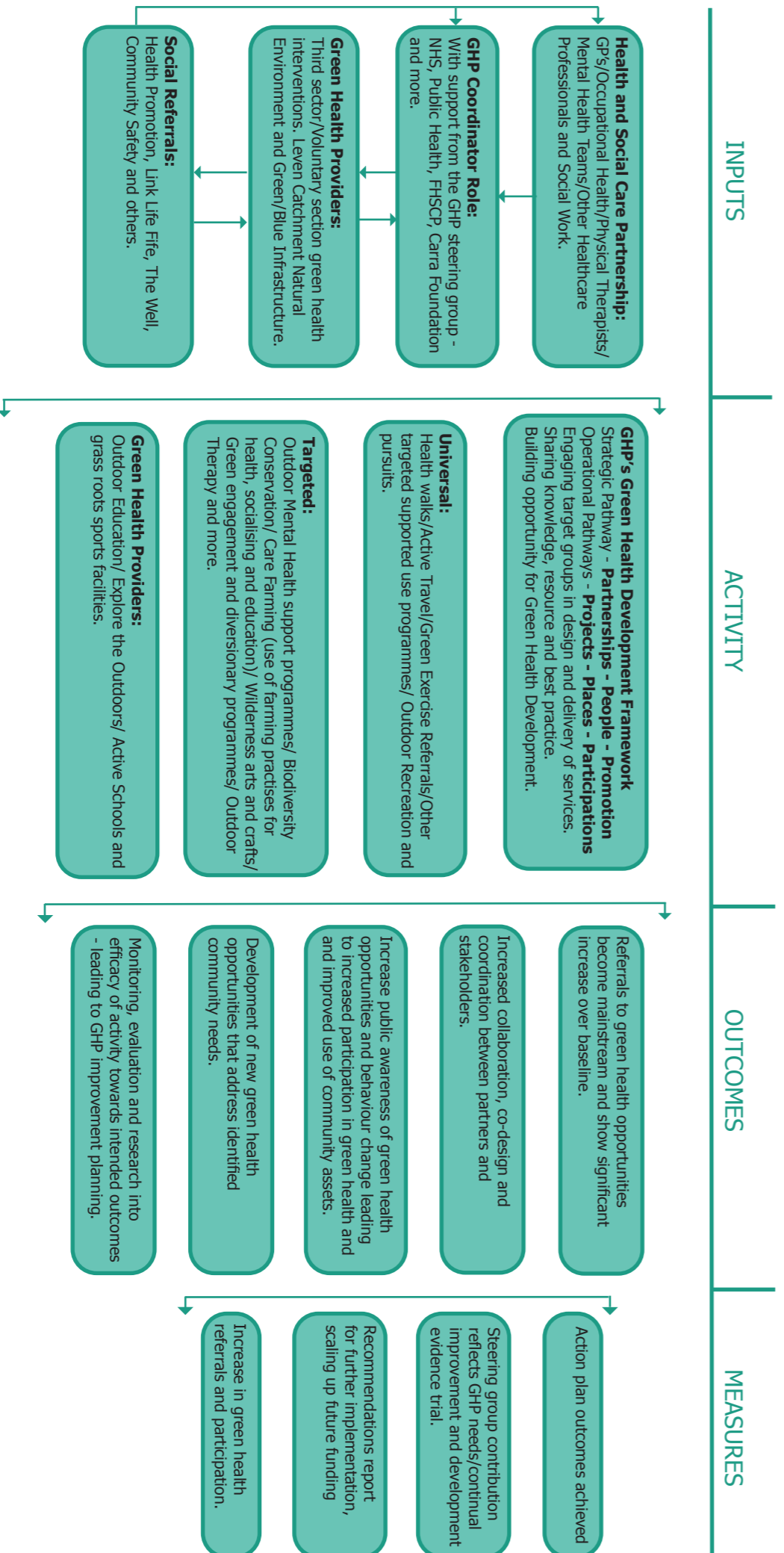
Throughout the year-long development process, we have engaged with a large number of individuals, including those who will benefit from green health interventions, potential prescribers, providers, and enablers. Our discussions have highlighted both existing barriers and exciting areas for growth in the field of green health. We are grateful for the support of various stakeholders, both nationally and within our community, who have offered their expertise, ideas, and resources.

Amidst this wealth of knowledge, we have identified two distinct pathways, strategic and operational, which have informed the creation of our Green Health Development Framework. This framework is a culmination of all our learnings to date and provides a generic structure for building a robust Green Health Partnership in our community.

A Green Health Partnership Coordinator will be appointed and will act as a constant enabler, with overarching responsibility for actioning both the strategic and operational pathways outlined in the Green Health Development Framework. This role will bring clarity, continuity and consistency to all of the partners involved in strengthening the green health offer within Leven. This role underpins the entire programme of work, acts as a central point of contact and will provide momentum for all involved in the partnership.



## Green Health Partnership Logic Model



This logic model illustrates the significance of the coordinator's role in being a catalyst for progressing green health developments consistently, collaboratively and in a timeous fashion. The role will be the glue that binds together the otherwise disconnected patches of green health activity in the area. This work will be crucial to developing the reputation that healthcare professionals require to give them confidence in adopting a more widespread approach to regular and routine green health prescribing.

# Resources

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# Project Partners



Report compiled by  
Aidan Duncan, Education Manager,  
Fife Coast and Countryside Trust  
and Annemarie Smith,  
Senior Health Promotion Officer,  
Fife Health and Social Care Partnership

Fife Coast and Countryside Trust  
The Harbourmaster's House  
Hot Pot Wynd  
Dysart  
Fife  
KY1 2TQ

E: [ask.us@fifecountryside.co.uk](mailto:ask.us@fifecountryside.co.uk)  
T: 01592 656080  
W: [fifecoastandcountryside.co.uk](http://fifecoastandcountryside.co.uk)

