



Nature Recovery Plan for Otley

River Six, Jane Smith and Gordon Haycock

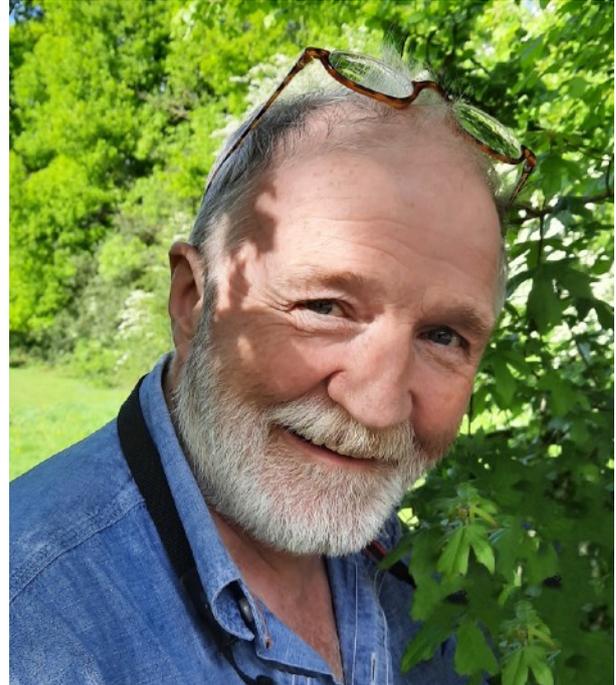
Foreword by Dr George McGavin

Contributions from Dr Catherine Burton, Claire Blindell and Steve Heaton



Foreword

That our livelihoods, well-being and ultimately our survival depend on the natural world is irrefutable. But we have taken the natural world for granted for far too long and it can no longer meet our demands. Our success as a species has come at an enormous cost to the environment and if we continue to plunder and pollute our natural capital, we will find ourselves scratching around for survival on an impoverished planet. Governments might be paralysed into inaction by the scale of the task ahead but, by taking action locally, we can get things moving much more quickly and show that there is a way out of the environmental chaos we have created.



As a committed conservationist I am delighted that Otley Town Council has declared a Biodiversity Emergency and are committed to putting nature on the road to recovery. I look forward to seeing the results and to the rest of the country following Otley's lead as soon as possible.

Dr George McGavin, Zoologist and Broadcaster.



A Nature Recovery Plan for Otley

Introduction

By declaring a Biodiversity Emergency, Otley Town Council has taken the first important step.

The council (Policy and Resources Committee) outlined the following actions:

1. Declare a 'Biodiversity Emergency'
2. Pledge to do everything within the Town Council's power to deliver measurable Biodiversity Net Gain
3. Call on the UK Government to provide the power and resources to make measurable Biodiversity Net Gain possible
4. Continue to work with Leeds City Councillors and local groups to promote schemes that will improve biodiversity in Otley
5. Support the extension of the Leeds Habitat Network within Otley
6. Work with local partners to measure the current level of biodiversity within Otley using Natural England's biodiversity matrix and develop an action plan to deliver biodiversity net gain based on scientific evidence

Wildlife Friendly Otley's (WFO's) Position

The declaration of a Biodiversity Emergency by Otley Town Council (OTC) is a hugely important step in enabling action to restore biodiversity. We, together with Otley 2030 and Otley Nature Network, would like to continue working with OTC to put together a **Nature Recovery Plan**, involving local conservation groups with the appropriate expertise. Suggestions for inclusion are detailed in this document for consideration:

We hope, also, to work alongside OTC to influence Leeds City Council (LCC) to follow suit, and to help them allow Otley to achieve meaningful habitat restoration and protection, and to accomplish measurable Biodiversity Net Gain in the next 5 years.

Why we need a Nature Recovery Plan

The world is facing climate and biodiversity emergencies, which are inextricably linked. Nature is in serious decline internationally and nationally.

In the UK, the Government has recognised the urgent need to achieve a significant recovery of nature across the country and this is reflected in ambitious targets in the 25-year Environment Plan and in the commitment to protect 30% of the UK's land for nature recovery by 2030.

For the future, government has asked that actions for nature recovery be delivered through Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These will be developed by county-level authorities, but to deliver these strategies each area will need to bring forward a Local Nature Recovery Plan.

The Otley Nature Network (ONN) was formed in 2020 to co-ordinate activity and share expertise between nature organisations in Otley. ONN aims to take the lead in this process by producing a twenty-year (2040) vision and outline plan for nature recovery across the Otley area. This plan is a living document which will develop over time and sets out to co-ordinate activity by ONN members listed below (the ONN is not limited to these members may change or be added to over time);

- Farnley Estate
- Friends of Chevin Forest Park
- Friends of Gallows Hill
- Global Learning Programme
- Natural England
- Otley2030
- Otley in Bloom
- Otley Town Council (Environment subcommittee)
- Otley Swifts
- Otley Wetlands Nature Reserve
- Rewilding Yorkshire
- Walkers are Welcome
- Wharfedale Naturalist's Society
- Wildlife Friendly Otley
- Woodcraft Folk
- Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

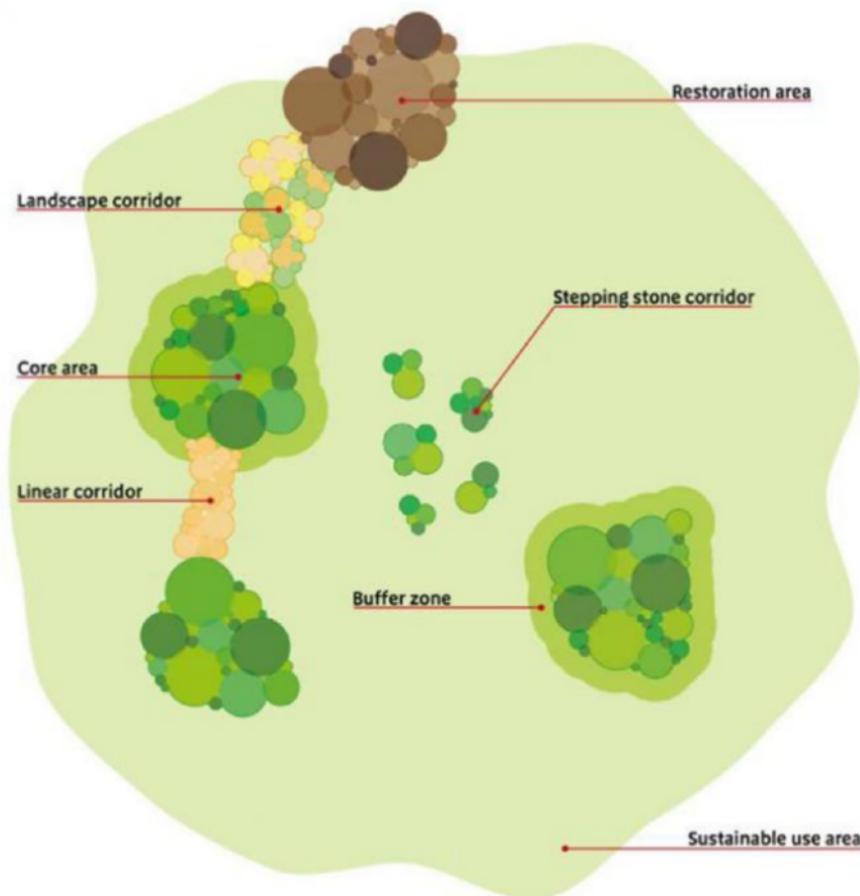
ONN is a part of the Nature Recovery Network Partnership which is being run nationally by Natural England (sponsored by DEFRA). By joining the Nature Recovery Network Otley has become part of a powerful and unprecedented joint effort to address three of our biggest challenges: biodiversity loss, climate change, and improving health.

We believe it is a purpose of Otley Town Council to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of our area. Conservation of wildlife and enhancement of the natural environment are addressed through the actions of a variety of local groups including ONN members underpinned by the OTC’s Neighbourhood Plan and supported by their Environment and Sustainability Committee.

Principles

Bigger, Better, More Joined-Up

For nature recovery to succeed, the wildlife habitats of Otley area need to be bigger, better and more joined-up, often comprising mosaics (intimate mixes) of wildlife-rich habitat. The figure below helps us understand the principles behind landscape-scale ‘nature networks’ that support nature recovery.



Core Areas — Sizeable blocks of land of high nature conservation value which form the heart of an interconnected network. They can be made up of single habitats or be mosaics. Core areas provide places within which species can thrive and from which they can disperse to other parts of the network. They include protected wildlife sites and other diverse semi-natural areas of high

ecological quality. The Chevin and Nature Reserves will form a large part of the core areas within our area. However, 'Priority Habitat' outside of designated sites may also be included.

Corridors and 'stepping stones' — Spaces that improve the functional connectivity between core areas, enabling species to move between them to feed, disperse, migrate or reproduce. This is essential so that plants and animals can easily re-colonise areas depleted of wildlife, and species may adjust their distributions in the face of climate-change. 'Landscape corridors' are relatively wide and may comprise mosaics of more than one type of habitat, whereas 'linear corridors' are typically narrow, yet relatively uninterrupted lengths of similar habitat. The corridors are already well documented in the Extended Leeds Habitat Network as it appears in the Neighbourhood Plan and include River Wharfe, hedgerows, lines of trees and other semi-natural habitat which help to make the town and surrounding countryside more permeable for wildlife.

Restoration areas — Areas where measures are planned to restore or create new high value habitat (and which will ultimately become new 'core areas'). Identifying restoration areas within Otley area is key to success.

Buffer zones — Closely surround core areas, restoration areas, 'stepping stones' and ecological corridors, and protect them from adverse impacts from the wider environment (e.g. rough grassy edges to hedges that protect tree roots).

Sustainable use areas — All other land within Otley area must be used sustainably if our legacy for future generations is to be positive. This includes sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. soils and water) and appropriate economic activities, together with the maintenance of ecosystem services. The way we live in Otley and use the land must help to 'soften the matrix' outside the network and make it more permeable and less hostile to wildlife.

The table below summarises ten key principles that should guide the restoration of functioning 'nature networks'.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand the place;• create a vision;• involve people;• create core sites;• build resilience;• embrace dynamism;• encourage diversity;• think 'networks';• start now but plan long-term; and• monitor progress.

Nature Recovery Plan

1. Pesticide/ Herbicide

Use of such chemicals is one of the top causes of biodiversity loss.

It is regularly used in Otley, often close to waterways. In fact, it is almost always unnecessary, and its use has become habitual – for example in churchyards and along footpaths.

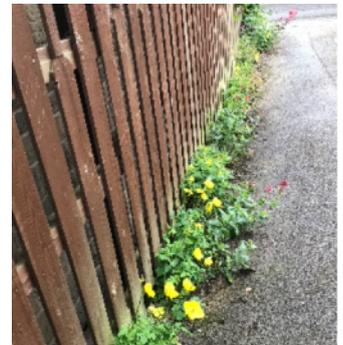
As people become more aware of the biodiversity loss, there is a tendency to allow the growth of wildflowers along lanes and footpaths, which is becoming widespread in Otley. The use of chemicals in graveyards can be discontinued, and the appearance of the area can be easily maintained with strimming, augmented with voluntary work.

(Added advantage of possible cost savings to LCC).

Action; Communicate with LCC Parks and Country to confirm their current approach to using pesticide and herbicide in Otley. Encourage the immediate end to use in Otley and replace with volunteers managing problem areas (such as around gravestones etc).

WFO and Otley 2030 will work together with OTC to manage resulting problem areas, such as weeding around grave stones, and manually removing Himalayan balsam. For example: ONN and WFO recently volunteered to manage the whip plantation on Wharfemeadows Park and added organic mulch to avoid further use of herbicide.

Cost-neutral; £0.00



Herbicide use can be reduced with considerable benefits for biodiversity.

2. Baseline Survey

The UK is one of the ten worst countries in the world for biodiversity loss.

It is estimated, for example, that we have lost 40% of our insects which is now adversely affecting birds and small mammals.

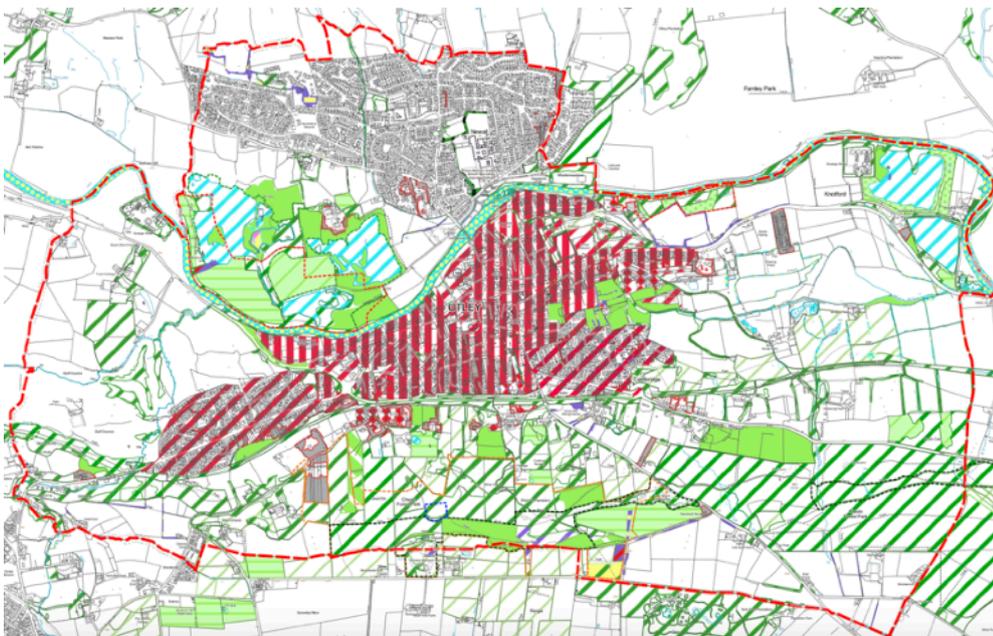
A baseline is required against which we can assess our progress in restoration over the next 5 years. The **Otley Nature Network** has been set up to begin mapping the current biodiversity situation and identify where we can improve habitat for biodiversity gains.

Baseline ecological survey data for habitats should be collected using methodology that is compatible with the latest Biodiversity Metric (available from Natural England) such as the UK Habitat Classification System (UKHab). Habitats should be subject to condition assessment using criteria stipulated by the latest Biodiversity Metric to allow measurement of Biodiversity Net Gain.

Action; Otley Town Council to commission an ecological survey of Otley using the same methodology as LCC.

WFO, Otley 2030 and ONN will work together with OTC to annually update the baseline survey to monitor our progress in biodiversity recovery and restoration.

Cost; quotes from local Ecology Consultancies will depend on the type of survey required.



Work done by the Otley Nature Network so far.

3. Habitat restoration

Biodiversity restoration is **entirely dependent** upon habitat.

With pesticide-free green spaces, we can start restoring habitat. The work done by WFO on non-council-owned land has received massive public support. Otley residents are broadly in favour of doing more to restore habitat (our petition rapidly reached 850 signatures, and the social media response for our work has been overwhelmingly positive so far, with Rewilding Britain reporting 85% of the public in favour of rewilding).

Action; OTC to communicate with LCC Parks and Countryside to

- increase the use of relaxed mowing
- further reduce their intensive management of Otley's green spaces
- involve community organisations wherever possible eg to make whip plantations more successful
- use the baseline biodiversity survey when available to direct this work

WFO and Otley 2030 will work together with OTC to expand our current habitat restoration efforts as more green space becomes available. Swathes of wildflowers are becoming apparent around whip planting, indicating the species-rich nature of Otley's grasslands.

Parks: where public access is essential, swathes can be augmented with wildflower seeding, and pathways mown to afford access to residents and dogs.

Verges could be left unmown for longer periods.

Suitable **residential areas** could be canvassed for limited wildflower seed planting in the autumn which could be extended in 2023 if agreeable. WFO has already been approached by a number of residents asking how their environment could be improved for wildlife.

(Additional cost-saving to LCC in reduced mowing is likely, as indicated by other UK councils employing similar strategies.)

Ref: Previous WFO Plan for Habitat Restoration, presented to OTC earlier this year.

Cost-neutral; £0.00

Possible Wildflower seed cost if required (+ WFO Grant).



Reducing mowing rapidly re-generates flora to the benefit of wildlife.

4. Community orchards

Growing fruit for the people of Otley is a win for biodiversity (if managed properly) and a win for residents who can become involved in growing and eating free fruit! Otley has a long history of orchards that has almost been entirely lost and now only hinted at in the street names.

We have people living in food poverty in Otley who would directly benefit.

Action; OTC to work with LCC Parks and Countryside to identify sites for a community orchards.

WFO, Otley 2030 and ONN are currently working on a new map of sites that would make ideal orchards. Schemes are already in place to share out gluts, and to maintain the orchards.

Several residential areas might benefit from the creation of community orchards, Saville Court for example.

Cost; Dependent on number of fruit trees required.



5. Privately-owned spaces

Private gardens comprise a significant potential area of support for wildlife. These can form valuable wildlife corridors which support insects and small mammals and restore biodiversity. WFO currently has a working scheme to advise and support residents who wish to make their gardens more wildlife-friendly, with over 80 gardens currently on the list.

Advice such as pollinator-friendly planting, small pond construction and hedgehog access is proving highly popular and contributing to biodiversity restoration. The scheme is spreading by encouraging neighbours to emulate wildlife friendly actions. Gardens can significantly contribute to wildlife restoration.

Action: WFO to continue to build on the current gardens scheme.

OTC to promote the Wildlife Friendly gardens scheme.



The support and influence of OTC could enhance the scheme by helping to discourage tree-felling, artificial grass, hedge-cutting when birds are nesting etc. Information to residents from OTC via Otley Matters etc is important in informing and encouraging good practice.

6. Lighting

Light pollution is one of the leading causes of biodiversity loss, adversely affecting the reproductive cycles of many insects and mammals particularly bats and moths.

Otley has some street lighting which is switched off after midnight, however the levels of light pollution are still relatively high, with extensive light spillage over 360^o.

Action: OTC might consider reviewing lighting in Otley to identify areas which could benefit from reduced hours.

OTC might lobby for shields/louvres to reduce light spillage around street lights, so that resident safety is preserved whilst reducing light pollution.

Cost-Neutral: £0

7. The River

The first stretch of England's rivers to be designated a bathing site, just upstream of Otley, has been given a water quality rating of 'poor'. This follows water sampling by the Environment Agency in which Yorkshire Water has failed to reach the required quality standard. The already unacceptable levels of contamination increase as water levels decrease in summer. The pollution is a result of both sewage and agriculture.

New figures show that average [Yorkshire Water](#) dumped raw sewage into rivers and the sea every eighteen minutes over the past five years.

This pollution is directly responsible for freshwater biodiversity decline, affecting not only fish, but invertebrates, vertebrates and birds, which depend on the river for their food source.

Although has committed to improving water quality, this is yet to become apparent. Further information on the amount, frequency and nature of pollution by Yorkshire Water would be useful in providing a baseline for improvement.

Action: OTC to contact Yorkshire Water for an update on their plans for cleaning the Wharfe in Otley. Work with Wildlife Friendly Otley and other local environmental groups to develop strategies with Yorkshire Water to further improve the Wharfe for wildlife and residents of Otley.

Cost-Neutral: £0



8. Communications & Working Together

Biodiversity Restoration in Otley so far has come about due to the collaboration of OTC councillors, WFO, Otley2030 and the ONN. It is clear that the most effective results will happen as a result of close association and cooperation between these parties.

There is a healthy level of public momentum for change in our green space management, and support for biodiversity restoration is building rapidly throughout the town.

The influence of OTC on local residents is an important factor in educating people and supporting the biodiversity cause.

Action: OTC should continue to publicise its important step in declaring a Biodiversity Crisis, and keep it in the public eye with regular communication and publicity. Widely advertising our collaboration and the actions we are taking is key to future success.

WFO, Otley2030 and ONN should increase their profile on social media, continuing to inform the public and support actions to restore biodiversity.

Cost-Neutral: £0