# Estate owners embrace wellness to revive heritage and meet rising costs



In the heart of a venerable oak glade at the expansive Wasing Estate in Berkshire lies a spiritual portal, a sentiment echoed by Di Dugdale, who, along with her husband Josh, has been nurturing their family's stewardship of the estate since 1759. This connection to nature and history has catalysed the launch of the Medicine Festival in 2020 and other evolving events like the upcoming Well Read literary and wellness festival. These initiatives attract an inquisitive public, seeking both knowledge and a reconnection with the natural world. Josh Dugdale asserts, “our aim is to connect people to nature,” a mission now under scrutiny as estate owners ponder the financial viability of such ventures amidst the rising costs associated with estate management.

The Dugdales are part of an emerging trend among estate owners across the UK, seeking to diversify revenue streams in the face of economic challenges. Traditional offerings, such as weddings and music festivals, are faltering; over 70 music festivals were paused or closed last year, a testament to an oversaturated market grappling with cost pressures. For estates like Wasing, the incorporation of wellness experiences into event programming is seen as an innovative response. This trend has gained momentum since the pandemic, which prompted many to explore new paths to wellness, such as ice baths, yoga, sauna sessions, and forest bathing—activities that have now become prominent features at various festivals and retreats.

The growing wellness economy, valued at $6.3 trillion in 2023 and projected to rise to $9 trillion by 2028, presents a tantalising opportunity for estate owners. This burgeoning market includes wellness tourism, which accounted for $224 billion in the UK, positioning it as the eighth-largest globally. However, transitioning to wellness-focused offerings often requires significant financial outlay and strategic planning.

Merlin Hanbury-Tenison, who manages Cabilla, a 250-acre estate in Cornwall's Bodmin Moor, highlights the essential investment needed to create a wellness retreat. After his experience with post-traumatic stress disorder and subsequent recovery, he saw the healing potential of Cabilla’s unique environment—its temperate rainforest healing a nature-starved public. Hanbury-Tenison aims to merge ecological restoration with wellness pursuits, mentioning more than 3,000 visitors to his estate over the past four years. He emphasizes a dual mission of human and environmental healing, allowing both visitors and nature to thrive together—an ethos increasingly reflected in the wider movement towards rewilding and sustainable estate management.

The significant mental health benefits correlated with natural environments have cemented wellness practices as essential, echoing sentiments expressed in literature such as Lucy Jones's *Losing Eden*. Research indicates that forest bathing, deeply rooted in Japanese culture, can bolster health by regulating stress responses and enhancing feelings of wellbeing. This notion is supported by studies that show significant physiological improvements, including reduced heart rates and lowered depressive symptoms when individuals engage with forested areas. The UK's own National Health Service has benefited from reduced costs linked to mental health issues spurred by outdoor engagement, a trend mirrored by Green Social Prescribing pilots that have emerged across various regions.

Notably, the impact of Covid-19 has not gone unnoticed by estates such as Fritton Lake in Norfolk, where owner Hugh Somerleyton has reimagined a previously popular destination as a wellness-focused private club. The estate now boasts eco-cabins and rewilded landscapes, catering to an environmentally conscious clientele who appreciate both traditional amenities and nature-driven wellness activities. Somerleyton acknowledges the challenges of cultivating a sustainable community ethos amidst traditional expectations, yet his approach reflects a broader acceptance of wellness as a lucrative business model.

Similarly, Lara Tabatznik’s establishment, 42 Acres in Somerset, exemplifies the growing interest in nurturing both people and environment. Offering retreats with a focus on self-sufficiency through local food sourcing and nature interaction, 42 Acres is poised for profitability through careful balancing of guest experiences and environmental stewardship. The integration of structured retreats and independent stays offers flexibility while remaining firmly rooted in the principles of sustainability and community connection.

While many estate owners embark on this ambitious transition to wellness-centric initiatives, the path to profitability remains precarious. Wasing Estate, having achieved financial stability only after six years of effort, highlights the importance of sustainable practices in maintaining heritage estates. Despite the challenges, the overarching commitment to custodianship and alignment with nature remains a guiding principle for these ventures. As Josh Dugdale aptly puts it, “we have an obligation to bring people into connection with these beautiful natural environments that we care for.”

The ongoing dialogue around the valuation of nature's services further underscores the economic potential of these estates, advocating for the quantification of benefits beyond mere financial returns. Metrics that illustrate the cost saved by improving public health through access to green spaces may pave the way for more support and funding for these vital community resources.

Through their pioneering approaches, these estate owners are redefining what it means to sustain heritage while prioritising environmental conservation and community wellbeing. As they navigate the complex intersection of nature, health, and commerce, the future of these estates is poised to evolve dramatically.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: 1, 2
* Paragraph 2: 1, 2
* Paragraph 3: 1, 2, 4
* Paragraph 4: 1, 2, 3, 5
* Paragraph 5: 2, 4, 5
* Paragraph 6: 2, 5
* Paragraph 7: 2, 4, 5, 6
* Paragraph 8: 2, 4, 5, 6
* Paragraph 9: 1, 6
* Paragraph 10: 1, 2, 5, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/ba2c3d35-7428-4e3b-9630-468498cdbbca> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/ba2c3d35-7428-4e3b-9630-468498cdbbca> - This article discusses how UK estate owners are diversifying into the wellness economy to sustain their historic properties. It highlights initiatives like Wasing Estate's Medicine Festival, which began in 2020, offering events that blend music, ritual, and nature to connect people with the environment. The piece also covers other estates, such as Cabilla in Cornwall, which offers nature retreats in a temperate rainforest, and Fritton Lake in Norfolk, which has been transformed into a private wellness club. These ventures aim to promote human and environmental well-being while addressing financial challenges faced by traditional estate operations.
3. <https://www.wasing.co.uk/wellbeing/workshops> - Wasing Estate in Berkshire offers a variety of wellness workshops and retreats designed to connect individuals with nature. Their offerings include yoga, meditation, breathwork, guided journaling, sound baths, ice baths, wild swimming, wood-fired sauna sessions, and nature immersion walks. These programs aim to provide holistic experiences that rejuvenate the mind, body, and soul, set within the serene environment of the estate's ancient woodlands.
4. <https://www.cabillacornwall.com/your-stay/activities/> - Cabilla Cornwall provides a range of activities focused on nature-based wellness. Guests can engage in wild bathing, immersing themselves in the River Bedalder within the estate's ancient oak woodland and temperate rainforest. The estate also offers sound experiences led by expert guides, blending traditional and contemporary methods to create therapeutic journeys through sound. Additionally, visitors can learn about the beavers introduced to the area, which play a role in the local ecosystem.
5. <https://www.cabillacornwall.com/vision/the-land/> - Cabilla Cornwall is home to a rare temperate rainforest and ancient oak woodland, ecosystems that support a rich biodiversity, including rare species. The estate aims to nurture and protect these habitats for the next thousand years, creating a model ecosystem from which others can learn. The temperate rainforest is recognized for its global conservation significance and is considered one of the richest and most complex terrestrial habitats in the UK.
6. <https://www.zenjungle.org//> - The Zen Jungle Retreat, located in a peaceful Devon valley near Bude, Cornwall, offers holistic wellness and transformation programs. Spanning 40 acres with five lakes and ancient woodland, the retreat provides luxury boho-chic cabins for self-catered stays. Guests can participate in daily holistic sessions, including meditation, shamanic breathwork, sound and vibration ceremonies, and hemispheric brain training. The retreat is designed to help individuals find inner peace, heal, and awaken to a more fulfilling life.
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