

# Hell Wath 2019 Management Plan

## Including 2022 Updates & Revisions



### 2022 Foreword

The original 2019 Management Plan included a scheduled review in December 2022. The Friends of Hell Wath ( FOHW) Committee agreed to bring this review forward to begin in March 2022 due to a number of changed circumstances. These are as follows:

1. Covid Restrictions imposed by the UK Government in 2020 and 2021 meant that FOHW could not undertake activities and maintenance as originally planned. The Action Plan and Annual Maintenance Schedule require updating.
2. Success of the National Trust bid for Heritage Lottery Funds for the Skell Valley Project is facilitating project work and activities that need to be recognised.
3. The decision of FOHW to apply for and be granted charitable status as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation needs to be recognised.
4. The imminent change to local government structures in North Yorkshire needs to be recognised.

The basic structure and content of the original 2019 Management Plan remains relevant and the Plan has not been fundamentally re-written as a result of this review. Changes have been made and new sections added simply to update events that have taken place; to add additional information or to update future planned activities.

### Summary

The location of Hell Wath, its role in history and its natural resources combine to make the area a valuable green space on the outskirts of Ripon, one which is well used and valued by many residents. This Management Plan presents the unique characteristics of Hell Wath and sets out how the site should be looked after to keep it as a special place for future generations to enjoy.

Keeping the site openly accessible for everyone to enjoy is acknowledged as a vital element to the ongoing care of Hell Wath, but intensive use brings pressure to bear on many existing assets. This Management Plan addresses these issues and documents the actions that have already been taken, and those that can be taken in future to balance recreational enjoyment of Hell Wath with the conservation and enhancement of its historical and natural assets.

Managing the site in accordance with this Management Plan will ensure that Hell Wath continues to be a special place for nature and for people to enjoy long into the future.



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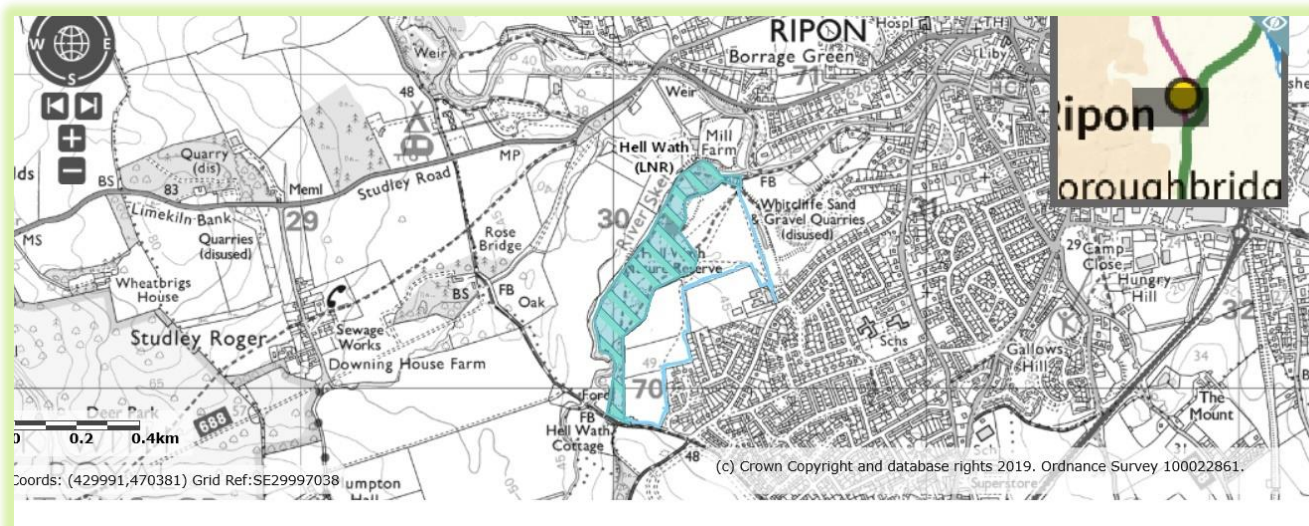
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## Section 1 - Background to The Management Plan

Hell Wath is a 21.9 acre area of land situated on the south side of Ripon. It is held under the terms of a 99 year lease initially granted by Redland Aggregates Limited to Harrogate Borough Council. This lease has been held by the current owner, Tarmac since 1997. The terms of the lease require Harrogate Borough Council to maintain the site for open public access; to conserve and enhance the wildlife value of the site, and to conserve and enhance the landscape character of the site.

Hell Wath is bordered on its western side by the River Skell and comprises two playing fields, (used as football pitches by Ripon City Panthers), two hay meadows, woodland and various areas of grassland interspersed with tree copses and hedgerows. Part of the site adjoining the River Skell is a designated Local Nature Reserve. The whole site is outlined in blue on the map below, with the Local Nature Reserve shaded in blue.



Since the lease commenced in September 1986, the area has been managed and maintained by Harrogate Borough Council. In September 2017 the Friends of Hell Wath (FOHW), a Community Voluntary Group, was formed for the public benefit with the following objectives documented in their Constitution:

- To seek to enhance the maintenance and management of Hell Wath to benefit the people of Ripon.
- Encourage all recreational visitors to be responsible visitors by providing facilities and information at relevant locations and educating them on the special nature of Hell Wath and how they can help maintain it for future generations.
- Preserve the 'wild' nature of Hell Wath and actively encourage native species of plants, animals, birds and insects to thrive in the environment of Hell Wath.
- To work towards improved safe access for all to the site.
- To raise funds, apply for grants and invite/receive contributions to further the objectives of the Group.
- To identify operational problems, such as path erosion, and suggest solutions. To facilitate communication with the local authorities, organisations and voluntary groups to further the above objectives.

The FOHW have enthusiastically and actively pursued these objectives with many people volunteering to take part in organised activities. Funding for various projects has been provided by grants; organisational and private donations; together with time and material commitments. A summary of activities and projects completed on Hell Wath since the inception of FOHW is included in Section 3.

In 2018 FOHW were approached by the National Trust to participate in a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for £2.4million to fund the 'Skell Valley Project'. The purpose of this project is to enhance management of the landscape running along the 12 mile length of the River Skell; from its headwaters on Dallowgill Moor down to its confluence with the River Ure at Ripon. The National Trust identified Hell Wath as an important part of the River Skell corridor being of historical, natural and recreational significance.

FOHW agreed to work in partnership with the National Trust to identify and document the objectives of the Skell Valley project. In December 2018 the National Trust received approval and funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for an 18 month scoping phase. Final project plans were submitted in June 2020 and project approval was received in September 2020. The 4 year delivery phase of the project started in April 2021

To support applications for funds and projects within the Hell Wath site, in 2019, FOHW identified the need to extend the objectives contained in their Constitution and decided to prepare a five year management plan.

Using a recognised Conservation Management Plan as a guide, the Hell Wath 2019 Management Plan (The Management Plan) will enable the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Skell Valley Project and other potential supporting organisations to

understand the context and value of the Hell Wath site and consider project proposals and funding applications, confident that any funds allocated will be well managed to deliver its objectives.

Management Plan Ownership, Authorship and Review Process

Ownership and Authorship

The Friends of Hell Wath have taken responsibility for producing The Management Plan and for its implementation. An initial draft of The Management Plan was completed by the Treasurer and Secretary of the FOHW in July 2019.

Review Process

An initial draft of The Management Plan was circulated to all members of the Committee for review in August 2019. An updated draft was prepared for wider consultation with stakeholders and approved for circulation in November 2019. Comments were invited from stakeholders and where received, appropriate amendments were made to produce the final version of The Management Plan, approved for publication by the FOHW Committee.

The published version of The Management Plan was made available to all stakeholders to enable them to see the impact the consultation process had on the final plan put forward for formal ratification at the June 2020 Annual General Meeting of the FOHW. A summary of the consultation process is included at Appendix S1A.

It was envisaged that The Management Plan would be implemented by means of an integral Action Plan and an annual Maintenance Schedule. Activities and maintenance works have been regularly reviewed and activities agreed by the FOHW Committee. It should be noted that Covid 19 restricted the work that could be undertaken in 2020 and 2021.

The Management Plan and the Action Plan was scheduled to be formally reviewed by the FOHW Committee 30 months after ratification (in December 2022) with any proposed revisions to be presented at the next AGM for ratification. For reasons explained in the Foreword, this review was brought forward to March 2022

The Management Plan will be put out to the widest level for consultation for review every five years (first consultation planned for 2024) to ensure it still reflects the viewpoints of the stakeholders and the needs of Hell Wath.

The Management Plan (as updated in 2022) was formally handed over from the FOHW Community Voluntary Group to the Friends of Hell Wath Charitable Incorporated Organisation when the former organisation was wound up at an Extraordinary General held on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

**Section 2 - Stakeholders**

The stakeholders to The Management Plan and to the Hell Wath site itself are comprised of very specific groups. The table below details the stakeholders and the means by which they were consulted in 2019. Appendix S1A documents the overall outcomes of the consultation process and broad indications of how and where feedback received during the consultation process has been incorporated into The Management Plan.

Stakeholders			
Stakeholder	Relationship To FoHW	Consultation Method	When
Tarmac	Current owners of the land	Formal written consultation and approval of Management Plan	November 2019
Harrogate Borough Council	Lease holders for Hell Wath and Planning Authority	Formal written consultation and approval of Management Plan via the designated committee representative on FoHW.	November 2019
Ripon City Council	Local Government Authority	Formal written consultation and approval of the Management Plan	November 2019
The Environment Agency	Regulatory authority for the River Skell.	Formal written consultation and approval of Management Plan	November 2019
The Friends of Hell Wath	Registered members of the group that will implement the plan and source of most volunteers for activity days	Consultation via email link to feedback questionnaire (including option to add comments)	November 2019
Ripon City Panthers Football Club	Partner Organisation and site user	Via the designated committee representative on FOHW.	November 2019

Moorside Primary School and Nursery	Partner Organisation	Via the designated committee representative on FOHW	November 2019
Ripon Physical and Sensory Impairment Group.	The FoHW now represented on this group working to improve access to Hell Wath and the city as a whole.	Via FoHW representative on their committee	November 2019
Disability Action Yorkshire	Undertaken an accessibility survey of the site to inform Management Plan	Direct contribution to the plan and formal written consultation	November 2019
Local Residents bordering Hell Wath	Properties look out onto Hell Wath and likely regular users	Notices on entrances with details of links to online consultation	November 2019
Ripon residents as a whole	Many use the site for walking and dog walking, including access to and from the city centre	Link to online consultation shared on community Facebook forum 'Blow Your Horn Ripon'	November 2019
The National Trust (Fountains Abbey)	Lead organisation in Skell Project bid.	Formal contribution to drafting process.	August 2019
Nidderdale AONB	Partner organisation to Skell Project bid	Consultation via email link to feedback questionnaire (including option to add comments)	August 2019
The Royal Horticultural Society/Yorkshire In Bloom	Through the 'Its Your Neighbourhood Award' the FoHW now have a mentor and are associated to the RHS	Through mentor, via email link to feedback questionnaire (including option to add comments)	November 2019
North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Group	Have contributed to the survey and analysis of the biodiversity found in/on Hell Wath	Formal contribution to drafting process.	July – November 2019

**Note 1:**

In 2023 a new Unitary Authority for North Yorkshire will be created. It is understood that responsibilities currently discharged by Harrogate Borough Council and Ripon City Council will initially be transferred to the new Unitary Authority ( North Yorkshire Council ).

**Note 2:**

A Public Meeting was arranged in February 2022 by local residents unhappy with works undertaken on Hell Wath during December 2021. The meeting was very well attended and gave everyone the chance to 'air their views' and raise questions. The Friends of Hell Wath, Skell Valley Project and Harrogate Borough Council all attended the meeting and welcomed the opportunity to answer residents' questions and concerns. The meeting was considered a success by all parties and a positive working relationship continues to develop between all parties to ensure Hell Wath is looked after and enhanced to benefit all visitors.

For Information: FAQ's published prior to the meeting are included at Appendix S2A. No minutes of the meeting have been published.

## **Section 3 - Understanding The Site**

### An Introduction to Hell Wath and the Local Area

Hell Wath is public access area forming a green link along the River Skell between the historic city of Ripon and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal. A brief overview of these two local areas helps puts Hell Wath into context.

### Ripon City

Founded over 1300 years ago, Ripon's rich heritage is still very much in evidence today. In addition to the 7th-century Cathedral, the City boasts many historic buildings, museums and monuments including a traditional market square and 300-year-old (and 90ft-high) obelisk. Every evening at 9pm the City's official Hornblower, sounds the 'Setting of the Watch' to assure everyone that they are in safekeeping for the night - a ritual that has been maintained without fail for over 1,100 years.

More information at: [www.discoverripon.org](http://www.discoverripon.org) ( reference superseded by [www.ripononline.co.uk](http://www.ripononline.co.uk) )

### Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal

In 1966 Fountains Abbey was transferred from private to public ownership. The National Trust bought the 674-acre Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal estate in 1983, although the Abbey and St Mary's Church are owned and maintained by English Heritage. In 1986 the parkland in which the abbey is situated and the abbey itself were designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It was recognised for fulfilling the criteria of being a masterpiece of human creative genius, and an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history. Today Fountains Abbey attracts over ½ million visitors a year from around the world.

More information at: [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey-and-studley-royal-water-garden](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey-and-studley-royal-water-garden)

### Hell Wath - Historic Points of Note

#### Agriculture

At one time Hell Wath was part of the vast estate owned by the Vyner family, the last private owners of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal before it passed into public ownership in 1966. Archive material points to a relatively unbroken continuity of agricultural use since the 18th Century with evidence in the form of lease agreements between the estate and local graziers indicating that the land was used as pasture.

#### Racecourse

In 1865 Ripon Racecourse occupied part of the Hell Wath site off Whitcliffe Lane at Redbank where it remained for over forty years until it was moved to the current site off Boroughbridge Road. The 1865 course had a grandstand which was later used as offices during the First World War by Royal Engineers as part of a massive army camp set up on the Hell Wath site. From 1960 the grandstand was used by the Ripon Cathedral Choir School, and the entire 'Choir School site' lies adjacent to Hell Wath off Whitcliffe Lane. Ripon Cathedral Choir School closed in July 2012 when the school site was sold to a developer. The site remained unoccupied until 2018 when planning permission was granted for residential development, including converting the grandstand into apartments. Work began in May 2019.

#### River

The 12 mile long River Skell originates in the Yorkshire Dales at Dallowgill Moor and runs through Fountains Abbey prior to forming the western boundary of the Hell Wath site. The River Skell is joined by the River Laver at the northern end of the site before flowing into Ripon. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a series of dams were built on the River Skell at Hell Wath. Their reported purpose was to ensure continuity of water supply to Ripon Canal and to provide a water source for mills in Ripon City. There is no information on removal of these dams but a boundary stone still marks the location of the Skell Crooks Dam.



This boundary stone was erected in 1820 with an iron plaque (no longer in situ) inscribed:

RIPON NAVIGATION  
1820  
LEVEL OF SKELL CROOKS DAM  
SEVEN FEET BELOW THIS  
MARK

The boundary stone was listed as a Grade II monument by Historic England on 19 March 1984.

#### Armed Forces

Soldiers had been billeted at Ripon on and off for over a hundred years before the outbreak of the First World War and the old racecourse at Hell Wath had been used by the Territorial Army as a summer training camp for a number of years. Ripon Corporation was in the process negotiating for a permanent Army Camp in the town to improve the local economy, so was well placed when war broke out for the construction of what became one of the largest army camps in the country. At its height the camp accommodated about 30,000 soldiers, completely dominating the city. This extensive army training camp was serviced by an infrastructure of roads and railways as well as sewage treatment plants and reservoirs and was later used to repatriate returning prisoners of war.



Some infrastructure foundations are still visible at Hell Wath, most notably a flight of concrete steps adjacent to the River Skell, known locally as ‘The Fairy Steps’ ( reason unverified).



These steps were constructed by the Army at the north-eastern end of the site and have a shallow channel on one side designed to ensure that the wheels of horse-drawn ammunition carts did not slip off the side.

Captain Wilfred Owen, the poet, was posted to Ripon where some of his most important war poems were written in rooms taken for the purpose in Borrage Lane, close to Hell Wath. After the war the Army camp reduced in size, particularly to the south of Ripon on the Hell Wath site. It came into prominence again during the 1939-46 war and the Army has continued to have a presence in Ripon until the present day, with the Royal Engineers housed at Claro and Deverall barracks in the north of the city.

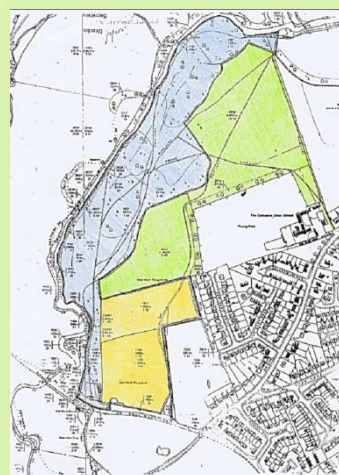
### Quarrying

Hell Wath was acquired by Cawoods, a sand and gravel company in the 1950’s. This company was granted a series of planning permissions by Harrogate Borough Council for the extraction of sand and gravel from Hell Wath, although these were never fully implemented. Cawoods was taken over by another company, Redlands Aggregates Limited, in the 1970’s. The decision by this company to proceed with sand and gravel extraction in the late 1970’s was opposed by local people who resented the loss of Hell Wath as a leisure amenity. Partly as a consequence of local protests, Redlands Aggregates Limited (as owners of the freehold site) and North Yorkshire County Council (as the minerals planning authority) were persuaded to enter into negotiations about the future of the site.

In 1986 these negotiations resulted in a ‘Section 52’ Agreement for North Yorkshire County Council to grant Redlands Aggregates Limited planning permission to expand another of their North Yorkshire sand and gravel extraction sites in return for rescinding planning permissions in relation to the Hell Wath site. Redlands Aggregates Limited also agreed to lease part of the land, including the Hell Wath site, to Harrogate Borough Council. This 99 year lease agreement commenced on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1986 for consideration of £1 per annum rent payable in advance (if demanded). The lease was subsequently transferred to Tarmac Limited when they acquired Redlands Aggregates Limited in 1997. Lease Agreement in Appendix S3A.

### Management of Hell Wath Since 1986

Outline map of Hell Wath showing the following areas referred to in text below:



- Amenity Area
- Part of Amenity Area designated as a Local Nature Reserve
- Recreational Area

The lease signed in September 1986 requires Harrogate Borough Council to manage the site for open public access in accordance with objectives set out in Schedule 3 of the Section 52 Agreement headed ‘Whitcliffe Lane Management Aims’. These management aims recognised two distinct areas of the site, the ‘Amenity Area’ and the ‘Recreational Area’.

*Amenity Area Objectives:*

- a) To conserve and enhance the character and quality of the existing landscape,
- b) To conserve and enhance the existing wildlife value of the site and maintain the existing mosaic of grassland, scrub and woodland vegetation; and
- c) To maintain free access along the length of the valley on the eastern side of the River Skell

Management proposals and methods were set out for this area as follows:

1. Ensure the security of the site against uncontrolled grazing by farm stock, especially the eastern boundary adjacent to agricultural land.
2. Undertake limited footpath improvements where necessary to ensure access and encourage use of defined footpaths. However such improvements will be of limited extent using natural materials so as not to lend a 'municipal appearance' to the site.
3. Carry out limited tree planting for visual and wildlife purposes using broadleaved species.
4. Initiate annual mowing to maintain the open grassland areas within the site.

*Recreational Area Objectives:*

- a) Subject to the clauses below, to maintain the area in suitable condition for use as a playing field, except that 0.5 acres may be set aside for children's playground area.
- b) To maintain vehicular access to the area from Hell Wath Lane, so far as the Borough Council is capable of so doing.
- c) To provide a parking area for user's vehicles.
- d) To provide appropriate planting scheme for the site.

Management proposals and methods for this area were set out as follows:

1. To maintain the area by regular mowing and line-marking.
2. To stone or tarmac an area of ground for car parking.
3. To provide goal posts etc. for formal recreational use.
4. To implement appropriate planting associated with any development.

To enable Harrogate Borough Council to fulfil the above objectives, a draft Outline Management Plan for Hell Wath was prepared by Paul Burgess, in 1989. The Plan objectives were supported by limited surveys of the physical and biological resources of the site, which confirmed the wildlife potential of the Hell Wath site. This work persuaded the Nature Conservancy Council's North East Region to designate part of the Amenity Area of Hell Wath as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). This proposal was approved by Harrogate Borough Council in April 1989 under Section 21 of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.

It is worth noting that a significant proposal contained in the draft Outline Management Plan was conservation of abandoned pastureland by means of animal grazing to encourage habitat diversity. This would have required fencing on site to enclose animals and to protect the Skell riverbank. During public consultation meetings vehement opposition to these proposals was voiced by local residents and users of the site who had enjoyed unfettered access to the site for many years and argued that the 'natural characteristics' of the site would be lost. A local residents group was set up and a petition against the Plan was submitted to the Council. This opposition resulted in proposals for fencing and the introduction of grazing animals to be dropped and replaced by a hay mowing regime.

The 1989 Management Plan set out its objectives for five years. These objectives are set out in Appendix S3B.

No records have been found to verify implementation of the 1989 Management Plan either in whole or in part for the intended five year period.

No records have been found to determine the management regime in place from the end of the Management Plan (1994) until the establishment of the Friends of Hell Wath community voluntary group in September 2017. It is only known that HBC have undertaken various maintenance works during this period, which included:

- Regular mowing of the recreational playing fields
- Arranging for the hay meadows to be cut in late summer (completion subject to availability of contractors and cost)
- Some scrub clearance
- Tree felling as required to maintain clear footpaths or for safety
- Introduction and regular emptying of dog waste bins
- Supervision by Countryside Rangers

*The Friends of Hell Wath*

On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017 a Public Meeting was arranged by Councillor Stuart Martin and Sam Walker, then the HBC Countryside Ranger. The purpose of this meeting was to propose the foundation of a Community Voluntary Group (CVG) to help look after the Hell Wath site. The proposal was warmly supported by attendees and volunteers were appointed as Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary to establish an initial Committee. These Officers together with the representative for Harrogate Borough Council, a representative of Ripon Panthers Football Club and other volunteers subsequently met to discuss objectives for the group. The Group was formally established as The Friends of Hell Wath (FOHW) by the approval of a formal Constitution on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

A copy of the Constitution is included at Appendix S3C.



During 2020, a proposal to make an application for FOHW to become a charitable organisation was considered by the FOHW Committee. The main drivers for this were to enhance the credibility of FOHW, to formalise membership and to improve access to grant funding. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 a separate charitable organisation was formally approved by the Charities Commission, setting up Friends of Hell Wath as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), charity no 1195980. The purpose and objectives of the FOHW as a charitable organisation remain the same as that of the community voluntary group. The difference is that as a charitable organisation the FOHW is now a legal entity governed by the Charities Commission, which requires a more formal structure and administrative regime.

A copy of the FOHW Charity Constitution is included at Appendix S3D.

The FOHW charitable organisation is administered by five Trustees. The inaugural Trustees are FOHW Committee members who volunteered to stand until the first Annual General Meeting, to be held within 18 months of incorporation. Work to date has comprised setting up bank accounts and policies required to manage a formally constituted charity. A working group called the ‘Members Activity Group’ has been set up to plan and oversee ongoing FOHW activities. The FOHW community voluntary group continues to fulfil its objectives, undertaking activities until assets are formally transferred to the charity and the FOHW CVG is wound up at an Extraordinary General Meeting.

All points made below relate to the FOHW Community Voluntary Group, which remained functional until the date the Management Plan was handed over to the Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2022.

The FOHW Committee was an enthusiastic group of people passionate about identifying opportunities to look after and enhance the Hell Wath site to benefit all visitors. The Committee comprised 9 members who were eligible to vote if decisions need to be made. The Committee comprised three Officers ( Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary ), three partner organisation representatives (Harrogate Borough Council as the site leaseholder, Ripon Panthers as key user of the recreational area and Moorside Primary School & Nursery as the local school) plus three local people with an interest in the site. Regular Committee meetings were held on site at the Ripon Panthers clubhouse and minutes were recorded. Committee meetings were publicised with an open invitation to the community to attend and participate in meetings. Ideas were discussed and activities agreed, with tasks delegated to various committee members and volunteers.

The work of the FOHW Committee was effectively taken on by the FOHW Trustees and the Members Activity Group when the FOHW Charitable Incorporated Organisation was established.

Achievements of the FOHW Community Voluntary Group

The Committee arranged volunteer events at Hell Wath and has successfully engaged the local community in a range of activities and events:

- Litter picks
- Himalayan balsam bashes
- Dog fouling awareness and clear ups
- Resurfacing and levelling steps on a footpath (known locally as the Giant Steps)
- Digging out an old pond
- Bioblitz Event
- Forest Schools Events
- Hedgerow planting
- ‘Wheels on the Wath’ for wheelchair users



Publicity via social media and local posters has attracted local individuals and families, who turn up to give an hour or two of their time to help look after Hell Wath. FOHW have also been assisted by cadets from the Army Foundation College in Harrogate who have undertaken voluntary work on several occasions; helping to clear paths, cut back vegetation and pull up Himalayan balsam.

Creation of the FOHW also enabled the HBC Countryside Ranger to put forward group proposals to improve and repair site infrastructure to Ripon City Council (RCC), Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) and North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC).

Examples of key works carried out on the Hell Wath site are noted below.

### Choir School Footpath

The FOHW identified improvements needed to the condition of a key footpath known locally as the Choir School path. This is a footpath that links residential areas on the south side of Ripon to areas on the north via a footbridge across the River Skell. It is used extensively by schoolchildren to walk to their schools avoiding main roads and a noted high pollution junction in Ripon. The footpath was noted for becoming very muddy in winter and significant improvements were needed to encourage year round use. With some work completed by FOHW volunteers, the Councils enabled resurfacing the entire length of the path in time for the beginning of the 2019 school year by:

- Providing materials and working with volunteers to level and resurface each step on the Giant Steps (HBC)
- Resurfacing the footpath from the Giant Steps to the footbridge with crushed limestone (£20,000 funded by NYCC)
- Resurfacing the footpath from Whitcliffe Lane to the top of the Giant Steps with crushed limestone c£6,500 (HBC & RCC)
- Approving grants totalling £1,300 to purchase footpath resurfacing materials (RCC & HBC)

### Site Access

- The FOHW have been keen to improve access to the site for all users, and identified two narrow gateways that prevented disabled users and those with young children in pushchairs accessing the site from Hell Wath Grove and Whitcliffe Lane. Harrogate Borough Council has completed work to: Widen two access points to improve access for users

### Riverside Footpath from Giant Steps to Fairy Steps

The FOHW identified significant erosion to the riverbank occurring along this path. Without action, the historically important Fairy Steps were at significant risk. Work is planned to restore the Fairy Steps, but this cannot begin until the riverbank is secure.



In 2021, NYCC completed a six week, £40,000 project to install stone gabions to rebuild the riverbank and resurface the footpath. This work has protected the Fairy Steps and will prevent future riverbank erosion in this area.

### Installation of Silhouette Soldiers



As previously noted, Hell Wath was the site of a large World War 1 army camp. In remembrance of those who fought and died in that war a number of Silhouette Soldiers were commissioned by the Ripon Community Poppy Project in 2018 to commemorate the WW1 centenary and installed around Ripon. Since 2018, some of those soldiers were found to be in need of a new home.

FOHW are keen to ensure the history of Hell Wath is not forgotten and pursued the idea of Hell Wath being a permanent home for three of the Silhouette Soldier sculptures. Thanks to the persistence of the FOHW Chairman, Stuart Martin, and the permission of the landowner, Tarmac, and the leaseholder, Harrogate Borough Council, the Silhouette Soldiers were installed on Hell Wath in time for Remembrance Day 2021. Poppy seeds from Flanders fields have been sown around the installation to provide an annual poignant reminder.

### Installation of Log Benches



During August 2021 four log benches were installed on Hell Wath to give site visitors a number of resting places. The log benches were funded by a grant from North Yorkshire County Council and donations from Ripon City Panthers, Ripon Rowels and Ripon Rotary Club. The benches were installed by volunteer Army Cadets with assistance provided by a local farmer, Stephen Britton.

The provision of seating on Hell Wath has been well received by visitors.

Scrub Clearance



In December 2021 work was completed by contractors as part of the Skell Valley Project to clear 0.4 hectares of dense blackthorn scrub. A small number of other trees identified as either diseased or unsafe were also removed during this process. Additional work was completed by Skell Valley volunteers to tidy the area and new hedgerow saplings have been planted to infill gaps in the surrounding hedgerow by FOHW volunteers. While this habitat management work has a short term visual impact, this is a project which will have long-term benefits to the natural environment of Hell Wath. The purpose of this clearance was to re-instate a large open area of ecologically important grassland. In time and with good management this area will become a species rich meadow, supporting a diverse range of insects, birds and small mammals.

Pond



In January 2019 the site of an old silted up pond was excavated. The intention was to recreate the pond habitat on Hell Wath to provide conditions for aquatic flora and fauna to become established. The new pond filled during 2019, the surrounding area become colonised with plants and the habitat began to support species of aquatic insects and animals. Unfortunately, due to the Covid pandemic, FOHW were unable undertake planned pond maintenance and the pond gradually began to silt up again.



In December 2021, during the dormant winter period, contractors re-excavated a slighter larger and deeper pond area as part of the Skell Valley Project. Although the area looks unsightly again, the banks will soon re-colonise with plants as it did before and as early as Spring 2022 tadpoles were seen in the pond. One problem noted for the pond habitat has been establishment of a casual footpath alongside the pond, a consequence of which has been the activities of dogs in the water. This not only disturbs the habitat, but medication for ticks and fleas can be fatal to aquatic species.



To protect the newly dug out pond, a chestnut paling fence was erected around the area. The fencing materials were funded by a grant from North Yorkshire County Council and a donation from Ripon Rowels Rotary Club and installed by Skell Valley volunteers in April 2022. This fence will keep dogs out of the water, but still enable people to view the pond and small mammals to access the water.

Hedgerow Planting

FOHW have received donations of mixed native tree and hedgerow saplings from The Woodland Trust and The Community Volunteers.

In January 2020 volunteers planted out saplings along the boundary of the Hell Wath Grove car park. This in time will grow up to shield the car park from Hell Wath and provide an additional wildlife habitat, joining up existing hedgerows on either side.

In January/February 2022 volunteers planted out saplings along the boundary of the Ripon Panthers playing field. These will fill out some gaps in existing hedgerows and replace some of the blackthorn scrub cut down in December 2021.

In March/April 2022 volunteers planted out saplings along the boundary of the Choir School housing development. These have been planted to define the Hell Wath boundary and in time will provide a valuable wildlife habitat.



#### Other works

In addition to the above works Harrogate Borough Council have also completed work on Hell Wath to:

- Refurbish one set of worn wooden footpath steps
- Install a new set of wooden footpath steps on a badly eroded slope
- Install new signage at some access points
- Replace wooden fencing on a site boundary (next to Hell Wath Grove car park)

These improvements to site infrastructure have been well received and appreciated by the local community and users. Additional projects have been identified for the future and these are included the Action Plan set out in Section 7 of The Management Plan.

#### Information Sources:

1989 Management Plan

Ripon Racecourse history: <http://www.greyhoundderby.com/Ripon%20Racecourse%20History.html> Boundary Stone information: [https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101173817-stone-on-south-bank-of-river-skell-due-south-of-mill-farm-which-is-on-the-north-bank-of-the-river-skell-and-just-outside-the-mb-boundary-ripon#\\_XRIKw25FxE](https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101173817-stone-on-south-bank-of-river-skell-due-south-of-mill-farm-which-is-on-the-north-bank-of-the-river-skell-and-just-outside-the-mb-boundary-ripon#_XRIKw25FxE)

Army Camp history: <http://www.ripon.co.uk/history/townandcity.html> (reference no longer active) and <http://www.kingsownmuseum.com/ko2917-59.htm>

## **Section 4 - Assessment of the Significance of Hell Wath Resources**

### Green Space

Since the Army camp was finally dismantled in the 1950's the site has been an important open space for Ripon residents. When the freeholder, Redlands Aggregates Limited, proposed excavating sand and gravel in the late 1970's, the site was saved as a result of protests from the local community. Since then, the site has been leased to, and under the management of, Harrogate Borough Council who are charged with maintaining Hell Wath as an open recreational and amenity space to the residents of Ripon. In September 2017 the Friends of Hell Wath, a community volunteer group, was founded to help look after the site.

Today Hell Wath is an important area of green space on the southern outskirts of Ripon, valued by local residents as a recreation and amenity area. The site has been recognised in the Ripon City Neighbourhood Plan as a Special Landscape Area linking Fountains Abbey directly to Ripon City centre and providing important green space deserving both protection and enhancement. Hell Wath has also been recognised within the Neighbourhood Plan as an important 'clean air' pedestrian route, linking the expanding residential areas on the south side of Ripon to the city centre and the north via footpaths running through the site. The Ripon Neighbourhood Plan was approved by Ripon residents in a referendum held on 14 February 2019 (86.85% in favour) and was accepted as part of the Harrogate District Development Plan on 10 April 2019.

For more information see: [https://www.harrogate.gov.uk/info/20103/neighbourhood\\_planning/575/ripon\\_neighbourhood\\_plan](https://www.harrogate.gov.uk/info/20103/neighbourhood_planning/575/ripon_neighbourhood_plan) (Reference superseded by [www.harrogate.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning-2/Ripon\\_neighbourhood\\_plan](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning-2/Ripon_neighbourhood_plan))

Hell Wath can be described by reference to two areas designated in the lease held by Harrogate Borough Council: The Recreational Area and the Amenity Area (which itself includes the area designated as a Local Nature Reserve).

### Recreational Area ( see map on page 6 )



This area comprises two level playing fields surrounded and divided by mature mixed hedgerows. It is an important recreational area used by Ripon City Panthers Junior Football Club ( [www.riponcitypanthersjfc.co.uk](http://www.riponcitypanthersjfc.co.uk) ). The area provides enough space for one full-size football pitch, one ¾ size pitch, two 7a-side pitches and two 5a-side pitches, which are marked out by a local resident as required by Ripon Panthers. The recreational area is mainly rye grass which is regularly mown by Harrogate Borough Council during the football season and occasionally during the summer.

In 2005 a purpose-built brick clubhouse was built on Hell Wath to provide changing facilities, toilets, kitchen and office facilities. Although the clubhouse is primarily used to support football matches during the football season it is also made available to other community groups to use (such as FOHW committee meetings and events) and is therefore a valuable community resource. To the front of the clubhouse there is a secure gravel car park used to provide car parking on match days and a secure storage area is located at the rear. There is also a community defibrillator located on outside wall of the clubhouse.

Ripon Panthers is a community based sports club run entirely by volunteers. Formed in 1984, Ripon City Panthers are an FA Charter Standard Community Club providing football for girls and boys from 5-18 years. The Club provides a safe and friendly environment where the children of Ripon and surrounding districts within North Yorkshire can learn new and enhance their existing footballing skills. The Club supports fair play and enjoyment. Winning is not the prime objective.

In the 2018/19 season the club provided opportunities for over 325 young people to participate in football activities, running 15 boys and 2 girls teams. Each team is coached and managed by an FA Qualified coach, typically parents and former players, all of whom give up their own time to volunteer their services to Ripon Panthers. Junior teams (7-11 year olds) are assigned an assistant coach to help organise and develop the teams. Football matches are held on Saturdays and Sundays with 10am, 12am and 2pm kick-offs. Every match needs referees and Ripon Panthers provide the opportunity for parents and older players to achieve refereeing qualifications.

The football pitches are not enclosed and so provide an open recreational area for visitors to enjoy throughout the year. Two hard surface visitor car parks, (one off Hell Wath Lane, the other off Hell Wath Grove) lie adjacent to the recreational area. The main users are dog walkers and leisure visitors accessing the local footpaths. Signs are erected at the access points from the car parks advising visitors that the area is used for recreational purposes, advising visitors of the 'rules' of the site and asking dog walkers to clear up after their animals. Dog waste bins are provided at each access point and are emptied regularly by Harrogate Borough Council.

#### Amenity Area ( see map on page 6)

The amenity area can itself be best described by reference to the open grassland meadows and the Local Nature Reserve which runs along the eastern bank of the River Skell. Both areas have open access to visitors and are criss-crossed by many informal footpaths, which have been used without hindrance for many years. Dog walkers are the main users of these paths, using them to navigate the site to exercise their dogs off the leash.

#### Open Grassland Meadows



Historically these meadows were used as pastureland for grazing cattle and Harrogate Borough Council proposed the re-introduction of animal grazing in their 1989 Management Plan. This was considered the best option for managing the area and maintaining biodiversity of the meadows. However, local residents had enjoyed open access to the meadows since Redland Aggregates Limited had acquired the site in the 1970's and strong objections were raised to enclosure of the meadows and the introduction of grazing animals.

As a result, plans were changed and an annual hay mowing and cutting removal regime was proposed which has been partially implemented to date. Hay cutting is not an ideal solution as it is difficult to secure contractors to complete mowing of all the grassland areas every year. Over time this will compromise the natural biodiversity of the meadows.

In April 2019 a limited site survey undertaken by Stephen Morley, a National Trust Ecologist, identified the grass meadows as species rich grassland with a good mix of grass, herbs and potentially fungal flora in Autumn. The area is therefore considered to be a priority habitat as per the 1994 UK Biodiversity Action Plan ([www.jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap/](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap/)) and the management plan should include actions to conserve this landscape, including the consideration of limited grazing. Grazing enables natural control of invasive species, such as Himalayan Balsam and species such as creeping thistle, stinging nettle and scrub which are all detrimental to the preservation of open grassland meadows. Any proposal to introduce grazing on the Hell Wath site would be subject to full public consultation prior to any decision being made.

#### Local Nature Reserve



8.88 hectares of the Hell Wath site bordering the River Skell was designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) on 1 January 1993. This followed surveys of the physical and biological resources of the site completed for the 1989 Management Plan which confirmed the habitat diversity and wildlife potential of Hell Wath. The results of the geological and natural surveys conducted in 1989 can be found in Appendix S4A.

The main habitat areas are: Grassland, Woodland, Hedgerows, Scrub, Wetland and River. These were all recognised as important habitats for flora and fauna in the 1989 Management Plan.

The following limited surveys of habitat have since been undertaken and confirmed the importance and diversity of natural resources at Hell Wath:

- October 2008 – Aquatic Coleoptera of the River Skell at Hell Wath undertaken by Martin Hammond, Wildlife Consultant  
Report included at Appendix S4B.
- This report concluded that: “The Skell at Hell Wath LNR provides an exceptional diversity of river margin meso-habitats, including small exposures of cobbles and gravel with a significant component of finer sediments: clay and bedrock cliffs, tree buttresses with partially submerged roots; undercut banks; and small timber jams. Preserving this quality and diversity of riverine habitat, avoiding siltation in the catchment and maintaining high water quality are important in protecting the biodiversity of this section of the Skell. “
- April 2019 – Hell Wath Visit undertaken by Stephen Morley, a National Trust Ecologist.  
Report and map referencing included at Appendix S4C  
This limited survey of the flora encompassed the entire Hell Wath site, including the meadows. The report described several areas of habitat within the LNR and included proposals for future management to maintain the nature of each area.  
The report identified two habitats of particular importance:
  1. Note 2 of the report - A triangular area of species rich grassland habitat considered to be a priority habitat as per the 1994 UK Biodiversity Action Plan ([www.jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap/](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/our-work/uk-bap/))
  2. Hedgerows - The report notes that the site has mature, well developed hedgerows throughout. Hedgerows are a priority habitat as per the 1994 UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

There has been limited management intervention within the LNR and the area has generally been allowed to develop naturally for many years. The area provides a number of diverse habitats which could be improved with sensitive management.

### Skell Corridor

The importance of water and land management along the entire 12 mile length of the River Skell was recognised by the National Trust in 2017 when a proposal to manage and develop the Skell Corridor was put forward for funding as a National Lottery Heritage Fund project. In September 2018 the National Trust was awarded Phase 1 lottery funds giving 18 months to scope and prepare plans for implementation of the project. The project was formally approved in September 2020 and the four year delivery phase of this project commenced in April 2021.

Hell Wath has been recognised as a key element of the Skell Corridor project with important historical, natural and recreational resources. The FOHW have a seat on the Skell Valley Project Partnership, an internal group set up by the Skell Valley Project to manage the scoping phase of the project, and development and rollout of the implementation plan. Hell Wath benefits directly from funding for projects and activities considered by the group and included in the implementation plan and from work carried out by Skell Valley Project volunteers.

### Historic Architecture

During World War 1 Hell Wath was the site of the largest army camp in Britain where soldiers were trained before being sent to the front lines. This camp housed as many as 30,000 soldiers at any one time supported by an infrastructure of buildings, tents, roads, railways and utilities. A few architectural features remain visible, the most important of which is a set of stone steps, known locally as ‘the Fairy Steps’ (reason unknown). These are a set of concrete steps constructed by the Army to enable ammunition wagons to be hauled up the bank by horses or mules. The steps are wide and shallow and a distinctive groove can be seen running down one side of the steps, which is believed to have prevented wagon wheels from slipping off as they were pulled up the slope. Over the years the Fairy Steps have fallen into a state of disrepair. One side of the steps has previously fallen away and has been repaired, but this too now requires work to prevent collapse of the structure. The FOHW believe it is important to conserve the Fairy Steps and make sure the important story of Hell Wath during WW1 is not forgotten.

## **Section 5 - Management Issues and Site Vulnerabilities**

The Friends of Hell Wath was created September 2017 as a Community Voluntary Group to help look after Hell Wath. FOHW became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in March 2022. It has become clear to FOHW that many parties have an interest in the site. These Stakeholders have been identified in Section 2 of this Management Plan and their interests have to be taken into account when planning long term strategy and short term activities that affect Hell Wath. Planned activities must also be communicated well in advance and reasons for any work fully explained to ensure all stakeholders understand the purpose and long term benefits of any works.

Overall objectives for long term management of Hell Wath have been stated by the owner of the site, Tarmac Limited. These are set out in the lease document which obliges the leaseholder, Harrogate Borough Council, to maintain the site in accordance with these objectives. Both Tarmac and Harrogate Borough Council are supportive of the FOHW and have approved their Constitution which seeks to complement both the long term and maintenance objectives for Hell Wath. Harrogate Borough Council were represented on the committee of the FOHW and in future there will be an open invitation to Tarmac and Harrogate Borough Council to attend FOHW Trustee meetings and Members Activity Group meetings.

### Decision Making for Major Works

Any proposals to carry out major works within site are put forward to the site owner, Tarmac Limited, for approval before any work is carried out. An example of the process to seek approval is the proposal to improve the quality of the Choir School footpath which runs along the north-eastern boundary of Hell Wath. This is an important pedestrian route, particularly for schoolchildren as it provides a 'green route' into Ripon. However, sections of this path were very wet and muddy during inclement weather and so the FOHW proposed laying down a hard surface along the length of the Choir School footpath to encourage year round use. Under the terms of the lease Harrogate Borough Council are allowed to:

*'Undertake limited footpath improvements where necessary to ensure access and encourage use of defined footpaths. However, such improvements will be of limited extent using natural materials so as not to lend a 'municipal appearance' to the site.'*

Taking this into account the FOHW discounted a tarmac or paved pathway and instead put forward a proposal to lay down a path of crushed limestone. In time this material will blend into the natural landscape whilst providing a hard wearing, long term solution to the problem. This proposal was approved by Tarmac Limited and undertaken by Harrogate Borough Council, part funded by Ripon City Council. Work was completed in August 2019 at a cost of c£6,500 to provide an improved footpath in time for the new school term and the winter period.

### Assets at Risk Requiring Major Work

#### Fairy Steps

As previously noted, the Fairy Steps are an important historical asset currently in a state of disrepair. The FOHW are keen to preserve and if possible restore the Fairy Steps and also to provide visitors with information on the Army camp based on the Hell Wath site during World War 1. This project will require substantial funding (est. c£6,500) to commission an initial survey to understand the extent of the works required, then to fund the materials and labour needed to complete the repairs (est. c£25,000). Due to historical links with the army the FOHW approached the Royal Engineers based at Ripon Garrison to see if they could help. Their commanding officer indicated they would be interested and may be able to assist with completing the works if the materials are funded.

A survey was completed by the Royal Engineers in 2021 and plans for the restoration drawn up. Completion of repairs of the Fairy Steps and interpretation to visitors about the history of the army camp at Hell Wath has been included in the National Trust River Skell Corridor project.

#### River Bank Erosion

There are a number of points along the River Skell where the bank is being eroded. The most serious of these was located on the public right of way between the bottom of the Fairy Steps and the bottom of the Giant Steps.

This erosion is caused by the natural flow of the river and increases when the river is in spate after heavy rains. It is clear that efforts have been made to shore up the river bank in the past as the remains of gabions faced by a stone wall can be seen. Part of the footpath has already been washed away and the protective stone wall is now in imminent danger of collapse. The FOHW were concerned that without repair the footpath along to the bottom of the Fairy Steps would quickly be washed away during winter floods, putting the Fairy Steps at increased risk of collapse.



North Yorkshire County Council is responsible for maintaining public rights of way and accepted that this area of river bank needed to be repaired as a matter of urgency. Works were carried out in September 2021 and the riverbank has been fully reinforced with new gabions and the footpath refurbished with crushed stone.

It should be noted that there are plans to direct overflow drainage from a new residential development on West Lane into the River Skell, just upriver from Hell Wath. This will increase river flow during high periods of rainfall and increase the rate of erosion at this point of the river. River bank erosion will be kept under review.

### General Site Management Issues

Hell Wath is maintained as an open area of green space for people to enjoy. This raises a number of issues to be managed:

#### Access

Hell Wath has no roads, tracks or bridleways within its boundaries. Only foot traffic is permissible within the site. Two public footpaths run across the site, but many other footpaths have been created by walkers throughout the site as visitors have enjoyed open access for many years.

There are signs at some access points to indicate that cycles, motor vehicles and horses are not allowed on site, but the access points have not been designed to prevent this. In fact, the FOHW requested some access points be widened to improve access for wheelchair and pushchair users. There have been occasional reports of motorcycles and horse riders on site, but this has not been a major problem to date. Cycle use has become more frequent and this is an issue to be monitored as bike tracks can cause damage to footpaths and habitats.

FOHW have been approached to support a project to complete a cycle route from Fountains Abbey, through Hell Wath into Ripon and beyond to Newby Hall. At a committee meeting the FOHW gave reserved support to the principle of a cycle route, whilst acknowledging this would raise significant management issues for the site which would need to be addressed before approval could be given. FOHW will not progress this further unless a formal project proposal from a reputable organisation is put forward.

FOHW noted that there was strong resistance to the idea of cycling and tarmac paths on Hell Wath voiced at the Public Meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022. FOHW reassured the meeting that there were no plans to construct a cycle path on Hell Wath, and no plans to construct any tarmac paths on Hell Wath. Any proposals made by a third party to introduce a cycle route across Hell Wath would require planning permission and full public consultation.

Improvements to the surface of the cinder track running from Hell Wath Cottage is included in the Skell Valley Project, together with some levelling of footpath surfaces to make access easier for visitors with impaired mobility. These works will be consulted on prior to being undertaken.

There are five access points to Hell Wath;

- North access from High Cleugh ( via footbridge ) and Borrage Lane  
 Part of this footpath was re-surfaced by North Yorkshire County Council in July 2019 as it had become very uneven and muddy. This forms part of the 'green route' into Ripon so is an important footpath to maintain.  
 The Giant Steps link this access point to Whitcliffe Lane. These steps have been the subject of maintenance work undertaken by volunteers with materials provided by Harrogate Borough Council. These steps will continue to be maintained as necessary.
- East access from Whitcliffe Lane  
 Known locally as the 'Choir School Path' the access point was widened by Harrogate Borough Council to enable wheelchair and pushchair access in June 2019.  
 Forming an important part of the 'green route' into Ripon, this footpath was re-surfaced with crushed limestone by Harrogate Borough Council, part funded by Ripon City Council in August 2019.
- South-east from Hell Wath Grove and car park  
 The boundary fence was replaced and the access point was widened by Harrogate Borough Council to enable wheelchair and pushchair access in June 2019.  
 FOHW are aware that the footpath is uneven and muddy at the access point and have noted this for future action.
- South from Hell Wath Lane car park and Ripon Panthers car park  
 Part of the boundary is closed off by fence and hedging, part is open access with vehicular access prevented by bollards and a secure gate to the Ripon Panthers car park.  
 FOHW have noted that the fencing is in a state of disrepair and will need to be replaced at some future date.  
 FOHW have noted that there is no designated disabled parking at this location and no easy access to Hell Wath for disabled users, unless the barrier is open.
- South-west from Hell Wath Lane  
 A cinder track runs from the bottom of Hell Wath Lane into the Hell Wath site. This used to be the base of a railway line that serviced the Army camp in World War 1. Vehicular access is prevented by a large stone placed in the middle of the track at the access point. This track has been identified as a route which could be used to improve access to lower reaches of Hell Wath for visitors with mobility issues. Re-surfacing the track and some levelling of grass paths at the end of the tracks have been identified for work within the Skell Valley Project. The plans will be made available for public comment in advance of work being undertaken.

### Footpaths

Many footpaths have been created by visitors criss-crossing open areas of the site and meandering through the scrub and woodland areas. Whilst visitors are able to use these paths to enjoy the site, such access can cause issues that need to be managed. Some paths are so well used that vegetation cover has been worn away leaving underlying soil open to erosion. Acute problems can arise on slopes where the action of rainfall increases erosion caused by footfall. Over the years several sets of wooden steps have been installed on slopes within Hell Wath to make slopes easier to navigate and minimise erosion but there are a number of places where further action is needed, particularly on slopes leading down the river, and along the river bank itself.

Many footpaths run through the Local Nature Reserve and an assessment is needed to understand the impact of such footpaths on sensitive and important habitats and appropriate action taken to conserve the landscape and habitat where deemed necessary. Care will be needed if footpaths within the site need closed or re-routed as local residents are used to enjoying access to the whole site without hindrance.

### Dog Fouling

Dog walkers are the main users of Hell Wath throughout the year who enjoy exercising their dogs off the leash. Whilst most dog walkers are responsible and pick up after their animals, dog fouling is an issue across the site caused by irresponsible or careless dog walkers. There are notices at each entrance to the site advising visitors of the need for dog walkers to clear up after their animals. Dog waste bins are provided and regularly emptied by Harrogate Borough Council.



The FOHW organise some dog fouling awareness and clearance activities and there are a number of responsible dog walkers who voluntarily pick up dog waste from around the site on their walks. However, dog fouling remains an issue to which a solution has yet to be found.

#### Litter

Hell Wath is enjoyed by many people throughout the year. There are notices at some access points advising visitors to pick up their litter, but there is always an element of littering that takes place with some particular 'hot spots' such as the Hell Wath Lane car park, the Choir School path and a clearance in the woods used by young people for social gatherings.

The FOHW organise litter picks on a regular basis. These have been well attended and raise awareness of the issue. There are now several individuals committed to picking litter on their daily walks. The work of these individuals is much appreciated.

#### Invasive Species

Hell Wath is a haven for native species of flora and fauna and action is needed to control any non-native species identified within the site, particularly within the Local Nature Reserve.

The most prolific of these, and the most difficult to control, is Himalayan balsam, which is found along the riverbank and is beginning to spread inland up into the grasslands and hedgerows. There is no natural way to control this annual plant, so management of this invasive species requires manual effort. The FOHW organise Balsam Bashes during the summer months and some visitors voluntarily pull up plants on their walks around the site, but no effective system of eradicating Himalayan balsam has been identified to date. FOHW have been made aware of a project to test the use of a non-native rust fungus which targets and inhibits growth of Himalayan Balsam. This will be explored as a potential solution to the problem.

For more information see: <https://www.cabi.org/projects/biological-control-of-himalayan-balsam/>

Other invasive species, such as cotoneaster and Spanish bluebell have been identified on site and removal of such species by digging them out will be included as part of the FOHW ongoing maintenance activities.

#### Management Issues Specific to the Recreation Area

Ripon City Panthers Junior Football Club is a key user of the recreational area of Hell Wath during the football season. The football pitches are not enclosed and the playing fields are enjoyed by dog walkers and leisure visitors throughout the year. This gives rise to a number of specific management issues.

#### Dog Fouling

As noted above this is an issue across the site, but is a particular problem for the football pitches as the safety of players, officials and spectators is a matter of concern.

#### Footpaths

Site visitors have enjoyed unfettered access to the recreational area and footpaths criss-cross the open space. Access across the football pitches has previously been managed by closure of gaps in surrounding hedgerows to guide walkers to more defined footpaths around the pitches. This will continue with the use of new fencing and hedgerow planting as required.

Due to growth of the club, Ripon Panthers have secured permission from Tarmac to site an additional football pitch on one of the playing fields. This will require the levelling and re-routing of a footpath that currently runs across the area of the new pitch.

#### Car Parking

Secure car parking is available in front of the Ripon Panther clubhouse. This is only open for football matches and events to provide additional car parking space. Two areas of hard surface car parking are available for all visitors, one off Hell Wath Lane and one off Hell Wath Grove. These car parking areas are insufficient for busy match days when many cars are found parked on nearby grass verges or residential streets. In the past this has caused issues with local residents and car parking has been voluntarily restricted on Hell Wath Grove as a result.

FOHW have also raised the issue of disabled access from the Hell Wath Lane car park. HBC have acknowledged that this needs to be improved and will incorporate this into their plans.

A small section of the recreational area is opened up for car parking when events are held on site and additional capacity is required.

#### Habitat Conservation Issues

One of the FOHW objectives documented in the Constitution is to:

*'Preserve the 'wild' nature of Hell Wath and actively encourage native species of plants, animals, birds and insects to thrive in the environment of Hell Wath.'*

Whilst in the past there have been a number of limited surveys to identify native species and to document the diverse habitats of Hell Wath there has been little, if any, active management of those habitats to encourage the native wildlife to thrive.

The FOHW are committed to identifying action that can be taken to protect and improve the existing habitats of Hell Wath, particularly within the Local Nature Reserve to encourage the diversity and numbers of native species. The FOHW are also committed to re-instating habitats where possible to revive areas that have been neglected or abandoned in the past.

This will provide opportunities for additional native species to re-colonise areas within Hell Wath. Examples of this are the digging out of an old pond that had become silted up to provide a still water environment, the clearance of blackthorn scrub from grasslands and the potential clearance of an old quarry area to provide the right conditions for chalk and limestone based plant species to thrive.

The FOHW will seek out knowledgeable organisations to identify the potential to protect, improve and create wildlife habitats to encourage native species to thrive. Once identified, the FOHW will work with its Stakeholders to undertake the work required and to ensure habitat maintenance is completed on a regular basis.

## **Section 6 - Policy Aims and Objectives**

### Vision for the site

The long term vision for Hell Wath can be encapsulated by the following key statements:

- To enhance the maintenance and management of Hell Wath to benefit the people of Ripon.
- To encourage all recreational visitors to be responsible visitors by providing facilities and information at relevant locations and educating them on the special nature of Hell Wath and how they can help maintain it for future generations.
- To preserve the 'wild' nature of Hell Wath and actively encourage native species of plants, animals, birds and insects to thrive in the environment of Hell Wath.
- To provide safe access for all to the site without damaging the natural and historical features of the site.

### Philosophy of conservation

The long term vision for Hell Wath recognises the need to balance conservation and development of the site's valuable resources.

The aim is to protect, preserve and enhance Hell Wath, giving due consideration to its history, whilst seeking to correct any significant changes that have a negative impact on Hell Wath's landscape and natural resources. For example:

- The removal of scrub which is encroaching into important grassland habitat.
- The replanting of hedgerow trees to fill gaps in current hedgerows
- The removal of invasive species

The identification of such actions will always be based on external specialist advice which will be sought to evaluate the site and identify areas or aspects for action.

FOHW have identified the need to draft some conservation policies in relation to specific habitats. The purpose of these would be to guide future habitat management across Hell Wath. These policies will provide a consistent long term approach to works and activities on Hell Wath with the objective of improving habitats to encourage native species of flora and fauna to thrive. FOHW will seek to draft these policies during 2023 with input from individuals and organisations who have knowledge, experience and expertise in the relevant areas. Habitat policy areas identified are:

- Trees ( with particular reference to Harrogate Borough Council's tree policy )
- Hedgerows
- Field margins
- Grasslands
- Pond
- River

### Policy Context

Note: Responsibilities for these policies will transfer to the new unitary authority, North Yorkshire Council, in 2023. FOHW will take steps to engage with the new authority and continue to engage with Ripon City Council to ensure the effective management of Hell Wath is secured.

- Hell Wath is not subject to any statutory regulations or conditions other than local planning policy under Harrogate Borough Council.
- Hell Wath lies within the Ripon City boundary and so is included in the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan, which was approved following a local referendum in 2019. Hell Wath is listed as an area to be protected and as part of Clean Air route planning to and from Ripon city centre ( noted in Section 4 – Assessment of the Significance of Hell Wath Resources).
- The lease from Tarmac Limited, under which Hell Wath is held by Harrogate Borough Council, places restrictions on the use and management of the site ( noted in Section 3 – Understanding The Site). These are designed to 'maintain the site for open public access; to conserve and enhance the wild life value of the site, and to conserve and enhance the landscape character of the site.' This is reflected in the objectives and constitution of the Friends of Hell Wath.

- The River Skell (which forms the western boundary of Hell Wath) is designated an 'ordinary water course' and needs to be managed under the authority of North Yorkshire County Council. The Environment Agency are recognised as an important regulatory authority for main rivers and their guidelines will be to ensure best practice is applied to maintain the River Skell habitats and protect the species of flora and fauna found in and around the river course.
- In 2022 the Friends of Hell Wath became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered with the Charities Commission ( registration number 1195980 ). The FOHW is now subject to regulation by the Charities Commission and has a legal obligation to ensure the organisation has the required policies and procedures in place. Copies of these are included at Appendix S6A.

### General policies

The FOHW operates within the policy framework of the leaseholder, Harrogate Borough Council, exercised by working closely with the HBC Countryside Ranger. Key decisions affecting the nature, operation or management of the site are referred to both the landowner, Tarmac Limited, and the leaseholder, Harrogate Borough Council for approval. Examples of policy areas that are generally applied are:

1. Define appropriate uses
2. Plan for disasters
3. Security of the site (the site is open ground with no current access for bicycles and horses and no access for vehicles other than those used for maintenance).
4. Compliance with all statutory regulations including Healthy and safety, disability access.
5. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
6. Heritage and Environmental Protection
7. Conflict and compliance resolution

Whilst there are no formal policies in place to regulate activities undertaken by the FOHW on the Hell Wath site, since September 2017 the constitution of the FOHW has been adopted as the key driver and guide for all activities (See Appendix S3C for the Community Voluntary Group, superseded by Appendix S3D for the Charitable Incorporated Organisation). The Constitution is augmented by The Management Plan.

In addition, participation, by invitation of the National Trust (Fountains Abbey), in a successful National Heritage Lottery bid for the River Skell Corridor project requires the FOHW to work within additional policy guidelines to secure funding and complete activities. The FOHW is committed to working with the National Trust as this project is delivering significant benefits to the Hell Wath site.

### FOHW Funding, Record Keeping and Communication

The FOHW seeks funding from donations and grants, which may be secured for general expenditure or for specific projects. The FOHW operate a dedicated bank account to manage income and expenditure, with access limited to approved signatories. The Treasurer of the FOHW maintains accounts that are reported to the Committee/Trustees at every meeting and annually at the Annual General Meeting. As a charity, FOHW will need to prepare and file annual accounts with the Charities Commission.

Projects will only take place when funds have been secured for the work and the proposed works must have been identified as a priority before funding has been sought. Work will not be undertaken just because money is available, but because the works is in line with site policies and objectives.

All expenditure is authorised, in advance, by the Committee/Trustees and this is recorded in the minutes of meetings. The Treasurer acts to ensure that grant expenditure is in line with the grant conditions and the Treasurer will report on this expenditure, where required, to the grant provider.

The FOHW produce activity specific risk assessments for every activity they undertake, supported by Public Liability insurance for up to 500 volunteers at any one time. Risk assessments are reviewed after each activity/event to ensure that all lessons are learned where needed.

Documents and records relating to FOHW policies, procedures and activities are maintained by the Secretary, filed electronically and currently made available to the public via the Facebook page. FOHW intend to develop a website to improve information about the Hell Wath site and FOHW activities. This will included development of an online archive to hold all historic and current public documents, records and images. This will include the minutes of all meetings and risk assessments.

The archive, in combination with the FOHW social media accounts will ensure all Stakeholders have access to all the information available as well as details of upcoming events. All those who have agreed to be included on our distribution list will also get full information by email (or by hand if they do not have an email account). To ensure compliance with GDPR best practice all those included in our distribution will be invited annually to reconfirm their wish to remain on the list.

FOHW social media accounts are: Facebook: [www.facebook.com/fohwadmin/](https://www.facebook.com/fohwadmin/) and Twitter: [/twitter.com/fowath](https://twitter.com/fowath)

### Ecological Data

The Hell Wath site has been divided into 8 zones through a recent broad ecological report produced for the FOHW by ecologist, Stephen Morley on behalf of the National Trust (Fountains Abbey) (See Appendix S4C). These zones have been formally adopted by the FOHW to provide clear guidance and direction for all maintenance activities.

The FOHW have worked with the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Group (NEYEDG) who have assisted in the survey of Hell Wath.

The NEYEDG assisted with the running of a successful Bioblitz event on Hell Wath in July 2019 which encouraged volunteers to participate in the identification of flora and fauna across the site. The results are summarised in Appendix S6B. The NEYEDG planned to offer free training and education into their research methods in our locality, but this did not happen due to Covid. The FOHW are now working with the Skell Valley Project and plan to undertake an annual detailed survey of one aspect of Hell Wath flora and fauna each summer (or other season if appropriate). Initially this will target aspects that were not studied in enough detail in July 2019 or will build on existing studies such as the 2008 Water Beetle study (See Appendix S4B). This model will also form the FOHW approach to learning opportunities. As with the Bioblitz event each one of these activities will include the chance for community participation and interaction with an expert in their field. The first of these activities, the Butterfly Transect project, was initiated in April 2022. This involves volunteers covering a predetermined route once a week from April through to August, recording the butterfly species observed. It is intended to run this each year to provide a measure of butterfly populations over time.

#### Improving Access

Some actions have already been taken, such as the widening of some site access points re-surfacing the Choir School path and reconstructing the footpaths from the rustic bridge through to the Fairy Steps. FOHW believe further improvements can be made to improve access without changing the wild nature of the site.

FOHW are working with Disability Action Yorkshire and the Skell Valley Project to develop policies and proposals to improve safe access to the site for all. These will be used to draft an Accessibility Plan for the site.

#### Improving Information & Education

Very little information about the history and ecology of Hell Wath is currently available on site to enable visitors to discover its hidden gems.

FOHW recognise there is an opportunity to provide valuable information to educate visitors and engage with the local community, particularly primary and secondary schools. Funds are available within the scope of the Skell Valley Project to enable the development of interpretation boards. FOHW will need to gain permission from relevant parties to locate these at relevant points on site. These boards will help visitors understand the landscape and nature of Hell Wath and appreciate the sites' World War 1 history. The same information will also be made available electronically via the FOHW social media sites.

## **Section 7 – Action Plan**

The natural and historical assets of Hell Wath have been identified and an assessment of their significance and their vulnerabilities has been made and documented in this Management Plan.

To protect these valuable resources and secure the long-term future of the site, the FOHW drafted a comprehensive Action Plan designed to engage all stakeholders in the maintenance, retention, restoration and enhancement of its important assets. This Action Plan forms an important and integral part of The Management Plan and is regularly reviewed and updated. The original Action Plan is set out in detail in Appendix S7A and the current Action Plan as at November 2022 is set out at Appendix S7B

In summary, the Action Plan identifies key issues and presents the actions and resources needed to successfully address each of the five key site management issues identified:

1. Maintenance
2. Ecological Protection and Enhancement
3. Historical Features
4. Community Engagement
5. Accessibility

The FOHW will use the Action Plan proactively to ensure future decisions, activities and actions contribute to success in one or more of the key issues. Progress against the Action Plan will be reported at each Annual General Meeting of the FOHW and the content of the Action Plan will be formally reviewed together with The Management Plan to ensure it remains relevant.

## **Section 8 - Maintenance Schedule**

Ongoing maintenance of Hell Wath is a key issue identified in The Action Plan as noted above.

Maintenance of the Hell Wath site is the responsibility of Harrogate Borough Council, but the FOHW have an active role in how this is implemented and can initiate new work with the agreement of HBC (and the site owner, Tarmac), with all works undertaken with appropriate approval (noted in Section 5 – Management Issues and Site Vulnerabilities

In addition to the maintenance works undertaken by Harrogate Borough Council, the FOHW organises volunteer maintenance events, such as litter picking, to help look after Hell Wath. Previously organised on an ad hoc basis these will in future scheduled as an activity in the Action Plan with timings of each activity planned by the Members Activity Group.

An annual site walk will be undertaken in April each year by the HBC Countryside Ranger and members of the FOHW committee to assess and identify any areas of concern or potential improvement such as:

- Locations of invasive plant growth
- Locations of dead, dying or damaged trees and hedgerow plants
- Footpath quality
- Accessibility issues
- Areas of youth activity and rough sleeping
- Boundary damage

The Action Plan will be updated following review of the outcomes of the annual site walk.

Specialist maintenance activities are only undertaken under the supervision of the HBC Countryside Ranger responsible for Hell Wath. Specialist work, such as tree pruning and scrub clearance, may be contracted out by HBC. The advice of external specialists will always be sought to ensure work complements the Hell Wath habitat and is in keeping with the agreed objectives of the FOHW.