

Mental health benefits of visiting UK Woodland's estimated at £185 million

Visits to the UK's woodlands boosts mental health and is estimated to save £185 million in treatment costs annually, a landmark report published by Forest Research finds today (4 December).

The report, published during 'National Tree Week' and funded by the Forestry Commission, Scottish Forestry and the Welsh Government, is the first time the health and wellbeing benefits of the UK's woodlands have been quantified.

For England specifically, woodlands save £141 million costs associated with mental health illnesses, including visits to GPs, drug prescriptions, inpatient care, social services and the number of days lost due to mental health issues. The figures are based on evidence of the reduced incidence of depression and anxiety resulting from regular visits to woodlands.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the prevalence of mental illness has increased. Access to trees, woods, forests, and other natural environments including urban parks and green spaces has become even more important for individuals to support and maintain their wellbeing. Of visits to all greenspace over the past 10 years, from farmland and countryside to parks and playing fields), 14.1% of these were made to woodlands.

In urban areas, trees and woodlands are essential for communities, supporting wellbeing, reducing pollution and improving quality of life. Supporting this, the report finds that the value of street trees through avoided antidepressant costs related to mental health issues is £16 million.

The report also finds that longer term, the value over the next 100 years is estimated to be just over £11 billion for the mental health benefits of visits to woodlands, and a further £1 billion for the mental health benefits of street trees.

Forestry Commission Chair, Sir William Worsley, said:

This report demonstrates just how vital it is to invest in healthy trees and woodlands. It makes medical sense, because it will mean better health for all; economic sense, by saving society millions of pounds and it makes environmental sense, helping us to tackle the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

This National Tree Week, let's all step outside, enjoy trees in town and countryside and reap the benefits of being close to nature.

[Almost half the population say that they are spending more time outside than before the pandemic](#), while the majority of adults surveyed by [Forest Research](#)

agreed that their level of happiness when in woodlands and nature has increased.

As recent hosts of the climate change summit COP26, and President of the G7, the UK is leading the climate change agenda. Today's report highlights the role of nature as our most precious asset, reiterating the reliance of economies, livelihoods and well-being on nature.

The Government has committed to trebling tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament. It's new England Trees Action Plan will deliver unprecedented rates of tree planting, helping to create diverse treescapes across the country which will benefit wildlife, the environment and people's wellbeing.

[Read the 'Valuing the mental health benefits of woodlands' report here.](#)

[For more information on wellbeing opportunities in our nations forests, please visit the Forestry England site.](#)

Supportive quotes:

Welcoming the study, Scottish Government Environment Minister Màiri McAllan said:

Scotland's forests and woodlands offer so many environmental, social and economic benefits to society. During Covid-19 pandemic, access to woodlands has become even more important to individuals in supporting and maintaining their well-being.

It is widely recognised that spending time in woodlands can have a positive effect on alleviating conditions such as depression and anxiety. This study is important because we now have a clear monetary value on how much our woodland resource could be worth in tackling poor mental health.

Welsh Deputy Climate Change Minister, Lee Waters, said:

Earlier this year I issued a national call to arms for us to plant more trees in Wales and one of the reasons for doing so was the benefit they have on our health and mental wellbeing.

I welcome this report, which makes for fascinating reading and provides yet more evidence as to why we need to plant more and more trees if we are to create a stronger, greener, fairer Wales.

According to the Climate Change Committee, to reach net zero, we need to plant 43,000 hectares of new trees by 2030, rising to 180,000 hectares by 2050. That means planting around 86 million

trees over the next nine years. To achieve this, we have big ambitions that include creating a network of high quality, multi-purpose woodland across Wales and today's report really does show how much of a positive impact this work will have.

Stephen Buckley, Head of Information for mental health charity Mind said:

Spending time outdoors – especially in woodlands or near water – can help with mental health problems such as anxiety and mild to moderate depression. This might be due to combining regular physical activity and social contact with being outside in nature. Being outside in natural light can also be helpful if you experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression that affects people during particular seasons or times of year. Although many of us feel like hibernating in winter, getting outside in green spaces and making the most of the little daylight we get can really benefit both your physical and mental health.