

Open Country is a charitable organisation (1107331) which enables anyone with a disability to access and enjoy the countryside, through the provision of outdoor activities and information.

Ever heard of the 'social model of disability', whereby people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference? Well, in the wake of the pandemic, it often seems to us that life is getting needlessly harder for many of the folk we work with. The shops and pubs that have gone 'card only' may have their own lives made a bit easier but cause dismay to those still relying on cash. Those attractions that now charge entry to essential carers may claw a bit of money back after the pandemic, but seem to forget that their policy often means a disabled person ends up paying twice! And don't even get us started on the places that have dropped free Blue Badge parking. Or the restaurants that stigmatise people with assistance dogs. Or the pavement parkers. Or the A-frames and car park height barriers that make access hard for many disabled people. We could go on, and on, and on...

It's the season of goodwill and many of us like to have a New Year's Resolution round about now. What say we resolve to work together to challenge all those silly and thoughtless actions that have a negative effect on those in society with enough on their plates as it is?

On a more upbeat tone, we have long wanted to set up a third Hub to go alongside our two current bases in Harrogate and Wakefield. After much thought, Middlesbrough has been selected. There's a lot to like - can-do people, a vibrant voluntary sector, a major river with easy access to the sea and a National Park on the doorstep. Obviously it is a massive step for our charity so, over the next couple of years, we will need all the help and support we can get if we are to make this vision a reality. Look out for some Teesside activities in the current programme, as we start to familiarise ourselves with the area. You can read more about it on page 2.

Enjoy the festive season, everyone!



## Middlesbrough News

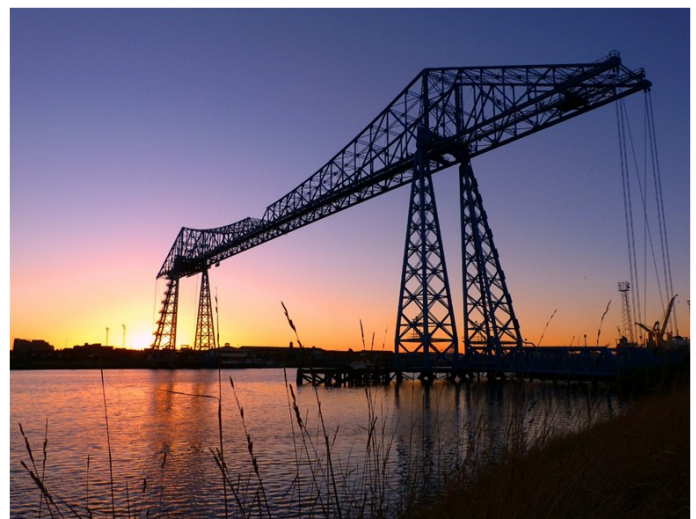
Our proposed hub on Teesside will be additional to our existing work and will compliment, rather than detract from, our two current hubs. It's our way of reaching more people, in more places. In time, we can even have a Satellite operating in nearby Redcar. Does anyone have any helpful connections in the area - maybe a friendly business, a contact who could volunteer for us up there or some inside knowledge of local walks and cycle routes? Trust us - it will all help!

To get us in the mood, here are some little known facts about Middlesbrough:

- In 1801, Middlesbrough was a farm, home to just 25 people. Today the population is over 140,000!
- Middlesbrough is famous for the 'Parmo', a version of scallopini parmigiana or schnitzel consisting of deep-fried breaded chicken or pork cutlet, topped with thick béchamel sauce and grilled cheese. It's worth venturing up there for that alone!
- Sir William Arrol & Co. of Glasgow built the iconic Transporter Bridge in 1911, which still spans the River Tees between Middlesbrough and Port Clarence. At 850 feet long and 225 feet high, it is one of the largest of its type in the world, and one of only two left in Britain. It is also a Grade II\* listed building.
- Film director Ridley Scott is from the North East and based the opening shot of Blade Runner on the view of the old ICI plant at Wilton.
- By the mid-1870s, Middlesbrough was producing one third of the entire

nation's Pig Iron and earned the nickname "Ironopolis".

- The body of a Native American, Moses Carpenter, is buried in Linthorpe Cemetery. Carpenter was a member of the Mohawk tribe and was born in Ontario, Canada in 1854; his birth name was 'Ska-Run-Ya-Te'. In 1889, he visited Middlesbrough as part of a travelling show, where he tragically died of a fever.
- 'Smoggie' is a colloquial term used to refer to people from Teesside and also describes the local accent and dialect spoken in the area. It dates from the 1960s, when the area was known for its high levels of industrial pollution, which often resulted in thick smog cloaking the region. Visiting football supporters began to refer to the locals as "smog monsters", later shortened to "smoggies".
- Famous people from Middlesbrough include musician Chris Rea, comedian Bob Mortimer, actress Thelma Barlow and wheelchair racing Paralympian Jade Jones-Hall.





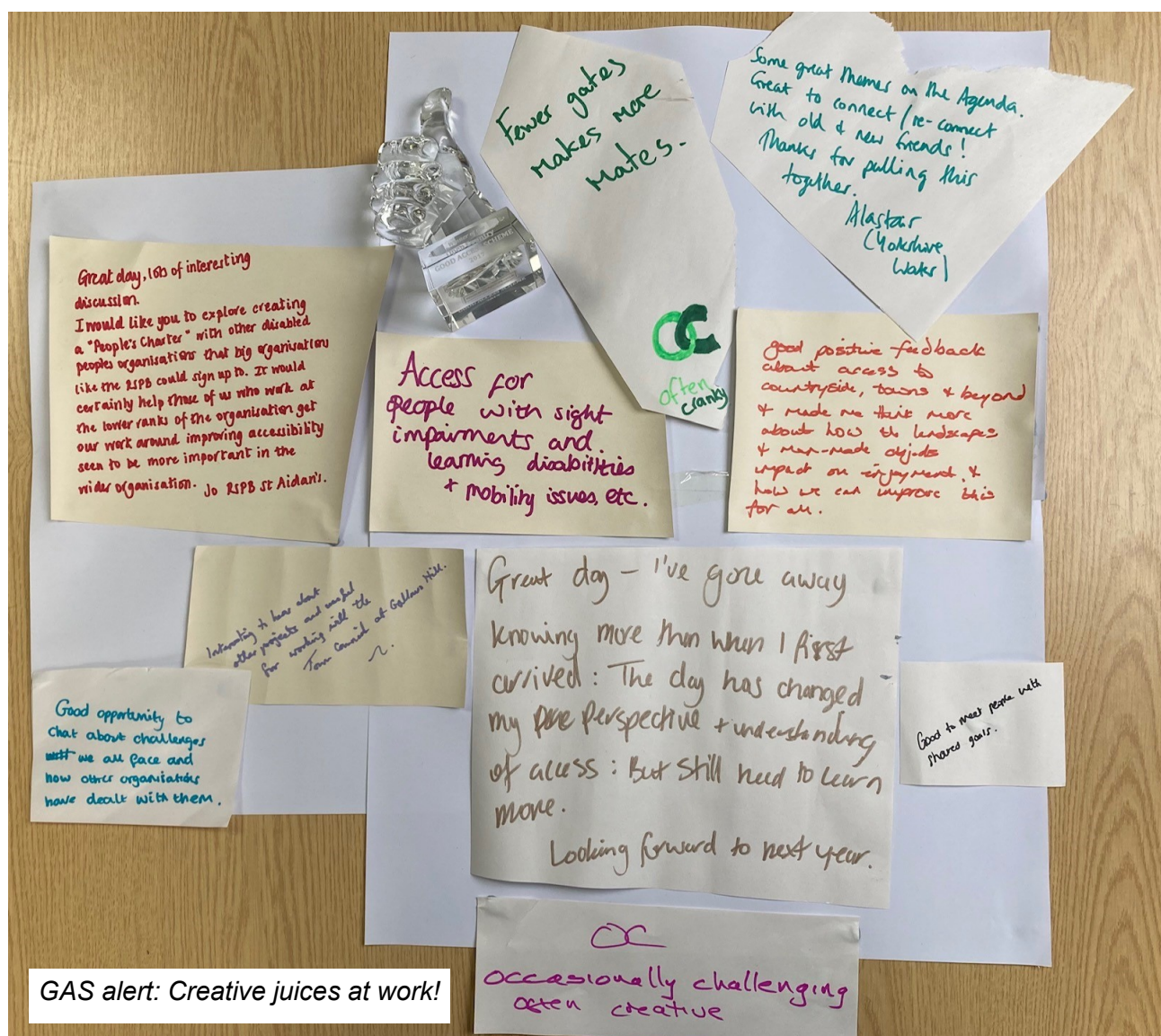
## GAS Conference

Our 'Good Access Scheme', award, recognises the best inclusive access initiative in Yorkshire annually. We held our first 'Conference' in November where previous winners of our 'GAS' award got together with other access providers to talk about some of the great inclusive access issues of our time. Participants included representatives from *RSPB*, *Experience Community*, *Groundwork*, *Yorkshire Water*, *Peak District National Park* and the *Land Trust*. We hope that the Conference will become an annual event - it's only by communicating better that we can effect lasting change.



Trying out some Mountain Trikes

Next year's Conference will be on **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024**. It will kindly be hosted by *Wentworth Woodhouse Garden* in their newly restored orangery.





## Good Access Scheme award 2023

The winner of our 2023 GAS award is *Wentworth Woodhouse Gardens*. They have made a terrific job of improving the access on their historic estate - creating a sensory trail, improving path surfaces, installing a quiet room for chilling out in, having all-terrain power chairs and many other initiatives besides. They appreciate there is still more work to do but have made a really impressive start!



*It's got a brew, a view and a portaloo. Perfect!*



*Disabled people are even reflected in the Wentworth Woodhouse Garden scarecrows!*

We were delighted to be able to award a special discretionary award to the former *Harrogate Borough Council*, whose functions have now been absorbed by *North Yorkshire Council*, for its sterling work on barrier removal around Stonefall Park/Panhandle in Harrogate. They were a terrible blight on the area for many years - now there is superb access for everyone.



*Stonefall Park back in the bad old days!*

We also wanted to commend *Yorkshire Water* for their new hide at Tophill Low. It replaces an old dilapidated one and is fully accessible. We thought a nice touch was having two doors for those who are intimidated by a hide with just one means of entry. Great work!



We now call on other access managers to follow on the fine example shown by all these organisations.



## Trustee news

David Robinson has done a great job for us but is stepping down as our Treasurer next year, so we need to replace him. Does anyone have any idea of someone who is financially-literate who might fit the bill? We can supply a role description and have an informal chat if that helps.

Welcome to Michelle Tempest-Mitchell who has joined the Board as our Marketing trustee. She has a marketing background and is Head of Marketing for the *Bradford Literature Festival*.



## Annual Survey

Our annual survey is included in this mailing. Please find time to take part and to give us feedback on your experiences with Open Country, be it as a member or volunteer. It's great to know whether we're making a difference and we'll take your suggestions on board as we put together our programme and activities for the year ahead.

Please let us have your responses by **27<sup>th</sup> January 2024**.

## Companion cycling anyone?

For many years, we held a successful Companion Cycling group on a weekend. It catered for people riding solos, along with trikes and wheelchair bikes. As the success of our tandem clubs grew, support for our Companion Cycling waned, and eventually we scrapped it altogether. Years later, and with some younger recruits around, we were wondering if there is there fresh demand for companion cycling on a weekend? Let us know!

## A Co-op coup!

We are thrilled that Open Country is now one of the Co-op's chosen charities. Here's how you can show your support:

Sign in to your Co-op account or join in using this web address: <https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/76373>

Select Open Country as your charity.

Now, every time you shop at the Coop, a percentage of your spending will directly benefit Open Country (RCN 1107331).



## Volunteer News

### Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our wonderful volunteers!

We are really grateful for all your hard work and support over the past year - we couldn't do it without you!

A warm welcome to Damian Staniforth, who has joined the Harrogate Nature Force group, Chris Burt who has joined the Harrogate Tandems and Lisa and Tony Schumacher who have joined the York Walking Group. We hope you have just as much fun as we do!



Ripon, Selby and Wetherby Tandem clubs could do with a few more **volunteer pilots** for the 2024 season, so if you know any cyclists who would like to get involved with the clubs, please ask them to contact us. You don't have to have any experience of riding a tandem as all new volunteers get paired up with experienced volunteers for their first ride.

Join us at Community House in Harrogate on **Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March, 6-8.30pm** for a Sighted Guide Training and Disability Awareness refresher. It will

help you become more confident in guiding people with a visual impairment and give you greater understanding of disability and the people we support. The session is open to all volunteers, new and old. There will be cheese and wine too! If you have already completed the Sighted Guide course you can just come along for the Disability Awareness. Please get in touch to book your place.

We were very sad to hear that Ian Parkinson passed away recently. Ian had been a member of our Nature and Natterers group and subsequently became a regular volunteer with the Thursday walking group and weekend outings, where he was a kind and well-loved member of the team; on one occasion hosting the group for tea and cake in his garden! Although he hadn't been out with us since the pandemic, Ian kept in touch and was a loyal supporter. He will be sadly missed by us all and we send our sincere condolences to his wife, Lynda.



*Ian (second from left) volunteering with us at Middleton Park in Leeds*



## Wakefield and Barnsley News

### Nest boxes for sale!

Many thanks to Paul Ormerod from Lofthouse, Wakefield, for hand-carving us 10 beautiful bird nest boxes. We are selling his boxes for £20 each and 100% of the donation will go to our Wakefield project. Fancy one for your garden?



### Could you adopt a collection box?

We still have a few donation boxes left in Wakefield in need of a good home. They don't cause much mess or need feeding, but are a great way of helping us market our local charity and raise vital funds to support the work we do. Give us a bell if you know of a good, warm home for one!

### Breakfree with Open Country!

Thanks to funding from the *West Yorkshire Combined Authority*, we have re-audited the Wakefield Breakfree pack and will reprint 2,000 copies of the pack in January. To get a free copy of these 15 accessible routes around our district, ring us on 07426 716677.

## Minibus Appeal

A big thank-you to our friends at the *Postcode Lottery Community Fund* and *Coca Cola Europacific* partners for supporting our Wakefield Minibus Appeal. We've now ordered the bus and look to welcome it late next year!

## Food Bank

We appreciate some people are struggling with money over winter. We would hate to see any of our members in need, so if you need some help with food, do let us know and we'll send a (confidential) food drop to your home.

## Barnsley News

We're proud to say we've worked with 35 people in Barnsley district so far, with more folk to join us in the New Year on our accessible taster days. We loved this feedback from Fran Shaw:

"Joining Open Country's Barnsley group has been fantastic. I have made lots of friends. I am visiting new places which I couldn't have done without Open Country. Bob is a lovely man and on our walks he talks to us about the different trees. On the fishing trip to Ladybower, Troy let me drive the boat which I have never done before. All the trips I have been on I have loved."



## Wakefield and Barnsley News

### Are you Wild about Water?

Thanks to Wakefield Council's Culture Grant team for helping us connect our members to bluespaces in 2024! The new weekly Wednesday group will run a suite of different outings to local spaces near water to practice new crafts and to experience all the joy bluespaces can bring. Give us a bell if you want to be added to the programme mailing list.



Aisha & Angela enjoying Ellerton Lake

*Please email [info@opencountry.org.uk](mailto:info@opencountry.org.uk) if you would prefer to receive our newsletter electronically or if you want to be taken off our mailing list.*

### Yoga is back!

Thanks to funding from the *Sir George Martin Trust*, we are happy to offer our free Zoom Yoga sessions again, every Friday from 10am - 11am. If you want help relaxing and unwinding, give our partners at Wakefield Recovery and Wellbeing College a bell on 01924 316946 and book on.

### Volunteer News

A big welcome to our newest volunteers - Blake Mawson-Burren, Carol Topham and Maria Foulkes. It is great having you on board the good ship Open Country!

We will be running a Sighted Guide course on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March, 4.45pm - 7.45pm at Ridings Management Centre, alongside our friends at *Guide Dogs* to give volunteers an opportunity to practice their guiding skills in a comfortable and friendly environment. Give us a bell if you wish to attend this free session.

## GET IN TOUCH...



Our Head Office address is:

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46 East Parade, Harrogate, HG1 5LT.**

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Wakefield Hub - **07426 716677**

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Complaint? Our confidential trustees' email address is [opencountrytrustees@gmail.com](mailto:opencountrytrustees@gmail.com)

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