



**Yorkshire  
Wildlife Trust**



## #TeamWilder Communities in Action

### CASE STUDY: Dene Road Residents' Group, Cottingham



A working party prepares the ground for the wildflower meadow

#### Tell us a bit about your group/community

We're a group of Cottingham residents and neighbours; ours has always been a friendly street and this really became apparent during Covid when we started holding safe outdoor coffee mornings, partly to ensure that those living alone did not feel too isolated. Post-pandemic, we carried on what had now become our regular get-togethers with street gatherings at different times through the year. In my spare time I'm the co-ordinator for Hull and East Riding Friends of the Earth, and so my neighbours have heard things along the way about some of the campaigns I've been involved in and have expressed interest in these. I thought it would be lovely to do something on our own patch where we could involve people of all different ages and abilities, and the green space at the end of our road seemed like the perfect place to make a start.

#### How did you get started on your #TeamWilder journey?

The idea for Dene Wood nature area came about in 2023 after a conversation I had with one of our local councillors about the potential for more wildlife-friendly spaces in Cottingham – particularly on verges with heavily mown grass. Councillor Redshaw was very supportive of our desire for change, and this gave me the confidence to draw up a vision for the site at the end of our road. We sought input from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's #TeamWilder team to refine this and then took this proposal out for consultation, going door-knocking with Councillor



We are getting many encouraging comments from local residents pleased with what we have achieved so far and hope what we are doing might provide inspiration to others who would like to do similar projects in their own patch."

Redshaw to canvas people's views. The vast majority were very supportive and so, with practical support to get started from Andy at Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and the help of some lovely community members, I am pleased to say it has developed into what I am calling an "experimental site"! We are getting many encouraging comments from local residents pleased with what we have achieved so far and hope what we are doing might provide inspiration to others who would like to do similar projects in their own patch.

#### What actions have you taken for wildlife in your community and why?

In November 2023, we held a community day, planting bulbs around a bench to provide a bit of colour and some pollen for early emerging bumblebees, along with native saplings along the rear perimeter of the site which will develop into a hedgerow to increase food and shelter for birds and insects.



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The main task at the event was to scarify and rake off an area of grass and sow an experimental patch of yellow rattle as the basis of our wildflower meadow area. Like many similar spaces, the verge is quite fertile – from years of cuttings being left after mowing, as well as the underlying clay soil – which means that the grass dominates other species. Wildflowers do much better in low fertility soil where grass is less dominant; people often get disheartened when they sow wildflowers expecting an instant colourful display, but it comes to nothing. Based on this, our first task was to sow the rattle, which parasitises the grass, weakening it over time and allowing more wildflowers to establish.

Following on from this first community day, in spring 2024 we planted some alder buckthorn saplings to supplement our hedgerow, as well as build further habitat for the ever-expanding Hull & East Yorkshire brimstone butterfly colony which is being established via [Hull Butterfly City](#). Our group members have already reported brimstone sightings in the area, so we thought any extra trees to build a sustainable habitat would be helpful. Given the widespread sightings of caterpillars across the region this year (as at end June 2024), this initiative seems to have been very successful, so we're delighted to be contributing further to that on our patch.

In June 2024, we joined up with another local group, [Cottingham Wildspaces](#), to do some litter picking and put up some bat boxes in Dene Wood that had been donated to us. When I first moved to Cottingham seven years ago, I often saw bats flying around, but sadly there have been no sightings for a while. It's hard to know when they disappeared, as sometimes you don't notice an absence of something until a specific thing draws your attention to it – there also seems to be far fewer insects around this year. Hopefully the bats will see their new selection of homes and feel inclined to move back in!



Scarifying the meadow area

In July, we got together to conduct a nature count on our area. The children had just broken up from school so were less than impressed with the idea of another worksheet, so they left that part to the adults, whilst happily cracking on with litter-pickers and bags and collecting two bags of rubbish from neighbouring Dene Wood instead! That's the great thing about working together as a community – even on just a small patch of land there are so many different jobs to do that it's possible to find something to suit everyone's mood and interest everyone. Most recently, my husband, Alan, has purchased a scythe and made a start on cutting back some of the ranker grass areas around the edges of the site, as part of our efforts to strike a balance between creating space for nature but also maintaining a site that is appealing to the neighbourhood.



Bat box

CLAIRE GRIBBEN



Claire scything at Dene Road

CLAIRE GRIBBEN



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A laser cut sign highlights our aims for the project

A couple of times when we've been working on the site families have approached us and their children have loved running around the pathways that we have mown through the meadows. Considering it is a relatively small space it's been amazing to me to see children enjoying it so much in this way.

What has surprised me is how much people love nature – I think this is something we underestimate. I didn't expect such a positive response to what we've been doing and this encourages us that it is a real benefit to people as well as wildlife.

**Did you face any challenges or barriers in taking your action for wildlife? If so, what were these?**

Despite signage to demarcate the wildlife area and agreement being in place from the local authority that it would no longer be mown by their team, there was some early miscommunication whereby the area was mown twice after our agreement was meant to have begun. Luckily this happened before the yellow rattle shoots had emerged, and we were able to get out and rake off the cuttings, so it didn't lead to a significant setback. We have since added additional signage around the area to block off the mower (and spoke to the chap on the mower when he next came round – he is very nice by the way, and we have found these polite conversations do really help the process!).

We also had a few months when our signs were uprooted and thrown into Dene Wood Pond, but after perseverance (and a little polite word with the culprit), this seems to have stopped (fingers crossed).

**What resources or support have you used?**

The amount of support and resources that you can access when you start to look into it is fantastic. [Hull Friends of the Earth](#) have provided us with funding for our spring bulbs. We were successful with an application to the [Woodland Trust's free trees for communities scheme](#) which provided us with 60 trees to create our hedgerow, which we augmented with some additional alder buckthorn saplings provided for free by [Hull Butterfly City](#). Recently we have had a donation from [Rubbish Friends](#) too to buy some more bulbs.

A friend has a laser cutter and so created some fantastic signs to help highlight our aims for the space; one of these was produced as a word cloud design using keywords contributed by the children involved in the project, telling us what they love about the space.

Andy at [Yorkshire Wildlife Trust](#) provided us with some yellow rattle seed, and has come along with tools and resources to support our community action days, with local residents also bringing along their own equipment to contribute to the collective effort.

In terms of on-going meadow management, we have found [Plantlife's Good Meadow Guide](#) a fantastic reference point.

**What differences for wildlife and/or people have you noticed as a result of your actions?**

We did a species count at the one-year point of the project and found 37 species of flora in the meadow area alone. We were blown away by this, especially considering we have only added yellow rattle – it is amazing what comes through naturally when we mow less and nature is allowed to flourish!

Almost every time we go out for an evening walk people stop us to say how much they are enjoying seeing the space develop, which is really rewarding.



Some younger members of the working group



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There have been some concerns aired by several local residents who felt that some of the area was starting to look ‘messy’ towards the end of the summer, but we’ve had positive conversations with them which seem to have helped put their minds at rest.

Looking to next year we’re exploring the possibility of having some interpretation designed to explain what the area will look like through the different seasons, as we’re aware that people’s conceptions of what a meadow should look like do not always match with the reality, and so we feel it’s important to convey what to expect and how what they see before them is part of a process that is functioning for wildlife.

**Has being part of #TeamWilder changed the way that you or other people in your community feel about nature? If so, how?**

To reassure local residents that the area is being looked after, we have taken on board #TeamWilder advice and maintained a neater perimeter to the areas of long grass as well as keeping mown pathways through the meadow areas. For such a small space, we have been incredibly heartened to see the number of children that are getting such joy from running down these little paths.

All it takes is 10 minutes outside doing a bit of work (which is all that’s really needed), and people are coming past and chatting to us about what we are doing, and how they want more areas like it. I do a lot of work on campaigning with Friends of the Earth, but out of everything I have been involved in, this small area set aside for nature has probably been the activity that has generated the most positive comments! Teaming up with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has reinforced the hope I have that most people love nature and can be inspired to protect it.



It’s easy to feel that people don’t always care about nature, especially if you look on social media where there is often a glut of negative news, but this project has proved to us, based on all the positive feedback we’ve had, that people enjoy and value a bit of wildness.”

**Since being involved in #TeamWilder, have you felt differently about your local area for the better or worse? Why?**

It’s easy to feel that people don’t always care about nature, especially if you look on social media where there is often a glut of negative news, but this project has proved to us, based on all the positive feedback we’ve had, that people enjoy and value a bit of wildness – things don’t have to be pristine, we don’t have to have mown grass everywhere to keep people happy – quite the opposite when it comes to children! Becoming part of #TeamWilder and seeing this manifest in our own space, and



Consulting with the community about our plans

in the spaces of other groups that we are now aware of and connected to, has made us feel confident that our local area is valued and forming part of a bigger movement of change.

**Has your involvement in #TeamWilder supported you to speak to local decision makers, like your local council, housing association or MP? If so, what was the result?**

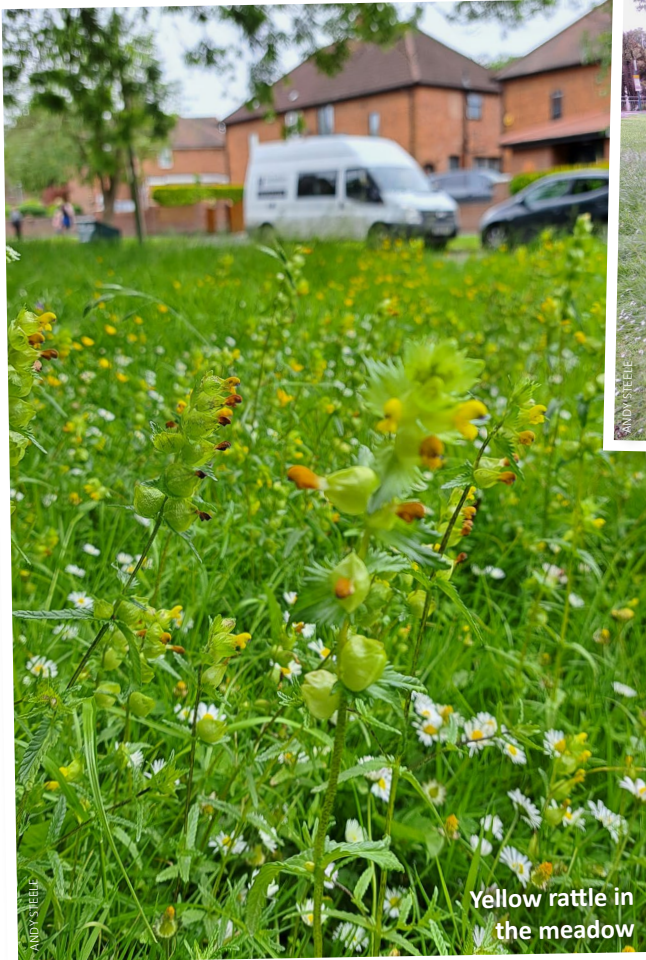
The whole project started from a debate on social media about messy vs tidy verges. Our local councillor was involved in that discussion and seemed open to the idea of wilder spaces, so we decided to visit him at his surgery to see what might be possible in our area. He was really open to our ideas and helped us to get agreements in place with the Highways and Grounds & Forestry teams within our local authority.

We would encourage others thinking of doing something similar to contact their local councillors and decision makers – we had already taken this step before joining #TeamWilder and got a positive response, but Andy and the staff at Yorkshire Wildlife Trust can certainly support you to do this if you’re unsure on the best way to go about it.

#TeamWilder was really helpful with developing our draft plan for the site, which they provided ideas and input into, before we joined forces with our councillor to take this around the neighbourhood to consult with residents on. Looking back, this was quite a daunting idea – but once we had made it clear we weren’t selling anything, we found people generally very chatty. We would recommend being brave and taking this personal approach to involving your neighbourhood – you may be pleasantly surprised by people’s reactions, as we were! We feel doing this consultation as widely as possible has worked really well in terms of giving everyone a voice, allowing us to have more detailed conversations both with those who were supportive and those who expressed concerns, thereby reducing the chances of misunderstanding arising or divisions developing before our project even got going.



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**What have been your favourite nature moments or encounters with wildlife whilst doing this?**

It's still very early but we were delighted to see the yellow rattle emerging. As I said, this whole meadow area was a bit of an experiment, so after scarifying and sowing we waited over the autumn and winter with bated breath to see if anything would appear...just as we were starting to wonder if the experiment had been a failure, April came around and the first emerging leaves of yellow rattle began to appear – this was a real “wahoo!” moment!

We're now looking forward to seeing what new species start to emerge from the seedbank in the ground over time, as well as which invertebrates visit to feed in the meadow and how our hedgerow starts to fill out and attract more species over time.

When out collecting the rattle seed, we were staggered at the amount of insect life feeding in this area – shield bugs, hover flies and various others which we have not yet identified, but look forward to doing so now we are starting to use [iNaturalist](#)! The previously mown grass would certainly not have supported this kind of numbers or diversity – there were almost more insects than seedheads! This really showed us how much nature goes under the radar and can benefit from spaces like this largely unseen by the human eye – until you really start to look.

Everyone loves and comments on the bees and we love them too, but there are so many more crucial creatures that make up our ecosystem and working on a site and observing it at close quarters is really helping to bring this ecosystem into focus and make it a source of intrigue and joy, for both the adults and the children that make up our group.

**What do you plan to do next?**


Looking to the future, we harvested some of the yellow rattle before we cut the meadow with our scythes at the end of the summer and we will use this to supplement and extend the wildflower area, and if possible, we will pass surplus on to other local nature groups.

We also want to extend our surveying activity; we're currently setting up an [iNaturalist](#) project for the site and are exploring the possibility of arranging some training, both for our group members and the wider community, into how to use this tool to help them become citizen scientists! Once the project is set up for our site, we're looking forward to starting seasonal surveys to help us understand how site is functioning and to build ecological justification for the changes we have put into practice, in the hope that our Local Authority and other community groups might see the value in managing more sites in a relaxed-mowing, wildlife-friendly way.

If we can find funding, we may look to do some soil sampling to better understand our meadow area, and then, if appropriate, supplement the existing plant base with suitable native wildflower seed or plugs.

We're really pleased to have a site which we can easily manage within the capacity of the group, but which provides a basis for more learning and which we can use as a launch pad to develop activity across a wider area of the village, if and when our capacity allows.

**Contact us to find out more:**

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