



**opencountry**  
out there together

## OPEN COUNTRY NEWSLETTER

### January to March 2025

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.

Hope can be a precious commodity at the best of times and it is currently in particularly short supply around the World. Desmond Tutu, (shortly before inventing the ballet dress), said “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” The august St. Augustine added “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”

Well, as 2025 dawns, far too many disabled people in the World face far too many barriers every day and that is something we should all be angry about. We should also be properly marked about the global environmental catastrophe that approaches. At this dark time of year, thanks to each and every one of you who has the courage to step up and help Open Country spread our unique little brand of light, laughter and love. We know we're far from perfect but our charity, like thousands of others around the World, helps spread Hope. And right now, we need all the Hope we can get.

It's hard to believe, but 2025 marks the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Open Country! Not bad going for what was initially meant to be just a three-year project! We'll be marking this landmark later in the year, perhaps with a ceilidh, a mass tandem ride or a celebratory calendar. Give us

your ideas as soon as you can. Meanwhile, please raise a glass to Open Country and to the next 35 years! Whilst we are at it - here's to a happy and hopeful 2025 for one and all!

### Charging ahead

We are really excited at the imminent delivery of our first electric minibus. It's just one of the ways we are looking to minimise the environmental impact of our work. We've named it 'Albus', partly because it's Latin for 'white' and partly because, like Albus Dumbledore from the Harry Potter books, it'll be a wizard way of getting about. Magical, in fact!



## GAS Winners' Conference - more than just hot air!

We had a real gas at our second annual 'Good Access Scheme' Winners' conference, held at Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham. Around 20 people from organisations such as *North Yorkshire Council*, the *Land Trust*, *Experience Community* and the *RSPB* attended, enjoying a very fancy room which featured in the film, 'Darkest Hour'!



The conference started with a fantastic walk around the grounds of Wentworth Woodhouse, to see all the accessible and inclusive work which earned the venue last year's award.

This included a new Changing Places loo, accessible picnic tables, 'porta-path' strip matting over lawns and a 'quiet space'. We all spent far too long playing on the outside musical instruments!

Much inspired, we returned to the hall to discuss how we have all contributed to a more inclusive countryside, and how there is a growing movement to 'bin the barriers' which discriminate against so many people on paths and cycle routes.



*Virtually presenting the award to Access the Dales*

This year's GAS award went to a charity called 'Access the Dales', that provides all-terrain wheelchairs to hire from locations in the Yorkshire Dales and the Forest of Bowland, as well as holding inclusive events and offering inspiration for accessible activities.

The conference was a great chance to meet other organisations and charities committed to making access more inclusive, and to pool our knowledge. Open Country received some lovely feedback about the conference, which is proving to be a valuable forum for like-minded partners.

We can't wait for next year's event, to be held somewhere in the Dales on **Friday November 14<sup>th</sup> 2025**. Get the date in your diary now!

## Harrogate Advisory Group

Our next meeting is on **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March**, from 6.30 - 8.30pm, in Harrogate Community House. All regular members are welcome. The Special Item is 'How can we increase the health impact of our work?'



## Volunteer News

THANK  
YOU!

Thanks to all our lovely volunteers who have supported us over the last year; you've helped over 400 disabled members to get out into the countryside, helping their physical and mental wellbeing. We are very grateful for everything you do; whether it's supporting members to enjoy the outdoor activities, fixing our ever-growing fleet of tandems, peeling potatoes on our weekend residentials, or attending one of our training courses...the list is endless. Every little (or large) act of volunteering all helps Open Country to thrive!

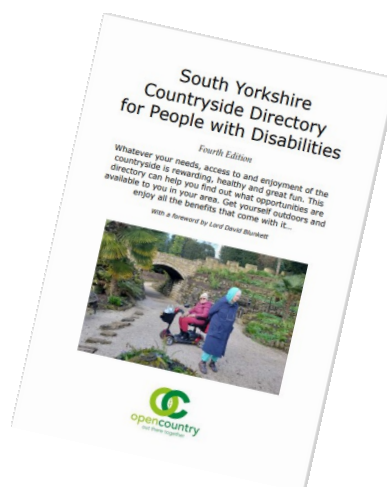
A warm welcome to our newest volunteers, Fran Allen, Shirelle Hawkins and Judi Knapton - thanks for joining us.

We're sending our annual Volunteer Questionnaire out with this newsletter. This year we have separated it from the general questionnaire so that we can give more focus to volunteering - your feedback is important to us, as we want to ensure we give our volunteers the best experience possible.



## Our Countryside Directories

The winter is the time when we really knuckle down on our project work, and this season is no exception. Our highly-successful 'Countryside Directories' need regular updating and we've just uploaded an updated 'South Yorkshire' directory to our website. We're now concentrating on versions for 'North Yorkshire' and 'East Yorkshire'. The 'Wakefield' directory is being merged with the 'West Yorkshire' one. We hope this will make it more relevant for our users, as well as more manageable for the staff to update! All our Countryside Directories are available to download for free on our website.



## Trustee News

Trustees are essential to the efficient running of any charity and we extend a very warm welcome to Chris Burt, who recently joined the Board of Trustees.

Hello too to Jane Green, our new Treasurer. She takes over from David Robinson, who has done a really sterling job for the last six years. We are delighted that David Robinson has agreed to stay on as a trustee.



## Fundraising News

### Christmas fundraising - it's on the cards!

As the festive season hurtles towards us faster than our tandems heading towards the pub, we're sharing our annual Open Country e-card so you can support our work. Simply use the link below to donate in lieu of the money you would have spent on stamps and cards. Your gift, no matter the size, will help fuel miles more smiles for local people with disabilities. You'll feel the warm glow of knowing your seasonal message to friends and family is making a difference - whilst saving a fortune on stamps!

<https://www.givey.com/opencountry1>

Merry Christmas!

### Theatre Vibes and Community Ties: HOPS supports Open Country!

2025 kicks off with an exciting new partnership for Open Country. We've been chosen as a Charity of the Year by *HOPS Musical Theatre Company* in Harrogate.

*HOPS* will be supporting us throughout the year, starting with their production of 'The Witches of Eastwick', set to hit the stage in June.

This promises to be a fantastic show, and we're thrilled to see their creative talents bringing it to life whilst also helping to raise some awareness and funds for our work.

This year, instead of sending Christmas cards, I have decided to share Open Country's virtual card. I have donated the money I would have spent on cards and postage to Open Country. Why don't you do the same? Simply click on the link below to make your donation and share this card with your family and friends!

**Registered Charity Number: 1107331**



## Harrogate Hub News

### Artfelt thanks!

Harrogate member Charlotte recently popped into the office with a really 'artfelt' surprise for us. Charlotte enjoys our walking and conservation groups but also likes to spend time being creative. She presented us with a huge multi-media artwork featuring all the activities and adventures she has had coming out with Open Country. Museum trips, sailing, farm visits, archery sessions and games were all lovingly represented, highlighted with beads, moss and leaves. We'll enjoy examining the finer details and are glad our trips out are so inspiring! Charlotte says:

"I love coming out with Open Country. It makes me feel more positive and useful. I like being outside and helping the other members. We always have a great day out and it gets me out of the house."



### We're Wild about Christmas!

We're taking part in two tree-mendous events this Christmas. We're entering a tree at both St Peter's and St John's Church Christmas tree festivals. So, if you're looking to get into the festive spirit of things, feel free to visit and admire our trees, with the theme – 'Wild about Christmas'.



St Peter's Church tree festival runs from 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> December, in central Harrogate, and visitors can vote for their favourite tree, lovingly created by individuals, charities and businesses.

St John's Church, in Knaresborough's annual tree festival runs from 7<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> December, with over 70 trees decorated by local groups and organisations. Admission is free. Opening times are Saturdays 10am to 5pm, Sunday 12 to 4pm and Monday to Fridays 12 to 5pm.

Mulled wine and refreshments are available in the church and The HUB opposite. Please be aware the church gets very busy!





## Harrogate Hub News

### Nidderdale access project

Our Nidderdale 'Access for All' project is our first attempt at improving access on a landscape scale and it's coming on apace! With less than a year to deliver the whole project, we have already delivered two training courses on aspects of encouraging access in the area. Tom has created ten lovely audio walks which you can find on our website and we have also drafted a new Breakfree pack especially for the area.

We are now embarking on twelve access improvement projects. The first of them has been to create a fully accessible path around the pond in Fishpond Wood, Beverley. The work has been done by our own work parties, who have had to shift 54 tonnes of crushed stone.

We are especially proud of a short section of path to the Victorian icehouse, which is home to some amazing cave spiders! Does anyone know of another fully accessible icehouse anywhere in the country? We certainly don't!



Now there's just the small matter of an access audit report to write, two films to make and two power chair hubs to set up by the middle of March. Piece of cake! We will report back on the final project in the next newsletter.



*Our volunteers hard at work laying the new path*



**Nidderdale**  
National  
Landscape



## Teesside Hub News

Our 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is a time for looking forward as well as back and we are delighted to announce some major progress with our planned Teesside Hub.

Welcome to Ellie Rawden, the new 'Teesside Hub Manager'. She has had several environmental jobs, including 'Community Tree and Woodland Opportunity Coordinator' with *Oxfordshire County Council*. A native of Teesside, she's relishing developing our Teesside Hub from scratch.



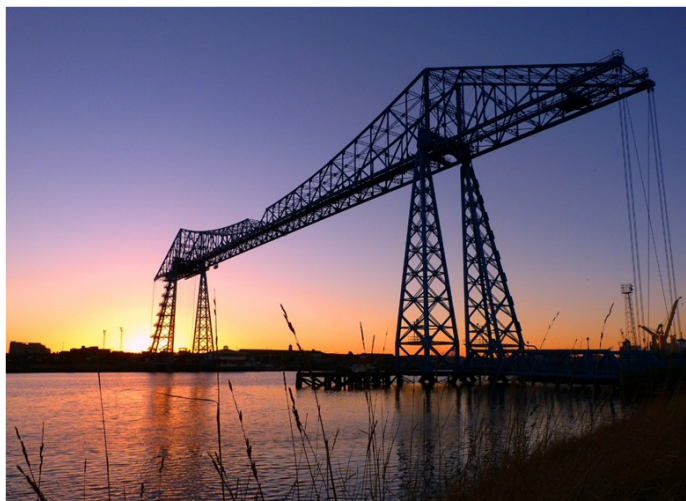
We are also really chuffed to announce our new office will be under the wing of *Tees Valley Wildlife Trust*. Their base, at Margrove Park near Guisborough, will give us a great working environment, around lovely, supportive people. What more could you ask for! Thanks to new Chief Executive Tom Harman and the rest of the *TVWT* team for their generosity and support! We look forward to working with you.



From mid-January, the postal address for our new Teesside Hub will be:

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

It will take us a little while before we are properly up and running, as we undertake essential staff training and volunteer recruitment, followed by plenty of taster sessions around both Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland. In the meantime, we'd really appreciate any suggestions, introductions, offers of help or ideas for places to visit. It's time to really put the Tees into Disabilities!





## Wakefield Hub News

### Welcome to Simon

Welcome to Simon Pedley who has taken over from Ella as Wakefield Hub Manager. He comes via *The Land Trust*, where he has been the Estate Manager for Yorkshire. He has previously worked in a range of environmental roles working with volunteers and nature reserves and green spaces.



### Frickley funding

We are grateful to *Wakefield Council* and *Nova Wakefield* for a pledge of £5,000 towards outreach work in South Kirkby, South Elmsall and Moorthorpe from March 2025. We'll use the funding to run sessions for local residents to Frickley Country Park. Do get in touch if you want to be involved with this project, or know somebody who does!

### Cycle lock-ups at Thornes Park

We are pleased to welcome four new solo bike lock-ups to our base at Thornes Park. We saved them going for scrap when the previous owner had no use for them. If you would like to leave your bike with us in safety, let us know and we will give you the key.



### Ship, Ship hooray!

Our new shipping container has recently arrived at the Wakefield base in order to expand our onsite storage. Now we won't be able to complain about not being able to find the shovels or of tripping over random bike parts! Thanks to *Wakefield Council* and *Nova Wakefield* for funding it via their Climate Activity grant. It will really help us in our work.





## A plug for our plugs

In Wakefield, we have plenty of wildflower plug plants for sale in our polytunnel. All of our plugs are native, great for wildlife and a bargain at just 50p per plug. Planting-out services are also available. Why not get in touch and see how our wildflowers could help your garden or greenspace become more wildlife friendly?



## Barnsley News

Bob Mawson has run the Barnsley satellite project for over a year. Group members enjoy a range of countryside activities including kayaking, angling, seaside outings and tandem tasters. We still need new volunteers and members to join in with this South Yorkshire venture, and we seek funds to make it a more permanent fixture. Give us a bell on 07426 716677 to join.

## Revised Directory

We hope the revised 'West Yorkshire Countryside Directory' will be out in February. Ask us for a hard copy. Thanks to *West Yorkshire Combined Authority* for funding this project.

## Wakefield Advisory Group

The next Meeting is on **Monday 3rd March** at Thornes. It's a way members and volunteers can report on how our groups helped to deliver our Vision in 2024, and share ideas for 2025.



# Wild Flowers

## 50p a plug

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



## Tree-mendous planting

The Wakefield team have planted a tremendous total of 14,274 trees since starting out in 2017, and we're aiming to reach 15,000 before the end of February 2025. Please get in touch if you need help with a tree planting project in 2025.



## Time off in loo

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has been going great guns improving access at some of their reserves recently. We were delighted to spot this accessible toilet at Staveley Nature Reserve near Boroughbridge. It's situated above the West Lagoon and you need a RADAR key to enter. Thanks, YWT!



*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.*

## Bluesky thinking

We're excited to announce our transition from X (formerly Twitter) to Bluesky! If you're already on Bluesky, we'd love for you to stop by and say 'hi' as we begin to grow our new community. Let's connect and continue making a difference together! [@opencountryyorks.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@opencountryyorks)



## It's a mugs game

Thanks to Ian Ladley from *Skinny Design* for designing our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo. Limited edition

anniversary mugs are now available for the princely sum of £10. Order yours today, you'd be a mug not to!



## GET IN TOUCH...



**opencountry**  
out there together

Our Head Office address is:  
**Open Country, Community House**  
**46 East Parade, Harrogate, HG1 5LT.**

Harrogate Hub/Head Office - **01423 507227**

Wakefield Hub - **07426 716677**

Email: [info@opencountry.org.uk](mailto:info@opencountry.org.uk)

[wakefield@opencountry.org.uk](mailto:wakefield@opencountry.org.uk)

[www.opencountry.org.uk](http://www.opencountry.org.uk)

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

Follow us on Facebook, Bluesky, Instagram & YouTube

