

Trustees Annual Report for the period:

13/12/2022 – 03/05/2024

Charity name: Clara Vale Conservation Group

Charity No. 1201323

Charity Trustees

- 1) Don Atkinson
- 2) Sean Clay
- 3) Rosemary Davies
- 4) Penny Gray Treasurer
- 5) Michael Mc Farlane
- 6) Gordon Pollinger
- 7) Sarah Raad

Purposes of the Charity

To promote for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Clara Vale and its surrounding area including the the promotion of environmental diversity and contribution towards conservation work nationally

To advance the education of the public in the conservation and protection of the physical and natural environment.

Main Activities

Management of the Clara Vale Local Nature reserve to maintain and Improve biodiversity.

Allow and encourage public access to the Nature Reserve to observe its wildlife

Through the Nature Club, provide an opportunity for children and their parents or carers to experience and explore the natural environment.

Management of the Clara Vale Community Orchard.

This, we believe, conforms to the Commissions guidance on public benefit, PB1.

The Nature Reserve and Community Orchard are freely open to the public at all times.

Contribution made by Volunteers

The Conservation Group is entirely dependent on volunteers to care for the Nature Reserve and the Community Orchard. There are no paid employees. We are very grateful for the many hours volunteers have given to the Group.

Governance document.

Constitution adopted 10th June 2024

Financial review

The charity made a small profit in the reporting period. Our policy on reserves is to hold £1000 for the payment of unexpected expenses not covered by insurance, for example replacement tools and small running repairs. The accounts show that the charity currently holds this in reserve in the current account and we are not in a deficit position.

How the charity is constituted

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Trustee selection method.

Trustees are appointed or reappointed at the AGM in June.

Our main achievements and activities

The Nature reserve

The Nature Reserve developed from the site of the Clara Vale coal mine. A campaign by the residents of the village in the 1980's resulted in it being declared a nature reserve rather than for industrial use. It was formally designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 1995 which gives it additional legal protection.

From the start the objectives of the Clara Vale Conservation Group have been to maintain and enhance the habitats and biodiversity of the site and to enable the general public to observe nature in the Reserve.

It attracts visitors both locally and from the region. We receive many compliments that it provides a haven of peace and tranquillity. That it was once a coal mine working twenty four hours a day, visitors find hard to believe. It is open to the public throughout the year and is visited daily by many people from the village and the region. It is a small site with diverse habitats which require active management to maintain.

Scything the meadows and coppicing willow and hawthorn are two of the main management activities employed to maintain the Reserve's varied habitats. The meadows in the Reserve, although they are small, are some of the best areas of grassland for wild flowers in the Gateshead Borough. Scything is how we maintain and improve that diversity. The Exmoor ponies, courtesy of the Mousie Trust are important helpers by grazing the Reserve for a couple of months in late autumn/winter.

Coppicing lets light onto the woodland floor giving different plants a chance to colonise, for example primroses. The regrowth that follows coppicing is ideal for nesting birds such as willow warblers and blackcaps.

The Bird hides continue to be popular. They attract local visitors as well as visitors from around the north east and beyond. We feed the birds every day from the end of October until the end of May. This has helped sustain Red Data book species such as yellowhammers which are declining nationally. The Northumbria Ringing Group visited monthly to catch and ring birds between October and April giving the general public the chance to see birds close up, in the hand. Many thanks to the Northumbria Ringing Group.

We have put up thirty six nest boxes in the nature Reserve. Birdlife in the Reserve seems to be reflecting the national picture of many species declining. The nest boxes were very successful up until last summer. In particular tree sparrows, a species that has declined nationally by 90%, had been making good use of them and over 400 nestlings have been ringed in the past 5 years. Last year however only three boxes were used by tree sparrows and only 11 nestlings ringed. This year, so far, only one box has been used by tree sparrows the other boxes being used by blue tits and great tits. It is far from clear what has caused this collapse but we know it is being repeated elsewhere. Thanks again to the Northumbria Ringing group for monitoring the nest boxes. All the data collected is sent to the British Trust for Ornithology and contributes to the national picture of bird population trends. The eight swift boxes on the village hall were once again ignored by the swifts but rather liked by the house sparrows which are also birds whose population is in sharp decline.

Of course there are not just birds in the reserve. Of other animals, roe deer are seen very frequently, stoats have been spotted, along with their favourite food, rabbits. Foxes and badgers are here but seen less often. Wood mice and voles are often seen from the hides. Bats can be seen at dusk mainly pipistrelles but there's also Daubenton's bat hunting over the ponds.

Butterflies are perhaps the Reserve's most visible insects. There are only 59 species of butterfly in the UK and 18 of them can be seen over the spring and summer, which is an indicator of the health of the Reserve. Moths are less obvious but more numerous (2500 different species). They are important pollinators. After two attempts at moth trapping last summer were rained off, we were eventually successful in early September (which is getting a bit late in the season) and caught 32 different species. The Nature Club children were fascinated by the different moths and did some excellent drawings of them.

The other very visible insects are the dragonflies and damselflies that breed in the reserve. There are 57 different species in the UK, 12 have been seen in the reserve. The ponds and wetlands hold populations of common frogs, common toads and smooth newts. There are also great diving beetles, caddis flies, water boatman and many other aquatic invertebrates.

Overall, the Reserve continues to thrive as a small but diverse mix of natural habitats, allowing the Nature Club, local schools and the public to explore and experience a range of habitats within a relatively small and accessible space.

Nature Club

Clara Vale Conservation Group provide a monthly Nature Club for village children aged 4-11 who attend with their parents or carers. It meets on Saturday mornings in the Nature Reserve or in the Community Orchard. Its first meeting was in May 2022.

Over the period covered by this report, seventeen village children participated with numbers averaging around 8 each session.

The sessions are planned around the seasons. We often begin with nature news where children talk about what they have observed in their gardens and local area. We remind each other about taking care and 'treading gently' so as not to harm wildlife or habitats. There will often be a nature trail and the children go off with their parents/carers to hunt for the items on their sheet. They love following a map. We encourage co-operation and working in pairs or small groups. Then we come back together and share our findings. There will normally be a creative activity linked closely to the topic using natural materials. Every child has a Nature Journal to record their observations. We usually end with a game and then stories and poems. The sessions are flexible so that we can respond to what we observe in the environment, the weather and to children's ideas. The wide age range and varying needs of the children encourage co-operation and empathy among the children.

Sometimes Nature Club coincides with task days on the nature reserve when volunteers from the conservation group are coppicing or maintaining habitats. The volunteers explain what they are doing and why. This gives children an understanding of the work of the conservation group and how the nature reserve is managed hence sparking children's interest from an early age in the importance of conservation. On several occasions members of the conservation group have also shared their knowledge with nature club. Moth trapping was a particularly popular session after a moth trap was set overnight and children came along early the next morning to investigate. Also popular with nature club families are the regular bird ringing sessions by the Northumbria Ringing Group. These experiences extend children's knowledge of the natural world and they return to nature club keen to share their experiences.

These are topics covered over the period:

Hapa Zone crafts (leaf bashing)

Building a bug hotel in the community orchard

Apple day craft activities and making apple juice in the orchard

Hibernation

Willow stars and Christmas wreaths

Habitats in the orchard and wassailing

Winter tree identification, bark rubbing

Sticks and dens

Wildflower planting in the orchard

Water colour painting of trees in blossom

The colour green in spring

Pond dipping

Moth trapping

Parents or carers attend with their children and are fully engaged in the sessions. Parent say they value this opportunity to experience nature alongside their children and that they are more confident about sharing nature activities at other times as a result of joining in with nature club. Over time children have learnt to observe and note detail. They have extended their understanding of seasonal changes and life cycles. They are very keen to learn new vocabulary to describe natural phenomena and the names of plants and animals. Above all, nature club is always a joyous time and there are many moments of awe and wonder throughout the year.

Community Orchard

Orchard History

The Clara Vale Community Orchard was created by the Conservation Group in 2000 as a Millenium Project. The site, which previously was the grounds of Stanners House until it fell into dis-repair, is approximately 0.9 acres, and was converted into a productive and well-loved community space through multiple community led efforts to clear the grounds and create an orchard. Currently there are approximately 100 fruit trees. We describe the orchard as “The wild and fruity space for people and nature” to reflect our community and conservation values.

Objective

We aimed to make gradual changes and implement small interventions to benefit both the local community and the ecological health of the area. Our main objectives for the Clara Vale Community Orchard during the period of 2023-2024 were to: 1. Continue the maintenance of the orchard in a lightly managed working condition while preserving its natural and wild essence. 2. Implement the new member management scheme and member website. 3. Implement the new bio-diversity plan.

Orchard management

Through a combination of pruning days with multiple volunteers, and individual volunteers taking on specific tasks (such as maintaining the willow arch or keeping the paths clear), we have maintained the productivity and aesthetics of the orchard whilst keeping it a safe and open community space. A previously disused water trough was dug out and restored to a working condition allowing members to water their trees during the increasingly hot summers. Harvest last year was somewhat mixed with some trees producing well, but others that had previously been productive produced less fruit. Risks assessments for volunteers days, and general orchard risks, have been produced or updated.

Apple Day

This popular annual community event was a big success in both reporting years, with good attendance in the Orchard and Village Hall, income in line with previous years, and lots of laughs and sugary apple fritters washed down with delicious fresh apple juice. A membership station in the Hall gave support to member enquiries about the new membership website.

New management scheme

We successfully moved from the original management scheme (one renter per tree with an annual tree rent) to a new more open community management scheme. Under the new scheme, any resident of Clara Vale or Stannerford Road can join the scheme at any time, and they are then welcome to pick a fair share of fruit from any tree through the harvest season. Initial community feedback has been positive, although membership has perhaps was lower than hoped in the first year. In 2024 we introduced a new membership website. The focus for this site, was ease of use, transparency on member benefits and to provide card payments (based on feedback from many members who no longer use cash) whilst preserving a cash option for those who don't use the internet. The website received many positive comments from the community and helped us return the membership numbers to close to the older levels, but still some work to be done to increase membership.

New bio-diversity plan

Following the ideas generated in the management scheme consultation survey, a bio-diversity plan was produced to increase the ecological health of the orchard and surrounding areas. The big project was to add a nature pond. This was no small undertaking and we would like to thank our donors who paid for any new materials required (e.g. the pond liner), the core team of volunteers who dug a BIG hole and made it into something beautiful, and all the other volunteers who dropped in to help when they could. Within a matter of weeks wildlife had started colonising the pond and it has generated a lot of positive community conversation. A big early

success was repeated sightings of Great Crested Newts, presumably migrated from a nearby chain of ponds along the railway which have other recorded populations. We have also developed the back edge of the orchard into a path of connectivity for wildlife which includes a new native tree hedge (courtesy of QTS Network Rail Contractors) and a butterfly wildflower bar (which was a joint project with Nature Club).

Conclusion

The Clara Vale Conservation Group has achieved its original objective of developing and maintaining a site for nature. The development of the Community Orchard increased the range of habitats. The Nature Reserve and Nature Club and the Orchard provide spaces for the community in which to relax, enjoy and learn about the natural world.



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Charity Name CLARA VALE CONSERVATION GROUP	No (if any)
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Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	1 Decembe 2022	To	3 May 2024
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Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £
A1 Receipts				
Private donations	1,401	-	-	1,401
Apple day including tree rents	741	-	-	741
Garden Bird Watch	50	-	-	50
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	2,192	-	-	2,192
(see table).				
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	2,192	-	-	2,192
A3 Payments				
Insurance	554	-	-	554
Bird food	318	-	-	318
Equipment	1,166	-	-	1,166
Administration	91	-	-	91
Tree certificates	55	-	-	55
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Sub total	2,184	-	-	2,184
A4 Asset and investment				
	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-
Total payments	2,184	-	-	2,184
Net of receipts/(payments)	8	-	-	8
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	4,554	-	-	4,554
Cash funds this year end	4,561	-	-	4,561

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted to nearest £	Restricted to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Orchard	2,648	-
	Nature Reserve	1,913	-
		-	-
	Total cash funds	4,561	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK
		Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets	Details		
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
		-	-
B3 Investment assets	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)
			-
			-
			-
			-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)
			-
			-
			-
			-
			-
			-
			-
			-
B5 Liabilities	Details	Fund to which	Amount due
			-
			-
			-
			-

Signed by one or two trustees on

Signature	Print Name

CC16a

**Last year
to the nearest £**

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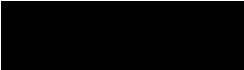
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**Endowment
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OK

**Endowment
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to nearest £**

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**Current value
(optional)**

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When due

Date of approval