

Open Country Newsletter March to June 2024

Spring is always an optimistic time of year and there is certainly lots of upbeat stuff going on at Open Country right now! Our Business Plan for 2024/2025 has been agreed and if we only realise half of it, it will still be a bumper year! Some key things we wish to achieve are

- Starting our new hub in Middlesbrough
- Receiving our first electric minibus.
- Creating inclusive access on a landscape scale in Nidderdale.
- Keeping our existing activities full and flourishing by successful fundraising.
- Shouting a little louder on topics that concern our membership.

To represent your interests properly it's vital to keep communicating and we're thrilled that the results of our 2023 annual survey are in. Thank you to all who participated. Your valuable feedback is important to us and will help us shape our activities in the future. We asked our Open Country community to comment on several factors including impact on physical and emotional wellbeing and health, as well as asking for some constructive feedback.

Here are some examples of our member and volunteer responses:

- A total of 78% have been involved with Open Country for over five years.
- Respondents engage in a variety of services, showcasing the broad appeal of Open Country.
- Over 75% have tried something new, spent more time outdoors, and learned about wildlife and nature.
- 83% enjoy visiting the countryside with Open Country.
- Over 80% agree that Open Country provides fun and a sense of belonging.

Overall, the survey reflects a strong sense of community, a positive impact on wellbeing and a desire for more diverse and challenging activities.

Rewilding? It's in our Nature!

With the tree-planting season coming to an end, it's a good time to celebrate our environmental achievements. For instance, our Harrogate Trailblazers and Harrogate Nature Force conservation teams have recently planted over 1,500 trees at Denton Hall Estate, Studley Royal and Jacob Smith Park.

We were especially pleased to get involved with the Denton Estate project, which looks set to become a major Rewilding project in the area. Open Country stands full square behind the Rewilding agenda and believes the large-scale restoration of ecosystems is still something in which everyone can and should help to replicate at a local level. Between them, our Harrogate and Wakefield Hubs have up to seven work parties going out each week and the contribution our willing workers make to conserving Yorkshire's wildlife is immense. Nice work, everyone!

Our focus on improving physical access to nature also continues. For, example, we've created a new section of pathway in Burley-in-Wharfedale, making a one-mile riverside walk fully accessible. This walk will be included with others in a new Breakfree pack for the area - watch this space! You can read about our Wakefield Hub's super new access work on *page 9!*

Finally, a very warm welcome to our new members: Sophie and James!

You can see a full breakdown of the survey results on our website.

Audio walks - talk the walk!

Tom has added to our range of audio walks with a new walk around the world-famous Harewood estate. We have produced twelve walks this year alone and you can check them all out on:

www.opencountry.org.uk/audio-walks

The audio walks idea is catching on! We recently went down to Langsett Reservoir in the Peak District to work with countryside managers from the *Peak District National Park Authority*, *Derbyshire Wildlife Trust* and *Yorkshire Water* on producing their own audio walks in their own patches. Everyone was very receptive to the idea and we hope the day will encourage more people to follow our lead!

Nidderdale National Landscape

123 scheduled monuments, 564 listed buildings, one World Heritage Site, four historic parks and gardens, four dark sky discovery sites, 14 conservation areas and 568 miles of public rights of way. There's a lot to like about *Nidderdale National Landscape* (formerly known as *Nidderdale AONB*)!

Our big project for the year ahead is to project manage a scheme to promote inclusive access on a landscape scale in the area. With funding from *DEFRA*, and working with other project partners, over 12 months we intend to:

- Conduct a strategic mapping exercise of the best options for inclusive access.
- Produce and print a brand new 'Nidderdale Breakfree Pack'.
- Create 12 audio walks for the area.

- Work on a series of ten small-scale inclusive access projects (suitable sites wanted, please!). Projects could involve barrier removal, path surfacing and widening or bench installation.
- Facilitate two inclusive access training sessions for local countryside managers and groups.
- Set up a power chair hub in the area for people wanting to explore the Nidderdale area themselves.

We'll bring you regular updates on our 'NNL' project throughout the year. Watch this space as we work to put Nidderdale firmly on the map for inclusive access!

Farewell to Bryan

Many of our supporters will be saddened to learn that long-time member Bryan Needham has died, at the venerable age of 96. He had been a member of Open Country for over 30 years, accompanied for many of them by his loving wife Marjorie. A volunteer driver for us for several years and a member of our Advisory Group, Bryan was always wonderfully good-natured and a great provider of tea and biscuits for the office! He will be very sorely missed indeed.

Hello to Rachel

Open Country has welcomed a new full-time Communications Officer to its team based in Harrogate. Rachel Gregory has a background in the third sector spanning two decades, ten years in local media and previously worked for a local hospice charity for almost ten years.

Passionate about nature and our countryside, Rachel is excited to be joining Open Country at this time of expansion, and looks forward to telling the world (or Yorkshire at least to begin with) about Open Country's remarkable achievements and activities.

It is all change within the Harrogate office as, from the end of April, Netty Newell our Fundraising Officer will be working remotely for a few months in sunny Spain. Our new Fundraising Manager role is currently unfilled, so please tell us if you know anyone who might fit the bill!

To help our brilliant Fundraising and Communications team work even more productively, we have recently taken on a third office in *Harrogate Community House*. It's Room 4 on the second floor, if you are looking for them. Thanks to *Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation* for donating all the furniture - your kindness has saved us thousands of pounds!

Help Open Country flourish

Every year we need to raise over £650,000 to keep our amazing countryside work up and running. Your support means we'll be there for our disabled community, helping them to access and enjoy the great outdoors.

Here are some simple ways you, your family, and friends can support us:

- Hold a fundraising event for Open Country - whether it's a simple cake sale at home or work, or you have bigger ideas, do let us know what you have planned.
- Donate online or create an online fundraising event on our Givey Page at <https://www.givey.com/opencountry1> or you can donate via the donate button on Facebook.
- Sign up for easyfundraising - whenever you buy anything online you could be raising free donations for Open Country at no cost to you. Go to <https://www.opencountry.org.uk/fundraising-donations/donate-while-you-shop/>
- Help us spread the word about Open Country - can you request a talk at your club or organisation; think of somewhere we can display a collection tin, nominate us for support from your workplace or organisation or simply share our social media posts with your networks?

- Consider leaving a gift in your Will to Open Country, once you have ensured the people and things closest to you have been looked after. A gift in your will, no matter the size, could be your way of helping us in the future.

However you choose to support us, every penny raised will help. If you'd like more information on any of the above, please ring us on 01423 507227 or email: community@opencountry.org.uk

Nidderdale Charity Walk & Run

Did you know that May is 'National Walking Month'? It's a great time to dust off your walking boots and enjoy the countryside. Why not raise some money for Open Country at the same time? The 'Nidderdale Charity Walk and Run' is an annual event organised by *The Rotary Club of Harrogate* to raise money for local charities. This year is its 30th anniversary and it will be held on Sunday 19th May. Visit www.nidderdalewalk.com to register, and for all the information you need.

There's a choice of different routes of varying lengths, ranging from 4 miles to 26 miles, so there's something for everyone. You can also choose whether you want to walk or run. We would be most grateful if you could use this opportunity to raise funds for Open Country, whilst having a great day out in the fresh air.

Harrogate Volunteer News

We'll be teaming up with the Wakefield and Barnsley volunteers on **Monday 24th June** to enjoy a summer picnic and nature activity to say thank you for all your hard work! Food, drink & transport from Harrogate will be provided. More details to follow...please book your place, as seats on the bus are limited.

Long Service Award

Our wonderful volunteer Sarah Bailes recently celebrated 20 years with Open Country and was presented with her glass apple trophy after a very muddy walk at Skipwith Common! Sarah says:

"After a change of career left me with my weekends and evenings free, I went in search of something to help fill my time. The Harrogate

Volunteer Bureau highly recommended Open Country, so I signed up in February 2004. Here I am, 20 years later still volunteering for Open Country. I have done many amazing activities, explored new places, met lots of people and seen Open Country grow into what it is today. I look forward to the next 20 years!”

A very warm ‘Welcome Aboard!’ to our new volunteers – Martin Woolley (Harrogate Nature Force group), Sheila Kirkham (Wednesday Walks), and Caron Lumley (Selby Walks). We hope you enjoy your time with Open Country.

‘Good Access Scheme’ award -it’s a GAS, GAS, GAS!

We have presented our ‘Good Access Scheme’ (GAS) award annually for the last nine years and now ask you to keep your eyes peeled for candidates for 2024! Nominations can be for any inclusive access work that takes place in Yorkshire in 2024. It could be a section of accessible path, a well -designed new bird hide or an exciting audio trail. The deadline for nominations closes on 31st October and we hope to announce the lucky winners at our ‘**2nd GAS Conference**’, kindly hosted by *Wentworth Woodhouse Gardens* on 15th November 2024. Get your thinking caps on, please. If you want some inspiration, check out the previous winners on our website!

Wild about Wakefield News

Wakefield Breakfree pack

In February, 2,000 copies of our new ‘Wakefield Breakfree pack’ arrived from the printers. It features 15 accessible route cards, tried, tested and spell-checked by a small group of our members. We are now giving them out to local people and places across the Wakefield district. If you would like a FREE copy of the pack, do let us know. Alternatively, you can find this and all packs for other areas available to download on our website. Thanks to *West Yorkshire Combined Authority* for funding this pack.

Wild about Water launch

We have been making waves in Wakefield with the start of our newest group, 'Wild about Water'. This group runs on a Wednesday and will enable people with disabilities to access and enjoy blue spaces. The activities are funded thanks to Wakefield Council Culture Grants as part of 'Our Year - Wakefield District 2024'. There's a whole raft of activities on offer, from gentle waterside strolls, nature spotting, plenty of arts and crafts to accessible watersports and boat trips; there will be something for everyone!

'The Den' - open for business!

'The Den' is our new indoor warm space for the Wakefield hub. Offering our activity groups some shelter, comfy seating and hot beverages on colder, soggy days; this new cabin has been installed thanks to funding from *Nova Wakefield* and *Prosper Wakefield*. Three cheers to everyone who helped mend the roof, fit the ramps, mop the floor, donate the furniture, plumb the taps and wipe the windows!

Wild about Wakefield News

Grandstand Road Footpath - what a stretch!

For over a year, our Tuesday groups have worked on a 550m stretch of public footpath between Grandstand Road and Potovens Lane in Outwood - making it accessible for all by widening it, laying new hardcore, removing the steps and replacing them with a ramp. We will be excited when the path makes it into up-to-date maps, meaning more people can enjoy this lovely, tree-lined amble.

There is an opportunity to join our Trailblazer day service for people passionate about making the countryside more accessible. We have joined up with our pals at *Wakefield Recovery and Wellbeing College* to offer a free introductory taster course in April & May. Ring them on 01924 316946 to book on.

Wakefield Volunteer News

A big welcome to our latest volunteers - Louise Fox, Tom Rendell, Johnny Carr, Duncan Stokoe, Oscar Bedford, Janet Lonsdale, Sabina Karki, Brad Wynne and Troy Ramsden - it's great to have your support in 2024.

There is a Volunteer Summer Picnic planned for Monday 24th June, 11am - 3pm, with minibus transportation available. The location will be confirmed nearer the time. We hope you can make it for some nibbles, a natter and a light bit of nature study!

Barnsley News

Our latest satellite project in Barnsley goes from strength to strength, with various weekly taster sessions now running for South Yorkshire residents to get involved with.

As we continue to grow, we really need some more local volunteer supporters to help us deliver such a broad range of activities including tandem cycling, weekday walking and weekend outings. Give us a bell for an informal chat and find out whether it is for you.

Treasurer needed!

David Robinson is retiring as treasurer and so we urgently need to replace him. The successful candidate must have a financial background. Does anyone know someone who might fit the bill?

Minibuses update

Our new Wakefield minibus has been ordered and should arrive around November. Our first electric minibus has also been ordered (though we still have a small shortfall) and we expect to receive it early in 2025. We now have a short break in our minibus fundraising before we look to getting a new minibus for our Middlesbrough Hub! Thanks to everyone who always gives so generously to keep our minibuses rolling along.

Please email info@opencountry.org.uk if you would prefer to receive our newsletter electronically or if you want to be taken off our mailing list.