

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Natural England West Midlands

March 2025

INCLUDED IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

1. YOUR NATURAL ENGLAND CONTACT
2. SPOTLIGHTS
3. WHERE TO FIND NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES & PROVIDERS
4. WHAT'S ON OFFER
5. CALLS FOR HELP!
6. TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES
7. MORE TRAINING!
8. EVENTS & WEBINARS
9. REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS
10. NATURE IN THE NEWS
11. USEFUL RESOURCES



WELCOME TO THE MARCH NEWSLETTER

March brings a welcome burst of colour as nature wakes up for spring. This month, I'd like to highlight two key things:

1) Natural England have been working in collaboration with Intelligent Health and GP's to create a training module tailored to health professionals all about Green Social Prescribing. Released on National Social Prescribing Day, 19th March, the training is now live, free and available for health professionals to access. Please see the [training page](#) for more info. I think this module perfectly complements the recently rolled out [RSPB Nature Prescriptions](#) with tailored West Midlands training and resources.

2) A webinar which will be delivered by Natural England colleagues, taking place in June, on Embedding Nature Connection in Mental Health Care which is specifically designed for NHS secondary care colleagues. I would encourage you to sign up to this as it is set to be an extremely useful webinar.

There's a new page in my newsletter, all about [how to find nature-based activities in your county](#). Please take a look and let me know which directories/sites I might be missing!

As always, I have compiled an [external funding opportunities PDF](#) suitable for wellbeing & 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!

Transforming Greenspaces for Nature & People at Walsall Manor Hospital



On the 27th February, at Walsall Manor Hospital, a team of volunteers and corporate partners worked together to turf strip in readiness for planting a vibrant wildflower meadow next to the Urgent & Emergency Care Centre. This project, funded through DEFRA's Conservation Enhancement Scheme, has been delivered by [Groundwork West Midlands](#).

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) day saw volunteers from HS2 and Skanska gathered under the rare winter sun to strip turf in preparation for wildflower seeding. Their collective effort marks a significant step towards establishing a thriving green space that will not only support biodiversity as part of Natural England's West Midlands [Purple Horizons Nature Recovery Project](#) but also provide a serene place for hospital visitors and staff to relax and reconnect with healing nature. The Trust's new Group Chief Executive, Joe Chadwick-Bell also came down to show support for the project and find out what the volunteers were getting up to....

..."It is great to have a lovely wellbeing space within the hospital and I can't wait to see the end result this summer," Joe Chadwick-Bell, Group Chief Executive of The Royal Wolverhampton and Walsall Healthcare NHS Trusts. [see BBC Article](#).

As the enhancement funding comes to an end and Groundwork West Midlands completes its involvement, the hospital is looking for organisations and volunteers to help maintain these beautiful spaces. Whether through one-off sessions or ongoing support, volunteers can contribute to preserving the Wildflower Meadow and Staff Memorial Garden as vital havens for wildlife and wellbeing.



If you'd like to get involved, please let me know –we'd love to hear from you!



County by County - where to find out about your local nature-based activities and providers

Country-wide Social Farms & Gardens

Their map showcases hundreds of organisations that are doing inspiring work connecting people with nature; from city and care farms, to community gardens

Birmingham

- [Birmingham City Council 'Improving your health with nature' Website](#)
- [Birmingham Open Spaces Forum](#)
- [Route2Wellbeing Directory Map](#)

Walsall

- [Walsall Healthy Spaces | Facebook | Linktree](#)
- [Healthy spaces team Facebook](#)
- [Walsall Wellbeing Directory](#); search 'nature' or 'garden' or 'walking'

Sandwell

- [Route2Wellbeing Directory](#)

Dudley

- [Community Information Directory](#); 'nature' or 'gardening' or 'walking' or 'conservation'
- [Dudley Outdoor Active Facebook Page](#)
- [Healthy Dudley – Move More](#)
- [Dudley Nature Reserves Facebook page](#)
- [Dudley Parks Facebook page](#)

Worcestershire

- [Community Services Directory](#); search 'nature' or 'gardening' or 'walking' or 'conservation'

Herefordshire

- [Talk Community Directory](#); search 'nature' or 'gardening' or 'walking' or 'conservation'

If you have any suggestions of sites/directories for finding nature-based activities, especially in other West Mids counties please let me know!

WHAT'S ON OFFER

Keep an eye out for continuing and brand new Park Yoga venues for 2025 season (May - September)

Announced so far...

- Telford
- Kidderminster
- Worcester City



Nature Connectedness Network



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!

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](#)



CALL OUTS

Community Gardening Survey



Tell us about gardening in your community and you could win gift vouchers

Do you grow or garden in your community? Natural England have teamed up with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to understand more about your experience growing or gardening in your community. This is part of a major national research project to learn more about community growing spaces, your input will help shape support for community gardening in future. There are lots of ways people garden in their local area from planting bulbs in high street planters, to food banks harvesting allotment produce to share with others.

Please take the **15-minute survey about your community growing space here:**
<https://link.mhminsight.com/NEC>

The survey closes on 31 March 2025.

If you have any questions about the survey please email communities@rhs.org.uk

Why take part?

- You could win: As a thank you for taking part, respondents will have a chance to enter a prize draw and eight lucky winners will be selected at random to receive £125 in National Garden Gift vouchers. Winners will be notified directly by email by Monday 7 April 2025.
- Your voice matters, whether you're a seasoned gardener or just getting started
- Help us grow: Your feedback will help organisations like ours better support community gardening groups across the country to help make the UK a greener, brighter place.

Neighbourhood Futures Festival 2025, Birmingham Settlement

Birmingham Settlement are inviting local people, organisations, researchers, artists, practitioners & performers to contribute to the 2025 Neighbourhood Futures Festival—a four-day exploration of nature, community wellbeing, & climate resilience in the city.

We're particularly interested in how environmental challenges intersect with the everyday realities of our communities, as well as climate & youth - so if your work aligns - we'd love to hear from you!

Neighbourhood Futures Festival attracts a varied audience.

On the Thursday/Friday expect thought-provoking talks, panel discussions, and workshops for those passionate about urban futures, climate justice, and community resilience. Open to residents, students, academia, civic leaders, activists and professionals alike.

On Saturday/Sunday, we relax! Expect engaging, hands-on activities for families & communities, storytelling, theatre, music, play, Forest School sessions, wellbeing activities & immersive experiences that bring sustainability to life for all ages.

This is an opportunity to challenge ideas, experiment with new formats, and connect across disciplines and audiences.

If you have something to contribute, whether as part of the Thursday/Friday or the weekend - if you'd like to exhibit or be part of the festival in any form, we'd love to hear from you! Please get in touch - lizzie.forrester@bsettlement.org.uk



TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES



Green Social Prescribing e-learning Module for Health Professionals

Green social prescribing has been proven to be an effective, low-cost treatment that is already improving patient outcomes in primary care.

Natural England have been working in collaboration with Dr William Bird at Intelligent Health, NHS partners, [NASP](#) and online training education provider, [Red Whale](#), to create two **e-learning modules**. The course created and peer reviewed by GP's, comprises a **30-minute video explaining the evidence underpinning the health benefits of connecting patients to nature** and an accompanying **15-minute consultation video outlining some simple, practical steps showing GPs how they can integrate nature into their everyday practice**.

A [short promotional video and link](#) has been shared on social media on National Social Prescribing day on 19th March. The **free module is made available to over 25,000 GPs on the Red Whale training platform** and promoted via their mailing list of 40,000 health professionals. Dr William Bird has also released a related blog '[A breath of fresh air](#)' and a [slide set summarising the key evidence](#), which Natural England collaborated on, will be available to download from Intelligent Health's website.

The partnership has also secured a 45 minute workshop 'The Nature Pill' at the NHS ConfedExpo event in June [Welcome - NHS ConfedExpo 2025](#) which Natural England will co-present along with Dr William Bird and ICS Personalised Care Partner, Steve Spiers.

It is an exciting time for Green Social Prescribing - please share with any partners or colleagues who might find this useful!



MORE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES



nature prescriptions | West Midlands

Free training for healthcare professionals

Photo: Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Want to learn more about how nature can support us to overcome health and socioeconomic barriers? RSPB is now partnering with healthcare professionals in Birmingham, Walsall, and Sandwell to deliver RSPB Nature Prescriptions. Please get in touch about arranging a session for you and colleagues.

Contact to book

Alexis Johnson

Nature and Wellbeing Officer

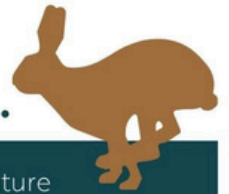
alexis.johnson@rspb.org.uk

Find out more

www.rspb.org.uk/natureprescriptions



You'll come away with...



- Clear knowledge of RSPB Nature Prescriptions
- Better understanding of how a connection to nature can support our health and wellbeing
- Increased confidence in starting conversations about the importance of prioritising nature for our wellbeing
- Free resources for you and your clients

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

Nature Connectedness: For a new relationship with nature

This **free online** course from the University of Derby explores the importance of Nature Connectedness and its benefits for both human and environmental wellbeing. Through eight short units, you'll learn how our relationship with nature can be improved and its impact on behaviours and wellbeing. The course is informed by leading research and aims to help individuals, especially those passionate about nature, foster stronger connections with the natural world. [Find out more here.](#)



EVENTS & WEBINARS



NASP webinar: Celebrating the National Cross Government programme: Preventing and Tackling Mental Ill-health through Green Social Prescribing – Key Achievements and Next Steps | NASP – 26th March, 10.30-11.30pm



Embedding Nature Connection in Mental Health Care Tickets, Tue 3 Jun 2025 at 14:00 | Eventbrite

Join us **online** for a free informative session sharing lessons learnt from two projects funded by Natural England and the NHS to test how nature can support health delivery and environmental outcomes as well as wider nature recovery. We will also identify resources and explore next steps. **This webinar is tailored specifically for healthcare and sustainability staff working in the NHS.** This might include strategic NHS colleagues, clinicians including Occupational Therapists and other Allied Health Professionals, psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists, and anyone with an interest in nature and biodiversity on NHS sites.

Agenda

1. Welcome: why Nature Connection matters, cost benefit statistics.
2. Case study 1: NHS Sussex- Marina Robb, Circle of Life Rediscovery, CIC Director and FSA Endorsed Forest School Trainer.
3. Case study 2: NHS Bradford District Care Trust-Clinician's perspective- Cathy Schofield, NHS Chief Allied Health Professional
4. Clinician's perspective-tbc
5. NHS Sustainability Manager's perspective, Emma Clarke
6. Resources, including NHS and NE support
7. Next steps



Community-led approaches to health and wellbeing

Community-led and person-centred approaches play a crucial role in improving individuals' and communities' health and wellbeing, offering unique solutions that are more tailored to their specific needs. If the shifts from sickness to prevention and moving care closer to home are to be successful, stronger recognition of the role communities can play, and appropriate mechanisms for them to work in partnership with integrated care systems, their local health system and local authorities at the place and neighbourhood level, is needed. Online webinar. 16 July 2025 - 17 July 2025

Price: £95-£250 +VAT (concessions for community groups, charities and public sector)

Early bird prices are available until 13 April.



Natural England - National Nature Reserve EVENTS across the West Midlands

From birds to butterflies, dragonflies to dark Skies and bug hunting to bog clearing there is something for everyone on our NNR events. Go to our [Eventbrite page](#) for all the details and to book your place on any of our 26 activities (including Motte Meadows, Chartley Moss, Aquelate Mere, Wynbunbury Moss and Wheaton Aston NNRs)

For example, there is an easy access walk called The Myths and Legends of the Stiperstones at Fenn's Whixhall and Bettisfield Mosses NNR. Friday 6th June 11am. Free. An accessible walk for people with limited ability to learn about the myths and legends of the Stiperstones hill.

Each event details are on Eventbrite if you want any more info, or please get in touch with Amber.

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS



Nature Connected Communities Handbook

A guide for inviting communities to notice, engage, and relate with the more-than-human world, for closer community-nature relationships.

WMCA Community Green Grants Impact Report

This report is a comprehensive evaluation covering the full grant programme period. It:

- Measures community engagement & wellbeing
- Evaluates the environmental improvements
- Evaluates economic and social value
- Assesses value for money
- Provides recommendations for future programmes



Study launched into relationship between people and nature

Led by the University of Exeter and funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, is a five-year programme of research to develop solutions to one of the major environmental challenges for humankind: the renewal of biodiversity.



Wildlife gardening on a blank canvas: addressing motivations, barriers and possible interventions for homeowners living in new build houses - Research study

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

GREEN SOCIAL PRESCRIBING IN THE MEDIA



The Bartlett partners with the NHS to explore relationship between mental health and greenspaces - [UCL news](#)

The Bartlett's Liza Griffin (DPU) and Gemma Moore (BSEER) worked with Jane Faulkner and Cerdic Hall from the North London NHS Foundation Trust and consultant Catherine Max to explore how greenspaces can contribute to mental wellbeing.

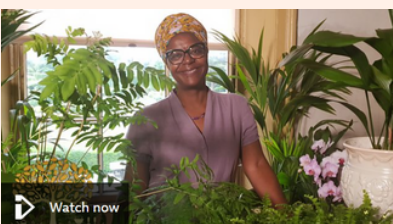


Social Prescribers: Winter Wellness - [Age UK](#)

AgeUK speak to Olivia, Social Prescribing Link Worker, to find out how she helps clients to stay well during winter *"The winter months can be difficult, so we advise clients to do what they can to help improve their mental health - whether this is building socialising into their day as well as trying to get out of the house every day if they can too, even just for a short walk."*



Pulse - [Professor Kamila Hawthorne to chair National Academy for Social Prescribing - Pulse Today](#)



Dr Susan Taheri, the self-proclaimed 'gardening GP' was recently featured in Episode 31 of Gardener's World on BBC Two. [Watch the episode](#) on BBC Iplayer to find out more about her social prescribing project.

USEFUL RESOURCES

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 BUDDIES TOOLKIT

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 and recruit new volunteers, and support existing volunteers.
- How to empower people to feel better, improving their mental health, other health outcomes and build social connections
- 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 wellbeing & nature connection
- Case studies and testimonials

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.



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

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.