



Promoting land management in the NHS to support local biodiversity



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Sarah Lawson, Regional Public Health Group, GOSW.

Foreword

Staying healthy: It's in our nature - Supporting biodiversity in the NHS

Too good an opportunity to miss

It's not hard to be inspired by nature. If you were to think about your favourite place in the world I'll bet it is more likely to be a wild mountainside or shoreline than sitting indoors.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that natural environments make and keep us healthy. The NHS has enormous power for change as a major social and financial institution in this country. It is important that it does everything it can to help people live healthy lives and speed up recuperation. This study points out many opportunities to make positive changes and the links between staying healthy and caring for our environment.

How appropriate it would be if more of our favourite natural habitats were found in the care of our health service.

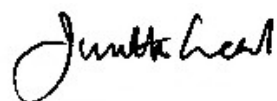


Dr Gabriel Scally
Regional Director of Public Health for the South West

The importance of a rich and healthy environment as a determinant of human health and well being has long been recognised, from the writings of Hippocrates in 400 B.C, to the work of Victorian pioneers like John Snow and his work on cholera. More recently, there is growing recognition that access to quality environments, particularly those rich in biodiversity, can enhance the physical and mental well-being of people, staff, patients, and the wider community alike. This report sets out the results of some innovative work across the NHS estate in the SW region, which has explored how positive estate management can contribute to patient and staff well-being, and makes a wider contribution to enhancing local biodiversity.

In itself, the process of exploration has been revealing. It has shown that there is a body of evidence that supports the principle of access to biodiversity rich environments to deliver improved health care for staff and patients alike. The NHS estates managers and grounds staff are also doing a surprising amount to encourage biodiversity in small but important ways, and at no additional cost. The variety of ways in which this is being achieved provides some very practical ways forward for all NHS estates. Finally, this report highlights the role of estate management for biodiversity as a tangible way of contributing towards targets for sustainability and the responsibilities of corporate citizenship.

This report represents the start of a new partnership between health and environmental sectors in the South West. The recommendations set out some sensible ways in which this can be taken forward and developed.



Janette Ward
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English Nature

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Introduction

Early in 2005 the UK government published an updated version of their sustainable development strategy. "Securing the Future: Delivering the UK Sustainable Development Strategy" led to renewed debate around the whole sustainable development agenda. Government expectation is that its own departments should help lead the way on sustainable development and to assist, "The Framework for Sustainable Development on Government Estate" was finalised, providing implementation guidance and targets for government departments.

The NHS, as a large and complex organisation, is recognised as being able to make a major contribution to the sustainable development agenda in many ways. This recognition resulted in NHS Estates leading work on sustainable development for the NHS and publishing a range of supporting guidance, including "A New Environmental Strategy for the NHS", "Sustainable Development in the NHS" and jointly with the Kings Fund "Enhancing the Healing Environment – A guide for NHS Trusts".

The Sustainable Development Commission also recognised the ability of the NHS to contribute and supported this with its "Healthy Futures" programme and associated guidance publications. The Commission has also been developing a self-assessment model for the NHS on Good Corporate Citizenship to further this work.

Biodiversity is the area of sustainable development in which the NHS role has been least explored. In the South West region, great importance is given to the environment and as such three regional organisations (Dept of Health Regional Public Health Group, English Nature and NHS Estates) wanted to explore the potential for enhancing biodiversity on NHS estate through changes to land management practice.

A project proposal was drawn up and put to the South West branch of the Health Estates and Facilities Management Association (HEFMA). The branch supported the proposal and the project ran from May to November 2005. The project brief was to research the health benefits of promoting biodiversity; to identify "drivers" for NHS support of biodiversity; to assess regional interest in and knowledge of biodiversity; to identify existing initiatives and good practice; to identify barriers to implementation and development needs and to identify suitable information resources. The project was to culminate in a learning event for NHS organisations within the South West.

Project Research

1. The Health Evidence Base

There is a growing understanding in health policy that sustainable health requires not only effective medical approaches, but also healthy environments and lifestyles (Dept of Health 2004 (1)). A growing evidence base, increasingly scientific in nature, which shows how nature affects health, has supported this understanding. The health benefits of nature are physical, mental, social and spiritual. The evidence base shows three broad levels of engagement with nature that can have beneficial health effects, those being “a room with a view”, the presence of nearby nature and active participation with nature.

As early as 1984, research from the USA (Ulrich 1984) showed that hospital recovery rates from surgery were more rapid in patients with a view of green space than in those with a view of concrete from their hospital beds. Dutch research (De Vries et al 2003) tested the hypothesis that people living in greener areas were healthier than those living in less green areas. The study was of 10,000 people who self-reported on health indicators. Controls were put in place to take account of socio-economic and demographic characteristics and urbanity. The research showed that proximity to green areas had a positive impact on three health indicators; symptoms reported in the last 14 days, perceived general health and propensity to psychiatric morbidity score. In the UK recent research into the value of various forms of green exercise (physical activity whilst directly exposed to nature) has shown that the synergistic effects of green exercise generate positive physical and mental health benefits, regardless of the level of intensity, duration and type of green activity (Countryside Recreation Network 2005). The report urges the health sector to recognise the contribution that green exercise can make to public health and well-being and calls for physical activity plans to emphasise the value of green space and nature for formal and informal use. It also stresses the therapeutic value of outdoor spaces (rural and urban) for delivering mental well-being. The existence and success of a network of “Green Gyms” now running in many areas of the UK support the report findings (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers 2005).

The value of green space and nature in terms of health benefit is reflected in the fact that the Government’s Biodiversity Strategy (DEFRA 2004) has a section dedicated to biodiversity for recreation, health and well-being. It accepts that objective research supports what many people intuitively feel, that nature is good for us. The strategy also notes that projects aimed at encouraging people to take up walking in natural environments, or to undertake active countryside management, have resulted in far higher levels of sustained participation, as the attractiveness of the environment acts as an additional motivator, and that research demonstrates that mere visual contact with nature reduces stress and promotes well-being. The strategy makes the point that the delivery of biodiversity objectives will not only enhance the

quality of the environment, but will also provide the underlying foundations for health improvement initiatives, so long as people have access to biodiversity.

Health sector specific research and evidence (Kings Fund/NHS Estates 2004) also demonstrates that good environments make us feel better and that feeling better is key to getting better. Projects have demonstrated that good environments can have a therapeutic effect on patients and simple things, like creating walking routes and seating areas in good quality natural environments in hospital grounds enable patients, visitors and staff to gain gentle exercise, engage with nature, socialise and gain the health and well-being benefits.

2. “Drivers” for NHS support of Biodiversity

The health evidence base shows that achieving biodiversity objectives and providing good natural environments is good for mental health and general well-being. The “Choosing Health” White Paper (Dept of Health 2004 (1)) set the national public health agenda and required the whole health sector to work to create environments that make it easier for people to make healthy choices in their lives. The priority areas of “Choosing Health” included tackling obesity, improving mental health and promoting healthy and active lives amongst children, young people and older people. In delivering the priorities of “Choosing Health”, the NHS is expected to work in close partnership with the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Public Service Agreement targets are set for such work and now Local Area Agreements provide the opportunity to work in creative, challenging and inspiring ways to improve health and well-being of local populations (Dept of Health 2005 (1)). The whole health sector is expected to contribute to helping improve physical activity levels in the population. Under “Active Communities” and “Active Healthcare Systems” (Dept of Health 2005 (2)) the NHS is required to work closely with all other sectors to create access to opportunities for physical activity, to create cleaner, safer, more activity-friendly local environments, and to introduce exercise referral systems.

Physical inactivity costs the NHS an estimated £1.7 billion each year and is now as important as smoking and unhealthy diet as a causal factor for chronic disease in the UK population. (Dept of Health 2004 (1)) It is also estimated that a ten percent increase in adult physical activity would benefit the UK by £500 million per year and save six thousand lives. (Dept of Health 2004 (2)) By improving the environmental quality of its estate and, where possible, opening it up for use by patients, visitors, staff and communities, the NHS has the potential to make its estate an extension of its treatment service and to contribute more widely to health improvement. Supporting biodiversity provides the NHS with the potential to help improve public health and reduce its costs. This is the sort of action that not only fully contributes to the aims of “Choosing Health”, but also is exactly the sort of approach that Sir Derek Wanless envisaged in his “fully engaged” health scenario (Wanless 2002 and 2004).

The Framework for Sustainable Development on Government Estate aims to integrate biodiversity objectives into the way government departments manage their land and buildings, so as to contribute to supporting viable populations of species at risk and to restore and enhance habitats. Whilst the framework and its guidance and targets only apply to government departments, it states that partner organisations, such as the NHS, must be encouraged and supported to adopt it wherever possible. The Government will also soon hope to bring into force the proposals within the Natural Environments and Rural Communities Bill, which place a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to have regard to the purpose of conservation of biological diversity in the exercise of all of their functions.

Sustainable development remains high on the government agenda. The Sustainable Development Commission, the government's independent advisor on sustainable development issues, has this year been focusing its resources on creating a self-assessment tool for the NHS to help improve its sustainable development performance and engage in the "Good Corporate Citizen" agenda. A ministerial launch of the tool early in 2006 will focus attention on the NHS in this area.

The Health Care Commission's Standards for Better Health identify care environments and amenities and public health in their domain for action. The standards mean that health care settings must promote patient and staff well-being and all health agencies are required to work in partnerships to promote, protect and improve the health of the population.

There are, therefore, government policy "drivers" and health benefit and cost "drivers" for the NHS to seek to support biodiversity, as well as the general rise in public support for environmental and sustainable development issues and concerns.

3. Information Resources

A list of information resources and relevant guidance around sustainable development and biodiversity for the NHS was drawn up and is attached as Appendix 1.

In addition, work was done on identifying the proximity of NHS property and estate to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and local nature reserves in the region. Whilst this proximity may be an important factor for NHS organisations to consider in engaging with the biodiversity agenda, it should be recognised that supporting local biodiversity should be an aim in all locations and not just those close to existing sensitive sites. NHS organisations can gain information on the location of existing sensitive sites and nature reserves by accessing the English Nature website and entering the postcode of their properties.

Survey

Fifty-five members of HEFMA within the Government Office for the South West region were surveyed by questionnaire, to gauge the level of knowledge, engagement and interest in biodiversity and supporting it through land management practice. The survey form used is reproduced as Appendix 2.

A summary of the survey results is reproduced as Appendix 3. The most salient points are;

- A 27% response rate was considered acceptable
- Very little management time was currently set aside for sustainable development issues, including biodiversity
- The majority of NHS Trusts have contracted out grounds maintenance work to some extent
- Knowledge of NHS specific guidance on sustainable development was good, but there was little knowledge of other available policies and guidance
- There was already some excellent, innovative work on biodiversity taking place within NHS Trusts in the region
- The majority of NHS Trusts would welcome advice and assistance in this work area

Learning Event

A learning event was organised and invitations sent to all HEFMA members and Chief Executives and Chairs of NHS Trusts and organisations in the region. The event consisted of a series of presentations, both practical and theoretical, and sessions to exchange experience and ideas.

The theoretical presentations explained the health evidence base and policy context for supporting biodiversity through land management. The practical presentations were of current examples of excellent work in support of biodiversity already taking place in the region, both inside and outside the NHS.

30 delegates attended the event from a variety of Trusts and organisations. At the conclusion of the event, the following actions were agreed;

- HEFMA is a suitable existing network to enable the sharing of information and experiences on biodiversity work. At the next meeting of the South West HEFMA Environment Group, support will be sought for establishing a Biodiversity Group to provide a platform for debate and networking and to support the spreading of this agenda within the NHS in the region. The group should be practically based.

- Links need to be forged between NHS Trusts, local biodiversity forums and existing local biodiversity action plans. By hooking up with existing biodiversity support structures, NHS organisations will be helped to gain a wider community focus, essential for this work and for the Good Corporate Citizenship agenda. Local English Nature county-based groups could help with this.
- HEFMA Environment Group to lead on identifying how to incorporate biodiversity principles into commissioning documents and what further tools and support are needed in the longer term to nurture biodiversity initiatives in a controlled way.
- Clinicians and public health professionals within the NHS need to become engaged in the biodiversity agenda to ensure that maximum benefit is gained and to ensure this work contributes as fully as possible to the Choosing Health agenda. Assistance will be needed to achieve this, possibly from the Regional Public Health Group.
- The Ministry of Defence, through its land management responsibility for many large, sensitive and biodiverse habitats, has much experience in this area of work. Means of sharing this valuable experience and knowledge with NHS colleagues should be explored and the existing Special Estates Partnership, between Defence Estates, NHS Estates and Valuation Office Agency appears the most suitable way of doing so. The NHS Estates representative for the partnership will be asked to pursue this.

Conclusions

There exists an objective, scientific health evidence base that conclusively supports that physical and mental health and well-being benefit from contact with nature, greenspace and quality, biodiverse environments.

The NHS, being an estate owner and manager, has the potential to develop and use their estate as an extension of their treatment service and a means of health improvement.

There are policy “drivers” in the sustainable development and health arenas that support & encourage NHS engagement in supporting local biodiversity. Whilst some valuable work has already taken place on sustainable development issues such as energy use and conservation and waste minimisation, the NHS has done little so far to enhance biodiversity through land management. Good Corporate Citizenship requirements support the NHS engaging more widely with the community at large and supporting the biodiversity of habitats under their control provides significant potential to do this. Undertaking a project to encourage local biodiversity can, in fact, contribute to all areas required under Good

Corporate Citizenship. “Choosing Health” emphasises the vital role of healthy environments and lifestyles in delivering health improvement for the whole population and again, supporting biodiversity through sensitive land management, provides the NHS with opportunities to contribute to health improvement.

A wealth of advice and guidance exists to assist the NHS in efforts to incorporate supporting biodiversity into land management policy and practice. HEFMA can fulfil a vital role in supporting estate managers in the NHS in understanding and engaging with the biodiversity agenda. There are existing examples of good practice within the region that can help with this.

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Appendix 1

Biodiversity Information Sources

www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/index.htm

This part of the Defra site provides links to lots of information including several key documents including;

“Working with the grain: A biodiversity strategy for England”

“Life-Support: Incorporating Biodiversity into Community Strategies”

DEFRA Biodiversity Policy Unit

Zone 1/10b

Temple Quay House

2 The Square

Temple Quay

Bristol BS1 6EB

Tel: 0117 372 6276

Fax: 0117 372 8182

Email: biodiversity.defra@gtnet.gov.uk

www.ukbap.org.uk

Website of the England Biodiversity Group. Lots of information about Local Biodiversity Action Plans and reports on progress across the UK so far.

www.businessandbiodiversity.org.uk

A site funded by Defra and supported by English Nature and others. Lots of excellent documents aimed at businesses provided by Earthwatch, including;

“Business and Biodiversity: A UK business guide for understanding and integrating nature conservation and biodiversity into environmental management systems.”

“Business and Biodiversity: Site Biodiversity Action Plans”

“Case Studies in Business and Biodiversity”

“What is Sustainable Development? Summary guide for companies”

www.sustainable-development.gov.uk

This is the Government’s site for all sustainable development information, with a section on biodiversity and useful information in the delivery section on delivering biodiversity on Government estates.

www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/delivery/integrating/estate/etstate.htm

Also the latest version of the Governments national strategy is available here.

“Securing the Future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy”

www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/uk-strategy-2005.htm

Sustainable Development Unit

sdudiv@defra.gsi.gov.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk

The Sustainable Development Commission is the Government's independent advisory body on sustainable development. One of their specific work streams relates to health and their "Healthy Futures" programme. Several useful documents are available via the website by searching under resources by title or by looking at the information under the Health work stream.

The documents include;

"Healthy Futures: Sustainable Development Opportunities for the NHS"

"Healthy Futures: Food and Sustainable Development"

"Healthy Futures: Green Gyms"

"Healthy Futures: Buildings and Sustainable Development"

"Sustainable Development Action Plans: Getting Started: Guide for Government Departments and Executives Agencies"

Sustainable Development Commission,

Ground Floor, Ergon House, Horseferry Road, London. SW1P 2AL.

Tel: 020 7238 4999

enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk

www.english-nature.org.uk

The Environment and Health Forum is national network of governmental and non-governmental environmental organisations with interests in helping to deliver health outcomes through sustainable environment mechanisms. The Forum bodies are engaged in a range of activities from influencing health policy to running local initiatives on the ground. The network is a resource that can be accessed to provide expertise, practical advice and help.

"Strategic Environmental Assessment and Biodiversity: Guidance for Practitioners"

www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/SEAbiodiversityGuide.pdf

"Green Roofs: their status and potential for conserving biodiversity in urban areas"

www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/498.pdf

Details also available on the website of county based area teams.

English Nature

Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA

Tel: 01733 455000 Fax: 01733 568834

Enquiries: Tel 01733 455101 Fax 01733 455103

enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

English Nature also chair the National Environment and Health Forum, which is made up of government and non-government agencies. This is another good source of information.

National Health Service

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/OrganisationPolicy/EstatesAndFacilitiesManagement/fs/en

There is a heading of Sustainable Development under this part of the DH website. Also look for Estates and Facilities Knowledge and Information section.

Documents and tools available include;

“NHS Environmental Assessment Tool Kit” (NEAT)

“Sustainable Development in the NHS” (ISBN 0-11-322000-0)

“Sustainable Development: Environmental Strategy for the NHS”
(ISBN 0-11-322720-5)

“Developing an Estate Strategy: Modernising the NHS”
(ISBN 0-11-322142-8)

Separate website available for procurement in NHS which also has useful information on sustainable development

www.pasa.nhs.uk

www.sustainabilitysouthwest.org.uk

The independent champion of sustainable development in the region who have published a framework for the region, available on the website

Sustainability South West, 4th Floor, 100 Temple Street, Bristol, BS1 6AE.

Tel: 0117 933 0249 Fax: 0117 933 0240

sustainabilitysouthwest@yahoo.co.uk

www.futurefoundations.co.uk

A sustainable construction charter for the South West region, to which organisations can sign up.

www.sensorytrust.org.uk

The Sensory Trust promotes and implements an inclusive approach to the design and management of outdoor space, richer connections between people and place and equality of access for all people to quality outdoor spaces.

Useful documents including;

“Making Connections: A Guide to Accessible Green Space”

(ISBN 0-9526473-3-X)

This document provides effective ways of opening up sites to a wider audience.

Sensory Trust

Watering Lane Nursery

Pentewan

St Austell

Cornwall PL26 6BE

enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk

Appendix 2

Biodiversity & Land Management within the NHS

Q.1 Are you the person responsible for / leading on land management, environmental & sustainability issues in your Trust?

If no, please pass this on to the relevant person:

Name:
Job title:
Email:
Telephone:
Trust:

Please estimate how much of your time is spent on Land Management issues%

Q.2 Are you aware of the following publications?	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Sustainable development in the NHS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Environmental Strategy for the NHS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthy Futures: Sustainable Development opportunities for the NHS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with the grain of nature: Biodiversity Strategy for England	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS Environmental Assessment Tool	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.3 Does your Trust have a land management policy? Yes No

If Yes, does the policy include;

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Restriction or prevention of use of toxic chemicals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensitive management regimes, e.g. grass cutting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planting of native plants / species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouragement of local flora	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouragement of local fauna	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local composting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Please send examples of policies that you are happy to share)

If No, would you welcome assistance in creating a land management policy?
Yes No

Q.4 Is Grounds Maintenance in your Trust...

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Carried out by in-house staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contracted out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part in-house / part contract	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>	

Q.5 Are biodiversity & land management principles built into any contracts?

Yes No

(Please send copies of contracts that include these principles that you are happy to share – these may be anonymised if you wish)

Q.6 Are there any projects currently underway within your Trust to help encourage biodiversity & create better more suitable environments?

Yes No

If Yes, please would you supply brief details of the project & the contact details of the person leading it:

Q.7 Do you have any examples of good practice, which you feel you would like to showcase to other NHS Trusts?

Yes No

If yes please would you put brief details overleaf.

Kindly return this questionnaire to: Sarah.Lawson@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk

Sarah Lawson, Regional Public Health Group, GOSW, Mast House, Shepherds Wharf, 24 Sutton Road,
Plymouth PL4 0HJ. Tel: 01752 635160 Fax: 01752 635095

Thank-you for your time

Appendix 3

Biodiversity and Land Management within the NHS South West Region

Summary of Questionnaire Survey July 2005

Responses

15 responses were received from the 55 questionnaires sent out to HEFMA representatives. This is a response rate of 27%, which is considered good for a postal questionnaire.

Responses were received from a range of Trusts, spread throughout the region, which should mean responses are representative of the region as a whole.

Type of Trust	Responses
Ambulance	2
PCT	4
Hospital	4
NHS Other	5

Responses were made by Directors (20%) and Estates/Facilities/Operational Managers (80%). The percentage of their time spent on environmental issues as part of their job ranged from 1 to 20%, with the majority (70%) spending less than 5 % on this type of work.

Knowledge of Publications

Publication Name	Yes	No
Sustainable development in the NHS	80%	20%
New Environmental Strategy for the NHS	60%	40%
Healthy Futures : SD opportunities for the NHS	34%	66%
Working with the Grain : Biodiversity Strategy for England	6%	94%
NHS Environmental Assessment Tool	86%	14%

Land Management Policies

2 of the Trusts (South Devon Healthcare and Avon Ambulance) who responded have an existing or draft Land Management or Landscape Policy. The policies both include sensitive management regimes, restriction or prevention of the use of toxic chemicals, and actively encourage local flora and fauna. 1 of them also covers the planting of native species, composting and community access. 86% of Trusts who responded would welcome assistance with creating a land management policy.

Existing Grounds Maintenance Arrangements

Grounds maintenance is carried out by contractors in 60% of Trusts, with 34% carrying out the task in-house and 6% having part in-house and part contracted out. None of the existing contracts have biodiversity principles built into them.

Existing Projects and examples of good practice

5 (34%) of Trusts have existing and ongoing projects which include biodiversity principles. 3 (20%) have volunteered these projects as being examples of good practice. Some details are provided below;

South Devon Healthcare Trust

Have a Landscape Strategy that covers all the areas asked about except water management. The grounds maintenance is carried out in-house. Projects include; bird box initiative, replacement of mono-species hedges with native hedges, and replanting woodland areas with native species. The provision of a new hospital at the main Torbay site has stopped further development at this time, but the Grounds and Gardens Manager is involved with the planning of the new project and the landscaping requirements.

North Devon Healthcare Trust

Try to encourage biodiversity principles with their contractors although not written into contract. Projects include; native tree planting, creation of wild flower area, bird box initiative, controlled use of pesticides and insecticides.

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust

Currently use on site bore hole for brown water extraction for toilet flushing.

South Somerset PCT

No details of projects provided on response but claim to have in place

Avon Ambulance NHS Trust

Currently writing a land management policy. The Trust says they have an existing small nature reserve, active tree management programme, and only cut hedges outside nesting season. They are planning a bird box initiative and are exploring composting of all garden waste.