

Holmedale Nature Network

Strategy Review January 2025

The Holmedale valley is a pre-glacial landscape feature to the south of the A66 west of Scotch Corner in North Yorkshire. The undulating landscape is mainly used for farming, with some moorland at the fringes and a watercourse that runs to the River Swale. The Holmedale Nature Network brings together nine parishes with a population of 2300 people and a series of small villages spread over 40 square miles. Our aim is to improve the natural environment and create more bio-diverse habitats for flora and fauna. The Holmedale communities are connected by the watercourse, landscape features, history and religious associations which provide the basis for coordinated action to nurture nature.

Background

The Holmedale Nature Network began in early 2023 following a public meeting involving residents from Whashton, Ravensworth, Kirby Hill, Gayles, Dalton, Newsham and Barningham. A steering committee was formed and consultations were undertaken with local communities. We then developed an initial 5-year project concept based on the premise that substantial funding and support would be provided by Highways England as compensation for the A66 improvement works. Our aspirational plans included:

Strand 1: Landscape projects

- a) Feasibility studies in year 1 for large capital projects to create and improve wetland, with a secondary aim of mitigating flood risks, with delivery of viable schemes in years 2-5
- b) A farming liaison officer to work with local farmers on meadow creation or other habitat improvements

Strand 2: Local projects – initially mapping the local area to identify opportunities for small-scale habitat improvement works to be undertaken by local volunteers in years 2-5

Strand 3: Community engagement – monthly talks and activities to engage with residents in year 1, with a reduced offering in years 2-5

By the end of 2023 funding from Highways England was delayed, preventing work on Strand 1 projects. It was agreed to proceed with other activities and work on formation of a legally constituted organisation which could then apply for funding from other sources.

What we've achieved in 2024

In 2024, the following progress has been achieved:

Strand 1: Capital projects

- We facilitated support from the White Rose Forest to design and plan a woodland creation scheme at Dalton Mill, which is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Natural England and North Yorkshire Council have approved the plan to plant 1200 trees over an area of 3.3 acres which has had continuous bracken cover for more than 25 years. Further work is planned to enhance the other valuable habitats at the site including rare acid grassland.

Strand 2: Local projects, monitoring and action to protect wildlife

- Eight residents trained to undertake **Watercourse Naturalness Assessments**, a citizen science project run by Natural England, NCEA (Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment) and the Freshwater Biological Association. The group agreed a strategy for assessing local watercourses in the upper part of the Holmedale-Skeeby catchment (Barningham, Newsham, Dalton and Ravensworth). Feedback from initial work was that the results were not sufficiently detailed to provide the habitat improvement opportunities wanted, so the work has been discontinued. Nevertheless, the mapping tools available and survey walks undertaken improved our knowledge and understanding of the local watercourse condition and connections.
- Six Holmedale residents were trained to undertake **Bumblebee Identification and Surveys**, under the Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected Project. The training was funded by the Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust and uses techniques developed by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Surveys were undertaken around Holmedale.
- Two **curlew nest protection** kits were borrowed from the Curlew Recovery South Lakes to protect two nests noticed by a resident in a livestock field near Whashton. The kits included electric fences and cameras. All eight eggs hatched successfully (four per nest).

- **Mapping and removal of invasive Himalayan Balsam** from local watercourses, with training and other assistance from the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust. Sixteen residents were trained to use the INNS Mapper, an app and website for reporting sightings, surveys and management of invasive non-native species in Great Britain. Thirty-eight volunteers helped with summer balsam pulling sessions in Dalton, Newsham, Ravensworth, Whashton and Gilling West, contributing over 160 hours of effort to remove an estimated 40,000 plants. Support was also provided by North Yorkshire Council, which mowed a ½ mile stretch of verge in Dalton that had become heavily infested with balsam.

Work was focussed on a 5m corridor around the becks in the upper part of the catchment, i.e., in Newsham and Dalton, to reduce transmission of balsam seeds downstream and follow the ‘top of the catchment down’ approach as recommended by the rivers’ trusts. Pulling sessions were also held at road bridges over the becks in Whashton and Gilling West, to reduce potential seed spreading by vehicles and walkers.

- Holmedale volunteers participated in the **Great UK WaterBlitz**, a long-term global water monitoring initiative run by FreshWaterWatch. Seventeen volunteers assisted with water quality testing for nitrates and phosphates at 20 sites along Holmedale watercourses, including 11 locations which are used for ongoing monitoring of river flies. Overall, we found that our headwaters had low levels of nutrients (good for the ecological status) increasing to moderate to high nitrates and moderate phosphates further down the catchment, particularly around Ravensworth. The data have been provided to the local rivers’ trusts to identify priorities for their work in reducing inputs.
- **Riverfly monitoring**, which provides an indication of watercourse ecosystem health, is on-going at 11 sites along the Holme-Skeebly watercourse. This is part of a UK citizen science project administered by the Freshwater Biological Association on behalf of the Natural History Museum and Natural England. Nine residents and ten local anglers were trained to undertake the monitoring in July 2023.

Strand 3: Community engagement

The table below shows talks and activities that we hosted during the year.

	EVENING TALKS	ACTIVITIES
January	Postponed due to storm Isha	Watercourse Naturalness Assessment training , by <i>Josie Niemera, Freshwater Biological Association</i> , Ravensworth Village Hall
February	Away with the Birds , by <i>Carl Watts, Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve</i> , Newsham Village Hall	Bird Nest Box Building , by <i>Brian Rogers</i> , Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve
March	Planting for Pollinators , by <i>Malcolm Hockham, formerly Eggleston Hall Gardens</i> , Barningham Village Hall	Seed and Plant Propagation workshop , <i>Malcolm Hockham</i> , Barningham Village Hall
April	Healthy Rivers , by <i>Charlotte Simons, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust</i> , Dalton & Gayles Village Hall	Bumblebee Identification and Surveying , <i>Catherine Mercer, Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust</i> , Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve
May	Meadow Creation , by <i>Catherine Mercer, Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust</i> , Ravensworth Village Hall	Earby Hall farm visit , hosted by <i>the Hoskyns-Abrahall family</i> , Newsham
June	Creating a Wildlife Pond in your Garden , by <i>Jim Pearson, JMP Pond Services</i> , Gilling West Village Hall	Tackling Non-native Invasive Species (INNS) , <i>Jenny Lee, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust</i> , Dalton & Gayles Village Hall, training in use of INNS App, followed by three balsam pulling volunteer sessions and one survey.

	EVENING TALKS	ACTIVITIES
July	None scheduled	Mapping and removal of Himalayan Balsam: three surveys, nine balsam pulling sessions and one wildflower plug planting session
August	None scheduled	Family Nature Activity, <i>Catherine Mason, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust,</i> with woodland walk, invertebrate identification and craft activities
September	Postponed due to heavy rain	Great UK Water Blitz, testing for nitrates & phosphates at 20 sites on Holmedale watercourses and collection of samples for additional analysis at Imperial College London.
October	Fabulous Fungi, Science, Fiction, Facts, Forays and Fun, <i>by Catherine Gillie, member of North East Fungus Study Group,</i> Newsham Village Hall	Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust Open Day, Gilling West – information stand and presentation by M McBarron about Holmedale Nature Network Fungi Foray, Barningham Visit to Pepperfields Farm Hedgehog Rescue, Dalton-on-Tees
November	Postponed due to forecast of heavy snow.	Volunteer sessions for tree and hedge maintenance (two in Barningham; one in Newsham)
December	None scheduled	Volunteer sessions for tree and hedge maintenance (one in Whashton, one in Barningham)

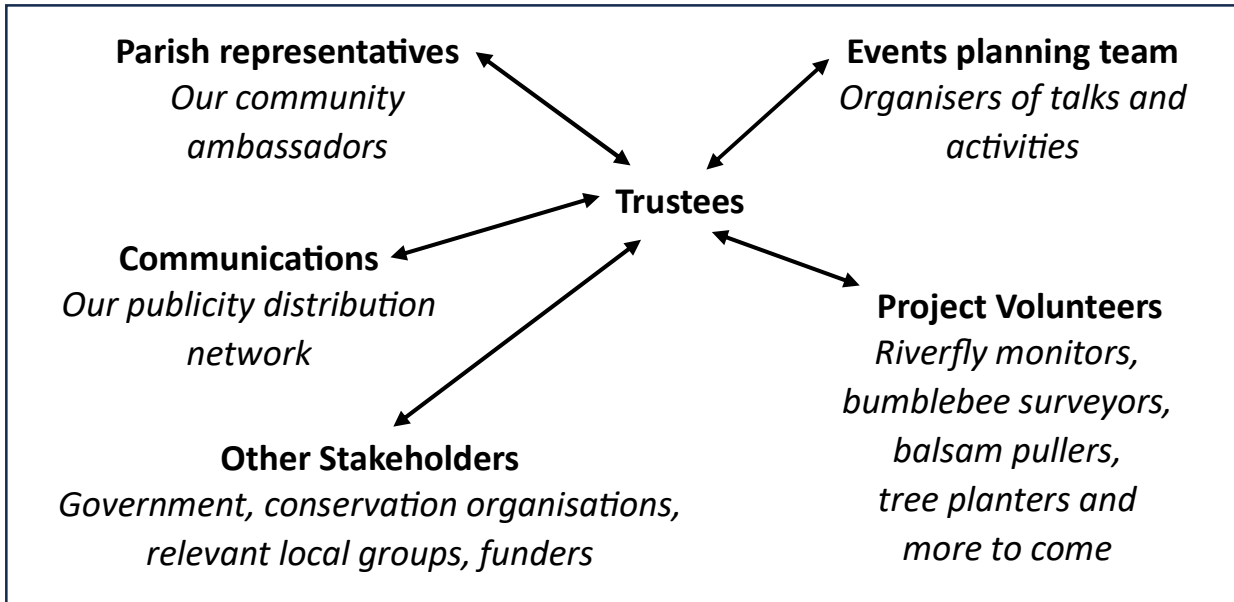
Other achievements:

- Following a review of possible organisation structures, we decided to form a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. A constitution, mission statement and list of core values were agreed and five residents became trustees: Chair: Edmund Baker (Newsham); Treasurer: John Moore (Whashton); Secretary: Martha McBarron (Barningham); Clerk: Anne Baker (Newsham) and Ian Mains (Whashton). With assistance from Community First Yorkshire, an application to the Charities Commission is underway.
- We have been working to create a branding package for the organisation with the assistance of a qualified graphic designer, Amber Davies. In 2025, we will launch a new logo and new look to our publicity.
- Two newsletters were issued for Spring and Autumn giving details of our activities and opportunities for involvement.
- We engaged with three additional parishes (Gilling West, Hartforth & Sedbury; Aske; and Skeeby) to invite them to participate in the Holmedale Nature Network. Consultations with residents in Gilling West and Skeeby were undertaken and the results will be reported in our Spring 2025 newsletter.
- Presentations were made to engage with Robin Dindas, Earl of Ronaldshay, Aske Estate; residents and business of Aske Estate; and Sir Josslyn-Gore Booth, Baronet, Hartforth Estate. All are supportive of the Holmedale Nature Network's aims and activities.
- We engaged with established organisations, including the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, White Rose Forest, Buglife, and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, to assist in training and delivery of local projects

What we are planning for 2025-2029

In 2025, we expect to complete our application to the Charity Commission and hope to be successful in forming a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This will enable us to apply for grant funding to progress our work to improve the biodiversity of Holmedale.

The success of the organisation is dependent on the many individuals from across our communities who have an interest in helping nature. Input from individuals and groups will be vital for the organisation to thrive. Our operating vision reflects the importance of continual engagement and input from our wider community and stakeholders, as shown below.



Holmedale Nature Network Operating Vision

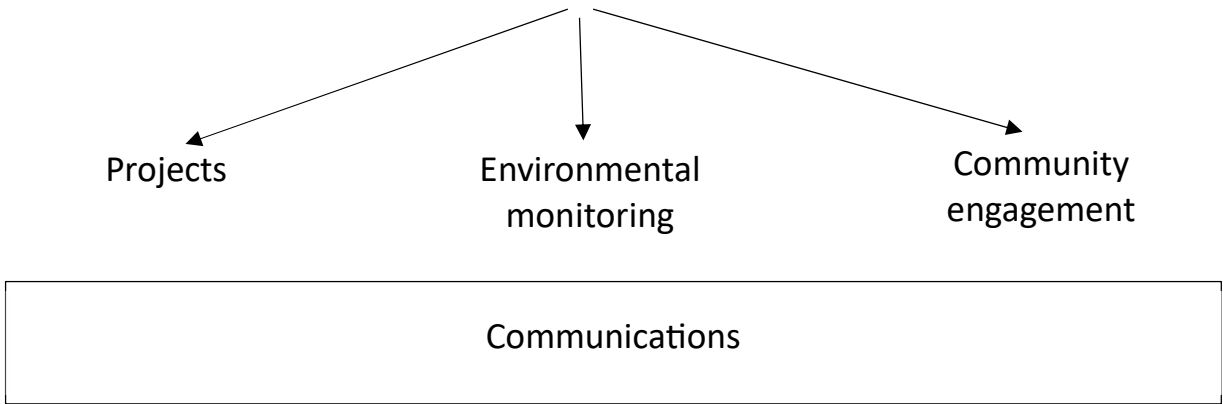
Our forward 1-year and 5-year strategies are summarised in the tables below. We will continue to work on three strands: projects (led by Edmund Baker and John Moore), environmental monitoring (led by Martha McBarron) and community engagement (led by Anne Baker). Across all our activities, Ian Mains will lead our endeavours to communicate effectively and personally with Holmedale residents and the wider community. We hope to recruit additional trustees during 2025, with opportunities for individuals to become more involved in their specific areas of interest and expertise.

Holmedale parishes and residents will be invited to submit ideas for projects. These will be evaluated by the trustees, followed by funding applications as appropriate to progress selected projects. In 2025, we will continue the habitat improvement project at Dalton Mill, while bringing forward other small-scale projects commensurate with the skills and experience of the organisation. Larger projects may be planned for subsequent years.

We welcome your comments on these plans!

Edmund, Anne, Ian, John and Martha

Our Activity Strands



Strand 1: Projects (Edmund Baker and John Moore)

2025	2026-2029
<p>Aim: plan and deliver small-scale projects to improve local habitat, e.g., planting a new hedge or woodland, creating an educational garden, removing Himalayan Balsam, connecting habitat to improve wildlife corridors.</p> <p>Activity: potential projects identified across Holmedale will be reviewed to select priorities for delivery.</p> <p>Process inputs: parishes and residents can submit project ideas to be considered by the trustees.</p> <p>Funding: the trustees will identify appropriate funding for selected projects and the delivery will be progressed once this is in place. Some projects may be delivered with volunteer support.</p> <p>Evaluation: assessment of project outcomes will include a pre- and post-project survey, appropriate to the nature of the work.</p> <p>Benefits: the natural environment in Holmedale will be improved in accordance with our organisation mission and we will build a portfolio of delivered work.</p>	<p>Within 5 years, we hope to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the experience and skills to deliver larger projects with specialist support. • Fund a farming liaison officer, set up farmer clusters to exchange ideas and assist in developing plans for new Environment Land Management Schemes.

Strand 2: Environmental monitoring (Martha McBarron)

2025	2026-2029
<p>Aim: participation in citizen science monitoring and survey initiatives to assess Holmedale habitats with training and oversight by reputable organisations.</p> <p>Location: strategic locations across Holmedale (e.g., providing coverage of the watercourse catchments) and other useful locations (e.g., habitat improvement projects).</p> <p>Activity: resident volunteers will receive training as appropriate to undertake the work. Our volunteers currently undertake a range of monitoring and survey work as listed under our 2024 activities.</p> <p>Evaluation: feedback from volunteers will be reviewed at least annually, supported by periodic evaluation meetings arranged with specialists, e.g. the Environment Agency or relevant ecologists.</p> <p>Benefits: our understanding of the natural environment in Holmedale will be improved and volunteers will gain valuable skills.</p>	<p>Within 5 years, we hope to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake routine water quality testing of local watercourses. • continue to promote citizen science projects that are relevant to habitat improvement work in Holmedale, providing training and volunteering opportunities to residents.

Strand 3: Community Engagement (Anne Baker)

2025	2026-2029
<p>Aim: provide talks and activities open to all.</p> <p>Location: local village halls or other appropriate venues, e.g. community spaces, other organisations, nature reserves</p> <p>Activity: talks on topics of interest, training courses, activity workshops, field trips and volunteer opportunities.</p> <p>Evaluation: the trustees will record attendance at events, outcomes from training activities and volunteer involvement. The information will be used for planning of future activities.</p> <p>Benefits: continue to engage with Holmedale residents and educate them on the natural environment, with focus on issues relevant to Holmedale.</p>	<p>Within 5 years, we hope to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to offer talks and activities on a wide range of nature topics. • consider additional means for connecting Holmedale residents with their natural environment.

Cross-Strand: Communications (Ian Mains)

2025	2026-2029
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue and circulate a minimum of two newsletters • Issue regular press releases to local news agencies • Increase our communication through other organisations’ websites, social media, etc • Engage with local landowners regarding our work • Engage with other organisations relevant to achieving our objectives, including Parliamentarians, Local Government, Parish Councils & Parish Meetings, Community First Yorkshire, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, Environment Agency, National Park Authority, Save our Swale, Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected and Yorkshire Water. 	<p>Within 5 years, we hope to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a bespoke website.