



# Chairperson's Report – January 2023

Page | 1 This Report is an amalgamation of the last annual report (July 2022) for the FOHW Community Voluntary Group (FOHW CVG) and what is now the first report for the FOHW Charity (FOHW) as the two have existed together during the transition period.

The FOHW CVG was formally wound up, by unanimous agreement, at the last AGM in July 2022.

The FOHW Charity is now established and has accepted it's first paid up members. It now has 31 members with a further 68 people on our volunteer supporter distribution list. The Members Activity Group (MAG) is now undertaking key work that the CVG undertook with the Trustees ensuring that all legal and good practise systems and policies are in place.

The first Trustees were:

Stuart Martin – Chair/Safeguarding  
Carol Leo – Vice Chair/Treasurer/Health & Safety  
Jem Dunford – Secretary/Child Protection  
Katie Scott – Social Media/Public Relations  
Malcolm Scott – Finance Officer

The Charity Number is: 11959980

The trustees will all step down at the first AGM as required by the constitution and a trustees elections are being held as part of the AGM.

## **Community Engagement**

Whilst much of the work of the committee and designated trustees has gone into establishing the charity much work has continued on Hell Wath although it is fair to say this has been done in difficult circumstances at times as some community opposition to planned works has been experienced.

What became clear through this is that whilst significant and wide-ranging engagement activities had taken place since the group formed in 2017, some residents had either not been aware of these, not engaged with these or not realised the significance of these.

A community meeting, that was not initiated by us, did prove to be an unexpected positive development and seems to have eased then reservations of many and also encouraged some of those still with reservations to join the charity. It also encouraged strong, yet unknown, supporters to also join and the charity now have a vibrant and growing group of active members who will have a formal voice in work going forward.

We have also benefited from significant support from other organisations and groups from Ripon and the surrounding area.



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## Grants

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Ripon City Council again awarded FOHW CVG a grant of £1000. This has been used to purchase tools and equipment as well as the storage needed for these tools. With growing numbers of members and volunteers having tools they can use is essential. We are still awaiting formal permission from HBC and Tarmac for our placing the storage unit in the fenced area behind the Panthers' Clubhouse but the storage container has been purchased and it, and all the tools, are being stored by one of the trustees.

The tools and storage shed as assets of the CVG, were transferred to the ownership of the charity following agreement at the final CVG AGM.

## Partners

The Army Foundation College (AFC) in Harrogate are proving to be a very useful partner. Last summer 140 young soldiers gave 13 hours each completing work on Hell Wath including:

- Installing 4 log benches as part of the Ripon Disability Forum 'Take A Seat Campaign'. These were funded by a donation from the Locality Fund (Cllr Stuart Martin), Ripon Rowels and Ripon City Panthers and were supplied by Sawley Wood Mill.
- Removing damaged and broken fencing with barbed wire. This had caused injuries to dogs on the site and were a hazard to young children.
- Clearing large areas of Himalayan Balsam.
- Cut back brambles that were starting to encroach on the football playing fields.

We had expected another platoon coming down in June to undertake further work, unfortunately this work has had to be postponed.

The AFC representative is invited to attend, as an observer, all trustee meetings.

The Skell Valley Project (SVP) is a significant partner. The project provides 3 days a month Countryside Ranger support and approximately £30 000 of funded work on site. SVP works have so far included:

- The recent vital clearance of encroaching scrub was a major and visible piece of work. This is part of planned works to protect and enhance the grassland habitats (including their own volunteers). (Including their own volunteers).
- Clearance of the pond and fencing around it to deter dogs entering it and leaving flea and tic treatments in the water
- Guided walks on themes as part of an on-going monthly programme.
- Funding for the amazing Forest Schools family event last August ( as part of the Ripon Together Summer of Play). 80 children and 170 family adults took part in this and it will be repeated this year.
- Secured the participation of the Royal Engineers in planned restoration and protective works for then Fairy Steps, restoring them to their WW1 condition with protection from flood erosion.

The AFC representative is invited to attend, as an observer, all trustee meetings.



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Representatives of Harrogate Borough Council and Ripon City Panthers are also invited, as observers, to all Trustee meetings.

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## **River Bank Repairs**

In 2019 £40k of funding was secured from NYCC to undertake repairs to the river bank path near the Rustic Bridge. As COVID took hold this work was postponed. We worked hard throughout the pandemic to ensure this funding was retained and ring fenced to these works and, on the appointment of a new Countryside & Education Officer for Hell Wath this work was completed in 2021. The substantive work weathered the floods well although some of the stone bridging the gap between the stone baskets and the bank will need replacing and securing in a different way.

## **Hedgerow Planting**

The Woodland Trust and TCV both donated hedgerow whips to us, including some delivered during the pandemic and 'heeled out' until volunteer activities could resume. We planted most of these this spring. Some were planted to gap fill internal hedgerow areas. Sadly some were damaged and removed but most are secure. Our longest run of planting (approximately 800 whips) is designed to, in the long term, create a natural boundary to the Choir School estate. Much of the boundary fence has been removed during the development and we are asking HBC to either reinstate this fence or seek to get the developer to do this.

The fantastic outcome of this specific planting is that it has been accepted as part of the 'Queen's Canopy'. This Jubilee initiative is a national one and there is a permanent online record of all the planting that has been accepted as part of the canopy.

The very dry summer of 2022 had a significant affect on our planted whips, of various ages. Members undertook a survey of the whips in the autumn of 2022 and assessed that over 400 whips would be needed to replace dead whips and fill remaining gaps in existing planting.

450 whips had already been donated by the Woodland Trust and these will be planted in the spring to replace dead whips and fill remaining gaps in areas where planting has already started.

No new areas will be planted this year as we focus on maintain the whips already planted as far as is possible.

## **Site Walk**

Our own volunteers have undertake extensive removal of Himalayan Balsam, litter picked, removed dig waste as well as the significant hedgerow planting. With our new membership we were able to take a new approach to our annual site walk with members leading specific walks. One looked at wild flowers and one at hedgerows. The group leaders have both written detailed reports from this and we now hope to develop specific plans for these aspects of the site. A third group walked the boundary and identified issues and opportunities in this area. The loss of a boundary around the choir school site was evident with both residents and Hell Wath users raising concerns about this.



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Sadly all three groups identified the significant presence of disease in ash and elm trees on site. It is likely that many of these trees will be lost in the next few years. We have raised with HBC the need for a tree plan that will allow for replanting with alternative or complimentary species.

The current position is that if any tree (dead or alive) is at risk of falling in an area that poses a risk to people or property we must report it via the HBC portal and removal will then be considered by HBC and. If needed, removal work undertaken by HBC.

We have requested that any trees that are cut down are used to create log piles on site if this is permissible within disease control regulations.

## **Himalayan Balsam**

One of the new members of the charity shared the benefits of their regular Balsam Bashing in one area over five years and more intensive and targeted pulling has been the focus this year.

We have adapted our methods this year reflecting this and have promoted the benefits of people, families and groups taking on an area of the site and pulling balsam whenever they can.

We have also encouraged the 'Take 20' model inviting anyone coming on Hell Wath to pull plants. We have promoted this online and put posters up around the site telling people about this.

A very recent development is that, after over two years of trying, we have been able to secure DEFRA funding for the inclusion of Hell Wath in national trials for the use of Himalayan Balsam Rust on Hell Wath with volunteer monitors in place who have been trained by CABI and will also apply the next doses of Rust next year. We have secured their support of HBC and the SVP in this initiative and now understand that sites within the Nidderdale AONB are now joining the trial. This is as a direct result of our raising the option with SVP discussions. They, like us, had not heard of this option until a member of the Ripon community contacted us about this. They should be congratulated for their initiative and support.

The impact of the rust on our balsam population will be monitored as part of the national trials.

## **Grassland Management**

It has become clear that reliance on annual grass cut if the site is not a possibility. There was an unexpected grass cut this year but this is unlikely to be repeated.

In seeking ways of addressing this to allow the improvement of the grassland habitats it has become clear that single annual cuts mainly serve agricultural purposes and not the needs of ecology.

Ideally areas of grass are cut at different times of year with some being left uncut for overwintering insects and small mammals. It also requires the removal of cut grass to ensure that the soil does not become too nutritious which favours rich grass growth and inhibits flower growth.

We are therefore looking to develop a grassland management strategy which will involve manual cutting of as many areas that can be managed and the rest being left uncut. The cutting will happen at different times of the spring, summer and autumn to favour flowers growing at different times of year.



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Page | 5 We are also initiating a wildflower cultivation project which has been launched and more detail will be given at the AGM.

## **Scrub Improvement**

A strategy has been developed to manage scrub incursion and the quality of the scrub habitat that remains. This strategy learns from the challenges and mistakes in the first piece of work with a focus on manual work by supervised volunteers rather than the use of heavy machinery (other than a chipper). The remains will be used for path improvement, dead hedging or habitat piles.

## **Other**

Some of our members have been given training in Butterfly Monitoring and weekly monitoring walks were undertaken and the results fed into the national database as well as maintained by FOHW.

Butterflies are a key indicator of the strength of biodiversity on the site and the outcomes will be used to develop further strategies. This has been facilitated and resourced by the Skell Valley Project.,

Some members have also undertaken Moth monitoring training through the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Group. We will look at ways that this can be used on the site.

Since its inception in 2017 the FOHW CVG and now FOHW has grown to be a strong advocate for Hell Wath. It's prime role is to gather the expertise of professionals and knowledgeable amateurs and then work to secure the skills and resources to undertake the needed work to put this guidance into action. As a charity it will now be able to bid for, and secure, further funding as well as advocate for the site as it becomes a very small part of a very large estate managed by the new unitary authority.

We look forward to the continued support of the members, volunteers and wider community partners in meeting the aspirations of the management plan.

Cllr Stuart Martin  
Chairperson  
Trustees  
Friends of Hell Wath