

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2025

Natural England West Midlands

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WELCOME TO THE MAY NEWSLETTER

You might have noticed that West Mids woodlands have been smelling delicious throughout May—and that's thanks to wild garlic! It carpets shady spots in spring, especially near bluebells, with its green leaves and starry white flowers. And yep—you can eat it! It's nearing the end of its peak season, but you can still pick it. Just forage responsibly: avoid busy paths, leave some for the bees, and double-check you're picking the right thing!

This month there's *loads* of training, events and opportunities on offer for community groups/orgs engaging in nature based activities. Including festivals, call outs for help and gardening training!

The Nature Connectedness Network Health and Wellbeing Node is well under way - [sign up to be a member](#) for free if you are interested in the intersection between nature and health and wellbeing, or children and young people and much more.

You'll notice I've played around a little with the layout and contents of this month's newsletter, so please let me know if you have any feedback. Please note, there may be a very simplified June edition due to annual leave.

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 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

WHAT GREEN THERAPY CAN LOOK LIKE IN THE NHS

I'm sharing a brilliant Aspiring Allies story from Bradford NHS Trust—not our usual West Midlands patch, but too good not to highlight.

Joseph Courtney, a Green Occupational Therapist, is showing just how transformative nature-based health care can be. By working with patients outdoors—gardening, walking, and connecting with green spaces—Joe's approach is delivering remarkable outcomes. Service users report greater confidence and better recovery. Just as importantly, staff wellbeing and job satisfaction are soaring. Joe says: *"Hopefully in a few years' time it will be so embedded within the NHS, it won't require any explanation to what a Green Therapist is."*

This is a fantastic example of what's possible within the healthcare system—between hospital wards, libraries, OT's, psychological therapists and local nature organisations. A powerful reminder of the benefits of working with nature. [article and NHS film](#)



LET'S GET POTTING FACE-TO-FACE MEET-UP AT THRIVE GARDENS, KING'S HEATH

Let's Get Potting is part of Natural England's project in Birmingham called *Doorstep to Landscape*—which looks at how we can help better connect communities with urban nature for improved health and wellbeing.

A series of train-the-trainer style workshops funded by Natural England were delivered in Autumn 2024 by Ecobirmingham at Birmingham Settlement's Nature & Wellbeing Centre. 17 representatives from local VCFSE organisations explored practical seed planting and nature connection activities, while also sharing ideas about how this work could support wellbeing across diverse settings (see Nov 2024 and Feb 2025 newsletter editions for case studies).



Since those initial sessions, we've continued to foster a network of passionate organisations embedding nature connection into health and wellbeing support. Participants showed a desire to reconnect in person, share ideas, and learn from one another's experiences. So on the 2nd May, 9 of the original cohort joined us for the first meet up, at Thrive Gardens in King's Heath...

We were warmly hosted by Kyra, Community Engagement Officer, who gave us an insight into Thrive's inspiring garden spaces, their therapeutic horticulture programmes, pondlife area, and engagement opportunities.

Over fresh lemon balm tea (picked from the garden) and biscuits, we heard updates on participants' nature projects, talked honestly about what's gone well and what's been difficult, and exchanged practical ideas to take away. All are at different stages, but exploring how nature can play a bigger role in the support they offer their communities.

As one attendee shared, *"There were so many areas to get inspiration for our own projects... people talking and sharing was the objective, and that's what we achieved."*

"I really enjoyed meeting people in the sector who are passionate about connecting people to nature- especially hearing each other's highs and lows- it helped me to feel part of something bigger than just my little corner of Birmingham"

The meetup showed the value of learning from one another. Our next meetup is at Moseley Hall Hospital in their Therapy and Reflection Gardens in August.

Birmingham-based VCFSEs looking to do more to connect service-users with nature! Be part of the Let's Get Potting network, or host a future meet-up. I'd love to hear from you.
Amber.Marquand@naturalengland.org.uk

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!

Park Yoga Telford 2025

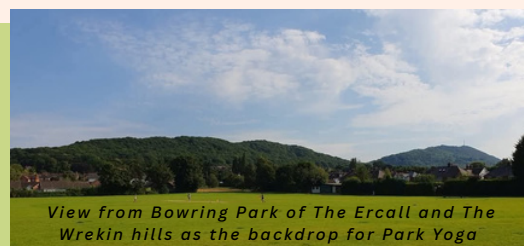
By Diana West, Health Improvement Practitioner, Telford & Wrekin Council

My first awareness of Park Yoga came from this newsletter in April 2024. Walsall and Wolverhampton were featured as the first Park Yoga venues in the region – and having previously worked in both areas, I was intrigued.

As my role focuses on Healthy and Active Communities, I'm always exploring opportunities for physical activity, especially outdoors. I contacted Amber, who put me in touch with Park Yoga – a charity offering free community yoga sessions in parks across the UK May - Sept.

Following discussions with colleagues, partner organisations, community reps and local yoga instructors, there was overwhelming enthusiasm for Telford to apply as a 2025 venue. Bowring Park in Wellington was the perfect site – well-located, accessible, and with a stunning natural backdrop.

We secured grant funding with Wellington Town Council via the Telford & Wrekin Sports and Recreation Trust. We were able to begin planning, booking the park, sourcing an instructor, and promoting the programme.



So far, it's been a great success – with around 180 people attending the first session and over 200 at the second. Participants of all ages have taken part, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive:

"Really enjoyed it, it was so lovely to be outside listening to nature and doing yoga."

"It was my first time... I loved it and will be back next week."

"It was really heart-lifting."

We're excited for the rest of the season and to see even more people benefiting from free, accessible outdoor yoga in a beautiful natural setting!

The Small Woods Association is a charity that brings people and woodlands together. Based at the Green Wood Centre in Shropshire, it runs courses and projects that combine traditional woodland skills with wellbeing support and social connection.

Its Build a Bench programme is a powerful example of the work they do. Participants learn green woodworking in a supportive group, gaining confidence and structure – both in the benches they make and in their own lives.

One participant shared how the course supported their recovery from addiction, illness and isolation. They had lived with long-term pain and addiction to painkillers, which later led to heroin and alcohol.

Working life became unmanageable. After a crisis point, they lost a relationship and spiralled further. Eventually, they sought support, but recovery was tough. It included an eight-week hospital stay, four of them in a coma. Following rehab, they were referred to Build a Bench.



"To begin with I struggled with groups. But the shared activities helped. Before, I was just sitting in my room drinking. Now I'm socialising, getting out and about."

Over time, they regained both physical and social strength.

"When I came out of the coma, I couldn't feed myself and had to learn to walk again. The course helped build my strength. My fitness and breathing have improved."

"I can now sit in an AA group – I wouldn't do that before. It's given me a more positive outlook. I feel part of something again."

They now volunteer with Small Woods and take part in biodiversity sessions. The routine, social contact, and time outdoors have been key to their ongoing recovery.

To learn more or get involved, visit: www.smallwoods.org.uk



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

- [BCC's 'Improving your Health with Nature' Website](#)
- [Birmingham Open Spaces Forum](#)
- [Route2Wellbeing Directory Map](#)
- [Sport Birmingham's Local Outdoor Activity Finder](#)

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'
- Worcs Wildlife Trust map of community groups taking action for nature: <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/community-action>

Herefordshire

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

Telford & Wrekin

- [Live Well Community Directory](#); search 'nature' or 'gardening' or 'walking' or 'conservation'
- [Healthy Telford](#); blogs, events and info on looking after physical and mental wellbeing. Includes the [Green Spaces are Go project](#),

Any suggestions of directories for nature-based activities, especially in other West Mids counties please let me know!

WHAT'S ON #1



Neighbourhood Futures Festival 2025 – BIRMINGHAM Settlement 26th - 29th June

Seeking local people, organisations, researchers, artists, and performers to take part in the festival exploring nature, community wellbeing, and climate resilience.

Thurs/Fri: Talks, panels, and workshops

Sat/Sun: Hands-on, family-friendly activities

A chance to challenge ideas and connect with others. If you'd like to contribute (talk, workshop, performance, or activity)

Get in touch: lizzie.forrester@bsettlement.org.uk



GoodGym is a charity combining fitness and physical activity with doing good; digging, litter picking, gardening and more. We help out various charities and local community organisations, including Canal & River Trust and local Nature Reserves. We love connecting with nature. Get involved in **BIRMINGHAM** or **SUTTON COLDFIELD**:

- [Community Missions](#)
- [Group Runs/Walks](#)
- [Sutton Coldfield Community Missions](#)

CALL OUT: Do you also look after a greenspace, or run a nature-based project in Birmingham/Sutton Coldfield? Do you require extra help with outdoor/gardening work? GoodGym are always on the lookout for organisations/projects to help. See introduction on 'What's On ' page for who Good Gym are and what they can offer. Get in touch with jonny@goodgym.org.

NATURAL
ENGLAND



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, Aqualate Mere, Wynbunbury Moss and Wheaton Aston NNRs)



E.g. easy access walk called The Myths and Legends of the Stiperstones. **Friday 6th June 11am. Free.** An accessible walk for people with limited ability to learn about the myths and legends of the Stiperstones hill.

All event details on Eventbrite, or please get in touch with Amber.

WHAT'S ON #2

7th - 15th June - GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK 2025! The UK's biggest celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature.

Check out events near you in the West Mids!

e.g. Bromsgrove and Redditch Borough Councils are organising the Green Fair event which is promoting climate change, sustainability, recycling, eco-friendly products, health and well-being. Includes representation from organisations across this sector, arts & craft workshops, health and well-being activities, artisan market, street food and live entertainment. Email sharan.dass@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk for booking forms. Fees not applicable for VCSEs.

Sat 7th June 2025, 11am-7pm – Sanders Park, Bromsgrove B61 7JP

Sat 14 June 2025, 11am-7pm – Arrow Valley Park, Redditch B98 0LJ



Keep an eye out for continuing and brand new Park Yoga venues for 2025 season (4th May - Sept)

FREE yoga in the park every Sunday from 09:30 - 10:30.

- Sandwell
- Leominster
- Sutton Coldfield
- Telford
- Kidderminster
- Worcester City



2 EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS/LECTURERS AND YOUTH GROUPS ACROSS THE WEST MIDLANDS

The Wildlife Trusts Environmental Leadership Programme (ELP) is dedicated to supporting young people from underrepresented and underserved communities to fulfil potential, take leadership roles, and gain meaningful employment in the green sector.

However, significant barriers such as low pay, lack of diversity, and need for unpaid internships are impacting young people's entrance into the green sector. Our workshop aims to address these challenges and engage young people in the conversation around developing more green careers. **2 opportunities:**

1. Book a FREE Green Pathways workshop for your group of 18-25s – a unique and free opportunity for you to host our engaging workshop, "Green Pathways: Building Confidence and Skills for the Environmental Sector," designed specifically for young people aged 18-25 in the West Midlands.

How to get involved: See the INFORMATION SHEET and contact Libbi at lpalmer@wildlifetrusts.org.

2. Take part in our 5-10 mins 'Building Better Youth Partnerships' anonymous survey. Help us create a more diverse environmental sector! We're exploring how building more meaningful relationships between organisations can support young people's development. Take the survey!

WHAT'S ON #3

WEBINARS

Intelligent Health: Nurturing a thriving natural environment

Mon 2 Jun 2025 at 14:30

Register on [Eventbrite](#)



Chaired by Dr William Bird MBE, with panel guests from Natural England, DEFRA, Wildlife Trusts and the Eden Project.

Explore vital links between health and nature by OHID and Natural England. Designed for professionals in health, environment, local government, and the voluntary sector. Sharing practical examples and inspiring partnerships to improve wellbeing and nature.

Embedding Nature Connection in Mental Health Care

Tue 3 Jun 2025 at 14:00

Register on [Eventbrite](#)

Insights from 2 projects where nature supports mental health, delivery, and environmental outcomes.

Aimed at NHS staff in health and sustainability—clinicians, OTs, AHPs, psychologists, sustainability leads, etc:

- Why nature connection matters: cost-benefit and impact
- Case studies from NHS Sussex and NHS Bradford
- Perspectives from clinicians and sustainability leads
- Practical resources and next steps



New from Thrive: Cultivating Wellbeing App

Thrive, the therapeutic horticulture charity, has launched an app to boost mental and physical health through easy nature-based activities. Just £2.49/year with a free trial.

👉 [Find out more](#)

Threads of Yardley Event

Saturday 28th June 2025, 12pm – 3pm at St Cyprian's Memorial Hall, 2 Fordrough, Birmingham, B25 8DL

Come and make community connections at our event.

Contact [Eliza](#) for more info.

July 2025

Birmingham Disability Festival

Aston University

📅 Saturday 5 July 2025
🕒 12pm til 6pm
📍 Birmingham, B4 7EX

[Register to attend via eventbrite link here](#)

📧 bhamdisabilityfestival@gmail.com

'Fantastic day and can't wait for next year'

'Thank you - I have never felt so seen and included'

'Please do this every year'

[Birmingham Disability Festival Tickets](#)

TRAINING ON OFFER



Roots to Fruit
Midlands Ltd.

SUTTON
COLDFIELD

Grow Like a Pro: Organic Veg Gardening Sessions

FREE, hands-on sessions at Roots to Fruit for all experience levels

Plot Tending 📅 Fri 13 June, 13:00 🔗 [Book your place](#)

Learn how to weed effectively, keep soil healthy, water and feed your crops, and care for individual plants.

Crop Care 📅 Fri 11 July, 13:00 🔗 [Book your place](#)

Get crops ready for harvest with sustainable care tips and expert advice

FREE, accredited City & Guilds NPTC Level 2 Competence Training

Funded by National Lottery to help empower community gardens or green spaces to safely use and maintain garden machinery.

- Hedge Trimmers. 17th June. 6 spaces left.
- Strimmers/Brushcutters. 10th June. 6 spaces left.
- Tractor Operation. 23rd, 24th, 26th & 30th June. 4 spaces left.

Contact [Jon Ensell](#) for more information and to book.

CALL OUT: to West Mids Community Gardens, Allotments & Shared Green Spaces! 🌿

Roots to Fruit are applying for funding to offer more **FREE TRAINING** and events for volunteers and community garden leaders - they're planning:

- Practical training to manage green spaces safely
- Free events tailored to what you need
- A fun regional gardening competition – from best hanging basket to most productive plot 🏆

But before we finalise anything, they want to hear from you!

- 👉 What kind of gardening training would benefit your group?
- 👉 Would your garden be interested in a local competition?

Tell them your ideas by emailing [Jon Ensell](#) by **latest June 10th**! Thanks so much! 🌻

SEEKING TRAINING

🌿 Call Out: Help WorkWell Connect People with Nature 🌿

WorkWell offers early, holistic support for those 16+ in the Black Country facing barriers to work due to health conditions or disabilities. Their coaches help people find, return to, and thrive in work—through personalised support and local services.

They're now looking for training opportunities to help their staff bring nature into that journey—such as:

- Walk leader training
- Nature-connectedness and green prescribing
- Practical ideas for nature-based wellbeing support

If you or your organisation can help, WorkWell wants to hear from you! Contact [Amber](#).

They want to ensure a holistic approach is available for participants including offering nature-based wellbeing activities to improve livelihoods and mental health. Their participants would greatly benefit from this support and the confidence it will provide in their employment journey.

NETWORKS TO BE A PART OF

Nature Towns & Cities Network

A new programme set up by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and Natural England, will tackle lack of access to nature and greenspace 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](#))



Nature Connectedness Network



Nature Connectedness Network is open to everyone and provides the opportunity to explore when spending time in, and connecting with nature, can play a role in different areas of work. Do consider becoming a member as you have the opportunity to join various working Groups and Nodes such as nature connectedness for **Health and Wellbeing** or **Children and Young People**.

The next NCN meeting is **Tuesday 3rd June 2025, 10:30-12:00**, with updates on the network, and nature connection policy, research and practice, and an opportunity for members to share updates and events. To register to attend, please follow this link to sign-up free on Ticket Tailor: <https://buytickets.at/naturalengland2/1686272>

Working Groups and Nodes

Are you interested in joining a thematic sub-group (Node) or a working group? The focus and activity of these nodes and groups will be shaped by the membership and thus may change over time. Some nodes currently meet every 2-3 months to share and discuss projects, ideas and issues. Others are not currently active, but indicating your interest will help us identify areas for future nodes and working groups.

- ☐ Health and Wellbeing
- ☐ Education/Children and Young People
- ☐ Arts and Culture
- ☐ Law and Policy
- ☐ Business and Organisations
- ☐ Environment and Sustainability
- ☐ Food and Farming
- ☐ Campaigns
- ☐ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- ☐ Postgraduate

USEFUL NATURE CONNECTION RESOURCES

NATURE CONNECTION HANDBOOK

Developed with the Uni of Derby and Natural England.
The importance of connecting with nature: including case studies on nature on prescription and social prescribing.



NATURE CONNECTION PRACTICES

Set of 5 nature connection practices to help activate the 5 pathways to nature connectedness. Each one takes just a few minutes a day alongside ordinary daily activities. E.g. watching videos of nature for 10 minutes every day can increase nature connection and reduce feelings of stress.



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



Green Social Prescribing e-learning Module for Health Professionals

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 GSP **e-learning modules**. Includes a 30-minute video explaining evidence and health benefits of connecting patients to nature. And 15-minute consultation video with simple, practical steps for how to integrate nature into everyday practice.

THINKING ABOUT CREATING A COMMUNITY GARDEN/GREENSPACE FOR WELLBEING?

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.
We hope it's helpful - please share around!



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.