

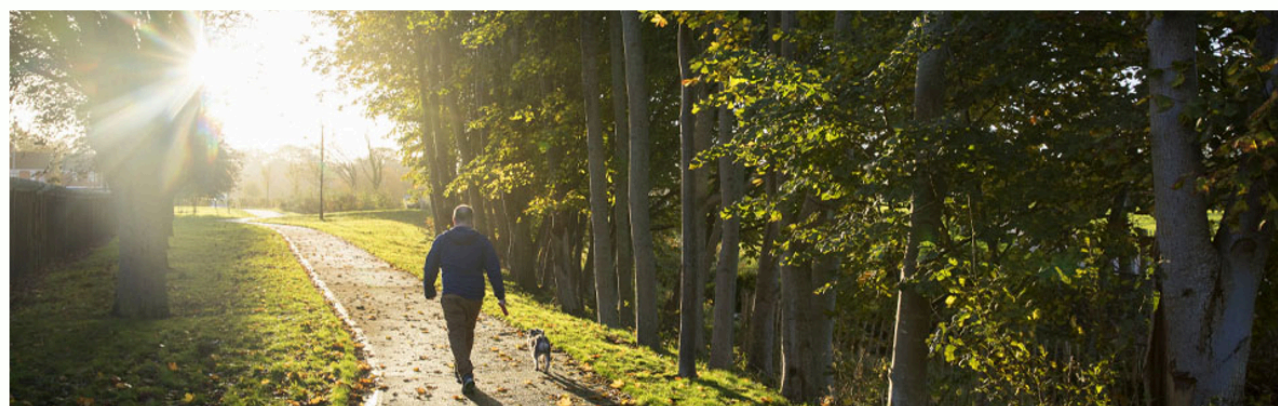
1. Urban green and blue space (UGBS) in climate action policies

The Challenge

Currently we face a triple planetary crises of climate change, nature degradation and pollution, impacting in population health and inequalities. However, little research is available about policies and interventions which would provide evidence about “what works”. We require research on intervention development and evaluation of policies and interventions that aim to mitigate, as well as reduce the vulnerability of populations to these crises.

Policy Landscape

In 2022, Northern Ireland (NI) published their Climate Change Act (1) detailing the legislation of how government will respond to climate change. A particular clause states that “proposals and policies under section 29 shall as far as is practicable, support nature based projects that enhance biodiversity, protect and restore ecosystems, and seek to reduce, or increase the removal of, greenhouse gas emissions or support climate resilience”. The government are currently undergoing a public consultation phase on their intended carbon budgets and developing the climate action plan, and investigating the opportunities for interventions and policies that provide multiple ‘wins’ or so-called ‘multi-solvers’ that address climate change, the nature crises, pollution, population health and wellbeing, and inequalities.



Connswater Community Greenway, Belfast

1. Urban green and blue space (UGBS) in climate action policies

Underpinning Research

The Connswater Community Greenway (CCG) (2) is an example of a nature based solution (NBS) that addresses these challenges. The GroundsWell team in partnership with EastSide Partnership, Belfast City Council and The Paul Hogarth Company, are working closely with the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), who are the lead department for the Climate Change Act, to integrate learnings from this work to inform the NBS element of the climate action plan. The CCG was an urban greenway which opened in east Belfast, comprising some of the most deprived communities in NI, in 2017. It involved 16km of new/improved walking and cycling infrastructure, remediated rivers, flood alleviation scheme, social programmes and events, signage, landscaping, and new civic square and public art. The GroundsWell Belfast team have been conducting research on the CCG since 2010 (3-6); one of the longest running natural experiment evaluations of a NBS/UGBS intervention (7). The team are currently conducting a 5 year follow-up study involving a household survey, administrative data linkage, qualitative component, and economic analyses that explore health (including NCDs and physical activity as a NCD risk factor), social, economic, environmental, inequalities and climate impacts. The team have recently completed community consultation and published a report on developing a climate resilient CCG with lessons for climate mitigation and adaptation.

Pathways to Impact

GroundsWell have co-hosted a public consultation on the NI carbon budget with DAERA on 22nd Sept 2023, and presented and were part of an expert panel on an introduction to NBS workshop on 26th Sept 2023 with DAERA and the climate leads from all government departments. The presentation showcased the CCG research as a NBS exemplar. Further discussions are taking place regarding the integration of the CCG in the NI climate action plan. The underpinning research is informing NI policy and the climate action plan. In summary, we have an opportunity to showcase UGBS as exemplars of NBS informing multi-sectoral policies at the nexus of health, climate action and inequalities. We are also responding to the climate crisis through relevant case studies in each pioneer city such as development of climate-resilient greenways, biodiversity interventions, and impact of green bus routes.