

# A Strategy for Nature and Health in the West of England



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West of England Nature Partnership  
Joining up the dots for nature

# Introduction

## The links between Nature and Health

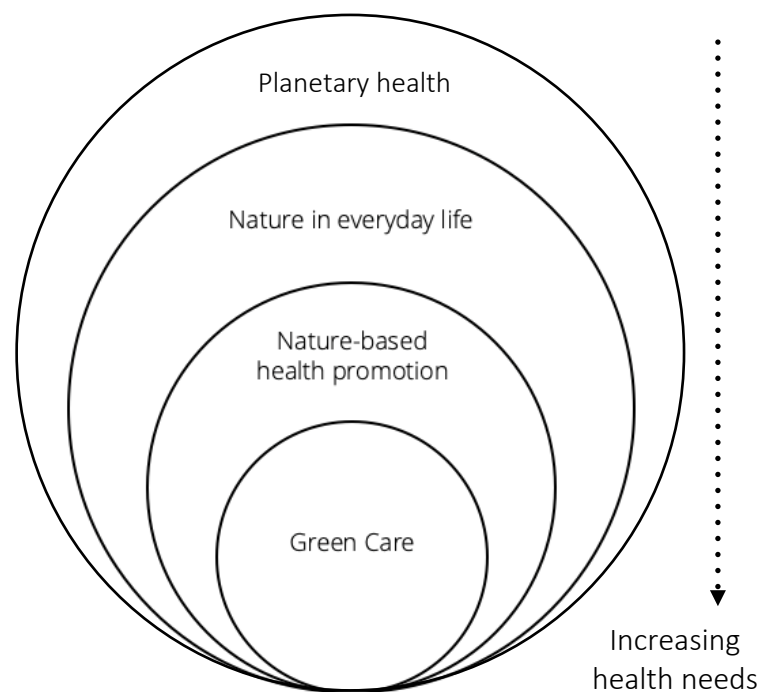
Our lives are part of and dependent on the natural world. We are currently facing the interlinked challenges of a climate and nature emergency, a physical and mental health crisis, and deepening inequalities, with the urgent need to act holistically for the health of the planet and people.

It is well evidenced that contact with nature is essential for our physical and mental health. Different levels and forms of support are needed to enable everyone to benefit from connection with nature, depending on their specific needs; from ensuring nature is woven into everyone's daily lives, to targeted nature-based health interventions for those with a defined need. This strategy for Nature and Health is focused on 3 areas of action, which are embedded within the wider context of our planetary health.

**Planetary Health** sets the context and underpins the strategy. Advocating for, and taking action on, the fundamental relationship between planetary and human health is an essential step in activating communities and systems to engage in nature recovery. It is also well evidenced that individuals developing nature connection are more likely to take active steps to conserve nature, take part in nature-restoration activities and live more sustainable and healthier lives.

**Nature in everyday life** is nature connection in normal everyday routines, which underpins and maintains health and wellbeing and supports a relationship with nature. This may be self-initiated or incidental and enabled by having sufficient access to nature-rich environments. For example, listening to bird song, gardening, walking through a park, noticing the natural environment. We recognise the multiple protective and restorative effects of nature-rich environments and the increasing importance of healthy ecosystems and nature-based solutions for public health as we adapt to accelerating climate extremes.

**Nature-based health promotion** is the provision of more supported opportunities for engagement with nature, which play an important role in enhancing human health, community cohesion, the wider natural environment and human-nature connection. For example, taking part in nature volunteering, community gardening groups and walking



Adapted from Bragg and Leck 2017 and Thrive 2017

**Green Care** refers to nature-based therapies or treatment interventions that are designed for people with a defined need and facilitated by trained practitioners. This may also be the integration of nature into existing treatment approaches. For example, therapeutic horticulture, nature connection-based therapies, woodland wellbeing programmes and ecotherapy.

# Nature and Health in the West of England

The WENP Nature and Health Strategy Group was set up in 2018, bringing together representatives from a wide range of organisations to work in partnership on nature and health across the West of England. Much progress has been made since. In 2021, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care System (Healthier Together) was selected as one of seven 'Test and Learn Sites' for green social prescribing across England, which has accelerated the integration of nature-based approaches into health and care. This 2 year funded pilot has come to an end and the challenge now is to maintain this momentum, ensuring a sustainable shift to an integrated and well-funded nature and health sector. This Strategy sets out how we will work in partnership to achieve this.

## Our Vision and Mission

**Our Vision** is for nature-based health services to be freely available to all who need them in the West of England and for nature to be a part of everyone's daily lives, improving people's mental and physical health, reducing demand on services and supporting individual, community and system action for nature recovery.

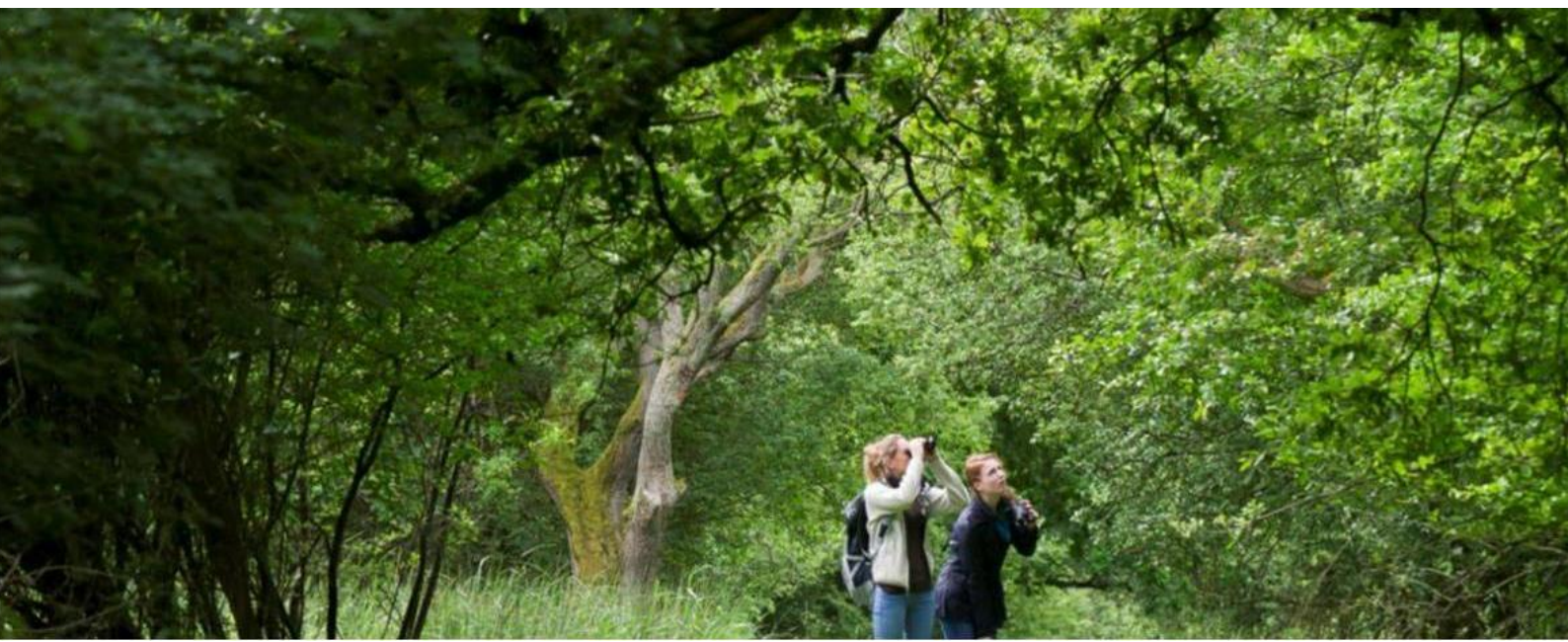
**Our Mission** is to bring the environmental and health and care systems in the West of England together to work in partnership on integrating nature into our health and care systems and on improving people's access to and engagement with nature.

### Ways of Working

We will ensure that we consider and actively address inequalities in health and social outcomes, and in access to and engagement with nature, prioritising working with people and communities with the greatest need.

We will strengthen links between our work and the wider work of the West of England Nature Partnership, including the role of nature's recovery in improving people's health and how engagement with nature can facilitate action to help restore the natural environment.

Our Vision contributes towards the broader Vision for the West of England Nature Partnership for: a thriving and well-connected natural environment in the West of England that underpins a healthy and resilient society and economy.



# Our Seven-Point Plan

**Our Impact Priority is to fully embed Green Social Prescribing into the health and care systems in the West of England.**

WENP's Nature and Health Strategy Group has collectively identified the following priority actions that are needed to achieve our Impact Priority, building on our existing work on nature and health in the region.

1. **Embed:** Embed support and action for nature-based health services in local and regional health strategies and policies, and in approaches to public health
2. **Invest:** Promote investment and funding mechanisms, including commissioning support for green social prescribing, that enable sustainable provision of nature-based health services and unlock support for the natural environment
3. **Assure:** Define standards for nature-based health services, and facilitate training and professional development for nature-based practitioners. Use this to provide quality assurance and help mainstream these services, building on the work of the established Nature and Health Practice Network
4. **Inform:** Signpost information about local nature-based health services to social prescribing link workers, GPs and other health and care practitioners, and make this information easily available in a centralised resource to facilitate green social prescribing. Embed the benefits of nature into existing training for health and care professionals through focused CPD days and reviewing existing training
5. **Access:** Identify inequalities in access to green and blue spaces and to targeted nature-based interventions, and develop plans to reduce these inequalities
6. **Engage:** Raise public and professional awareness of the importance of nature for health and engagement with nature, to help drive self-care and demand for nature-based health services
7. **Evidence:** Communicate existing evidence and develop additional, targeted evidence (through mapping, cost-benefit analysis, needs assessment and project evaluation) to make the case for nature and health-based services and drive knowledge of what works for different needs

Visit our website ([wenp.org.uk](http://wenp.org.uk)) or get in touch if you'd like to discuss our approach and opportunities to collaborate at [info@wenp.org.uk](mailto:info@wenp.org.uk).

The West of England Nature Partnership is a cross-sector partnership working to restore the natural environment in the West of England. Our vision is of a thriving and well-connected natural environment in the West of England that underpins a healthy and resilient society and economy.

[wensp.org.uk](http://wensp.org.uk)

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October 2023



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