# Historic UK estates pivot to nature wellness amid festival market collapse



In the heart of the ancient oak woodlands of the Wasing Estate, a remarkable transformation is taking place. Owners Di and Josh Dugdale, custodians of this 4,000-acre estate since 1759, have embraced the burgeoning wellness economy, reimagining the estate as a hub for holistic healing and connection to nature. This initiative, launched with the Medicine Festival in 2020, has drawn indigenous leaders and wellness practitioners from around the globe, each bringing their unique teachings and perspectives. From immersive rituals to musical serenades, the Dugdales aim to create experiences that foster a deeper connection with the natural world. Their latest venture, a wellness and literary festival named Well Read, further encapsulates this vision.

The shift towards wellness is not an isolated phenomenon at Wasing; it reflects a broader trend among British estate owners seeking sustainable revenue streams for their historic properties. While weddings and music festivals have long provided financial support, many estates are now finding these avenues increasingly strained by an oversaturated market. Last year alone, over 70 UK music festivals were either paused or permanently closed, citing rising costs as a primary concern. In response, many estates have begun pivoting to wellness offerings, integrating experiences such as yoga, sauna sessions, and forest bathing into their portfolios.

This trend has its roots in the collective introspection brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a surge in interest in nature and wellbeing. Josh Dugdale remarked that people are now drawn to activities like ice baths, lake swimming, and yoga retreats — pursuits that reconnect urban dwellers with elements of the natural world often taken for granted.

The booming global wellness economy, currently valued at around $6.3 trillion, is anticipated to grow to $9 trillion by 2028, with the UK market accounting for approximately $224 billion. For estate owners like the Dugdales, embracing this approach appears to be a pragmatic strategy for financial sustainability, albeit with caveats about the considerable investment involved in launching such initiatives.

Merlin Hanbury-Tenison, who operates retreats on his Cornish farm, Cabilla, offers another insightful perspective on this transition. Inheriting land that was once economically unviable, he and his wife, Lizzie, discovered the healing potential of their temperate rainforest, which became a sanctuary not just for themselves but for others seeking refuge from the stresses of modern life. Their dual mission encapsulates both personal healing and environmental stewardship, as they actively work to restore their land while providing transformative experiences for visitors.

Despite the opportunities presented by nature-based wellness, financial sustainability remains a challenging goal. Many estate owners have reported that, while they are gradually seeing profits, the journey is fraught with hurdles. For instance, while Wasing Estate's wellness initiatives are "finally moving into the black," the estate's expansive payroll, which includes over 220 employees, continues to necessitate careful financial management. Similarly, at Fritton Lake, part of Somerleyton Hall, the venture has seen revenue growth but is still not sufficient to cover the high costs associated with maintaining the estate.

Moreover, the growing popularity of nature experiences raises questions about the true economic value of these initiatives. A key argument among advocates is the need for recognising and quantifying the services nature provides, from improved mental health to ecological benefits. For instance, a 2021 report suggested woodlands save the NHS an estimated £16 million annually in antidepressant costs—a figure considered to be conservative. As such, initiatives that foster nature connection could ultimately lead to reduced healthcare costs, offering a compelling justification for investment in these wellness ventures.

Another estate taking significant strides in this direction is 42 Acres in Somerset, established by Lara Tabatznik with the intent of creating a holistic wellness centre. Since its inception in 2015, 42 Acres has focused on hosting a variety of wellness retreats, with plans to achieve profitability by the coming year. Their commitment to restoring the land while providing sustainable experiences reflects a growing ethos among estate owners: that nurturing nature and fostering community connection can coexist with financial viability.

As the wellness movement continues to gain traction among historic estates, it is clear that these ventures represent more than a means of financial survival. They signify a paradigm shift in how we relate to land and nature, prioritising ecological health and human wellbeing as key tenets of sustainable stewardship. As the Dugdales eloquently put it, their obligation extends beyond profit; it encompasses a responsibility to connect people with the natural environments they so fiercely preserve. In an age where the mental and physical benefits of nature are increasingly acknowledged, these estates may find themselves at the forefront of reimagining both wellness and conservation.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
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6. Paragraph 10
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8. Paragraphs 14, 15, 16, 17

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.ft.com/content/ba2c3d35-7428-4e3b-9630-468498cdbbca> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.ft.com/content/ba2c3d35-7428-4e3b-9630-468498cdbbca> - An article discussing how UK estate owners are embracing the wellness economy to sustain their historic lands and promote human and environmental wellbeing. Estates like Wasing in Berkshire, Cabilla in Cornwall, Fritton Lake in Norfolk, and 42 Acres in Somerset are leveraging their natural assets to host retreats, festivals, and wellness experiences, including yoga, forest bathing, and sauna sessions. These ventures aim to reconnect people with nature and fund ecological restoration projects like rainforest replanting and rewilding. While achieving early financial sustainability remains a challenge due to high start-up costs and market unpredictability, estate owners stress their dual mission of nature conservation and community wellbeing. They also argue for recognizing the economic value of ecosystem services, which can significantly benefit public health systems like the NHS. Though wellness alone may not offset estate overheads, these initiatives represent a model of sustainable stewardship that aligns purpose with profitability.
* <https://www.wasing.co.uk/lyrical/313-medicine-festival-2023> - The official page for the Medicine Festival 2023 at Wasing Estate, held from August 17-21, 2023. The festival featured indigenous leaders, headline speakers, and music headliners, offering a restorative alternative to traditional festivals. It emphasized wellbeing, ceremony, world music, dance, sacred activism, nature connection, multicultural arts, and a joyful celebration of diversity. The event aimed to revive ancient ways, bridge cultures, and inspire a deeper understanding of harmonious living on the planet.
* <https://www.cabillacornwall.com/> - The official website for Cabilla Cornwall, a retreat center located in Cornwall's Bodmin Moor. Cabilla offers nature retreats in a 250-acre hill farm, featuring 12 two-bed cabins and one of Europe's last remaining temperate rainforests. The center provides activities like forest bathing, wild bathing, sound experiences, and guided tours of their beaver enclosure. Their mission is to inspire everyone to experience the restorative powers of nature, offering a place where guests leave feeling both grounded and inspired.
* <https://www.cabillacornwall.com/your-stay/activities/> - A detailed overview of activities offered at Cabilla Cornwall, including forest bathing, wild bathing, sound experiences, and guided tours of their beaver enclosure. These activities are designed to deepen guests' connection to nature, themselves, and others, balancing the nervous system and enhancing emotional awareness. The center emphasizes the importance of experiencing their temperate rainforest, one of the rarest habitats in the world, and offers various guided walks and experiences to suit all abilities.
* <https://www.cabillacornwall.com/beta-retreat/> - Information about Cabilla Cornwall's Beta Retreats, a pioneering team-building experience rooted in nature. The retreats are fully facilitated and include activities like temperate rainforest guided nature walks, wild bathing, sauna sessions, restorative movement and meditation classes, and nourishing meals cooked by private chefs. The retreats aim to nurture and realize human potential, promoting positive wellbeing, inspired action, and sustainable change. The Beta Retreats are part of Cabilla's mission to offer immersive experiences that stay with participants for all the right reasons.
* <https://www.emilyruthyoga.com/the-rainforest-retreat> - Details about 'The Rainforest Retreat' hosted by Emily Ruth Yoga at Cabilla Cornwall. Scheduled from November 1-4, the retreat offers a nourishing weekend of autumnal walks, river dips, wood fires, and yoga. The daily rhythm includes morning yoga flow, slow breakfasts, exploration of the temperate rainforest, wild water dips, wood-fired sauna, moor walks, late afternoon restorative yoga, downtime, delicious dinners, and fireside decompression. The retreat focuses on returning to nature and discovering the abundance that autumn can bring to the soul.