



Flourishing
& Wellbeing

NIHR | Oxford Health Biomedical
Research Centre



Flourishing & Wellbeing

Investigating how non-clinical environments might be
utilised to enhance public health and mental health

FLOURISHING & WELLBEING

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2026



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WELCOME TO OUR SPRING NEWSLETTER!

As we share this March edition, we also mark a transition: this will be our final newsletter in its current form. Thank you for following and supporting our work. We are excited to continue sharing updates through our new [Oxford Human-Nature Health Research Platform](#) where you can follow our latest research and collaborations.

A central focus of this issue is the major new collaboration between the Flourishing Nature Connections programme and the Eden Project. Together, we will investigate how experiences in nature can promote mental health and wellbeing while protecting the natural world. The initial phase is generously funded by the Ashken Family Charitable Foundation.

In this edition, we also share updates on our AI-supported Green Space assessment research, national policy engagement, publications, team news and upcoming events.

We look forward to continuing the conversation on the [Oxford Human-Nature Health Research Platform](#). There we will also publish details on our ongoing work, new projects and people, and recruitment opportunities. Please stay tuned there to learn about our exciting developments.



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Flourishing Nature Connections and the Eden Project combine forces to research how nature can promote mental health

We are delighted to announce that an innovative new collaboration between the Flourishing Nature Connections programme and the Eden Project will investigate how nature can improve mental health and wellbeing.

We will work with the Eden Project's Nature Connections programme to investigate how experiences in nature can offer safe and accessible ways to tackle mild and moderate mental health challenges and promote wellbeing, while also protecting the natural world.

The team will evaluate practical solutions such as community horticulture projects and other nature engagement tools including apps, measuring their outcomes for mental health and wellbeing. They will then examine ways to scale up effective interventions so that more people can benefit, regardless of their current mental health status or proximity to nature. Policy recommendations and toolkits will also be developed to help guide future initiatives in this area.

The Ashken Family Charitable Foundation (AFCF) is funding the initial phase of the project, enabling world-class researchers at Oxford to join forces with Eden, whose practicality and ability to get things done have been demonstrated over its 25-year history.

Professor [Irina Singh](#), Professor of Neuroscience and Society at the University of Oxford and principal investigator for the project, said: 'By bringing together rigorous science and real-world delivery, our ambitious programme aims to transform the ways that nature can support and improve mental health and wellbeing.'

'With the Ashken Family Charitable Foundation's generous support, we build on our foundational research to develop systematic understanding of what works, for whom, and why. We'll use that evidence to shape nature-based mental health interventions that are scalable and effective, thereby improving people's wellbeing, their connection to nature and society, and enabling them to truly flourish.'

Dan James, Development Director at the Eden Project, added: 'This collaboration brings together the best of science and the power of nature to support the health of people and the planet. At Eden, we've long believed that reconnecting with nature is not only good for the soul, it's vital for our collective wellbeing. We're thrilled to be joining forces with the University of Oxford to deepen the evidence, expand the reach, and help more communities flourish.'

AFCF focuses its philanthropy primarily on the environment, healthcare and education. You can find out more about Flourishing Nature Connections, and lots more, on our new [Oxford Human-Nature Health Research Platform](#).



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Seeing Green Differently: When AI and Young People Co-Design Urban Wellbeing

Contribution from: [Dr Katrin Wilhelm](#) and Ina Pelster

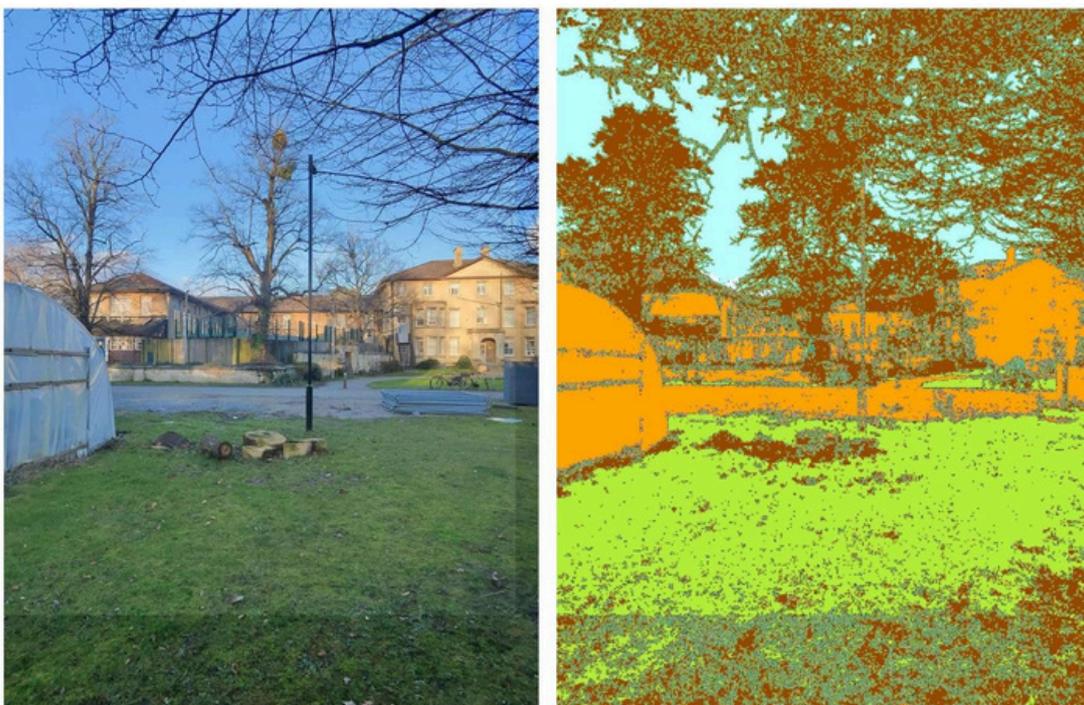
How can we assess urban green spaces in ways that are both scientifically rigorous and grounded in lived experience? Our ongoing project explores this question by combining open-source artificial intelligence with youth participation within the E-Co-Flourishing framework.

We use ilastik, an open-source, user-friendly machine learning tool for image classification, to analyse 360° eye-level photographs from three Oxford Living Labs: Merton Meadow, University Parks, and Warneford Hospital. The AI is trained to classify visual features such as grass, trees, sky, flowers, and built structures. From these classifications, we calculate proportional compositions to create a Green Space Composition Index, enabling rapid and reproducible environmental assessment.

Crucially, these objective measures are validated through participatory work with 6 -10 young people (YPAG-level or equivalent). Through guided nature walks, movement and body-mapping exercises, focus groups, and evaluation of AI outputs, young participants identify which environmental elements meaningfully shape their wellbeing, engagement, and use of space.

Preliminary findings suggest strong potential in human-AI co-production: while AI captures many perceived differences between spaces, youth perspectives reveal nuances, such as feelings of openness, safety, or crowding, that challenge purely compositional analysis. The iterative training process has also highlighted the limits of pixel-based classification compared to embodied human perception.

The project will conclude in November 2026. By integrating subjective and objective Green Space assessment, this work contributes to developing inclusive, scalable tools to support urban mental health research and intervention design across schools, hospitals, and community settings.



Sample output from ilastik



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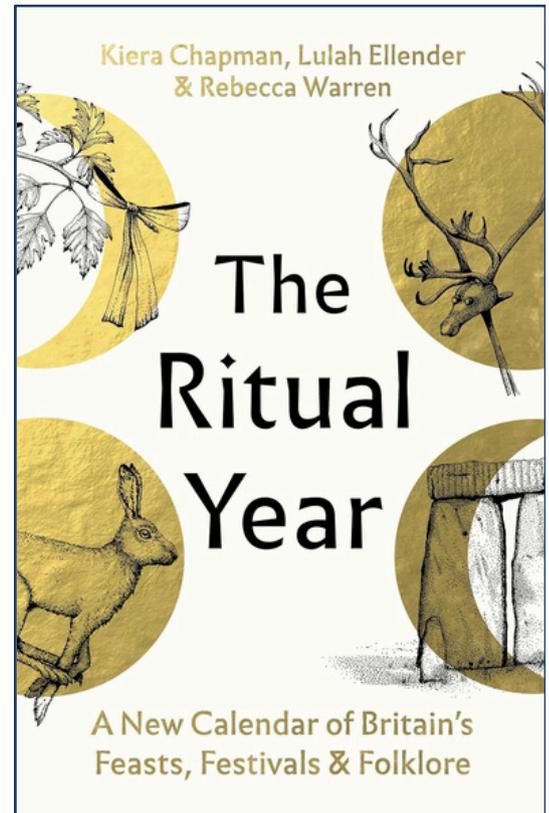
Dr Kiera Chapman Appointed to British Standards Institution Panel & Book Release

Dr Kiera Chapman has been appointed to the panel for British Standards Institution British Standard 42020: Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development.

This standard is widely used by Local Planning Authorities to provide guidance on best practice regarding how the interface between planning and ecology should operate.

Through this role, Dr Chapman is using the standard to design model planning conditions aimed at ensuring that green spaces delivered through development are better for both people and nature, and to help prevent wildlife crime. She is also seeking to draw attention to the need for much greater consideration of human health and wellbeing in the design of 'natural' green space. At present, the process is strongly focused on ecology, often considered in isolation from social dimensions.

In addition, Dr Chapman's new book, *The Ritual Year*, will be published 13 August 2026, and its cover has been released.



Talks & Events

In December, Professor Roger Crisp hosted a talk entitled 'Values and the Meaning of Life' at a workshop on Meaning in Life, Moral Distress and Philosophy of Health at the University of Southern Denmark.

Oxford is hosting its first Nature Festival, 27th June 2026, celebrating nature recovery across Oxford and beyond. Organisers are inviting creative, hands-on activity ideas that inspire people of all ages to connect with the natural world.

If you're a researcher, community group, artist, student, or nature enthusiast with an engaging idea, now's the time to get involved. Find out more and submit your proposal via the [Nature Recovery Network website](#).



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NEW ARRIVALS

We are very pleased to welcome Research Assistant Emma Fry and Postdoctoral Researcher Delia Ciobotaru to our team!



Meet Emma

Emma worked in mental health services before taking an NHS Research Assistant position, which inspired her love of research and academia. She attended Goldsmiths, University of London where she completed her masters in Psychology of the Arts, Neuroaesthetics & Creativity. She is interested in aesthetic experiences and how we / our brains and bodies respond to these experiences (e.g. beauty, awe) and also how it drives our curiosity.

Having always felt my best when outside in nature, I am particularly excited to be part of a team researching the benefits of nature for mental health and wellbeing whilst concurrently supporting and improving environmental health and wellbeing.

"I am delighted to have joined the Flourishing team and am feeling very welcomed by everyone. I have been enjoying delving into the literature, supporting the day to day running of existing projects and being involved in the planning of upcoming work. Having always felt my best when outside in nature, I am particularly excited to be part of a team researching the benefits of nature for mental health and wellbeing whilst concurrently supporting and improving environmental health and wellbeing."



Delia Ciobotaru

Delia will be joining our Flourishing Nature Connections programme as a Postdoctoral Researcher. Her research explores how emotion and cognition interact to influence well-being in both personal and professional life, with a particular focus on high-stress roles like teaching. She is skilled in mixed-methods research, non-invasive neurostimulation, and data visualisation and analysis, with experience in both academic and industry roles. With a PhD in Psychology and as a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, she has a strong foundation in teaching and learning, which complements her research focus on translating findings into practical, real-world applications.



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PUBLICATIONS

Wilhelm et al. *The role of Hybrid Green Spaces in secure psychiatric care*
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2026.100348>

UPCOMING PAPER: Maloney et al. *Mechanisms underpinning flourishing at the interface of humans and other natural entities: An umbrella review.*

KEEP IN TOUCH

To stay up to date with our work going forward, please visit our new Research Platform, Oxford Human-Nature Health. Our research aims to discover if, how and why 'nature' supports human mental health and wellbeing. In our research process, we intentionally look to re-connect humans with the natural world, and we investigate how and why that re-connection is good for humans and good for the planet.

Find out more



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