

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.

David, our Chief Officer, writes: "It's often said that all a day in the outdoors needs to be successful is a 'loo, a view and a brew'. Well, I'd like to add one more vital ingredient! Many people with disabilities really benefit from seats and benches, based at regular intervals. To illustrate, in the final years of his life my Dad, previously a good walker, found that benches were a real lifeline. A long, uninterrupted walk was now quite beyond him but, given enough seats on which to rest periodically, he continued to enjoy the outdoors for hours.



Wow, you'll have to get up early if you want to get a bench at Hornsea Mere!



It seemed fitting that when he died, the family bought a memorial bench at RHS Harlow Carr in our parent's name, so that other people in a similar position could keep on enjoying getting outdoors. This year, in our 'Benchmark' campaign, Open Country will be promoting the value of seats of all shapes and sizes. Ideally, popular countryside sites would have one every 100 metres or so. One or two countryside managers have told us recently that they are cutting back on benches in order to save money, but we'd urge everyone to remember our amended outdoor code - all you need is 'a loo, a view, a brew ... and a pew!'

Left: Karl, sat sitting. Find all the other people taking the load off in this newsletter!

Fun, fresh air & friendship!

We had some gratifying findings from our recent Members' survey, and some key results are shown in the image below.

- 100% of those who responded say they have fun, and feel safe and supported when out with Open Country.
- 98% feel like part of a team, spend more time outdoors, feel respected by Open Country, and have a real sense of belonging.
- 63% of people have been involved with Open Country for more than five years.

Across the board, responses are overwhelmingly positive, with our members taking the time to add additional comments praising volunteers and staff, and the impact our activities have on their health and wellbeing.

Thanks to everyone who contributed - your feedback is vital and helps shape

our activities this year and in the future. You can read more on our website blog at www.opencountry.org.uk/blog/



We promised a prize draw for all those who entered. Lucky winner Lobby is now the proud recipient of one of our exclusive 35th anniversary mugs, as well as some other treats. She seemed pretty chuffed, as you can see!



BEING PART OF TEAM OC



100% of members agree that they have fun with Open Country!

98% feel like part of a team, feel a real sense of belonging, and feel respected.

94% enjoy making new friends at Open Country.

85% have learned something new about wildlife and nature.

WELLBEING IMPACT



100% feel safe and supported with Open Country.

87% said they felt less alone.

77% feel more connected with their community.

www.opencountry.org.uk



opencountry
out there together
Registered Charity Number 1107331

HEALTH IMPACT



98% of members spent more time outdoors!

98% of people say they feel fitter, healthier, and better about themselves after a day out with Open Country.

62.5% say they would struggle to do any exercise without Open Country.



HOW IMPORTANT IS OPEN COUNTRY TO YOU?

79% said Open Country is important to them.



"I don't think I would have got through some of my life stresses if it weren't for them."

"It's very important because it gets me out and making new friends and chatting to people."

"Hugely important - every single session makes the day special!"

"I can get out to see new things and take part in activities I would never usually do. It really helps with my independence."



72% of our members were very happy with our service and felt there was no room for improvement!

Volunteer News

A warm welcome to our new volunteer Vanessa Quarmby, who will be helping out with the Trailblazers group in Harrogate - welcome aboard!

Volunteer Survey

We're excited to share the results of our volunteer survey! The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many people highlighting the flexible nature of their volunteer roles, feeling valued and enjoying the relaxed, informal atmosphere of the activities. Other results revealed that:

- 92% rated their overall volunteer satisfaction as '8 out of 10' or above.
- Top benefits of volunteering were: enjoyment, meeting new people and improving health and wellbeing.

While the responses were largely positive, a few areas for improvement were identified, including the need for more information on members' disabilities and medical issues to ensure better support and understanding during activities. Whilst some information is understandably confidential, we will make sure that any useful information regarding how best to support our disabled members on activities is relayed to volunteers. Please do ask the leader on the day for any help or guidance.

Thank you to all our volunteers for your dedication and invaluable contributions!

Recent Changes to the DBS Update Service

The Update Service allows you to register your DBS certificate for free and lets you keep it up to date (providing you join within 19 days of receiving your

certificate). Subscribing to the Update Service saves Open Country time and money and means you can potentially transfer your certificate to other organisations, so please read the following information from the Disclosure & Barring Service about recent changes to the process:

"From Sunday 8 December 2024, subscribers to the Update Service will be emailed 30 days before their renewal date to ask if they wish to stay subscribed. The renewal email will ask volunteers to access their Update Service Account and confirm that they wish to continue with the service. For those who confirm, this request will be repeated annually. If no confirmation is made, their volunteer subscription will automatically be cancelled.

Volunteers who do not renew their subscription will not be able to keep their DBS certificate(s) up to date and organisations will not be able to check them."



Summer Picnic

Join us for a picnic in the countryside on **Monday 2nd June** to celebrate *Volunteers' Week*; the annual celebration of volunteers across the UK. Book today to reserve your seat on the minibus!

More Volunteer News

All the fun of the fairs

Fancy a rewarding day out whilst helping us spread the word about our amazing and growing charity? As we get bigger and busier, we're looking for volunteers who are willing to help at some of the exciting and interesting community events we're planning to attend this year.

You might be helping people to have a go on our smoothie bike at York Pride, running a tombola at the Dragon Boat Race at Wakefield, or chatting all things Open Country at Ripley Show; it's always a day out with a difference!

If you think you can offer your support at any of the following events please email community@opencountry.org.uk or ring 01423 507227 to express an interest, and we will be in touch nearer the time with more details. There may be other opportunities not yet listed too, so do let us know if you are happy to be contacted to help on an ad hoc basis!



Upcoming Events

Any help our amazing volunteers can offer would be especially welcome at the following events:

May 18th - **Selby Big Bike Ride**
(info stall)

June 7th - **York Pride**
(info stall and smoothie bike)

June 14th - **Redcar Kite Festival**
(kitey crafts and info stall)

June 29th - **Horbury Show**
(activity to be confirmed)

July 12th - **Dragonboat Race, Wakefield.** (tombola, and maybe even taking part in the race!)

August 18th - **Ripley Show**
(Information stall and nature activity)

August 29th-31st - **Long Course Weekend**, Masham (possible Smoothie Bike and info stall)

September 20th - **Stokesley Show** -
(activity to be confirmed)

December (date tbc) - charity tombola stall at **Harrogate Christmas Market**

Fundraising News

HOPS are the tops!

Make sure you catch 'The Witches of Eastwick' this June! This is a fantastic opportunity not only to enjoy a brilliant production by HOPS Musical Theatre but also to support Open Country, who HOPS has selected as their charity of the year. See you there!



Our friends Mark and Emma, along with their fantastic pub, The Commercial Inn in Methley, are supporting Open Country and raising funds for us. If you're in Methley, do pop in and see how you can get involved! We also have a BBQ event planned for the summer at The Commercial Inn to raise funds for Open Country - don't miss it!



Julie is duly appointed

We are delighted to have appointed Julie Whitwham (below) as our part-time Finance Officer to help us keep on top of the increasing amount of paperwork. Julie will be working for us on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in the Harrogate office. Welcome aboard!





Harrogate Hub News

Pack mentality

We've been quite 'bookish' over the winter and nearly gave our printers a heart attack recently, with no fewer than five access publications in the pipeline!

We have a second York Breakfree pack. Entitled 'York District'. It contains routes such as Beningbrough Hall, the Solar Trail and Homestead Park, tying in with the existing 'York Bluespace' pack.

We have also just produced a Breakfree pack for the Selby area. It includes such gems as Skipwith Common, Three Haggas Woodmeadow and Selby Canal.

Finally, our 'North Yorkshire Countryside Directory for People with Disabilities' has revised and reprinted - for the sixth time!

We'll tell you all about our Nidderdale Breakfree pack and our 'West Yorkshire Countryside Directory for People with Disabilities' in our July newsletter!

Three of our packs have been funded thanks to the *UK Sustainable Prosperity Fund*. Ask for free copies or download them yourself from our website.

Wood you believe it?

Our 'special branch' teams have been hard at work recently, helping to plant hundreds of new saplings in Bilton Fields, Harrogate and Horsehoe Fields, Knaresborough.

The work is part of the 'White Rose Forest' - a community forest initiative for North & West Yorkshire.

Working with landowners North Yorkshire Council, our Trailblazers and Nature Force teams are aiming to plant almost 2,000 trees as part of this amazing project, which will eventually link existing forests across the North.

Although the weather has sometimes been chilly for our 'tree-mendous' team, we feel warm in the knowledge that our hard work will hopefully benefit future generations and local wildlife.



Teesside Hub News

Ellie Rawden has been undertaking staff training for the last few months and also making lots of community connections on Teesside. She will be launching our initial suite of activities on Teesside in April. Our first groups will be:

Tandem Bike Club:

Tuesdays 6pm-9pm

Nature and Access Club:

Wednesday 10am-4pm.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Club:

Thursdays 10am-4pm.

Weekend Outings: Every other Saturday in the month, starting June 7th.

Our club activities will commence in April and will leave from Margrove Heritage Centre. Pick ups and drop offs via our accessible minibus are available for those who are not able to travel to Boosbeck.

Our Teesside office address is:

Open Country,
c/o Tees Valley Wildlife Trust,
Margrove Heritage Centre,
Boosbeck, Saltburn,
Redcar and Cleveland,
TS12 3BZ

With the Teesside Hub only just opening, we are delighted to announce the project has been already supported by Primary Club and The Murray Fund, Tees Valley Community Foundation, Tees Million, and the Teesside Charity. We'd like to express our heartfelt thanks for their generosity and support, and to all who believe in our mission. Your trust and support is truly invaluable.



We're now going full steam ahead to get a brand new bus for the Teesside project and would appreciate any donations towards it. We'd also love any spare garden tools and winter woollies, to help get our groups started. Finally, we keen to received any ideas, offers of volunteer help or suggestions for places to visit. Together, let's really put the Tees into Disabilities!



Wakefield Hub News

All Beths are off

Staff member Beth will be heading onto maternity leave for a year in early June. She is expecting a baby girl in July!

Wakefield Cancellations

Due to a high number of recent, last-minute cancellations, we will now still charge the £10 bus fee, plus any prepaid entry fees, for any cancellations on weekend trips with less than 72 hours notice. Please really value your place and remember this when booking.

Wildflowers for Sale

Our Wild Things group grow and sell UK native wildflower plug plants - just 50p per plug. They will be ready to collect and plant out from late March. Why not place an order while stocks last?



This year we are growing:

Annuals:

Corncockle
Chamomile
Poppy
Common Vetch
Cow Parsley
Cornflower
Yellow rattle

Perennials:

Lady's Bedstraw
Wild Carrot
Knapweed
Oxeye Daisy
Musk Mallow
Wild Marjoram
Birdsfoot trefoil

Wakefield-based charity Open Country has been growing a range of native wildflowers with the Wild Things group, in our polytunnel.

All seeds are grown using peat-free soil.

Pick up and planting out services are also available.



Limited stock, pre-order NOW for March!

07426 716677

wakefield@opencountry.org.uk



Publish and be Dam-med

We recently had a poetry workshop with Helen Wilby. Everyone wrote an individual poem and then we combined parts of each to make a joint one. It was written in the order of the things we saw on a walk at Newmillerdam:

Together At The Dam

Feathers on a wet log, evidence of a nest blog.

Slightly choppy water rushes down, making a noisy exit to a calmer, deeper river where peace can be found.

The Snowdrops waking up the woodland banks, blooming out of the winter gloom.

Remembering it's time to grow.
Purple Crocuses, or are they Croci, resplendent in their spring robes.
The Crow, wings spreading wide, ready to take off like an aeroplane, leaving behind Hughes's 'black rainbow'.

Trees watching people go by, hoping for a hug.

The sunshine reflecting on the lake, reigniting a thousand memories.
The Boathouse shimmering above the water of the rippled Dam.

All sat on the bench, side by side.
Laughing and chatting, smile to the camera, a happy memory made.
We enjoy it, whatever the weather.
You'll always find us '*out there together*'.

Chrissy Brighton, Pat Clayton, Ralph Crouch, Dawn Ellis, Amanda Jackson, Beth Longfellow, Carol Topham, Mckenzie Ward & Helen Wilby.

Tandems Go Large

We have a new tandem at Wakefield - one with a large frame as requested by the Advisory Group back in November. Thanks to Marc Morgan, who's been doing an amazing job servicing the bikes and getting them ready for the start of the tandem sessions this Spring.

Trailblazers and Nature Force

We're looking to increase the scope of our practical conservation based groups by reaching out to new organisations and exploring new sites. This will give us the opportunity to improve more access for everyone and have a positive impact on Wakefield's wildlife.

We've delivered one task for The Land Trust at Frickley Country Park in February, improving the path surface for parkrun participants and other users.

We're talking with the site manager about projects at Kiveton and New Park Springs (also owned by The Land Trust) in our April - June programme. Looking forward to 2026, we hope to be working with Leeds City Council at Dolphin Beck Marsh delivering Biodiversity Net Gain.

Wakefield Advisory Group

Thanks to everyone who attended the March Advisory Group meeting for their valuable suggestions for the future direction of the Wakefield Hub.

Barnsley News

The Barnsley project continues to flourish, with members enjoying the activities and days out, including walks in the Peak District, indoor climbing, visits to country houses and accessible fishing at Ladybower.

The next three months will see us taking advantage of the improving (hopefully!) weather and continuing with our adventures. There is always a warm welcome for new members and volunteers, so if you know of anyone who would like to join us on our programme of events, please let them know about the amazing experience and opportunities that we provide.

Any potential new members and volunteers can contact:

Barnsley Bob: 07446 130777

Simon: 07426 716677

Email: wakefield@opencountry.org.uk



Potty decision

In our last newsletter, we reported that *Yorkshire Wildlife Trust* had erected a brilliant new accessible toilet at their Staveley reserve. Regrettably, they then swiftly decided to lock it to the public! It's a backwards step which we hope they will rethink. For now, it's back to unhygienic trips into the nearby bushes for visitors and YWT members alike. If you don't want to disturb the badgers, the closest accessible toilet is at Back Lane car park in Boroughbridge, a leg-crossingly far four miles away. Ouch!



Above: Mark and Mark - otherwise known as the 'Benchmarks'. Why not send us your favourite bench pictures? We can use them in our campaign to get more resting places in the great outdoors.

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.

GET IN TOUCH...



Follow us on Facebook, Bluesky, Instagram & YouTube



Our Head Office address is:

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Teesside Hub - **07848 257814**

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Complaint? Our confidential trustees' email address is opencountrytrustees@gmail.com