

Hell Wath 2026

Management Plan



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 local residents and visitors alike. 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 2026 Management Plan acknowledges the huge amount of work that has already been undertaken, but also recognises the ongoing challenges and the work that needs to be undertaken in future if the recreational enjoyment of Hell Wath is to be balanced with conservation and enhancement of its historical and natural assets.

This 2026 Management Plan builds on the knowledge and experience gained by the Friends of Hell Wath since its inception in September 2017. Whilst it includes information to enable any new reader to understand the context of Hell Wath and historical site management, it does not repeat all the historical information included in previous Management Plans (published in 2019, updated in 2022). Rather it seeks to set out the key areas of focus for FOHW and the principles the Trustees will use to guide their future decision-making.

FOHW believe that managing the site in accordance with this 2026 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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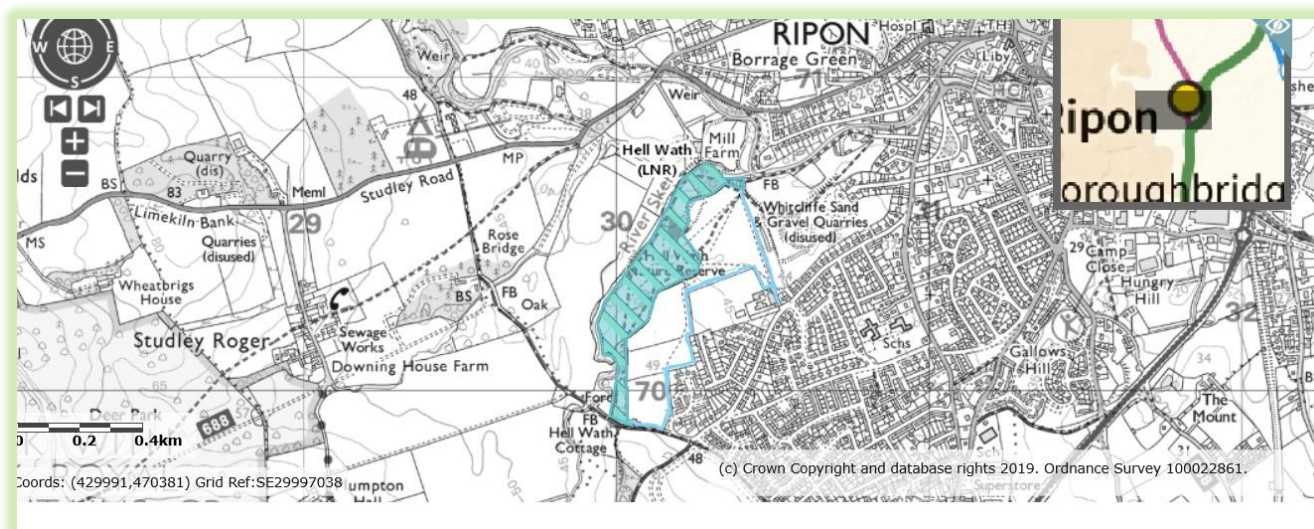
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Hell Wath – Location and Extent

Hell Wath is a 27.1 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 Ltd since 1997. The lease was assigned to North Yorkshire Council on 1st April 2024 as a result of a local government restructure.

The terms of the lease require the leaseholder 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 large 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.



Hell Wath - Location & Historical Context

An Introduction to Hell Wath and the Local Area

Hell Wath is a 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 supposedly been maintained without fail for over 1,100 years.

More information at: <https://visitripon.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: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/yorkshire/fountains-abbey-and-studley-royal-water-garden>

Hell Wath - Historic Points of Note

Agriculture

At one time Hell Wath was part of a 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. It remained here for over forty years when the racecourse was moved to it’s 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 and was completed in 2025.

River

The 12 mile long River Skell originates in the Nidderdale National Landscape 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 19th 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 constant 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 a plaque 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. The original iron plaque was lost, but replaced with a replica produced from a new cast as part of the Skell Valley Project. The new cast will be sent to the Fountains Abbey archive for safekeeping.

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 of 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. 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 the management plan should include conservation of the Fairy Steps to make sure the important story of Hell Wath during WW1 is not forgotten.

Captain Wilfred Owen, the poet, was posted to Ripon where some of his most important war poems were written in rooms in a cottage on 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 1950s. 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 1970s. The decision by this company to proceed with sand and gravel extraction in the late 1970s 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 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 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 29th 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.

A copy of the lease agreement can be seen at Appendix A.

Valued 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, North Yorkshire Council who are charged with maintaining Hell Wath as an open recreational and amenity space to the residents of Ripon.



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 B.

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.

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.riponcity.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/rcp-final-plan-2019-webpage.pdf>

The 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 was recognised as a key element of the Skell Corridor project with important historical, natural and recreational resources. FOHW had 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 benefited 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.

Information about the Skell Valley Project can be found at:

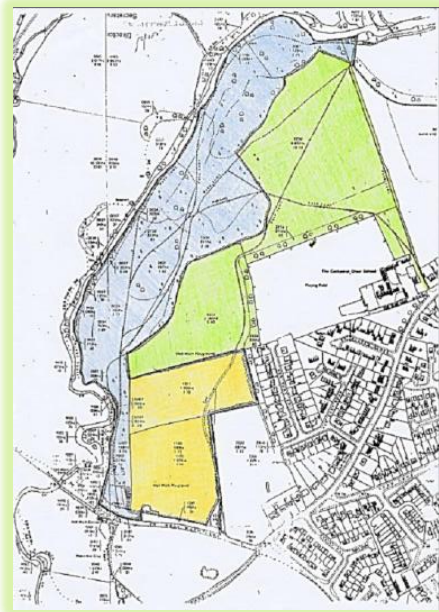
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/yorkshire/fountains-abbey-and-studley-royal-water-garden/skell-valley-project-at-fountains-abbey-and-studley-royal>

Hell Wath Site Management to 2025

It is essential to acknowledge the overriding objectives and obligations the leaseholder has in relation to Hell Wath. FOHW can only propose and undertake work and activities on Hell Wath that are approved by the leaseholder, North Yorkshire Council.

Leaseholder Obligations

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 (see Appendix A) requires the leaseholder 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.

Hell Wath Management from 1986 to 2017

Since the lease commenced in September 1986, the leaseholder (Harrogate Borough Council then North Yorkshire County Council) has been responsible for the ongoing care and maintenance of Hell Wath in accordance with their leaseholder obligations.

A five-year Management Plan was commissioned in 1989 but no records have been found to verify the implementation of that plan from 1989 to 1994. 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 the leaseholder has undertaken various maintenance works during this period, which included:

- Regular mowing, aeration and seed sowing on the recreational playing fields
- Cutting & baling of hay meadows in late summer (completion subject to contractor availability 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

Ongoing pressure on Council resources meant little attention was paid to other areas of Hell Wath until 2017.

Hell Wath Management from 2017 to 2025

In September 2017 a Community Voluntary Group (CVG) was formed for the public benefit, This CVG was named the Friends of Hell Wath (FOHW) and was established with a formal Constitution and a committee comprising a Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. Working with Countryside Rangers from Harrogate Borough Council (HBC), FOHW organised volunteering activities to help with the maintenance of Hell Wath. HBC provided resources (manpower and equipment) and Ripon City Council provided grants to fund some activities. These activities started out as 'low key' activities such as, litter picking, tackling dog fouling, Himalayan Balsam clearance and hedge planting.

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' (SVP). The aim of this project was to improve the landscape and flood management 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.

Hell Wath was identified as an important part of the River Skell corridor being of historical, natural and recreational significance. To support applications for funds and projects within the Hell Wath site, FOHW identified the need to extend the objectives contained in their Constitution and prepared a five-year management plan. This was reviewed and signed off by key stakeholders, including the leaseholder, and published in 2019. The 2019 Management Plan marked the beginning of FOHW taking a more active role in identifying projects to be undertaken on Hell Wath and proposing those projects to the leaseholder for support and action. FOHW continued with their volunteering activities during this period seeking to maintain and improve key habitats across the site. These activities included, tree & hedge planting, bulb planting, wildflower seeding, grass scything and baling, extensive Himalayan balsam control as well as the introduction of butterfly monitoring, bat monitoring, plant surveys and fungi surveys. The Management Plan was updated in 2022 (see Appendix C).

On 1st March 2021 the Charities Commission approved the setting up of the Friends of Hell Wath as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), charity no 1195980. The CIO is governed by five elected Trustees and its purpose is contained within a formal Constitution (see Appendix D).

Fully supported by HBC, the four-year Skell Valley project began in September 2021. This enabled the completion of several large-scale projects on Hell Wath, including extensive scrub clearance, grass cutting, fencing, tree & hedge planting, re-surfacing tracks and pathways.

The Skell Valley Project provided management, funding and manpower enabling these works to be completed in collaboration with HBC and FOHW. HBC continued to support Hell Wath with manpower and equipment and Ripon City Council continued their support with grants to fund FOHW activities. The Skell Valley Project was successfully completed in May 2025.

In June 2024 FOHW partnered with the charity Plantlife to begin a two-year project to understand the current state of Hell Wath's grassland areas and how they could be better managed and improved. The objective of the project was to identify any areas that had the potential to be established as wood meadows, which are diverse and important ecosystems made up of wildflower meadows and wooded areas. Grassland surveys were undertaken and two test sites were identified and fenced off to promote the growth of dormant seeds and perennial plants and to prevent rabbit grazing. Additional sites around the edges of woodland were also identified for ongoing regular scything and Himalayan Balsam control to promote native plant growth. The project was formally completed in 2025, but the work remains ongoing. To find out more about Plantlife see: <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>

This brings FOHW and the management of Hell Wath to the end of 2025.

2026 Management Plan Development (2026MP)

The overriding objectives of the Friends of Hell Wath as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation are set out in the constitution as:

To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the area known as Hell Wath, in Ripon, for the benefit of the general public including in particular by:

- a) Protecting the natural beauty of the area*
- b) Maintaining and improving access to the area and facilities within the area*
- c) Promoting biodiversity in the area*
- d) Increasing public awareness and education of the area and its conservation, protection and enhancements, and reflecting the opinions and concerns of the wider community in relation to the area*
- e) Working with other groups that have an interest in, control over or responsibility for the area in furtherance of these objects, including relevant public authorities and other local community groups*

The Trustees, members and volunteers associated with FOHW will use their best endeavours to meet these objectives over the 10 year period of this 2026MP. 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, North Yorkshire Council, to maintain the site in accordance with these objectives. FOHW have also established an ongoing working relationship with the National Trust through participation in the Skell Valley Project. Tarmac, North Yorkshire Council and the National Trust are supportive of FOHW and have approved their Constitution which seeks to complement both the long term and short-term maintenance objectives for Hell Wath. There is an open invitation to these organisations to participate in the governance of FOHW through attendance at Trustee meetings and Members Activity Group Meetings.

The Management Plan from 2019 was intended to be a five-year plan, including a review in 2022, which was completed and published.

No further changes were made to that Management Plan, which continued to be used as the basis for FOHW's involvement in Hell Wath site management until the completion and adoption of this 2026MP.

In 2021 the Local Council and FOHW began working with the Skell Valley Project to undertake a series of projects on Hell Wath. This project was completed in 2025. During 2024 FOHW began working with Plantlife UK on a project to improve the grasslands and also commissioned an initial review of the state of the hedgerows and woodlands on the Hell Wath site.

As these projects have now been completed, the Trustees of FOHW have taken responsibility for producing this 2026MP to guide them in their future decision making and help them achieve the objectives of the CIO.

Review Process

Development of the 2026MP proceeded as follows. A draft was produced by the Treasurer and submitted for review by the Trustees. Following review and updates the 2026MP was submitted to the members of FOHW and North Yorkshire Council. Following their review and updates a final version of the 2026MP was published and made available to key stakeholders, interested parties and the general public.

Key Stakeholders and Interested Parties

Key Stakeholders	Interest in Hell Wath
Tarmac Limited	Current owners of the land
North Yorkshire County Council	Lease holders for Hell Wath and Planning Authority
Ripon City Council	Local Government Authority
Members of the Friends of Hell Wath	Registered members of the group that will implement the plan and the source of most volunteers for activity days
Ripon City Panthers Football Club	Key user of the Hell Wath playing fields and clubhouse
The National Trust (Fountains Abbey)	Lead organisation in Skell Valley Project and the ongoing provider of support via the National Trust Ranger and National Trust Volunteers
Interested Parties	Interest in Hell Wath
The Environment Agency	Regulatory authority for the River Skell.
Moorside Primary School and Nursery	Local primary school
Ripon Disability Forum	An FOHW member liaises with this group working to improve access to Hell Wath and the city as a whole.
Local Residents bordering Hell Wath	Properties that look out onto Hell Wath. Likely regular users and potential supports and volunteers
Ripon residents as a whole	Many use the site for walking and dog walking, including access to and from the city centre
Plantlife UK and Project Sites	Have funded a project to improve the grassland habitats of Hell Wath. Continue to be a source of knowledge, expertise and potential resources
Nidderdale AONB	Partner organisation to the Skell Valley Project. Continue to be a source of knowledge, expertise and potential resources
North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Group	Have contributed to the survey and analysis of the biodiversity found across Hell Wath. Continue to be a source of knowledge, expertise and potential resources
North Yorkshire Bat Group	Have provided resources to enable the monitoring of bats on Hell Wath
Ripon Archaeological and History Tribe	Have provided resources to enable archeological digs to be undertaken on Hell Wath
Outdoor Adventures Forest School	Have previously been commissioned to provide a summer activity day on Hell Wath

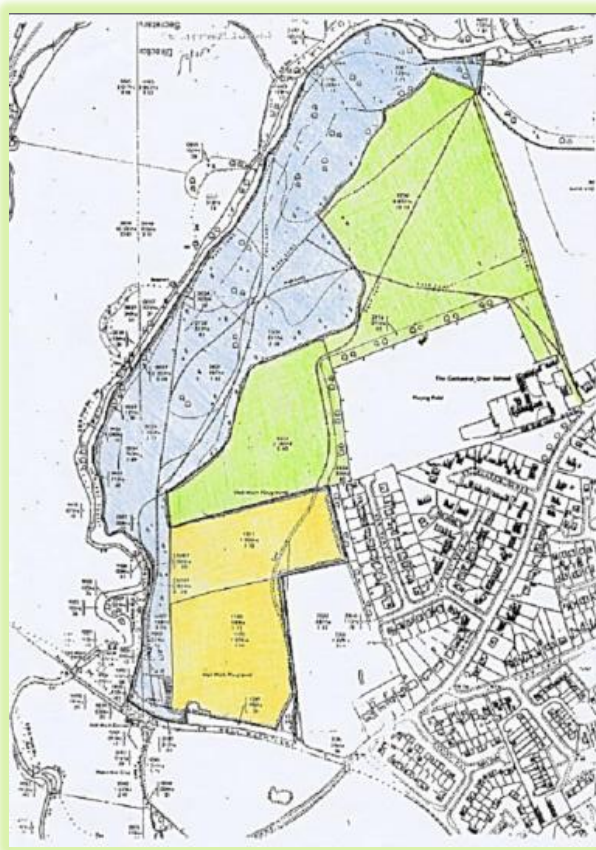
Focussing FOHW Resources

It is important at the outset to state that FOHW are limited in the extent of work they can carry out on Hell Wath. The 2026MP would look very different if FOHW had complete authority, and the resources, to manage Hell Wath for the next 10 years and beyond – but it does not.

So, this 2026MP is intended to focus efforts on areas of Hell Wath where FOHW can make a difference, and on activities FOHW can realistically undertake. Reference will be made to additional activities that could be undertaken to improve areas of Hell Wath and enhance wildlife habitats, but these would be subject to approval from the leaseholder, North Yorkshire Council and subject to resources being found to complete such projects.

2026 Management Plan By Area

To identify general areas of Hell Wath, this 2026MP will refer to the Recreational Area, Amenity Area and Local Nature Reserve Areas identified in the map below.

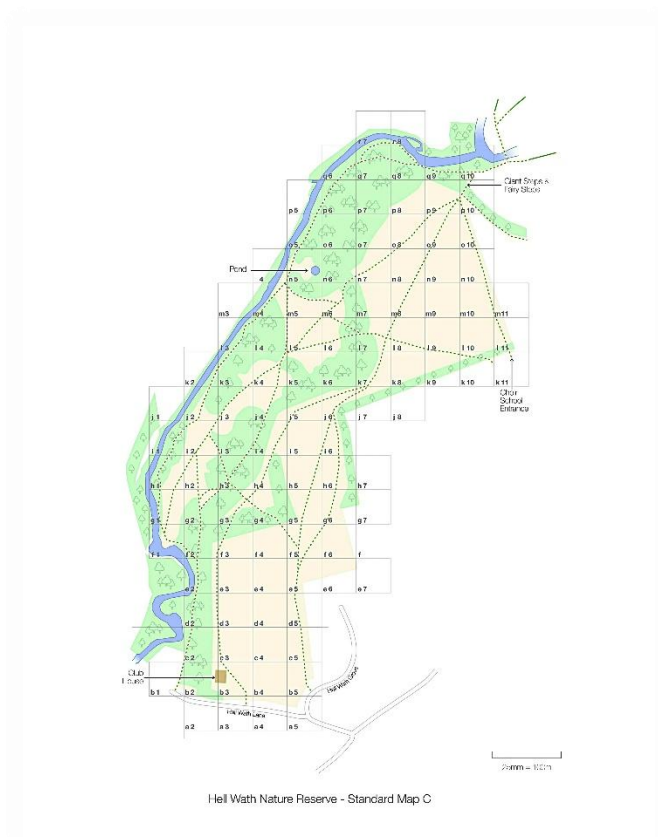
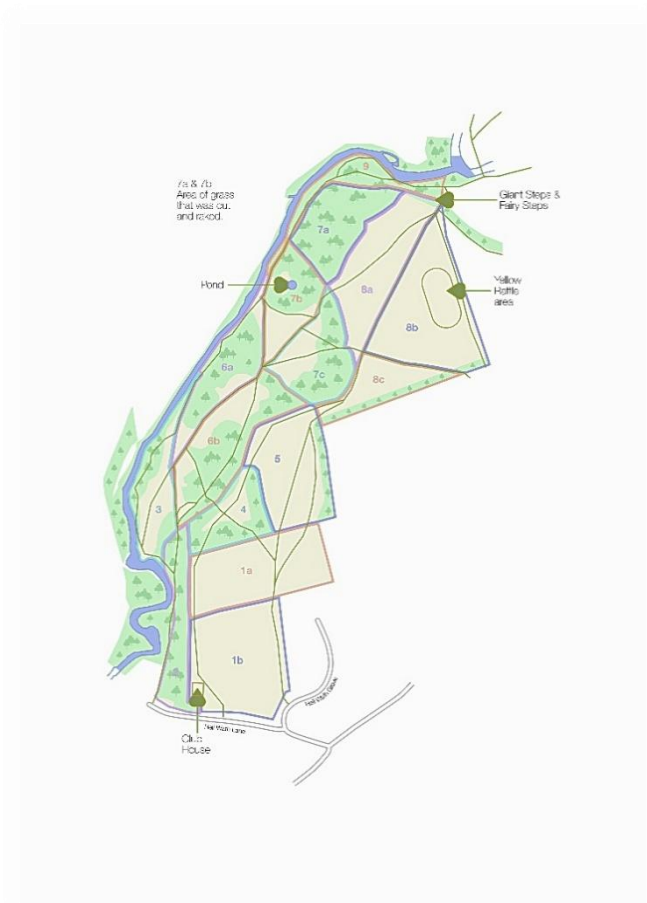


- Amenity Area
- Part of Amenity Area designated as a Local Nature Reserve
- Recreational Area

Specific parts of the site will be identified using the labelled areas or the grid square numbers marked on the following maps. Full sized maps are available at Appendix E (Area Map) and Appendix F (Grid Map).

Hell Wath Area Map

Hell Wath Grid Map



Recreational Area



This area comprises two level playing fields surrounded and divided by mature mixed hedgerows and trees. It is an important recreational area used by Ripon City Panthers Junior Football Club (www.riponcitypanthersjfc.co.uk). The recreational area is mainly rye grass which is regularly mown by the North Yorkshire Council during the football season and occasionally during the summer. They also aerate the soil and sow new seed during the off season.



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 for 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 a community defibrillator located on outside wall of the clubhouse as well as a community noticeboard.

Maintenance of the clubhouse and car park is the responsibility of North Yorkshire Council.

A mobile coffee van, Lotties, has permission to operate from the car park and is open from early morning to early afternoon every day (except Mondays). Lotties not only serves beverages, but it has become a focal point for site users who get together for a chat. Lottie is very supportive of FOHW, giving information on upcoming activities to customers and advising FOHW if customers notify her of site issues that need to be dealt with.

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 Ripon Panthers, dog walkers and leisure visitors accessing the local footpaths. There are also a couple of fun runs which use Hell Wath and the Ripon Panthers clubhouse as a base: the 'Ripon 10 Mile' in May and the 'Jolly Holly Jog' in December.

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 North Yorkshire Council. However, dog waste left by irresponsible dog walkers continues to be an ongoing problem, particularly for Ripon Panthers who have to scour and clear the pitches and surrounding areas before football can be played.

FOHW Planned Activities in the Recreational Area

Whilst FOHW have no active role in the maintenance of the playing fields, the following activities will be undertaken to help maintain the boundary trees, hedgerows and shrubby areas as these provide valuable habitats and wildlife corridors.

- Himalayan Balsam control
- Litter picks
- Dog fouling awareness
- Plant surveys
- Fungi surveys
- Bat Surveys
- Butterfly surveys
- Erecting boundary fences to protect habitats and guide site visitors where necessary
- Planting new hedgerow saplings to fill gaps and provide new habitats where needed
- Maintenance of hedgerows, including trimming, coppicing and layering



Note: Management of the mature trees surrounding the recreational area remain the responsibility of North Yorkshire Council. FOHW will report any issues arising for action and put forward proposals for any specific activities, such as thinning out, coppicing, bough removal, felling etc, which will require approval.

Amenity Area

This section of the 2026MP refers to the Amenity Area **excluding** the Local Nature Reserve. On the area map these areas are: 8a; 8b; 8c; 5 & 4

Amenity Areas 8a;8b & 8c



Taken together these areas can best be described as an open grassland meadow surrounded by hedgerows interspersed with mature trees.

A crushed stone footpath runs down the boundary from Whitcliffe Lane to the top of the Giant Steps and the south side of the boundary is open to the Choir School residential estate through a narrow ribbon of woodland. The area is criss-crossed by informal footpaths, used mainly by dog walkers who use them to navigate the meadow to exercise their dogs off the leash and for access to the Local Nature Reserve.

Under the terms of the lease agreement, these meadows should be mowed once a year at the end of summer. The cut grass should then be dried, baled and removed from site. Such a mowing regime would ensure the meadows retained their 'hay meadow' characteristics, being full of a wide range of native grasses and wildflower species, in turn supporting a diverse range of insects and invertebrates providing food for small mammals and birds.

This mowing regime has not been fully implemented for many years because of the cost and availability of contractors to do the work. This has led to slow deterioration of the grassland quality.

The question raised as part of the 2026MP is: Could these grasslands be restored?
The answer is yes, but not with the resources available.

In an ideal world, grazing animals would be introduced to this area to restore the grasslands, but this is not currently deemed possible due to the 'open access' nature of Hell Wath. The next most effective method would be the re-introduction of an annual mowing, baling and removal regime, but this is not deemed possible with the resources currently available. The size of the meadows would require a mechanical mower, followed by a mechanical baler, followed by mechanical removal of the bales. Even if a contractor could be found to complete this work at the end of each summer, the cost would be beyond the means of FOHW and North Yorkshire Council.

FOHW Planned Activities in the Amenity Area 8a,8b & 8c

In the past FOHW have completed small scale projects on these grassland areas, such as hand scything and baling, wildflower seed, and plug planting. These have had little effect on improving the grassland habitats, mainly due to their scale.

FOHW have reached the conclusion that further limited activities on these grasslands would be unlikely to deliver significant benefits. FOHW will instead focus resources on maintenance of the boundary trees & hedgerows and the development of existing tree copses to provide habitat, food and shelter for birds, bats and small mammals.

FOHW will continue to include this amenity area in these ongoing activities:

- Himalayan Balsam control
- Litter picks
- Dog fouling awareness
- Plant surveys
- Fungi surveys

- Bat Surveys
- Butterfly surveys
- Erecting boundary fences to protect habitats and guide site visitors where necessary
- Planting new hedgerow saplings to fill gaps and provide new habitats where needed
- Cyclical cutting back boundary scrub to prevent encroachment into grasslands and maintain habitat diversity
- Maintenance of hedgerows, including trimming, coppicing and layering
- Note: Management of the mature trees surrounding the recreational area remain the responsibility of North Yorkshire Council. FOHW will report any issues arising for action and put forward proposals for any specific activities, such as thinning out, coppicing, bough removal, felling etc, which will require approval.
- Potentially, subject to other site priorities and resources, a small area of the grassland could be partitioned off and managed as a meadow. There would need to be an annual cut carried out by manual scything followed by manual baling and removal of the cut grass. To be effective there would need to be a commitment to carry out this work every year, but it could allow a small area to be effectively managed as a meadow and allow people to see the potential to restore a greater area of grassland.



Amenity Area 5

This area is an open grassland meadow which sits between the recreational area, the large grasslands meadows noted above and the Local Nature Reserve. There are multiple footpaths criss-crossing the area used mainly by dog walkers who use them to navigate the meadow to exercise their dogs off the leash and for access to other areas of Hell Wath. The meadow is surrounded by hedgerows, interspersed with mature trees. The east side of the boundary is open to the Choir School residential estate through a narrow ribbon of woodland.

Mowing is not an issue here as the main problem is rabbit grazing. There are many rabbit burrows in the bank which borders the west side of the meadow and along the north boundary too. A large population of rabbits constantly graze the grassland area which prevents the development of grasses and wildflowers. The only way to restore these grasslands would be to drastically reduce the rabbit population or enclose the grasslands with rabbit-proof fencing. Neither of these options seems feasible so FOHW have concluded that restoration of this area is not possible as part of this 2026MP.

FOHW Planned Activities in Amenity Area 5

FOHW will instead focus resources on maintenance of the boundary trees & hedgerows and the development of existing tree copses to provide habitat, food and shelter for birds, bats and small mammals.

FOHW will continue to include this amenity area in these ongoing activities:

- Himalayan Balsam control
- Litter picks

- Dog fouling awareness
- Plant surveys
- Fungi surveys
- Bat Surveys
- Butterfly surveys
- Erecting boundary fences to protect habitats and guide site visitors where necessary
- Planting new hedgerow saplings to fill gaps and provide new habitats where needed
- Cyclical cutting back boundary scrub to prevent encroachment into grasslands and maintain habitat diversity
- Maintenance of hedgerows, including trimming, coppicing and layering
- Note: Management of the mature trees surrounding the amenity area remain the responsibility of North Yorkshire Council. FOHW will report any issues arising for action and put forward proposals for any specific activities, such as thinning out, coppicing, bough removal, felling etc, which will require approval.
- Potentially, subject to other site priorities and resources, a small area of the grassland could be partitioned off with rabbit-proof fencing and managed as a meadow. There would need to be an annual cut carried out by manual scything followed by manual baling and removal of the cut grass. To be effective there would need to be a commitment to carry out this work every year, but it could allow a small area to be effectively managed as a meadow and allow people to see the potential of the area without the effect of rabbit grazing.



Amenity Area 4

This small triangular area was noted as a particularly biodiverse area of grassland in surveys conducted in 1989. Over the years a dense thicket of blackthorn, hawthorn and elder had encroached on the grassland. Restoration of the grassland required clearance of the blackthorn which took place in 2022 as part of the Skell Valley Project.

Since then, the area has been seeded with green hay from nearby Quarry Moor (a local Site of Special Scientific Interest) and manual scything and clearance of cut grass has taken place to encourage development of a woodland meadow as it is surrounded by hedgerows and mature trees.

Unfortunately, the presence of a large population of rabbits in the surrounding banks prevented the full development of grasses and wildflowers as rabbits constantly graze new shoots. In March 2025, as part of the Plantlife Project, an enclosure of rabbit-proof fencing was erected to keep rabbits out of a small area of the meadow. Even though there was a severe drought in the summer of 2025, the difference between the meadow inside the enclosure to that outside was clear to see, with an increase in growth and diversity of plant species. This area was scythed and the grass cuttings removed in late summer.



FOHW Planned Activities in Amenity Area 4

FOHW have identified this a priority area for annual management as a meadow. In addition to the ongoing actions noted under Amenity 5 above, specific actions to be taken in this area are:

- Definition of footpaths to guide people around meadow area
- Removal of blackthorn and hawthorn re-growth, except around the edges where growth can be used as footpath guidance
- Annual mowing (cutting and removal of grass cuttings)
- Plant surveys inside and outside the rabbit-proof enclosures
- FOHW propose extending the area of the rabbit-proof enclosure to include the whole field, subject to resource availability. This will allow people to watch the development of a large woodmeadow, not only to appreciate the beauty of native grasses and wildflowers, but also the insects, butterflies and invertebrates that will be attracted to such a habitat.
- FOHW propose that in future this area be considered for inclusion with the Local Nature Reserve area where FOHW would like to prioritise habitat conservation, restoration and development.

Local Nature Reserve

FOHW consider the LNR to be the most important area of Hell Wath, but sadly it has not been effectively managed for the conservation and protection of native flora and fauna since it was designated in April 1989.

A key objective of this 2026MP is to revitalise the LNR; restoring it into an area recognised by visitors as an important wildlife habitat, to be enjoyed in a responsible manner.

Key steps to achieving this objective over the 10-year timeframe of this 2026MP are to:

- Clearly identify the area and boundaries of the LNR
- Educate site visitors of the need to enjoy the LNR in a responsible way
- Identify and understand various habitats within the LNR and actions needed to restore, conserve, enhance and protect those habitats to enable wildlife to thrive
- Identify actions needed to restore, conserve, enhance and protect historic structures within the LNR
- Monitor key species to enable the benefits of habitat improvement to be recorded and publicised

Clearly identify the area and boundaries of the Local Nature Reserve



In 2024/25 new information boards were erected at key access points on Hell Wath as part of the Skell Valley Project. One of the key features of these boards was the identification of the LNR.

Prior to these boards being erected, visitors to Hell Wath would have been completely unaware of the presence of the LNR. Without this information, visitors would not have thought of treating this area any differently to the rest of Hell Wath and so over time the impact of visitors on habitat quality has been significant and detrimental.

Local people and regular visitors do not want Hell Wath to be turned into a regulated park with lots of signs and gravelled pathways, but if the LNR is to be revitalised people must know where the LNR is. FOHW plan is to erect further appropriate signage at each entry point to the LNR so visitors know when they are entering a more sensitive environmental area.

Educate site visitors of the need to enjoy the LNR in a responsible way

Hell Wath is a well-used area of green space on the outskirts of Ripon. More houses are being built within walking distance of Hell Wath, which means it is coming under increasing visitor pressure. Many people visit Hell Wath on a regular basis to exercise their dogs off the leash, because it is a beautiful area and very accessible by foot and by car.

There is no intention to limit access to the LNR, but over time FOHW vision is to educate and guide visitors to behave differently within the LNR, to put nature first and, in time, be able to enjoy a more beautiful environment. The key elements to visitors' education and guidance will be:

- Making visitors aware of the boundaries of the LNR with signage and information boards
- Encouraging visitors to take an interest in the work of FOHW and participate in activities. FOHW recognise the need to engage more with site visitors so they understand the need for action to be taken to preserve the nature of the LNR.
- Advising visitors that cycling is not allowed within the LNR. In fact, cycling is not allowed on any part of Hell Wath as the only designated routes are footpaths. FOHW are aware that some cyclists use a route through the LNR as access from Ripon to Fountains Abbey. Cyclists need to be made more aware of the damage they can do by riding up and down slopes, especially in wet weather. FOHW propose clearer signage at the north and south entrances to Hell Wath (Grid Map Ref q10 & b1)
- Advising visitors to stick to designated routes and not create additional pathways through grasslands, hedgerows and wooded areas. These actions can fragment important habitats for wildlife and create bare paths that erode over time with increased footfall and water erosion following heavy rain. FOHW will seek to maintain a network of pathways through the LNR for visitors to enjoy, but some 'desire lines' will be closed off where necessary protect habitats.
- Reminding visitors to take their litter home. Litter not only spoils the look of the area for the next visitors, but can also be harmful to visitors, their dogs and to wildlife.
- Requesting that visitors consider keeping their dogs on a lead within the LNR. FOHW recognise that this is a big ask butif the LNR is to become a mosaic of beautiful habits and a haven for wildlife then this is a small request considering that the LNR is only a small part of Hell Wath. Many nature reserves exclude dogs, but FOHW believe that a balance between visitor access and nature can be achieved on Hell Wath.

- Request that visitors respect any activities undertaken by FOHW or other agencies within the LNR to restore, conserve, enhance and protect habitats within the LNR and undertake not to damage or remove any structures erected for this purpose, such as fencing, dead hedging, tree planting, bat boxes, owl boxes, bird boxes etc..

Identify and understand the importance of the various habitats within the LNR

Before listing the key habitats within the LNR there is one issue that affects all areas and requires significant and ongoing resources to control – Himalayan Balsam.



Himalayan Balsam is a non-native, invasive species that spreads widely and has a hugely detrimental effect on native plant species. It is evident throughout the LNR; within the scrubby margins, the woodlands and in the grasslands. FOHW have in the past organised many 'Balsam Bashes'. These involve pulling HB plants out by their roots so they cannot produce and spread seed. They are effective when only small amounts of HB are present, but over the years the problem of HB on Hell Wath has grown significantly so that small ad-hoc activities to pull HB are no longer effective.

Himalayan Balsam (HB) needs to be controlled if the LNR is to be revitalised and FOHW are tackling the problem in two ways, both of which require a long-term outlook.

In 2020 FOHW proposed that Hell Wath be included in a trial to test the introduction of a natural rust fungus to control the spread of HB. The rust fungus is approved by CABI (the Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International) and works by weakening the HB plants so they are less able to outcompete native species and so die out over time. Supported by North Yorkshire Council, the rust fungus was applied on Hell Wath in 2021 and 2022. Surveys have shown that the rust fungus is present on Hell Wath and has spread out from the initial application sites. The impact of rust fungus on HB will be monitored and, if successful, additional rust fungus may be applied in other areas to help control the spread of HB. For more information see: <https://www.cabi.org/projects/biological-control-of-himalayan-balsam/>

In 2025 FOHW began a long-term strategic plan to physically reduce the amount of HB within the LNR. It was agreed that clearing HB would be most effective starting around the perimeter of the LNR and working inwards over time. Volunteers began by scouring the woodlands at the north and south ends of Hell Wath (Areas 7a and 2) pulling out every HB plant found. Work then progressed to the eastern boundary of the LNR working around the pond area (Grid Map Ref: N5), around and through the old Quarry (Area 7c) and along the eastern boundaries of the grasslands (Areas 6 & 7). Areas were revisited several times during the year to ensure the removal of regrown HB plants. Pulling HB plants was the main method of removal, but large swathes of HB were also scythed where this was deemed to be more effective.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW will monitor the spread and impact of the rust fungus

FOHW will organise Balsam Bashes to be carried out in accordance with the strategic plan each year. It is hoped that there will be significantly less HB to be pulled each year so that eventually HB is not the big problem it is today.

FOHW will organise Balsam Bashes in the Amenity Area as necessary to remove HB plants that could then spread seed into the LNR.

The key habitats within the LNR are:

- The River Skell and its riverbank



A short stretch of the River Skell meanders along the western boundary of Hell Wath. The eastern bank of the river lies entirely within the LNR. Apart from ad hoc river surveys and water monitoring little work has been done on the river condition here, although detailed work has been undertaken elsewhere as part of the Skell Valley Project.

The riverbank is subject to erosion from the force of water and debris during flooding. In 2021 North Yorkshire Council installed stone gabions to prevent erosion at the bottom of the Fairy Steps, but otherwise the river is allowed to change course naturally through the LNR. People and dogs making tracks down the riverbank to enter the water also cause riverbank erosion.

An important riverside and woodland habitat is contained within a 'loop' of the River Skell (Grid Map Ref: D1). This area used to be inaccessible to visitors due a fence which ran along the track from Hell Wath cottage. When this fence was removed for safety reasons (barbed wire) visitors began to create desire lines down the steep slope and around the loop. This has had a detrimental effect on the habitat.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW consider action may be necessary to cordon off tracks to protect some sensitive riverbank habitats, including re-instating the fence along the Hell Wath track.

- Woodlands and Hedgerows



Hell Wath has several distinct areas of woodland and hedgerow within the LNR. These have not been actively managed and most areas would benefit from intervention to improve the woodland, hedgerow and understorey habitats.

There are several outstanding trees on Hell Wath including an ancient oak tree, a notable sycamore, a veteran holly and several notable hawthorne trees. Dead and dying trees are evident in all woodland areas, particularly ash and elm trees.

Concerned at the condition of woodland and hedgerows across the whole Hell Wath site, FOHW commissioned an arboricultural appraisal from Symbiosis Consulting Ltd (see Appendix G). This report provided an overview of the state of the mature trees and hedgerows on Hell Wath and some recommended actions. Following this, in 2024, the Skell Valley Project commissioned the production of a Woodland Management Plan, produced by RDI Associates Ltd (see Appendix H) which also recommended actions.

At the time of writing this 2026MP, North Yorkshire Council are unable to approve an overarching Woodland Management Plan for Hell Wath or approve the recommended actions included in the above reports. FOHW have been advised that this will only be possible after their Tree Policy has been finalised and work has been completed on their Tree and Woodland Management Strategy. This process may take several years. FOHW will monitor progress and in time develop a plan for Hell Wath compatible with this strategy.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW will continue to monitor the woodlands, trees and hedgerows and submit any specific proposals to North Yorkshire Council for approval. Such proposals may include hedge laying, coppicing, lopping, bough removal, cutting back, felling and understory clearance. FOHW will propose areas for new tree and hedgerow planting where appropriate to restore or enhance habitats.

- Scrubby edges surrounding the grasslands



The scrubby boundaries between mature woodland and grassland are important wildlife habitats, providing shelter, food and homes for birds, bats, small mammals, insects and invertebrates. However, left unmanaged these scrubby areas can become dense thickets, reducing their habitat value and encroaching upon valuable open grassland habitats.

As part of the Skell Valley Project a plan to bring areas of neglected scrub back under control was enacted. This has involved thinning out some areas of scrub (such as Grid Map Ref: M6: G3 & H3) and cutting back other areas of scrub encroaching onto the grassland areas (such as Grid Map Ref: G1, J5: N5:).

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW plan to maintain an annual cycle of thinning and cutting back scrub to ensure different ages and heights of scrub are maintained around the open grasslands, giving the best opportunities for a variety of flora and fauna to thrive.

- Grasslands

In 1989 the grasslands (Areas 6 & 7) were recognised as important biodiverse areas of Hell Wath; a significant reason for the area being designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

Over time and without management these areas have deteriorated and significant work is needed to restore the grasslands and recover the biodiverse species of grasses and wildflowers. Steps have been taken to cut back significant areas of scrub which over time have encroached into the grassland areas. As noted above the scrub will be managed on an annual basis to maintain the scrub edges around the grasslands.

Ideally the grassland areas would be grazed by animals, such as cattle, but as this is not currently possible on Hell Wath the next best option is an annual mowing cycle, with removal of the grass cuttings. FOHW recognise that resources are not currently available to complete this work across all the grassland areas. Working with Plantlife, specific areas of grassland have been identified which can be managed by manual scything and baling on an annual basis (Grid Map Ref: M6: J2: K3: N5).



As part of the Plantlife project, and with help from SVP volunteers, a triangular area in K4/K5 (which had been partially cleared of encroaching scrub) was enclosed with rabbit proof fencing in Spring 2025. Even though there was a severe drought in the summer of 2025, the difference between the meadow inside the enclosure to that outside was clear to see with an increase in growth and diversity of plant species. This area was scythed and the grass cuttings removed in late summer.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW will focus on managing areas M6: J2: K3: N5 as a priority, extending into other areas as resources allow. These areas will scythed at least once a year with the grass cuttings removed from the area by manual raking and baling.

Himalayan Balsam, brambles, thistles, ragwort and invasive species will be removed from the grassland areas as necessary.

Habitat improvements will be made by the introduction of local native species of flora by the spreading of green hay, seeding or plug planting as appropriate.

FOHW propose extending the area of the rabbit-proof enclosure, subject to resource availability. This will allow people to watch the development of a large woodmeadow, not only to appreciate the beauty of native grasses and wildflowers, but also the insects, butterflies and invertebrates that will be attracted to such a habitat.

- **The Pond**

In January 2019 the site of an old silted up pond was excavated. The pond is a semi-permanent pond fed by a small spring. It does dry up periodically but remains viable from early Autumn to early Summer. Ponds like this play a crucial role in biodiversity by providing habitats for various species, including aquatic invertebrates, amphibians, and birds.

Due to a lack of maintenance the pond re-silted and a larger, deeper pond was re-excavated in December 2021. A chestnut paling fence was installed around the pond in April 2022 to protect the pond from being disturbed by visitors and prevent dogs entering the water as tick treatments can be harmful aquatic life.

The area surrounding the pond has been cleared of a dense thicket of scrub and has been a priority area for clearing Himalayan Balsam. FOHW have proposed the removal of a large sycamore tree growing on the bank next to the pond. This would significantly improve the pond habitat by allowing more sunlight to reach the water and preventing leaf litter falling and building up in the water. Approval for this work is required from North Yorkshire Council.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW to propose the cutting down or lopping of significant branches from the sycamore tree
FOHW to organise the annual clearance of weeds and debris from the pond in late winter

The pond area to be kept clear of Himalayan Balsam
 Plant surveys to be conducted specifically around the pond
 Additional local native species to be introduced by seeding or plug planting as appropriate
 Scrub and overhanging branches to be cleared to maintain light levels

- The Quarry

In November 2024 a major project began to restore the Quarry area of Hell Wath (Area 7c). This site had been quarried on a small scale before being abandoned and left unmanaged for decades. The area is waterlogged, except during exceptionally dry periods and has been identified as an opportunity to restore a scarce open winter pond/summer pondside habitat within the LNR.



Working with North Yorkshire Council and Skell Valley volunteers, FOHW have cleared the area of dense thickets of willow, hawthorn and alder that had grown up over the years and prevented sunlight from reaching quarry floor. All the cut-down materials from the thicket clearance have been used to build a dead hedge around the perimeter of the Quarry to protect the habitat from visitor and dogs during habitat restoration.

Most of the clearance work was completed by Spring 2025 and FOHW will monitor the area for natural regeneration of native plant species before deciding if any supplemental planting is needed to improve the habitat.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW to oversee the completion of thicket clearance and construction of the perimeter dead hedging

FOHW to keep the area clear of Himalayan Balsam

FOHW to undertake regular plant and fungi surveys to monitor the emergence of native species

FOHW to identify the need for, source and plant additional species of flora to be introduced to improve the habitat

Identify actions needed to restore, conserve, enhance and protect historic structures within the LNR

Hell Wath was the site of one of the largest WW1 army camps in England, housing up to 30,000 soldiers. Substantial and extensive infrastructure and buildings were required to house and support the soldiers and their training activities. The remains of some structures can still be seen on Hell Wath today. Changes were also made to the River Skell to maintain water supply to working mills and the canal in Ripon. The river course was straightened and several dams were built. Again, remains of the infrastructure are evident along the river.

These architectural features are integral to the history of Hell Wath and should be preserved as historically important assets. Work completed to date includes:

- New information boards installed by the Skell Valley Project tell visitors about the army camp
- The recovery of a piece of track from the railway line which was used to bring supplies to the army camp.
- The installation of stone filled gabions at the base of the Fairy Steps to prevent the River Skell eroding the riverbank putting the structure of the Fairy Steps at risk of collapse. This work was carried out by North Yorkshire Council.
- A resin plaque has been installed on the Grade II listed boundary stone marking the position of the Skell Crooks Dam, replacing a missing iron plaque. This work was completed as part of the Skell Valley Project.

- A survey of the Fairy Steps has been undertaken to determine the state of the structure and the work needed to conserve and restore them. Plans to complete this work as part of the Skell Valley Project, assisted by the Army Corps of Engineers were planned but not implemented due to cost and resource availability.
- FOHW worked with RHATs (Ripon History and Archaeology Tribe) to complete an archaeological dig within the Amenity Area of Hell Wath during the summer of 2025. This unearthed interesting finds from the medieval period and a cache of live ammunition !



FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW will investigate the possibility of conserving / restoring the Fairy Steps by seeking grant funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other potential donors to assess and undertake the works.

FOHW will continue to engage with RHATs to complete more archaeological digs in non-sensitive areas of Hell Wath.

FOHW will ensure the architectural history of Hell Wath remains a key part of future plans

Monitor key species to enable the benefits of habitat improvement to be recorded and publicised

There have been several botanical surveys of Hell Wath in the past, but a lot of the information has been lost and none of the records are in an easily accessible format. An important element of the 2026MP is to complete a base-line survey of the plants currently growing on Hell Wath so this can be used to inform decision-making; to act as a historical record; and as a tool for future surveyors to investigate changes over the year. It is important to identify and monitor key species over time as these records will enable FOHW to review the impact of habitat changes made on Hell Wath. Records made on Hell Wath can also be input to recognised databases to enable the impact of climate change to be monitored on a national and international scale.

FOHW volunteers have been actively monitoring butterflies, undertaking defined transect walks each week from April to September each year. These surveys began in 2022 and the results are input to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme database. For more information see <https://ukbms.org/>.

FOHW have been working with the North Yorkshire Bat Group to monitor the presence of bats at Hell Wath. Bats are legally protected and FOHW only work with licensed and competent bat workers when carrying out monitoring activities. Defined transect walks have previously taken place monthly from April to September. Starting at dusk, bat detectors are used to locate and identify the numbers and species of bat based on the frequency and pattern of their echolocation signals. The North Yorkshire Bat Group has also supplied and installed 24 bat boxes in groups at 10 locations within the Local Nature Reserve. Surveys of the bat boxes have taken place from October to March to monitor and record the number and species of bat using the bat boxes to roost. The North Yorkshire Bat Group also use Hell Wath's bat boxes to train individuals working towards their Natural England bat license.

For more information see: <https://nybats.org.uk/wp/>

The North Yorkshire Bat Group enabled the installation of 2 tawny owl boxes on Hell Wath in Autumn 2023. These are monitored for roosting and nesting owls. A pair of tawny owls successfully raised three chicks in one box in Spring 2024.



Knowledgeable FOHW volunteers have undertaken plant surveys in various habitats across Hell Wath, using the Grid Map to record locations and densities of species identified. These surveys enable FOHW to identify sensitive areas for protection, the presence of rare species, opportunities to introduce native species and to monitor increases or decreases in biodiversity over time.

FOHW have also worked with Plantlife to identify key native species that indicate a healthy, biodiverse meadow habitat. The presence of these species will enable us to monitor improvements where management of grassland areas takes place, and compare them to unmanaged areas.

Knowledgeable FOHW volunteers regularly walk Hell Wath to find and identify species of fungi with assistance from the Mid-Yorkshire Mycological Society.

Moth trapping on and around Hell Wath has taken place as part of two Bioblitz events arranged in co-operation with NEYEDC, the North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre.

A programme of tree and shrub planting undertaken in the Autumn/Winter of 2024/25 has been catalogued and volunteer tree guardians have taken responsibility for their ongoing care and maintenance.

FOHW Planned Activities

FOHW to determine and use a method of collating and recording survey data.

FOHW volunteers will continue to monitor butterflies on a weekly basis from April to September each year and report findings to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Service.

FOHW volunteers will monitor bats on Hell Wath on a regular basis and report findings to the North Yorkshire Bat Group. Additional bat boxes, including bat maternity boxes, will be installed in appropriate locations if resources are available.

Owl boxes will be monitored and additional boxes will be installed in appropriate locations if resources are available.

FOHW volunteers will undertake plant surveys throughout the year to monitor the changes in biodiversity of habitats. Surveys to the end of 2025 established the absence of notable and characteristic herbaceous species evident in the local area. FOHW will seek to re-introduce these species through local seed sources or plug plants.

FOHW volunteers will survey the site to find and identify fungi.

FOHW volunteers plan to commence small mammal observations using footprint traps to capture small mammal movements in selected locations. There is special interest in the presence and movements of hedgehogs.

FOHW volunteers will take part in moth trapping events if arrangement can be made.
FOHW tree guardians will nurture their allocated tree and shrub plants, adding to and replacing them as necessary to establish, restore and maintain the woodland edge and wood meadow habitats.

Implementing the 2026 Management Plan

This 2026MP is intended to guide the Trustees of the Friends of Hell Wath in the decisions they make about activities to be undertaken on Hell Wath, but it must be noted that overall responsibility and authority for the management of Hell Wath lies with North Yorkshire Council.

Many action points have been noted in this 2026MP, but they are not intended to be prescriptive or finite. Other activities may take place in future if specific actions are identified and needed to restore, conserve, enhance or protect any aspect of Hell Wath. Other activities may also take place if opportunities arise in future to undertake activities that have not been identified in this 2026MP, but which serve to meet the Charity's objectives.

Agreed activities will be publicised and undertaken by FOHW volunteers, volunteers from other organisations as appropriate and individual volunteers interested in the activity.

The Trustees will endeavour to work in partnership with North Yorkshire Council, and other partner organisations as appropriate to deliver the Charity's objectives. Decisions on volunteering activities will be discussed and planned at regular Trustee and Members Activity Group Meetings. North Yorkshire Council and the National Trust (as a partner organisations) have standing invitations to attend FOHW Trustee and Members Activity Group Meetings.

Community Engagement

The Trustees recognise that Hell Wath is highly regarded as an important green space by members of the local community. The Trustees will seek to engage the local community to enable them to recognise the challenges of looking after Hell Wath and to enable them to participate in preserving Hell Wath for future generations to enjoy.

The Trustees will use a variety of communication tools such as their website, Facebook page, on-site posters, local news outlets, local events, leaflets etc... to keep the local community aware of actions being taken on Hell Wath and will encourage the local community to become active participants in the upkeep of Hell Wath.



***** END *****