



Find out more about the fantastic speakers we had at this year's WENP Conference

Nature recovery in action: Celebrating progress and shaping what's next



Sumita Hutchison

Chair, West of England Nature Partnership

Sumita became Chair of the West of England Nature Partnership in November 2024. She brings extensive experience from both the private sector, where she practised as a lawyer, and the voluntary and community sector, having served as the founding Chair of Bristol's Commission for Race Equality.

Currently a Board Director within the NHS, Sumita focuses on the vital links between health and environmental sustainability. She also serves as EU/UK Coordinator for Save Soil – a global movement promoting awareness and policy action on soil health. Through her leadership, Save Soil has played an influential role at international forums, including the COPs, championing the importance of nature-based solutions in addressing global environmental challenges.



Zoe Davies

Manager, West of England Nature Partnership

Zoe leads the West of England Nature Partnership, which unites local authorities, environmental organisations and other partners to accelerate nature's recovery through collaboration.

Her background spans UK land use, agriculture and environmental policy. Before joining WENP, she worked for the Royal Society, UK Flour Millers, and Wildlife and Countryside Link – England's largest coalition of environmental NGOs.

Zoe holds an M.Res. in Biodiversity, Evolution and Conservation from University College London (UCL).



Nature and Infrastructure: Speaking the same language



Matthew Lipton

**Biodiversity Assets and Commons Manager
South Gloucestershire Council**

Matthew has been working in local government for over 10 years and has had periods of time working in the charitable sector. His passion is the natural environment. Working in the Climate and Nature Emergency Team at South Gloucestershire allows him to work to this passion and explore ways of tackling the emerging nature crisis. He is now working hard to ensure that nature can move as freely as we can across the landscape, by leading on the Regional Priority Program Mobilising Nature, Matthew hopes our region will lead the way for reconnecting nature across the UK.



Claire Wansbury

**Fellow & Technical Director
AtkinsRéalis**

Claire Wansbury is a highly skilled ecologist with over 30 years' experience and co-editor of ICE's *Manual of Blue Green Infrastructure*. Her many accolades include CIEEM's *Member of the Year Award 2020*, the *Society for the Environment's Skilled Professional of the Year 2023*, and *Every Woman in Transportation and Logistics' Sustainability Champion 2023*. AtkinsRéalis are proud to be a member of the Rebuilding Nature Alliance.

Claire is one of the UK's leading experts on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), having worked on the East West Rail 2 project, a BNG trailblazer, and co-authored the national good practice principles. She is also a leading authority on Natural Capital, helping to build a shared understanding of the value of the benefits our natural world provides to our society and the economy.

Taking a holistic approach, Claire integrates thinking on nature recovery and nature-based solutions – working with nature to strengthen our collective resilience. This approach helps deliver multiple benefits for clients, unlock project funding, and advance progress towards a nature-positive future.



Matt Tooby

Strategic Growth Director, Resilient Infrastructure WSP

Matt began their career as an ecologist and has since advanced to several leadership roles in consultancy. With a keen interest in major project delivery, Matt has served as Project and Framework Director on numerous significant infrastructure projects, particularly within the rail sector and sits on RSSB's Sustainable Rail Leadership Group. Despite taking on broader leadership responsibilities, Matt remains dedicated to sustainability and the environment, helping clients and projects achieve long-term sustainable outcomes while balancing the often conflicting demands of cost, quality, programme, and environmental outcomes



A Natural Health Service

Helen Wood

Nature and Health Coordinator West of England Nature Partnership

Helen is the Nature and Health Coordinator for the West of England Nature Partnership and co-leads the Urban Nature Programme. She works with a wide range of partners to integrate nature into the health system and played a leading role in the Healthier with Nature Green Social Prescribing pilot with the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board – one of only seven pilots across England. The project supported over 90 voluntary and community organisations to deliver nature-based interventions, creating a thriving regional network of high-quality community nature programmes.

A Clinical Psychologist by background, Helen has specialist experience in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, particularly with young people in care, and led a dedicated service within children's social care. She is a committed advocate for restoring our relationship with nature as a foundation for health, social, and environmental justice.

WENP's Nature and Health Programme recognises that action is needed at every level: supporting individual wellbeing through nature connection; building resilient, healthy communities; and treating action on the ecological and climate crises as a vital public health priority.





A Natural Health Service



**Healthier
Together**

Gemma Self

Programme Director

Healthier Together 2040, Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board

Gemma Self is a strategic health professional with over 18 years' experience leading transformation across health and care systems. As Programme Director for Healthier Together 2040 at BNSSG Integrated Care Board, she leads a long-term strategy to build a more equitable, preventative, and community-focused approach to health and wellbeing across the region. Gemma's career spans roles in the NHS, voluntary sector, and small consultancies. In every setting, she has championed a holistic and preventative approach—addressing the root causes of poor health and advocating for a shift towards systems that invest in the conditions that help people and communities thrive.

She is particularly passionate about the connection between health and the wider determinants of wellbeing, including access to nature and a healthy environment. Her work is grounded in collaboration and real-life experience, shaping strategy around what genuinely improves health and reduces inequality.

Dom Higgins

Head of Health and Education

The Wildlife Trusts

Dom Higgins is Head of Health and Education at The Wildlife Trusts and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Public Health. For the past 20 years or so, he has worked to integrate nature into education, the health service and people's everyday lives. Prior to joining The Wildlife Trusts, he was Director of External Affairs at TCV, where he led on the development of Green Gyms. He has also worked in the Department for Education and internationally, developing environmental and community-based partnerships with organisations in South America, West Africa, East and Central Asia. He chairs Wildlife and Countryside Link's Nature and Wellbeing Strategy Group, sits on Cambridge OCR's advisory board and the Department for Education's 'Climate Ambassadors Programme' steering group.





A Natural Health Service



Ro Fry

Co-Director The Birch Collective CIC

Ro has worked with hundreds of children, young people and adults over the past 15 years, connecting them to nature as part of their holistic development. She has a background as a Primary School Teacher and Forest School Practitioner, which has given her an in-depth understanding of the importance of experiential education and play for all ages. Ro completed a Land Based Learning Apprenticeship at Embercombe, where she facilitated and designed residential programmes which inspire children, young people and adults to live in close relationship with nature and live a purposeful life. In Bristol, she has worked for organisations including the APE project, Windmill Hill City Farm and St Werburghs City Farm, where she managed the Child and Youth Program for 5 years. Ro has training in nonviolent communication, mediation and founded a women's circle in Bristol who use 'Way of Council', a way of communicating that encourages attentive listening, and honest and compassionate expression.

Ro co- founded The Birch Collective five years ago and believes that by grounding ourselves in nature and learning from each other, we can find strength, purpose, and a sense of belonging. She has a passion for making nature based experiences accessible and inclusive for all people, especially those who are at the beginning of their journey.

From Projects to Landscapes - Collaborating for nature at scale



Walid Al Saqqaf

Senior Nature Associate Green Finance Institute

Walid Al Saqqaf is the CTO and Co-founder of Rebalance Earth, building the technology that makes Nature an investible, resilient asset class. He leads the development of GPAP, turning climate liabilities into investible assets, and designs the firm's AI systems to scale impact. Before Rebalance Earth, he founded "Insureblocks," a leading podcast on emerging tech and [trustedplaces.com](https://www.trustedplaces.com).



State of Nature Monitoring and the Wildlife Index



Pete Charles

**Project Manager Nature Recovery
West of England Combined Authority**

Pete is a Project Manager on the Nature Recovery Team at the West of England Combined Authority. He oversees the State of Nature Monitoring Programme and the externally delivered nature recovery project portfolio. He also has an advisory role for the governance of the region's Green Recovery Fund and formerly managed the 3-year Community Pollinator Fund project and Bee Bold Awards.