

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

December 2024

Natural England West Midlands

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WELCOME TO THE DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

We might not automatically think of bees during Winter, but there are still things you can do to help in the colder months! See this [information sheet](#) for gardening for bees in Autumn and over Winter. Photographed above is the rare and threatened Tormentil Mining Bee, one of the species that Natural England are trying to take action for through our [Purple Horizons Project](#) in the West Midlands. Read more about this project taking place in Walsall and South Staffordshire in this blog: [How NE is helping people connect with nature in the West Midlands](#).

You might notice that this month's spotlights are rather Natural England focussed. Whilst it's nice to toot our own horn once in a while, please remember to send in any nature-based activities/projects case studies that you've been up to, to include in my spotlight section next month! You might just inspire someone else or gather interest/possible funding in your project!

Warm wishes to everyone for the winter season. And Merry Christmas to those who celebrate it. See you all in the New Year!

Please take a look at my [Funding Opportunities PDF](#), attached to the email you received this newsletter through. I have compiled external funding opportunities that could support health & nature projects.

YOUR NATURAL ENGLAND CONTACT

ABOUT ME

Hi, I'm Amber Marquand, the Health and Environment Lead in the West Midlands, focussing on Walsall and Birmingham.

Amber.Marquand@naturalengland.org.uk



WHAT I DO AND WHY

Nature plays a critical role in our physical and mental wellbeing, so Natural England want to ensure more people can access the healing properties of spending time in natural spaces. For example, via conservation volunteering, community gardening, tree planting, nature walks, green crafting etc.

Our Health and Environment Lead roles across the country support and create connections between any Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprises, health practitioners, Community Wellbeing Roles, or local authorities interested in increasing the offer of Green / Blue Social Prescribing. We want to increase the offer of nature-based activities within communities to improve health and wellbeing and pro-environment behaviours, especially in areas with poorer health outcomes and lower access to nature.

I have created this newsletter as a way of providing support and information around nature for health and wellbeing in the West Midlands. For projects taking place in Walsall or Birmingham, I am able to provide tailored support so please get in touch.

SPOTLIGHTS

A snapshot of the amazing work being done in the West Midlands connecting people and nature.

Please let me know if you would like to feature in a spotlight in a future newsletter!

Bringing People Closer to Nature on our National Nature Reserves

Natural England manages 6 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) across Shropshire, Staffordshire, and South Cheshire which are thriving hubs for connecting people with nature this year.

Across these 6 reserves, 21 unique public events were delivered, ranging from pond dipping, bat detecting and dragonfly walks to willow weaving and scything workshops. These activities have catered to a wide audience, including families, local communities, and wildlife enthusiasts. The 3 family events were particularly popular, but enthusiasm for all the events was evident, with additional sessions added to meet demand. In total, 310 participants attended the sessions, enjoying hands-on experiences that foster a deeper appreciation of nature and experiencing the benefits of nature for their health and wellbeing. Beyond these recorded activities, the reserves have also hosted numerous school visits, volunteer days, and other initiatives, further enriching connections between people and wildlife.

This year's work showcases the vital role NNRs play in inspiring communities and creating opportunities for all to engage with and care for our nature.

Find out more about [National Nature Reserves](#).

Please keep an eye on the 'Events' page of my Jan/Feb newsletter to see if an NNR near you has any events to book onto in 2025!



Winter Ramble



Willow Weaving Family event

NATURE FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT WALSALL MANOR HOSPITAL

Walsall Manor Hospital's staff memorial garden is set for a transformation, along with the creation of a wildflower meadow, through a Conservation Enhancement Scheme fund from DEFRA secured by Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust's charity.

Groundwork West Midlands will enhance the courtyard memorial garden, creating a peaceful, nature-filled space for staff to reflect and remember loved ones. Biodiversity will also be boosted with wildflower planting near the Urgent and Emergency Care Centre.

Jane Longden, Divisional Director Estates and Facilities, said: *"Thanks to the hard work of Well Wishers we have managed to secure funding from Natural England to reenergise the staff memorial garden. We are really excited about this project and I can't wait to see how the space is transformed."*

The Trust is encouraging staff to volunteer to help with the garden's transformation, fostering connections with nature, which can reduce stress and improve wellbeing.

Amber Marquand, Health & Wellbeing Higher Officer at Natural England, added: *"This is a brilliant opportunity to bring the benefits of nature to Walsall Manor Hospital and its community. We hope this project will provide a great long-lasting asset for staff, patients, visitors and nature."*



This project also supports the Trust's biodiversity goals by creating habitats for pollinators like bees and butterflies. The planting of scented, colourful wildflowers and shrubs aims to activate people's senses, whilst also benefiting insects and birds.

See [Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust's news piece](#) for more information.

This project sits within the geographical area of Natural England's Nature Recovery Project 'Purple Horizons'. Read this [blog](#) to find out the other work the Purple Horizons project is doing to connect people with nature for their health and wellbeing.

MORE SPOTLIGHTS

A snapshot of the amazing work being done in the West Midlands connecting people and nature.

GeoAnimations: using animations to explore geology in nature

The **GeoAnimations** project is funded by Natural England's Protected Site Strategies as part of the 'Nature Collective' series. It is an imaginative project to test out connecting people with their local landscapes and natural history through **animated storytelling**. By blending geology, storytelling, and artistic creativity, the project crafts engaging narratives that reveal the hidden connections between landscapes and our lives. Developed in collaboration with animators and geologists, the initiative explores how animation can make science accessible, relatable, and fun. It showcases how collaboration across disciplines can bring fresh perspectives to public engagement with nature and geodiversity.

If you would like to know more please contact geodiversity@naturalengland.org.uk

One standout example is **The Chronicles of Dudley**, which tells the story of Silurian limestone and its transformative role in the Industrial Revolution in the West Midlands. Narrated by Sir Lenny Henry, the animation dives into Dudley's geological past, highlighting fossils at Wren's Nest and linking the "magic ingredient" of limestone to the creation of the Black Country as we know it today. This inventive approach not only educates but also sparks curiosity and pride in local heritage, making geology come alive in a way that resonates with both locals and a broader audience.



SOCIAL & CULTURAL BARRIERS TO NATURE IN BIRMINGHAM

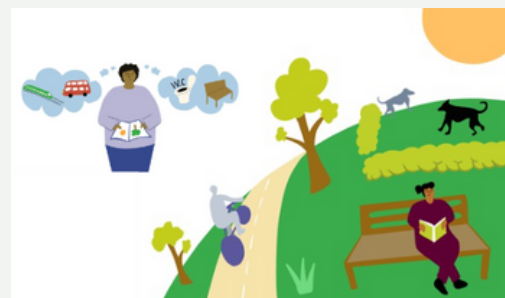
Chloe Thompson-Haynes, Inclusion Senior with Natural England's West Mids team, commissioned BVSC to explore social and cultural barriers to accessing nature and greenspaces in inner-city Birmingham. This work is part of Natural England's 'Doorstep to Landscape' project, which aims to connect more people with nature close to home. The project adopted a community-based approach, with community researchers designing, carrying out, and analysing the study.

A report from Natural England details the results, highlighting several key social and cultural barriers to people accessing nature equally:

- **Diverse needs:** Green spaces can't have a one-size-fits-all design. Some people's needs and preferences don't fit with others
- **Lack of purpose:** When someone feels there's no purpose for visiting a green space, it can make people feel like they don't fit in
- **Past experience:** Those who are new to green spaces can feel uncertain about the rules, what to wear and what do. Possible previous negative experiences in green spaces
- **Wider feelings of inclusion in local communities:** Common for people who've had a bad experience to feel nervous about visiting local green spaces
- **Awareness of local green spaces:** While some green spaces in Birmingham are well known, others can be more difficult to find.
- **Green Space quality:** Having green space nearby isn't enough, must be places people want to be

Recommendations from participants on how to reduce these barriers included:

- Dividing green spaces into **different zones**, like dog areas and quiet areas
- Make green spaces more **functional**-adding reasons to visit (cafes/exercise equipment)
- **Hosting events** to bring people together in nature and create a **sense of community**
- Help individuals at any age to make that **initial step into green space** and nature
- Working with community organisations who **focus on inclusion** for positive change
- Provide **easy-to-access info** about green spaces; maps and amenities
- Keep **parks clean and tidy** by regularly cleaning litter and rubbish



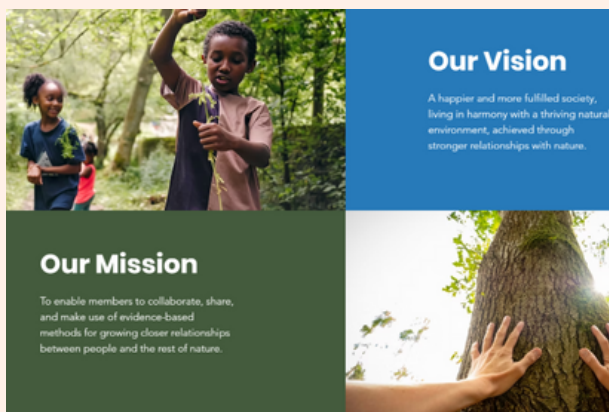
A short Practical Summary of this research is available. If you'd like a copy, please email the Project Manager, at chloe.thompson-haynes@naturalengland.org.uk.

YOU MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW...

Nature Connectedness Network



UNIVERSITY OF
DERBY



The University of Derby and Natural England run a **Nature Connectedness Network** and it now has a public face with the launch of its website! The Nature Connectedness Network is open to everyone, including government staff. It provides the opportunity to explore when spending time in, and connecting with nature, can play a role in different areas of work. Natural England has released a blog to explain more!

Some useful links for Social Prescribing from NASP:

- [Social Prescribing Day Toolkit](#) for 19th March 2025
- [Join the Social Prescribing Innovation Network](#)
- [Social prescribing and long term conditions blog](#)

Nature Towns & Cities Initiative - get involved

Millions of people living in urban areas lack vital access to nature and greenspace. Nature Towns and Cities, a new programme set up by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and Natural England, will tackle this by helping local authorities work together with local communities and partners to bring nature into every neighbourhood for all to enjoy. The aim is to grow networks of green space throughout towns and cities, from tree-lined streets and community greens, to heritage parks and canal paths.

Please see the [website](#) to find out more about **The Nature Towns and Cities network - which is open to all, and free to be a member**. Membership includes events, training and resources for community organisations and charities, as well as local government. See the 'How it will work' section on [Nature Towns and Cities](#) and [What's on - Nature Towns and Cities](#))



National
Trust



HERITAGE
FUND

USEFUL TOOLS FOR NATURE & GREENSPACE

“How can I teach kids about the Countryside Code?”

Download this pack of exciting resources full of engaging activities that explore the Countryside Code.

The activity sheets include:

- Litter - The Countryside Code
- Keeping Dogs Under Control - The Countryside Code
- Finding Your Way - The Countryside Code
- Guide to Visiting Parks, Waterways, the Coast and Countryside
- Caring for Nature - The Countryside Code



The Countryside Code Activity Pack (teacher made) - Twinkl



The Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool (EBNT)

The EBN tool is designed to help **green infrastructure planners** maximise the multifunctionality of their projects. The tool has been updated and can be used with Biodiversity Net Gain & the Green Infrastructure Framework to consider the ecosystem service implications of land use change and help deliver positive action for people & nature through more integrated design. Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool: a short introduction Video.

Use of the Beta tool is voluntary and has just been updated. It has proven to be a valuable resource for many stakeholders, with over 5000 downloads.

Visit the [EBN Tool page](#).
Watch the recent [deep dive webinar](#).

Any queries, please email: ebn@naturalengland.org.uk

Tool for How Nature Can Transform Policy and Health

Intelligent Health has launched a series of **policy postcards** showcasing how nature-based solutions can tackle society's biggest health and wellbeing challenges. These evidence-based resources align with the government's missions to:

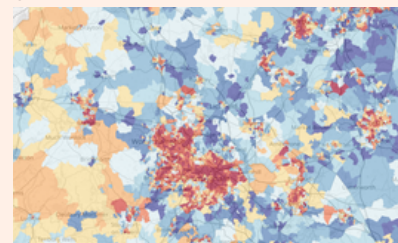
- Build an NHS fit for the future
- Kickstart economic growth
- Break down barriers to opportunity
- Make Britain a clean energy superpower

Shared with key policymakers, including government ministers, these postcards provide actionable recommendations for improving public health, reducing inequalities, and boosting sustainability. Explore the full suite and see how nature can drive meaningful change for a healthier, more prosperous future. [Learn more here!](#)



Natural England's Green Infrastructure Mapping Tool

This tool is something I use and mention a lot. It's a way of easily visualising a variety of natural and social environment data relevant to our communities we work with. A new version is being launched with enhancements around Public Rights of Way, data from the People and Nature Survey plus pilots maps for Urban Heat Mapping, Air Quality and Urban Food Production. [Green Infrastructure Home \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#). There's loads of great tools on here...



CALLS FOR HELP!

Expressions of Interest are sought for an organisation to support **Midlands Parks Forum**



to develop a green space training programme. EOI deadline: **12 noon on Thursday 16 Jan 2025** Please send any enquiries or information to: pm@midlandsparksforum.co.uk. Please download the [Expression of interest document](#) to find out more.

Read more about Midlands Parks Forum [here](#).

Natural England are seeking feedback on the Green Infrastructure Framework



Natural England's Green Infrastructure (GI) Stakeholder Survey needs your feedback. Survey is open to all Local Planning Authorities and anyone with an interest in GI. **Online survey**, which takes 10-20 minutes to complete. The **closing date is 31st December 2024**, and your feedback will support improvements to the usability and effectiveness of the [GI Framework](#) and highlight if further support is needed.



Nature Recovery and Biodiversity Resources for Healthcare Professionals

We are seeking input from healthcare professionals and those working closely with them to help shape the development of a comprehensive resource repository accessible to all in the sector. Currently, these resources are hosted in many different places and do not cater to all the needs of different NHS audiences, so there is a need to bring these together to promote shared action across the sector. This survey is designed to gather insights on the resources you currently use, the themes that interest you, and the gaps or barriers you encounter. It will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes to complete. Responses by **Friday 10th January** Thank you for your input! Any questions, please contact Dan Loveard via daniel.loveard@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk.



Love where you live' Solihull photo competition

Visit Solihull and Love Solihull have teamed up to launch a photo competition to find the best photographers across the borough to capture Solihull's beautiful parks, greenspaces and heritage sites. They are looking for images that showcase the beauty and vibrancy of Solihull across all seasons. The top 12 images selected by the judging panel will be exhibited at a display in Touchwood Shopping Centre and will also be used in Solihull's tourism promotional materials. The **closing date for entries is Tuesday, 14th January 2025**. [Read more](#).

A Garden Organic Volunteer Opportunity
Community Champion: Rugby

Working in partnership, Rugby Borough Council and Garden Organic are excited to champion 'the organic way' using natural methods to promote healthy, productive, sustainable gardens. By recruiting, training and supporting Volunteer 'Community Champions' we will help nurture land, inspire growing and green space activities, embed sustainability in gardening practices, and impact positively on biodiversity.

What does it involve?
Community Champions are volunteers who encourage people in their local community to support biodiversity and the environment through organic growing. Sharing skills and inspiring others to connect with the natural environment around us. They also offer advice to people who are already growing and may be having difficulties or need encouragement.

Anyone can be a Community Champion, you don't have to be an expert in organic growing. You'll join a network of likeminded volunteers, and with training and support from a local coordinator, together we can make a difference. Activities that you might get involved with include talking to friends, family, and neighbours, attending village fairs or giving talks to local groups.

How much commitment do I have to make?
There is no absolute commitment, we appreciate your support sharing the projects messages, however you choose to do it. Some volunteers will spend around 30 hours each year. These hours include all travel and preparation time. This figure however is not a requirement.

Is this for you?
We're looking for volunteers with an interest in growing and biodiversity, people that care about the environment and the impact of climate change.

You don't need to be an expert, you don't even need to have grown anything before. We will provide training, skills and support to equip you with the confidence to get growing yourself and go on to share these skills with others.

With your support we will engage and inspire more people across Rugby to get involved with green spaces and together deliver projects that support biodiversity and environmental benefits for people, places, and the planet.

Find out more and get involved
This is an exciting new project and we'd love to hear from you if you're interested in becoming a volunteer. If you follow the QR code it will take you straight through to the application form, alternatively you can contact Heather Thomas, your local project coordinator who will be happy to answer any questions and explain more about the project.

rugby@gardenorganic.org.uk or 024 7630 3517

Working in partnership
garden organic

www.gardenorganic.org.uk

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

One Walsall aims to help people at risk of social isolation, through a range of positive volunteering opportunities.

We will help applicants to find suitable volunteering opportunities that match their skill set and interests.

Applicants will have access to a minimum 12 hours support. Support can range from skills development to support around confidence building.

Applicants can be aged 18-75, who live in the Walsall Borough

Volunteering opportunities come from a range of organisations including the NHS, Local Authority, charities and not for profit organisations.

All expenses will be paid.

CONTACT US

volunteering@onewalsall.org
16a Bridge Street, Walsall, WS1 1HP
01922 619 840
onewalsall.org

Benefits of volunteering?
Volunteering is good for your health. It can reduce stress and improve mood, self-esteem and happiness.
Connecting with others positively impacts feelings of social isolation and loneliness.
Interacting with new people develops your social skills.

Funded by UK Government LEVELLING UP West Midlands Combined Authority Walsall Council One Walsall

WALSALL VOLUNTEERING

We will help volunteers be placed (where relevant) with local nature-based activity organisations in Walsall. For this, the organisation should be registered as a member with One Walsall to be eligible for volunteer support.

Please contact [Ritu Sharma](#) at OneWalsall to find out more!

WARWICKSHIRE



Every Second Tuesday of the Month
 Time: 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM
 Location: May Blossom Farm, Take turning for Barby moorings, Barby Lane, Rugby, Warwickshire CV23 8UJ
 Cost £5



Immerse yourself in nature by planting vegetables and enjoying the beauty of the farm. Interact with friendly animals and experience the joy of feeding and petting them. Reconnect with nature and





All are welcome to join us for cuddles, friendly chats, and a lovely cup of tea!

First Wednesday of the Month
 Time: 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM
 Location: Rugby Thornfield Bowling Club
 Bruce Williams Way, Rugby CV22 5LZ
 (For SatNav, use CV22 5L)



BIRMINGHAM






IMPROVE WELLBEING THROUGH NATURE!

Every Friday
 11am - 1pm

Join Birmingham Settlement's inclusive and relaxing group to access nature-based outdoor activities that improve wellbeing and mood at a tranquil oasis by Edgbaston Reservoir.

This group will offer a number of activities to support mental health and wellbeing including:

- Gentle gardening & conservation
- Crafting with natural materials
- Engaging with nature to reduce stress & anxiety
- Peer support



Sign-up here! We will be in touch.



Contact the Green Minds team
nature@wellbeing@bsettlement.org.uk
 or 07497519736



Birmingham Settlement Nature & Wellbeing Centre, 79 Selwyn Road, Edgbaston Reservoir, B16 0SL



The King's Fund

NATIONAL

Honest perspectives on the pressures and opportunities facing our complex health care sector

Join The King's Fund on the **4th and 5th February** for our two-day virtual event Health and care explained, where policy and leadership experts will break down the complexities of England's health care system. Over two insightful days, we'll explore:

- the structure of the NHS and social care in England
- the government's plans and their implications for patients, professionals and providers
- key challenges such as funding, performance and workforce pressures.

£100-£250 +VAT (students £55)

[Book your place here.](#)

Upcoming NASP Webinars in January 2025

Jan 15th - Learning from Phase One of the National Cross Government Programme: Preventing and Tackling Mental Ill-Health through Green Social Prescribing

Jan 21st - Community-led Social Prescribing - Lessons from Big Local and Beyond

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS



Podcast: Local green spaces and mental health

In this podcast, Helen Saul, Editor in Chief of NIHR Evidence, and study author Sarah Rodgers, Professor of Health Informatics, University of Liverpool, discuss the impact of local green spaces on people's mental health.

This study aimed to tease out the impact of green and blue spaces alone, regardless of wealth or other factors. Researchers analysed how living in areas with more green space, or how close the nearest green and blue space was to someone's house (access), affected people's mental health. They also considered if the effect of green space on mental health differed between more and less wealthy areas.

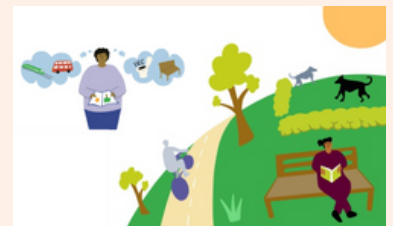
People and Nature Survey 23/24



The Adults' People and Nature Survey asks nearly 25,000 adults in England every year their views on the environment and spending time in nature. The survey is delivered annually to help Natural England, Defra and sector partners understand how people are engaging with the natural environment in England, and how this is changing over time. [View the new report](#) and [infographic](#).

There is also now a [Children's People and Nature Survey 2024 update here!](#)

Social and Cultural Barriers to Nature in Birmingham



A new [research project](#) led by Natural England as part of their "Doorstep to Landscape" project explored barriers to accessing green spaces in inner-city Birmingham. Interviews conducted with residents from diverse communities identified challenges like feeling unsafe, a lack of purpose for visiting, and limited awareness of amenities. Recommendations included creating tailored zones in parks (e.g., quiet areas or child-friendly spaces) and introducing practical supports like clothing rentals for weather preparedness.

The findings aim to guide improvements in urban green space accessibility and enhance community inclusion, promoting both environmental and health benefits. See spotlight section for more information.

Preventing and Tackling Mental Ill Health through Green Social Prescribing Project Evaluation

The Report Summary details the findings of the project, which aimed to tackle mental ill health through nature-based activities. Running from 2021 to 2023, the project supported over 8,000 people, particularly from deprived areas. Results showed improved mental well-being, reduced anxiety, and a positive social return on investment. The evaluation highlights GSP's effectiveness, but also emphasises challenges like funding, scalability, and the need for better data collection. Recommendations focus on sustainable funding, partnerships, and refining referral processes for broader access.

Report Summary

Full Report

USEFUL RESOURCES

NATURE BUDDIES TOOLKIT

NATURE CONNECTION HANDBOOK

A digestible resource developed with the University of Derby and Natural England. It sums up the importance of connecting with nature; and includes some case studies on nature on prescription and social prescribing.



NATURE CONNECTION PRACTICES

Based on the latest research on human-nature relationships, the University of Derby have put together a set of 5 nature connection practices to help activate the pathways to nature connectedness. Each one takes just a few minutes a day and can be done alongside ordinary daily activities. For instance, several studies show that even watching videos of nature for 10 minutes every day can increase nature connection and reduce feelings of stress.



The Toolkit includes information on:

- How to design a Nature Buddies programme to build on interests of volunteers and the people you work with
- How to enhance your offer to and recruit new volunteers, and support existing volunteers.
- How to empower people to feel better, improving their mental health and other health outcomes and to build social connections to overcome loneliness
- How to build people's connection to outdoor spaces / nature near them
- How to measure success and impact
- Evidence from pilot of impacts of Nature Buddies on individual's mental health and nature connection
- Case studies and anonymised testimonials that demonstrate benefits



CREATING GARDENS FOR WELLBEING - A RESOURCE MAP

Health Leads, Amber Marquand and Mandy Preece, have created a Resource Map - a compilation of useful websites and resources - for anyone interested in creating garden spaces to improve peoples' health and wellbeing, but also to benefit nature and wildlife. This is an 8-page resource for partners who are looking for some guidance on funding, what to plant, how to be people and nature friendly and where there might be further support. Plus more.

We hope it's helpful - please share around!



THINKING ABOUT CREATING A COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE, A GP GARDEN, ETC.?

Here are some great resources:

- [Greener Communities Toolkit](#)
- [In Our Nature Resource Hub](#)
- [Nature on Prescription Handbook](#)
- [Nature Connections Organisations Handbook](#)
- [Biodiversity Plans for Healthcare Sites - NHS Forest](#)
- [FINCH \(Families into Nature Connecting and Helping Resource\)](#)

PLANTING TREES, HEDGES, COMMUNITY ORCHARDS?

- [NHS Forest Digital Tree Pack](#)
- Also, reach out to your County Council or local Wildlife Trust for advice, funding or trees



Express your interest in receiving free trees →

WHY NATURE WORKS: THE EVIDENCE

- [Links between natural environments and mental health - EIN065 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)
- [Links between natural environments and physical health - EIN066 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)
- [How the Natural Environment can support Children and Young People - EIN067 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)
- [Connection to Nature - EIN068 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)



INSPIRATION

A video of an Occupational Therapy garden: <https://vimeo.com/411401512>

Follow Natural England on Social Media:

- [Natural England on Twitter](#)
- [Natural England on Instagram](#)
- [Natural England on YouTube](#)
- [Natural England on LinkedIn](#)

Although I hope that this newsletter will contain something useful for everyone, I completely understand if you feel it is not relevant for you. Please email me (Amber) if you would like to opt out of receiving my newsletter at any time. Thank you.