



**opencountry**  
out there together

## OPEN COUNTRY NEWSLETTER

**October to December 2025**

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

It might sound a personal question, but where's your Happy Place? On our website, I've long gone on record as saying that mine is the Forest of Bowland. True enough, I love it to bits but, on a recent Open Country tandem ride, I believe I found another! It was the remarkable view as we pedalled along Briscoe Ridge looking over Wharfedale, with the Dales beckoning in the background. The tree-lined vistas were stunning, the weather was gorgeous and, to be honest, even the company wasn't that bad! I've found another Happy Place thanks to Open Country, in the same way I suspect, as hundreds of us will have done over the years.

"Do you shut down in the winter?" is a question we're often asked. Our answer is a resounding "Not likely!" Though autumn and winter are upon us, that is no reason for hanging your hopes on a peg and heading inside for six months of misery. Instead, we can watch rutting deer or skeins of returning geese; press apples or carve pumpkins; enjoy roaring bonfires or explore illuminated abbeys. Whatever floats your boat, join us as the light dims and together, let's try and find some new Happy Places.

*David Shaftoe, Chief Officer*

### Our 35<sup>th</sup> Birthday Bash

We're holding a ceilidh to mark our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary on **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October** and we've booked a great band called *English Rebellion*, whose caller will make sure everyone can join in!

It's at St Andrew's Church in Starbeck, which has great rail and bus links, and parking is available on nearby streets.

Tickets are £5 and include a light supper, with a licensed bar too. They are limited, so please register your interest for what promises to be a fantastic evening of accessible fun.

The poster is decorated with green and white bunting. At the top is the Open Country 35th anniversary logo. The main text is in a green box: "Join Open Country for a Celebration Ceilidh!". Below this, in a white box, is the date and location: "Saturday October 18th St Andrew's Church, Starbeck, 7pm-10.30pm". A green box below that says "Tickets £5.00 including a light supper". In the center is a circular image of a cupcake with a green swirl and a '35' topper. Below the cupcake, in a green box, are the details: "Dancing to English Rebellion Ceilidh Band - with a caller to help us learn the steps!", "Licensed bar", "Quiet area", "Raffle", and "Inclusive dances for all". At the bottom, in a green box, is the ticket information: "Tickets are limited - order yours today", "Email: info@opencountry.org.uk", and "Telephone 01423 507227".

Join Open Country for a  
**Celebration Ceilidh!**

**Saturday October 18th**  
St Andrew's Church, Starbeck, 7pm-10.30pm  
Tickets £5.00 including a light supper

**35**

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with a caller to help us learn the steps!  
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Tickets are limited - order yours today  
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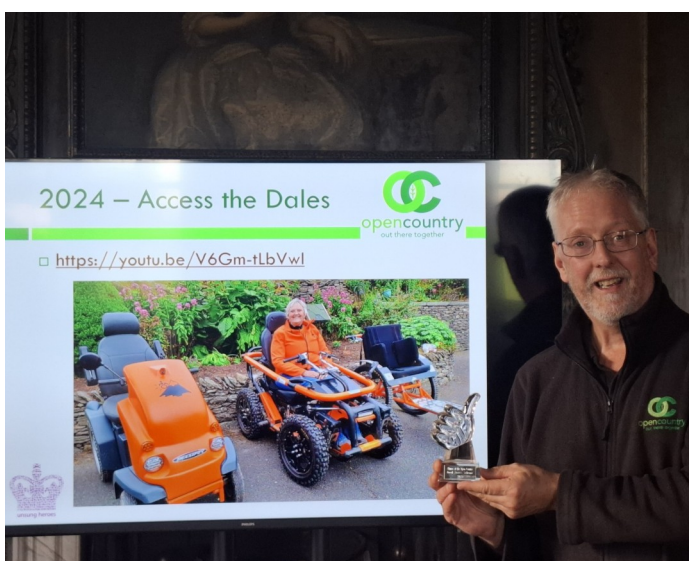
## It's a GAS, GAS, GAS!

Our annual 'Good Access Scheme' awards and conference will be held on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November at the beautiful Yorkshire Arboretum, next to Castle Howard, and we need your help!

The award recognises great examples of accessible countryside venues, so if you have visited somewhere this year which impressed you, please get in touch and nominate them.

Previous winners have included Wentworth Woodhouse, RSPB Fairburn Ings, Yorkshire Water and last year's winner, Access the Dales. We also gave a special award to Nidderdale National Landscape, for their part in the impressive Nidderdale 'Access For All Project', Phase One. Bravo, everyone!

The deadline for nominations for our GAS award is October 31<sup>st</sup>.



*David presents the prestigious trophy at last year's GAS conference at Wentworth Woodhouse.*

## Aisha's story

We recently caught up with Aisha (below) from Wakefield, who shared what Open Country means to her.



She said: "I am blind and I go out with Open Country on a regular basis. I do some of the adventure activities - like paddle boarding and waterskiing, as well as cycling. Cycling is my absolute favourite. I love socialising with the tandem pilots, though sometimes I chew their ears off because I might talk a bit too much!"

"I just love being out in the fresh air, exploring. In particular, when I go out cycling, the pilots (front riders) are my eyes, and I get a whole new perspective on things".

"It means a lot to me to be able to go out with Open Country. I absolutely love it."

Thank you, Aisha! If Open Country makes a difference to your life, we'd love to know, and it helps us show the impact of our work to funders.



## 35 Tandems

To celebrate our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we thought it would be top-notch fun to get 35 tandems in one place for a night of fun and frolics! On a stunning summer's evening, tandems and riders came from each tandem club - that's Guisborough, Harrogate, Ripon, Selby, Wakefield, Wetherby and York. We cycled in from different directions, converging at Spofforth Village Hall. Here, we had a disco and karaoke, party cake and enjoyed each other's splendid company.



In the end, we beat our target of 35 Tandems by a majestic one! It was a challenge to achieve but we laugh in the face of barriers at Open Country. Thanks to everyone who made it possible - we'll see you all for '40 Tandems' in 2030!



*'35 Tandems' - a night to remember*





## Thanks for our birthday gifts!

Thank you to those of you who have been able to support our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a donation - it is very much appreciated and will make a difference!

As a charity which is growing and having even more impact, funds like this support our future work, providing activities for even more people with disabilities.

If anyone else is feeling generous, there's still time to make a gift to our birthday fund. You can do it online at [www.givey.com/oc35thbirthday](http://www.givey.com/oc35thbirthday), or scan the QR code on the picture with your smartphone.



[www.givey.com/oc35thbirthday](http://www.givey.com/oc35thbirthday) - thank you!

If you have any fundraising ideas, please contact our fundraising team on 01423 507227 or email them at [community@opencountry.org.uk](mailto:community@opencountry.org.uk).



## Harrogate Hub News

### New weekday activities - join in!

Our Harrogate Hub has recently set up two brand new weekday groups - the 'Wanderers' (on Wednesdays) and the 'Explorers' (on Thursdays). They will both undertake a varied range of exciting countryside activities including walks, crafts and wildlife watching.

We pick people up in both Harrogate and Wetherby. Contact us if you are interested in joining in the fun.



*Our Wanderers having fun!*

We still have some spare places on most of our other chargeable weekday activities in Harrogate. Our work parties do wonderful things 'working for wildlife' on Tuesdays and Fridays and our walking groups enjoy great rambles on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Let us know if you are interested - free taster sessions can easily be arranged.



## Breakfree in Burley

Our latest Breakfree publication, this time for Burley-in-Wharfedale, has just been printed. The pack is chock full of 12 accessible walks and trails including the popular 'Burley Tree Trail', as well as nature reserves, a riverside walk, a park and even a five-mile trail in the grounds of a former psychiatric hospital!

As ever, each trail is in full colour and details accessible loos, transport links, features of interest, and route details - perfect for families with young children, those with limited mobility, wheelchair/scooter users or basically anyone seeking accessible places.

It's a collaboration with our friends at 'Burley-in-Wharfedale Walkers are Welcome' and was produced just in time for their walking festival in August. Let us know if you would like a copy. Stocks are limited and it's, err, the Burley bird that catches the worm (sorry).



All ten of our Breakfree packs can be downloaded completely free at:  
[www.opencountry.org.uk](http://www.opencountry.org.uk)

## Nidderdale Project update

Following the conclusion of the government spending review, the DEFRA funding for Phase II of our Nidderdale National Landscape access project was recently confirmed. The focus of this year is on improving the physical access to a number of sites, with a little more interpretation to draw it all together. To set the ball rolling, Tom has filmed three great videos, covering Fountains Earth Moor, Scar House Reservoir and Studley Royal deer park. Why not check them out on our YouTube channel. More Nidderdale updates to follow soon.

## Goodbye to Sharron

Sharron Smith leaves Open Country in October, after a creditable 13 years' service to the charity. Thank you so much for your amazing contribution during that time, Sharron. We wish you all the very best for your future.





## Harrogate Volunteer News

A warm welcome to our new volunteers Emma Bailey, Janet Tierney, Ant Wass and David Middleton; all helping out with the Selby Tandem Club and Angela Brewin who is joining the new Wanderers group - we are very grateful for your support. Goodbye and thanks to Linda and Tony Schumacher (York Walking Group) - we'll miss you!

### **Celebrating 20 years of volunteering!**

Christine Falconer (pictured below) has volunteered with Open Country for 20 years. She is a walking group helper but turns her hand to anything; outings, Easy Going Walks and Wild Things trips, as well as being chief washer-upper and porridge maker on residential weekends. Christine has been a great support over the years; her passion for the outdoors and for improving the lives of disabled people has enabled our members to enjoy new experiences they might not otherwise have had. We are very grateful for her help and don't know what we would do without her!



Christine says: "Open Country has given me 20 years of experience, exercise, adventure, fun and laughter. But, mainly, company and support during a very difficult time in my life. Now, 20 years later, I am still here and still enjoying every adventure."

### **Best Buds**

Four long-serving volunteers Angela, Sally, Phil and Helen (L-R below) represented Open Country at the Northern Garden Party in York earlier in the summer. The event was hosted by the Lord-Lieutenant of North Yorkshire and the Archbishop of York and celebrated the fantastic work carried out by charity volunteers and staff from across the county. Thank you ladies for attending and for all you do for Open Country!



### **Yuletide Cheers**

Join us at *Rubin's* Mediterranean restaurant on Cheltenham Parade, Harrogate for our volunteer Christmas social on **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December at 7pm**. We will be pre-ordering off the menu. Book your place today - we look forward to seeing you there!

## Teesside Hub Update

We're thrilled that our very **first tandem season** has been a success! Together, we've welcomed riders from all walks of life - including people with visual impairments, multiple sclerosis, brain injuries and agoraphobia.

We've shared some brilliant rides - from the beaches and riversides of Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar, to hidden trails and open countryside. For us, it's all about being out there together in the great outdoors, discovering new places, enjoying new adventures, and steadily getting better at what we do, through our shared learning and regular training at *Middlesbrough Sports Village*.

Alongside tandems, our other groups are beginning to grow. Our **Nature and Access** group is hard at work auditing tracks and trails across Teesside - and now we're beginning the exciting work of improving them! In partnership with the *Tees Valley Wildlife Trust*, our first project will be at Coatham Marsh, where we'll be making the bird hide accessible and improving the paths so that more people can enjoy the outdoors.

Meanwhile, our **Outings** Group has already been far and wide, from Helmsley and Rievaulx Abbey to Locomotion and the Land of Iron museum. Group member Thomas Shacklady is a big fan of the Teesside weekend outings and said: "We had a wonderful time in Helmsley - a successful trip, the best ever! I enjoyed

watching the brass band. I had a fantastic day. It was a lovely outing. Thank you very much for your organisation and to Ellie for taking us!"



*Thomas, (far right) gives our trips the thumbs-up*

We're also very proud to announce that we've received our **Dementia Friendly Award**, a big step in making sure that everyone feels welcome and supported in our activities.

Contact [teesside@opencountry.org.uk](mailto:teesside@opencountry.org.uk) for more information on our activities, or if you are interested in coming out, either as a member or as a volunteer!



## Wakefield Hub News

### Here's to you, Elspeth Robinson

Farewell to Elspeth, as she is leaving us in October to take up a rangers role within the Peak District National Park. Elspeth has only been with us for just over a year but she has made a very big impact in that time and we wish her all the very best in her new role.



*Good bye to Elspeth!*

### Hop on the bus, Gus

The new Wakefield minibus should be with us by Christmas and is currently being converted by *Treka*, who are based at Brighouse. Its arrival will mean that, after 12 glorious years of service, we're finally selling BX13, aka 'Jubilee Janice'. She has a full service history and has really done us proud. Speak to us if you are interested in buying it.

### Old Friends

Welcome to our two new volunteers Sharon and Louise. Thanks for joining the team and we look forward to having you out some more.

## El Funder Passo

A big thank you to Wakefield Council for supporting our 'Conservation Without Barriers' project. This project is part-funded by the UK Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The award of £12,797 will support our conservation work in Wakefield from July 2025 until January 2026. Our weekly conservation work parties are based at Thornes Park, Wakefield, and we carry out conservation and access tasks across the wider community.

As part of this, 'The Den' at our Wakefield hub will soon be much more comfortable, with solar-powered heating and lighting. This is just one of the ways we are trying to make our work as climate-friendly as possible.



Our Wakefield lottery bid has just been submitted and we have our fingers firmly crossed for a successful decision! If successful, it will safeguard our work in Wakefield for three years, also funding fresh outreach work in Dewsbury and Barnsley.



## Thank you to our Supporters!

With 2025 fast ending, we wanted to thank all our major supporters, both financial and in-kind, for their invaluable support between April 2024 and March 2025. Through your generosity and commitment, we have been able to break down barriers to the countryside, opening opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy outdoor adventures, make friends and build confidence.

We would like to acknowledge the incredible contributions of:

Alan Rayner; Alpkitt Foundation; Anna Baldwin; Aspire; Boshier-Hinton Foundation; Bruce Wake Charitable Trust; Cash4Clubs; CityConnect; Coca-cola; Co-operative Local Community Fund; Cone Exchange; Danny Heptinstall and Rajni Jassal; David & Julie Turner; Daniel Fleming; DEFRA; Department for Transport; Douglas Arter Foundation; Duke of Devonshire's Charitable Trust; The Feoffees; Fineline-Global; Frickley Athletic Community Foundation; Friends and family of Gwen Agar; Friends and family of Nicky Serlin; Garfield Weston Foundation; Harrogate & District Allotment Federation; HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust; HM Young Offenders Institution Wetherby; Horbury Heritage Community Trust; Huddersfield & Wakefield Rotary Clubs; The Inman Charity; Jan & Mike Bartholomew; Jonty Warneken; June Pamela Mooray; Judit Madi; Kenneth Hargreaves Trust; Meadfleet/Friends of Parkinson's Park CIC; Microsoft; National Coal Mining

Museum; National Lottery Community Fund; NHS South West Yorkshire Partnership; Nidderdale National Landscape, Nineveh Trust; Noble Charitable Trust; Normanton Rotary Club; North Yorkshire Council; North Yorkshire Councillors Matt Walker, Chris Aldred, Arnold Warneken, Paul Haslam; UKSPF (both North Yorkshire and Wakefield Councils); NOVA Wakefield; Otley Town Council; Oscar Bedford; Philip Robinson; Plantlife; Point North (Banks Property Grassroots Fund); Purely Cust Trust; Rhododendron Trust; Roger Cordier; Sovereign Health Care; Sally Weatherill; Scotton Parish Council; Shears Foundation; Simon Thomas & Outriders; Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust; Tees Valley Community Foundation/You've Got This; Everyone Active; The Bostock Foundation; The Cheridan Raithby Charitable Trust; The David Family Foundation; The Finnis Scott Foundation; The George A. Moore Foundation; The Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation; The Primary Club; The Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust; The Teesside Charity; Tom & Julie Leggett; Wakefield College; Wakefield Council; West Yorkshire Combined Authority; Wakefield District Housing; Warburtons; Whitewell Wellbeing Ltd; The Woodland Trust; Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Yorkshire Building Society.

THANK  
YOU!

## Welcome to our new Trustees

Our Board of trustees is essential to the good governance of our charity and we are delighted to welcome Sam Turner as our new HR trustee. Thank you to her predecessor Tracy Jackson, for six years' sterling service in the role.

We have a new Treasurer as well - Clare Dowson, as well as Teresa Damron, who between them will bring extra finance expertise to the Board. Thank you to David Robinson for being our interim treasurer whilst Clare was appointed.

The handover will be completed at our AGM on **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> December**. Why not come along and meet our trustees? The meeting will be held at Christ Church Parish Room at 3.30pm. It will last about an hour and there will be a buffet afterwards.

*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.*

## Audio walks - talk the walk!

We're still developing new audio walks that bring the sights and sounds of Yorkshire to people in the comfort of their own homes. The latest is for *Stoodley Pike*, one of West Yorkshire's most famous landmarks. Have a listen via the 'Explore' page on our website or our Youtube channel.



## GET IN TOUCH...



Follow us on Facebook, Bluesky, Instagram & YouTube



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