

HEALTH & NATURE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Natural England West Midlands

October 2025

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WELCOME TO THE OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

Coots (pictured right) and moorhens (pictured left) are a familiar sight along West Midlands canals at this time of year. As the vegetation thins, they become easier to spot – coots busy defending their patches while moorhens feed quietly along the edges. Their presence is a gentle reminder that even as autumn takes hold, our waterways remain full of life.

Speaking of canals, there is an exciting opportunity coming to the Black Country which I encourage you to get ‘on board’ with! Read more about [Lily the Art Boat](#) on page 5.

This month’s edition contains a really interesting range of case studies, which will hopefully inspire ideas for your own organisations, or offer a chance to connect in with existing projects.

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, focusing 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

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!

A Space to Reflect and Reconnect: Walsall Manor Hospital Memorial Garden Launch

Walsall Manor Hospital has unveiled its newly refurbished memorial garden – a calm, nature-filled space created to support reflection, remembrance, and wellbeing.

Funded by Natural England and brought to life by Groundwork West Midlands, the garden has been transformed into a peaceful haven of wildflowers, raised beds, and natural seating. At its centre stands a beautiful willow tree sculpture, where padlocks were added by colleagues, family members, and friends in memory of staff whose lives have been lost. The launch event brought together Trust executives, families, and team leaders from across the hospital. It was a moving and hopeful moment – celebrating the lives of those remembered while highlighting the healing power of nature within a busy healthcare setting.



The garden now offers a sanctuary for staff, patients, and visitors to pause, breathe, and reconnect – surrounded by birdsong, bees, and blossoms.

To keep it flourishing, volunteers are invited to help care for the space, ensuring it continues to grow as a lasting tribute and a reminder of how nature can comfort, restore, and bring people together. [Get in touch](#) to find out more.

[Express & Star coverage](#)

[Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust coverage](#)

Going Green at Mersey & West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Inspired by last year's Green Libraries Week, MWL Libraries, based at Southport Hospital decided to go green - and it's been blooming brilliant!

First up was the launch of the **MWL Seed Library**. After seeing it work well at other NHS Trusts, the team got stuck in - designing a logo, creating displays, buying seeds and gardening books, and setting up a promotional stall outside the hospital canteen. Staff were invited to pick up free seed packets (herbs were a big hit!) and chat with library staff about growing their own plants - some even planned to start desk gardens!

The Seed Library's been a hit on social media and internal comms and even inspired senior nurses from NHS Supply Chain to start their own version after visiting.

Next came the **Green Gazette**, a quarterly online newsletter packed with eco news, tips, and sustainability stories from across the Trust. It's informal, fun, and full of ideas to help staff bring sustainability and nature into their work and home lives.

Nearly a year on, both initiatives are thriving. The Green Gazette is growing in popularity (pun intended!), and the Seed Library continues to encourage staff to get involved in the Trust's green agenda - and maybe even get their hands dirty too!



Contact **Stephanie Burns** if you would like to find out more!

MORE SPOTLIGHTS

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

Green Social Prescribing in Nuneaton and Bedworth



Post-COVID, the Social Prescribing team at Nuneaton Bedworth Primary Care Network (PCN) found that many patients were reluctant to meet with others indoors for fear of becoming unwell. However, we understood there was a real need for social connection more than ever so this led us to explore the use of green spaces such as our local parks to establish our own Walk & Talk Group.

Walk & Talk offers a welcoming, informal walk with others through a local park, combining gentle physical activity with vital social interaction. This weekly group provides an excellent opportunity for participants to enhance their well-being by being in nature and taking in all the benefits of their surroundings whilst connecting with others. The group has flourished and since its inception has seen 197 local people sign up. No matter rain or shine, the group thrives on all of the benefits that both being in nature and social connection offer.



Following this success, we wanted to target other isolated groups who we felt could share in the same benefits that being in nature with others could offer. This led us to create our Buggy Talk Group for parents / carers of babies and young children, a group that often faces unique challenges related to isolation and stress. This group allows participants to share their experiences and seek advice and support for any challenges they may face with a young child whilst also taking a stroll in nature's calming surroundings. It's a fantastic way to turn a routine daily activity—walking with a buggy—into a supportive, health-promoting community activity. All those attending comment that by being outdoors and exercising with others, it sets a positive tone for their day from which both they as parents and their child benefit.



Moving on from these groups we are now really keen to expand our green social prescribing offer even further and have set our sights on developing a Community Garden!

Our aim is to provide a peaceful, green space for patients to engage in a range of nature based activities working in conjunction with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to deliver sessions such as a bird or bat box making, creating raised vegetable beds, growing plants from seed and general garden maintenance. Gardening has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and provide gentle physical activity. This new space will serve as a valuable resource for our community, fostering connections with nature and with one another. We have already identified two potential locations and are now working in partnership with local community groups to look at taking this forward... so watch this space!!

To find out more please visit our website <https://www.nuneatonandbedworthpcn.co.uk/social-prescribers-1> or contact us at cwicb.nunandbeddigital@nhs.net

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
- Connect to Support: search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking', 'conservation'
- The Waiting Room: search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking', 'conservation'

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; search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking', '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', 'gardening', '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', 'gardening', 'walking' or 'conservation'

Telford & Wrekin

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

Shropshire

- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Directory: interactive maps, access information, activities on offer across the county.
- Mossy Life Green Directory
- Shropshire Together Community and Family Directory - search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking' or 'conservation'
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust events page - free/small fee nature-based activities.

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

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT / INVOLVEMENT

HELP!

Lily the Art Boat tours the Black Country!

My name is Sara and I am a landscape painter living on a narrowboat. My work explores themes of wellbeing in nature. In spring 2026, I will be launching Lily the Art Boat—a converted canal boat that will travel around the UK as a floating art studio and gallery.

Along the way, I will be hosting **free, small-group art workshops designed to support mental wellbeing through creativity**. These sessions combine collage and acrylic painting, using nature-themed imagery as a starting point to spark ideas and encourage self-expression in a relaxed, no-pressure environment.



*Lily is still under construction so this is a generated image

I am currently applying for funding to make these workshops completely free for local communities, with a particular focus on individuals who have experienced mental health challenges. My goal is to offer a welcoming space where participants can explore their creativity, build confidence, and enjoy the therapeutic benefits of art and nature.

I will be visiting the Black Country in August/September 2026- as a vast network of historical significance. I'd would love to connect with organisations who would be interested in taking part. I will also be open to the general public along the towpath to encourage the use of canals for mental wellbeing and to showcase my artwork.

Please get in touch with me either via Amber from Natural England, or directly at hello@sarahoque.com


Anna Wilson is a PhD Researcher based at the School of Nursing at Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests aim to improve and support the wellbeing of people living with kidney disease through engagement with social prescribing, arts, and mindfulness-based approaches.


Her study is exploring how people with kidney disease can be supported to engage with social prescribing, including nature-based activities. She is gathering views from social prescribers, link workers and organisations providing socially prescribed activities to better understand what is needed by organisations such as yours to support this patient population. You don't need to have previous experience of working with people with kidney disease to complete the survey.

The survey is short, anonymous and voluntary. If you had a few minutes free to share your views, or share with colleagues, it would be much appreciated!

Survey link <https://forms.office.com/e/GfvRKp18vP>

WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #1

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care launches Neighbourhood Health

The National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP) aims to move healthcare closer to communities by creating integrated local teams that bring together NHS staff, social care, and voluntary sector partners. Launched across 43 areas in England, the programme seeks to reduce hospital demand and improve wellbeing through neighbourhood-based care, supported by a new website and LinkedIn group for sharing resources, case studies, and collaboration. Locations in the West Midlands have been announced:

- Walsall
- East Birmingham
- Coventry
- Solihull
- Herefordshire
- Shropshire



National Nature Reserve EVENTS West Midlands

Natural England

From birds to butterflies, dragonflies to dark Skies and bug hunting there is something for everyone on our NNR events. See [Eventbrite](#) for details and to book on any of our 26 activities (including Mottey Meadows, Chartley Moss, Aqualate Mere, Wynbunbury Moss and Wheaton Aston NNRs). All event details on Eventbrite, or please get in touch with [Amber](#).

Nature Connectedness Network

The Nature Connectedness Network unites people across policy, practice, and research to strengthen relationships between people and nature.

It's made up of member-led nodes—sub-groups focused on specific sectors, populations, or themes that members can join to share ideas and collaborate.

Online meetings:

- Education, Children & Young People
- Campaigns
- Environment & Sustainability
- Research
- Health & Wellbeing
- Food & Farming
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Arts & Culture
- Business & Organisations
- Law & Policy



Have Your Say on Birmingham's Future

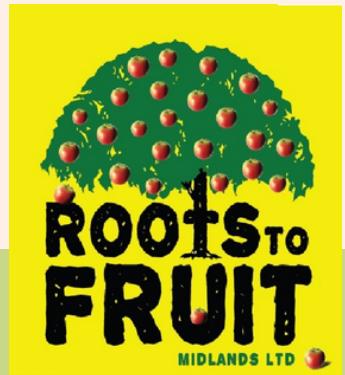
Birmingham's creating a new Local Plan – the long-term guide for where homes, jobs and green spaces will go up to 2044. It's a big deal for the city's future, and now's your chance to help shape it. The document is out for public consultation until **4 December**, covering key topics like housing, the green belt, climate change and open space.

There'll be **four online sessions** where you can join the discussion and share your thoughts – including one on 24 November that's especially encouraging younger people (18+) to take part.



Find out more and register to have your say at beheard.birmingham.gov.uk

TRAINING ON OFFER



FREE Gardening Workshops This November!

Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, Roots to Fruit is running three FREE workshops to help individuals and community groups turn gardening into income and improve green spaces.

Plants for Profit: Growing to Sell

Friday 14th November |  1:00-3:30pm

Turn your garden into a mini business! Learn what to grow, how to avoid common mistakes, and how to start selling your plants or produce. [Book here](#)

Selling Gardening Services

Friday 21st November |  1:00-3:30pm

Want to earn money helping others with their gardens? Learn how to price your time, attract clients, and build a professional reputation. [Book here](#)

Brash Fence Making

Friday 28th November |  1:00-3:30pm

Learn how to build a sustainable, wildlife-friendly fence using garden cuttings—great for the planet and your garden! [Book here](#)

Location:

51 Chester Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2HH
(Shared site with Oakdene Nurseries)
[Get directions](#)

NETWORKS TO BE A PART OF

Coventry & Warwickshire GSP Community of Practice

We are a relatively new group of Green social prescribing practitioners/professionals, who are working in the Coventry and Warwickshire area and are keen to connect with partners to exchange ideas, support each other and to campaign to raise awareness of the importance of GSP to support health and wellbeing. We are keen to work with partners across our geography and to make connections with anyone who has an interest in GSP.

We are in the process of identifying our priorities for 2026 and will be sharing these and news in the form of a regular newsletter.

If you would like to connect with us, please email our facilitator Karen Higgins on: karen-higgins1@outlook.com



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Community Environment Network

Run by the West Midlands Combined Authority, this network brings together local people, groups, and organisations who care about nature, climate, and community. It offers free membership, events, and peer support to help communities share ideas, access resources, and work together on projects that improve local green spaces and wellbeing. Nature helps us feel better, get active, and connect – this network makes it easier to turn that into action.

[Find out more and join here](#)



Green Social Prescribing Innovation Community

A national network for anyone helping people connect with nature for health and wellbeing. Whether you work in healthcare, local government, the environment or the voluntary sector, this is a space to share ideas, access resources, and collaborate. Join a growing movement making Green Social Prescribing more inclusive, accessible, and effective—so more people can benefit from the power of nature.



Nature Connectedness Network

Open to all, this national network explores how time in nature can support different areas of work. Members can join themed groups and nodes, including Nature Connectedness for Health and Wellbeing, Children and Young People, and Nature for NHS Staff Wellbeing.

Nature Towns & Cities Network



A programme by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and Natural England aims to improve access to nature by helping local authorities, communities and partners bring green space into every neighbourhood.

The [Nature Towns and Cities Network](#) is open and free to join, offering events, training and resources for community groups, charities and local government.

NEW RESOURCES



New guide: Nature Connection in Schools

This accessible handbook is designed for teachers, school leaders, governors and early years practitioners, and offers practical steps to strengthen children's relationship with nature.

It covers:

- what nature-connection really means and why it matters
- straightforward actions and activities to embed in schools and nurseries
- real-world case studies, including the UK's first biophilic school.
- Ideal for practitioners involved in green-space access, nature-connected learning or wellbeing initiatives.

[Download the PDF](#)



New government guidance to protect bees

The UK Government has released updated guidance to strengthen how pollinators are protected from pesticides.

Under the new approach, the Health and Safety Executive must now explicitly consider the risks to bees and other pollinators before granting any emergency pesticide authorisations.

This guidance aims to ensure greater consistency and transparency in decision-making – helping reduce the impact of harmful chemicals like neonicotinoids and supporting wider efforts to restore nature and pollinator health across the UK.

[Read the full guidance on GOV.UK.](#)



How just 20 minutes in nature can boost your health

A new BBC feature highlights the growing body of research showing how even short bursts of time outdoors can transform our health and wellbeing.

Spending as little as 20 minutes in nature can lower stress hormones, steady your heart rate, and even support your immune system and gut health. Studies show that being around trees, plants, and soil – or simply seeing and smelling natural environments – can bring measurable benefits, from calmer minds to stronger bodies.

Importantly, the article notes that every bit helps: whether it's a walk in the park, tending a window box, or simply adding natural sights and scents at home. These findings reinforce the value of green spaces, community gardens, and accessible nature-based activities for everyone.

[Read the full BBC article](#)