West of England Nature Partnership

Nature and Health Hub Programme Development and Implementation Report

March 2026



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1. Background

The West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) was invited to bid for the Green Recovery Fund, from the West of England Combined Authority, to advance the Nature and Health program in the region. As this fund is primarily to support nature recovery, it was important that the projects enabled nature to thrive and improved human health, demonstrating how these outcomes can go hand in hand.

The Nature Partnership was inspired by several examples across the West of England region of nature rich gardens in the grounds of GP practices which were having life changing effects on the people involved in their stewardship. For example, testimonials from participants of the Orchard Medical Centre Garden Group expressed how their involvement had led to them feeling "a worthwhile member of society". It was clear that people were finding purpose, meaning and community as well as benefiting from being outside and active in nature.

The WENP Nature and Health strategy group decided to focus one strand of the bid on scaling up such initiatives; creating new nature gardens in GP practices, creating communication and learning resources and a network of practice.

The purpose of this report is to focus on nature recovery and nature connected Health and Wellbeing, but it should be noted that the varied nature of programs also meant that the patient mix was also varied which should be seen as a contributing factor in how each of the surgeries looked to support their patients.



2. Spaces developed

An interesting aspect of this program was the variety of spaces and locations that were developed. These ranged from 49 square meters to 530 square meters. The locations also reflected different types of settings which also illustrates the variety of development opportunities that were possible in each.

The five surgeries signed up for the program were:

1. **Charlotte Keel Health Centre (CK) -** Inner city practice in Bristol with no green space.

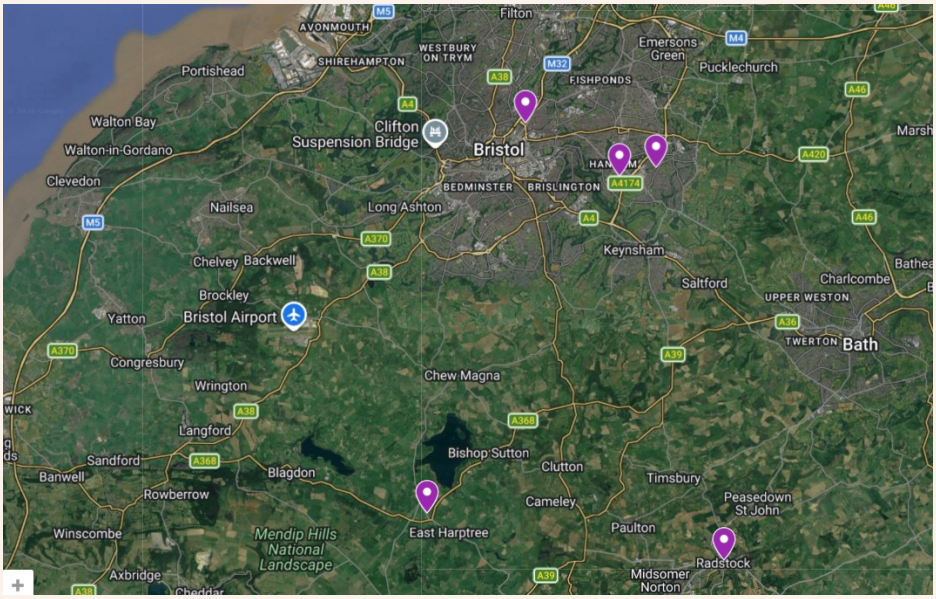
2. **Hanham Health Centre (HH) - South Gloucestershire -** Urban practice, with extensive green space around the building.

3. **Cadbury Heath Healthcare (CH) - South Gloucestershire -** Urban practice, based in NHS Property Services- owned building.

4. **Hope House Surgery - Bath & North East Somerset -** Practice based in area of high deprivation in Radstock with some derelict land alongside it.

5. **Harptree Surgery (HS) - Bath & North East Somerset -** Rural practice with extensive paddock area adjacent.

NB: A small addition to a garden at the Greenway Centre Southmead Development Trust was also funded, but this is not within the scope of this report.



[Nature & Health Hubs pilot map]

3. Programme overview

An Expression of Interest was sent to surgeries, between June and August 2024. Five surgeries showed interest in improving their outdoor space.

Site visits were then carried out to assess each location to provide advice on how outdoor spaces could be improved for nature. Avon Wildlife Trust's Community Ecologist and Kevin Thomas (One Planet Matters), focused on existing habitats and possible changes. Recommendations were shared in a report with ongoing support provided (See Appendix 1).

Between September and December 2024, all five locations completed their planning. By May 2025, all applications had been submitted and approved.

While this report does not cover each plan in detail, some key points are noted. All projects were led by passionate individuals and teams, focused on connecting people with nature. Each site made good use of their space, building on existing work where possible. Although plans evolved over time, all five successfully delivered.

4. Key areas of support

All outdoor spaces in the program aimed to increase biodiversity. At the start approximately 2,010m^2 of outdoor space was identified for improvement. All sites showed positive nature recovery. Changes varied by location. These included creating an orchard at Harptree, planting native hedging at Hanham Health and Cadbury Heath, and adding fruit trees at Hope House (13) and Cadbury heath (4). Raised beds and planters were also included.

Ecologist input ensure suitable plants and trees were chosen for each location. Pollinator-friendly plants were included, especially in planters and raised beds and wildlife features such as bat and hedgehog boxes, ponds, and water features. The report included recommended plants, trees and shrubs that support wildlife and pollinators. It also suggested other ways to improve areas for biodiversity.

Once funding was approved, the surgeries delivered their plans and the program was completed. (Appendix 1 for full report).

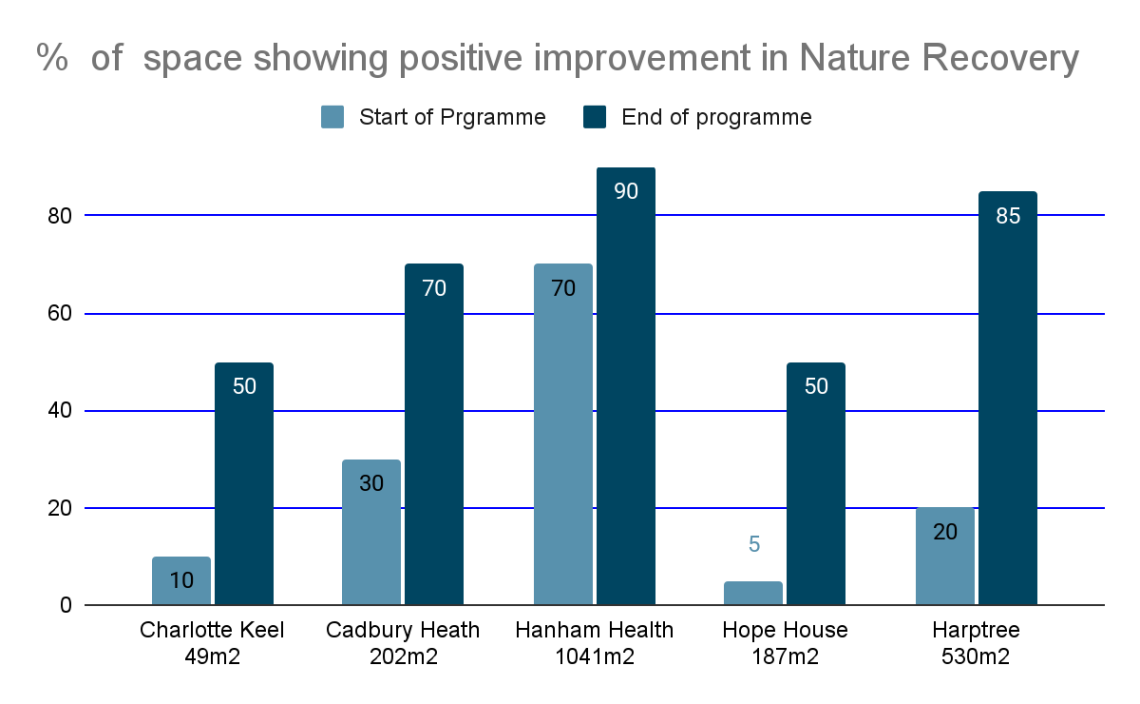
5. Nature recovery - Key findings

To understand the starting point, the following were recorded:

i. Approximate Outdoor space
ii. Estimated land cover (e.g. grass trees, shrubs, water, paving)

At the end of the program, the same measures were reviewed:

i. Estimated land cover (e.g. grass hedging, trees shrubs water, paving
ii. Number of existing trees



6. Use of outdoor space for health and wellbeing

At the start, surgeries shared how they planned to use the outdoor space. By the end, all had created nature-based activities that supported patients, staff, and wider community (see appendix 2: Question 4 for more detail).

All surgeries were asked to provide information at the start of the project and again at follow-up.

At the start and end of the program, Practices rated the following statements:

(1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

The outdoor space at [Practice Name]:

1. Supports patient health and wellbeing
2. Supports staff wellbeing
3. Is an important part of the practice
4. Helps people feel more connected to nature

Results

Location	Patient Wellbeing (Before/After)	Staff Wellbeing (Before/After)	Important Feature (Before/After)	Connected to Nature (Before/After)
Charlotte Keel	1 / 5	2 / 5	1 / 5	2 / 5
Cadbury Heath	1 / 4	1 / 4	1 / 4	1 / 4
Hanham Health	1 / 5	2 / 5	3 / 5	2 / 5
Hope House	1 / 5	1 / 5	1 / 5	1 / 5
Harptree Surgery	0 / 5	0 / 4	0 / 4	0 / 5
Average Improvement (as a % of 5 points)	**80%**	**68%**	**68%**	**65%***

Spaces varied in size, but all five surgeries created nature-based health and wellbeing opportunities. Support from partner organisation helped deliver sessions at some sites.

Spaces are being used in different ways. For example, Hope House runs a garden group while others use their outdoor space for consultations and staff wellbeing.

Access to outdoor space has supported staff health and wellbeing. Some sites are used regularly by patients and community groups, while others are starting to expand as the weather improves.

These examples show how the spaces are being used. Further impact is outlined in the *"What went well"* section (Appendix 2, see page 19).



7. Feedback - The users' voice

From the information collected, we can see that the program had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of patients, staff, and community members. This has been achieved by placing nature connection at the heart of the activities developed by each practice.

Users' voice

Feedback provided by Alive Activities, who run sessions at Charlotte Keel	
Staff feedback	**Participant feedback**
"It looks amazing." "So much better, it's going to be so good for staff morale!" "Can be an oasis." "Gardens are so good for you, make you relaxed."	"So proud of myself for getting out of the house." "So Therapeutic." "Really enjoyable." "I could do it all day." "Didn't want it to end." "Great to get something done!" "Get us, we're proper gardeners now, look what we did!"

Comments from weekly group at Harptree

- "I haven't spoken to anyone for 6 weeks."
- "I sometimes don't feel I have the energy to come, but I am always so pleased I did!"
- "I really enjoy the time sat and talking about nothing and just looking out."
- "Everyone is so friendly, supportive and care about each other."
- "I have learnt so many new things and I enjoyed making the planter."

Hanham Health Wellbeing Garden (community group)

- "I've enjoyed these sessions, meeting new people and interacting doing things I enjoy, also learning about what we should be doing".
- "Millie is very knowledgeable and helpful. It would be good if we could have another table, especially if more people come next year, and to have more shade".

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The report has clearly shown that the program was a success in both key areas it set out to address; nature recovery and nature-connected health and wellbeing. This evidence shows, given the opportunity and resources, the development of outdoor space can have a positive impact, providing spaces that support staff, patients, and community members.

To draw conclusions on both the effectiveness of the process and the impact, we asked the five participating surgeries to answer the following questions:

1. What went well?
2. What didn't go well?
3. How many community members/patients/staff are now using the space?
4. Can you identify the impact the program has had on you, your organisation, and patients?
5. What are your plans for the continued management and development of the space?
6. What are your plans to ensure that you can provide further and ongoing funding for the space?

Conclusion

The report to date has clearly shown the positive impact of the program. Some challenges were identified within the process, particularly delays in the release of funding, which affected delivery timelines and slowed momentum at key stages.

It should also be noted that the development of individual locations and activities was driven by the passion and commitment of individuals and teams. Response highlighted that, while some participants have concerns about sustaining the work, overall feedback was positive, and participants found the program beneficial.

This report shows that significant improvements in nature recovery and health and wellbeing have been achieved.

Recommendations

1. Create a network (*e.g.*, WhatsApp Group) to share experiences and support new surgeries joining the nature and Health Hubs network.

2. Establish resources to promote and run the network. Funding and partnerships arrangements will need to be considered.

3. Provide ongoing funding and support for newly established gardens.

4. Develop a toolkit based on learning from this program to support future practices joining the network.

I would like to finish this report by directing the reader to some before and after pictures that can be found in appendix 3.

Appendix 1

Summary of Avon Wildlife Trust ecologist recommendations

	Recommendations	Species / resource	Time to plant
CK, Ho	Create trellis and plant climbers in shaded corner to create bird and invertebrate habitat.	*Hedera helix*, *Clematis* (various), *Lonicera periclymenum*, *Pileostegia viburnoides*	Autumn through spring
CK, CH	Shade loving flowering plants in shaded corner.	*Pulmonaria*, *Geranium*, *Anenome*, *Aster*, *Tradescantia* (*andersonia* group). *Dryopteris*, *Asplenium*, *Angelica*, *Eupatorium*, *S. verbenaca.*	Autumn through spring
CH, Ho	Wildflower mix on bare ground in shaded areas - mix seeds with vermiculite and spread sparingly; 3-5g seed required per m^2	Shade loving native wildflowers seed mix - scatter on bare ground	Sow Autumn through spring
Ho, Har	Wildflower mix on bare ground in sunny areas- mix seeds with vermiculite and spread sparingly; 2-3g seed required per m^2	Bee Seed Packets	Sow Autumn through spring
CK	Fix bird boxes onto walls that will become covered by ivy/climbers in time	Catering to Blue Tit, Great Tit, Dunnock, Robin or other small garden passerine birds.	Anytime
CK, CH, Har, Ho	Mini pond/water feature - well planted half barrel pond for birds and aquatic insects - can be filled via downpipe diversion at CK.	Requires base container, EPDM rubber liner, pea gravel substrate, and aquatic plants including: *Nymphae alba*, *Persicaria amphibia*, *Ceratophylum demersum*. See advice.	Anytime
Har, Ho	Planting fruit trees for orchard / community wellbeing use	*Prunus domestica*, Somerset local varieties of Malus, *Pyrus*	Winter through Spring, ideally before Dec, but not after March.
Har, Ho	Native bulb under planting of fruit trees	*Frittilaria*, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, *Allium*, *Galanthus nivalis*, *Convallaria majalis*, *Ranunculus ficaria*, *Cyclamen hederifolium*	Plant in Autumn (preferred) or Spring
Har, Ho	Bat boxes fit in mature trees (on southern aspect of tree, min 2m up).	How to build a bat box | Somerset Wildlife Trust	Anytime
CH, Ho, Har	Hedgehog houses tucked into hedges	How to build a hedgehog home | The Wildlife Trusts	Anytime
CH, Har, Ho	Eco piles and dead hedges	Natural Barriers Team Wilder | Avon Wildlife Trust	Anytime

CH, Har, Ho	Food plants for insects that support bats	Encouraging bats guide [PDF] (worcester.ac.uk)	Plant in Spring
CH, Har, Ho	Compost heap- build when creating other structures	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-compost-your-waste	Anytime
CH, Har, Ho	Herbs that are good for wildlife and people	*Angelica sylvestris*, *Lavender angustifolia*, *Myrrhis odorata*, *Thymus*, *Salvia officinalis*, *Borago officinalis*, *Echinacea*, *Tanacetum parthenium*, *Calendula*, *Lunaria annua*, *Rosamarinus officinalis*, *Origanum majorana*, *Melissa officianalis* (only plant in pots)	Plant or sow in Autumn (preferred) or Spring

Appendix 2

Feedback from practices

Question 1	What went well?
Cadbury Heath	Securing additional funding helped and enabled us to get much further faster. We wouldn't have achieved what we have without the additional funding from NHS Property Services – landlords at the practice.
Charlotte Keel	A derelict courtyard transformed into a relaxing green space for staff and patients. A weekly gardening group used the space and also did gardening in other parts of the practice so the garden bed next to the main entrance was also transformed. Collaboration between healthcare staff and the charity, Alive, who are running the gardening group.
Hanham Health	The application process was reasonably straightforward, and we had good support from One Planet Matters.
Harptree	Securing the funding to make the Paddock Project happen. Working with the whole clinical team, to improve patients' wellbeing and reduce time spent with GP.
Hope House	The space has had a positive impact on patients, staff and the community as above. It is easily accessible by all and provides a welcome area of nature within the town that can be shared.

Question 2	What did not go well?
Cadbury Heath	Having to plant fruit trees and a hedgerow very early on when we were not ready.
Charlotte Keel	Took a while for funding to come through which delayed the garden installation.
Hanham Heath	It took quite a long time for the funding to come through.
Harptree	The weather! We have had incredibly wet weather and flooding. The runoff from the field behind us has been relentless. This is something not seen before or certainly to that extent and it meant that to prevent accidents to people or damage to the Paddock, I had to call a halt on our weekly meet ups. We are taking opportune windows of hope with the weather now and have started again with 2 or 3 people at a time to limit damage.
Hope House	Delay in funding process.

Question 3	Can you give an indication of how many community members, patients, or staff are now using the space?
Cadbury Heath	Up to 30.
Charlotte Keel	The gardening group has space for 6 patients weekly and the courtyard can be used by staff members. We expect it to be used a great deal more in the spring and summer by our nursing team and the physios in the practice building whose workspaces are close to the courtyard. The transformed bed outside the main entrance is passed by 100s of people daily (patients and staff).
Hanham Heath	The space is used every day by many people in the community who pass through along the footpath. The patient gardening group is still quite small with between six and ten people joining at various times but has the potential to grow. In fine weather around twenty or more staff a day will enjoy sitting at the picnic table for their breaks.
Harptree	I have had 53 different people using the space and a very strong patient group of 19.
Hope House	5-10

Question 4	Can you provide 1 short paragraph summing up the impact the program has had on you, your organisation, and patients?
Cadbury Heath	A space of peace and tranquility has been created. A time and space to breathe and be at one with the world and nature. To take time to notice the beauty within our world.
Charlotte Keel	The program has transformed a derelict courtyard into a relaxing green space for staff & patients, providing an oasis of nature right in the heart of urban inner-city Bristol. The weekly gardening group allows patients to access non-pharmaceutical means to help their mental health and reduce social isolation and loneliness. Other green spaces in the practice have also been improved by the gardening group, creating a calmer, more relaxing environment for patients and staff. The practice building looks more cared for, and we think this makes some of the patients feel more cared for too. Being part of this program has helped patients, practices and those of us involved in setting up the project. Thank you.
Hanham Heath	The space has been converted from a mainly empty grassy area to an orchard with trees, hedges and flower beds, making it a far richer environment to enjoy. So many staff have told me how much they love spending time in the garden. It's used for informal meetings all the time. The patient gardening group has been a great success, and we are excited about growing more vegetables this year.
Harptree	Well, all I can say is wow! The program has allowed me to make my vision of turning the paddock into a space for wellness, away from a clinical room will happen! What was once a disused paddock, is now a welcoming space that has shown how being in nature is such a positive thing for everyone. Patients have really pushed themselves to overcome barriers, so that they now feel part of a group, improve confidence, build connections with others and reduce isolation. The difference in some patients is so remarkable and that makes me proud of Harptree Surgery Paddock! The Surgery have been very supportive of the project and our wider primary care network. GPs can easily see the difference it can make and refer patients to me all the time for an introduction. Staff have been enjoying using the Paddock for break time and comment on how lovely it is to see and hear the birds and just relax!
Hope House	The space is used by: Staff: They take part in looking after the space and have introduced food waste recycling in the staff room to add to the composter. It provides outside quiet space for breaks. The surgery wellbeing team made chutney from the apples (established apple tree on site but previously inaccessible due to brambles) and these were given to staff as gifts. We have also provided fresh herb bundles for staff to take home.

Question 4	Can you provide 1 short paragraph summing up the impact the program has had on you, your organisation, and patients?
	Patients: One of our patients has kindly painted signs (bee friendly planting, hedgehog house, bats welcome) that help to add context to the garden. She has also painted the picnic table with a mandala in the surgery colours and added colour to the planters. Community: A local primary school made bird feeders that have been hung in the trees. Students from Little Lost Robot are creating metal artwork to be installed along the fence line. Somer Valley rediscovered are creating a willow arch. We are in contact with the local scouts as the 'Squirrel group' are interested in using the vegetable garden. The neighbors in the houses overlooking the space have added their own vegetables to the raised beds and some pots to the site, as they do not have gardens. A short vide of the transformation can be viewed here https://youtube.com/shorts/uNTawSA01sw

Question 5	What are your plans for the continued management and development of the Space?
Cadbury Heath	We have a gardening group every fortnight run by Alive a local charity and a GP clinic held outside once a month.
Charlotte Keel	The gardening group is helping with this and NHS property services can help with anything structural that should need doing in future.
Hanham Heath	We do have a contract with a company who maintains our outdoor space but ideally would like more funding so we can continue with our gardening group.
Harptree	The space will continue to be looked after by the very strong patient volunteers and staff from the Surgery. I have no concerns over its maintenance, as the Paddock has been planned to give the most, but with manageable maintenance. We are all so proud of the space and it's a joy to go out and potter around.
Hope House	Our staff will look after the space if there are no groups running from it for any reason. Currently in talks with local primary school and scouts group re: growing projects.

Question 6	What are you plans to ensure that you can provide further and ongoing funding for the space that has been developed?
Cadbury Heath	Currently looking at these.
Charlotte Keel	We are looking into options and our practice green team and practice manager are supporting us with this.
Hanham Heath	I'm not sure about this as apparently the funding for our gardening group ends at the end of March this year.
Harptree	The surgery is happy for me to continue with half a day in the Paddock with groups – my usual salary. In conversations with the Wellbeing Team BANES Council. Funding from East Harptree Arts Hub secured for Art Therapy/Social prescribing.
Hope House	Received some funding from The Big Local and linked with The Active Way and Somer Valley rediscovered.

Appendix 3 - Before and after images

Charlotte Keel Medical Practice

Before



After





Cadbury Heath Health Centre

Before



After





Hanham Health

Before



After





Hope House Surgery

Before



After





Harptree Surgery

Before



After





[See a digital album showing the progress at each location]

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