

Annual review 2019-20

This and the children's photos: Lewis Outing



enjoy nature

get inspired

make a difference

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Message from the Chair

It is a real pleasure to present to you St Nicks annual report for 2019-20, and what a year it has been – from the many successes, records and good news stories that you can read about throughout the following pages, to the challenges that the increasing risks and restrictions that the global Coronavirus pandemic is imposing on all our daily lives and St Nicks day to day operations.

In looking back across the year, I would like to highlight just a few notable achievements.

Our management and support of York’s green spaces has reached out to nearly 20 locations across the city, helping local groups to improve their own green spaces, whilst we continue to manage St Nicks' own Local Nature Reserve, where we’ve achieved a milestone – 1,041 different species of flora and fauna now recorded. That’s quite an achievement for an ex-landfill site!

Our Recycling Team have been equally busy too, diverting 379 tonnes of recycling from landfill – all collected by our electric vehicles and pedal powered load-bearing tricycles, whilst at the same time being placed in the top three in a national award for excellence in recycling and waste management.

Our engagement with York’s community has seen around 800 children engaged in educational activities, a record 27 stalls at various events across the city and an amazing 7,700 hours of support provided by our 243 volunteers. A huge thank you to everyone who has helped us in so many ways!

Finally, our Ecotherapy programme, recognised as one of the top three mental health service providers in York, continues to grow, this year providing over 3,000 hours of delivery and a 40% increase in one-to-one mentoring sessions.

None of this would be possible without the support of our various partner organisations and funders, to whom I would like to offer my grateful thanks – and also to St Nicks amazing staff team, who are always prepared to go the extra mile, remaining cheerful and positive.

However, the Covid pandemic together with the recent lockdown announcement by the UK Government is having an increasing impact on all our lives. This has resulted in the temporary closure of the Environment Centre from mid-March, the curtailment or adjustment of many of our services and the staff team having to work remotely, which they successfully achieved within a week. We are closely monitoring the situation and will be providing further announcements via our website and social media channels as developments occur.

Whatever the year ahead may bring, key for me is St Nicks’ steadfast focus and commitment towards promoting positive, sustainable lifestyles for the people of York. Thank you again to everyone who has been involved with St Nicks over the past year, I hope we can welcome you again soon, be it either in person or online.

Trevor Barlow
Chair of Trustees

March 2020





The vision of St Nicks is for York to be a city where people value wildlife, the environment and each other equally to sustain a rich and healthy life for all.

Earthrise, by NASA

Objectives & activities



Zero carbon



Zero waste



Land use
and wildlife



Health
and happiness

Due to humanity's overreliance on fossil fuels, the way we move about, what we eat, how we heat our homes and what we buy inadvertently affect our air, water and food quality, as well as access to quality green spaces. The health and wellbeing of people in York, and around the planet, very much depend on the health of the natural world. As the rates of climate change and environmental degradation continue to rise, so does the need for both collective and individual action to mitigate this climate emergency.

St Nicks aims to help counteract environmentally damaging activities and to promote positive sustainable lifestyles in York and surrounding areas, bridging the gap between environmental awareness and action. We work to create lasting positive change in actions and attitudes of individuals, as well as organisations, to enable them to move towards a sustainable future. We achieve this through:

- Improving St Nicks Local Nature Reserve, enriching its wildlife value and enhancing its educational and recreational value for all visitors.
- Developing the Environment Centre as a source of information, advice and inspiration for green living.
- Developing projects and services which help achieve sustainable communities.

Not "just an old landfill site", our main activities include the conservation and development of habitats on St Nicks' 24-acre nature reserve and off-site green spaces, a zero emissions kerbside recycling collection service and waste minimisation advice, Ecotherapy connecting people with nature, environmental education and development of the Environment Centre as a source of inspiration for sustainable living. We support our membership network in addition to a wide range of local businesses, community organisations and members of the public.

Strategic impacts

To achieve our vision, St Nicks has chosen to focus on four strategic impacts to have both on site and in York. These impacts are linked to the One Planet Living principles, developed by [Bioregional](#), where we have most experience. Further improvements in all these areas can help us all meet current needs, without compromising the ability to do so in the future.

- 1) **Zero Carbon:** Reduce the amount of carbon produced
- 2) **Zero Waste:** Reduce the amount of waste generated
- 3) **Land use & Wildlife:** Increase access to wild spaces and biodiversity
- 4) **Health & Wellbeing:** Increase the number of people leading happy and healthy lives

This report highlights our main achievements towards these strategic impacts during the past financial year.

Organisational values

Sustainability: conducting all activities in a way that is beneficial or at least neutral to the environment

Inclusivity: providing a safe and friendly environment for all staff, volunteers and audiences

Enthusiasm for our vision: fostering it in all our volunteers, staff and trustees

Expertise: retaining and developing the skills of staff, trustees, volunteers and the wider community

Education: enabling people to make informed choices as part of a sustainable lifestyle

Partnerships: working with other organisations and individuals to achieve shared goals, take opportunities and increase capacity



Connecting green spaces

St Nicks ecological monitoring

Our dedicated Wildwatch team have continued to collect weekly wildlife records of the numerous species found across the nature reserve. Thanks to the brilliant Wildwatchers, our current species list now stands at 1,041 found at St Nicks!

Among this year's particularly exciting finds is the slug *Arion owenii*, which was the first record of this species in the York area. Wildwatch volunteer Cliff Wilton has summarised this bumper year for flying insects:

2019 saw a butterfly bonanza on the reserve, with 19 different species found, and some of them in big numbers. At least ten species were found on all Wildwatch walks from late spring into the summer, and sometimes up to fourteen. Star of the show was Painted Lady, seen on numerous occasions and often in good numbers – only to be expected in the UK's best Painted Lady year since 2009. The last butterfly seen was a Speckled Wood in late October.

It was also a good year for moths, with a total of 38 species of day-flying moth seen. Another highlight was the total of eleven species of Shieldbug found, the best day being eight seen on one Wildwatch walk in September. Hoverflies numbered 33 species, with good numbers of the large and striking *Volucella zonaria* or 'Hornet hoverfly' – a recent Yorkshire colonist. One final pleasing statistic was the total of 94 new species of insect and other invertebrate added to the St Nicks list during the year – almost certainly the best year ever for our spotters.



We're currently undertaking Plant Monitoring surveys to record all the different species found in different areas across the reserve. These areas will be revisited each year to monitor any changes to the site's biodiversity. With the incredible work of our volunteers, we only expect these to be positive changes.

Woodland Improvements

Thanks to the Betty's Trees for Life fund, we spent another autumn/winter season managing and improving our 14 acres of woodland - now 25 years old. Over the last few years, we've been improving the structure within the woodland, creating new habitat niches that allow more species to benefit from the woodland. This has meant coppicing some of the taller trees, thinning out some of the canopy and developing the understory. We planted and transplanted over 250 understory trees and shrubs such as hawthorn, wild cherry, field maple and holly. We also sowed, planted and transplanted shade tolerant wildflowers such as wild garlic, cowslips, betony and snowdrops. These will provide an important nectar source for invertebrates and pollinators that rely on woodland habitat, such as speckled wood butterflies and mason bees.

We also developed 600 metres of species rich hedgerow around the nature reserve, creating a natural boundary and green corridor to aid navigation, nesting and foraging opportunities for invertebrates, birds, bats and small mammals. Over 300 trees were planted into the hedge, using various species such as blackthorn, dogwood, hazel, hawthorn and dog rose.

Better Becks

Last summer the nature reserve witnessed unusual amounts of machinery as we were busy trying to learn the difference between window samples, trial pits and bore holes. While there was some short-term disruption for both wildlife and people, this work was part of important ground investigation surveys to determine the feasibility of restoring Osbaldwick Beck to a more natural state. Currently the beck flows on-site underground through a culvert, which contributes to flooding problems and has very little wildlife value. A new open channel through St Nicks will create new wetland habitat and will help protect over 260 homes from future flooding. When combined with proposed work to naturalise the beck through Hull Road Park, this will also create a near fully open and natural water course from the source in Holtby to where it joins Tang Hall Beck at St Nicks – which will be of great benefit for the water voles and other native wildlife on the beck. The restoration is due to start in 2021 as part of York's Five-Year Flood Plan.

A good year for flying insects and work on green corridors



1,041 updated species total at St Nicks, in just 24 acres

Wildwatch volunteers identified **94** new invertebrate species at St Nicks this year

300 new trees planted into the 600-metre species-rich hedgerow along the edge of the reserve

19 number of other green sites we worked on or surveyed

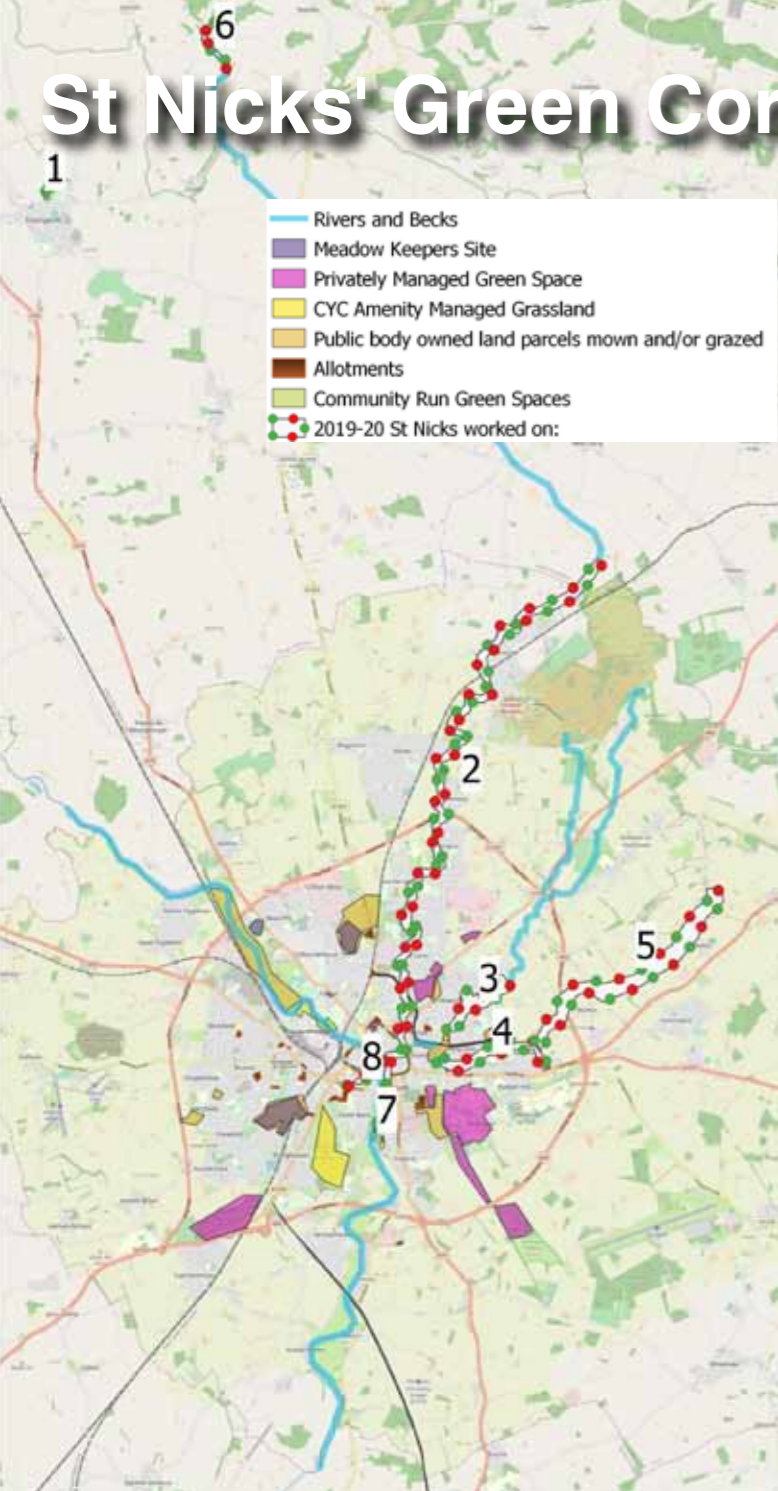
Found white-clawed crayfish **1.5km** further downstream of previous records on the upper Foss – important discovery

243 types of wildlife found at Heworth Holme during a 24-hour, family-friendly BioBlitz event



A young adult white-clawed crayfish found in the Foss

St Nicks' Green Corridors Work 2019-20



- 1 Millfield Wood: woodland management training for Easingwold Green Spaces Community Group
- 2 River Foss: walkover and riparian mammal surveys with the River Foss Society
- 3 Tang Hall Beck: Heworth Holme management, Himalayan balsam control and tree planting
- 4 Osbaldwick Beck: ecological surveys and Himalayan balsam control
- 5 Osbaldwick Beck upstream: walkover survey and landowner engagement
- 6 River Foss: white-clawed crayfish surveying
- 7 Millennium Fields: grassland management and development of woodland copse
- 8 Scarcroft Community Orchard and greening up of Micklegate Ward



Heworth Holme BioBlitz: small mammal survey



Grassland surveying at Millennium Fields

Over the last year we have continued to develop our off-site activities, focusing on some of the important green corridors that cut through our city. There are many wonderful wildlife sites across York with groups doing fantastic work conserving their local patch, but we have started to see a much needed shift towards more landscape wide thinking. Existing wildlife sites need protecting, growing in size and vitally they need to be connected to other sites to increase their impact on wider biodiversity value. As Professor Sir John Lawton expertly summed up in his 2010 Making Space for Nature report, “these nature conservation sites need to be bigger, better and more joined up”. With so much going on and so much potential for more, we really needed some help to develop this work. Thankfully we have been joined by Becki in the role of Green Corridors Development Volunteer. Becki, who also works part-time as an Environment and Communities Officer at City of York Council, has been working with us to help support our ongoing green corridors projects and crucially investigating the potential for new projects across the city.

Our initial focus was on the connecting sites which allow wildlife to travel back and forth to St Nicks, including Foss Islands Cycle Path, Tang Hall Beck and Osbaldwick Beck. However, in recent years our work has broadened, such as being more involved on the River Foss and through our recent Meadow Keepers project helping to support and improve grassland areas across the city. Our involvement with the amazing groups managing these sites started conversations about their own green corridors, such as Fulford Ings and Micklegate Stray area, and what could be done on a bigger scale to improve biodiversity across the whole York landscape.

Foss and becks river monitoring

As part of the Dales to Vale Rivers Network we are continuing our ecological monitoring work on the River Foss catchment in partnership with the River Foss Society. We continue to train local people to survey the River Foss and its tributaries - Tang Hall and Osbaldwick Becks. Designed to monitor a variety of river health indicators, the volunteers surveyed the water bodies for mammals such as water voles and otters, for freshwater invertebrates and major changes to riverside habitats. One of the highlights was recording large and healthy populations of white-clawed crayfish on the upper Foss, extending the known distribution 1.5 km downstream of previous records. All of this survey work is vital to inform ongoing management, habitat improvements and potential creation of new habitat.

Heworth Holme and other habitat works

While the bigger projects are happening on Osbaldwick Beck, we cannot forget Tang Hall Beck. We continue to support volunteers in restoring the wet grassland habitat at Heworth Holme, develop the woodland at Wolfe Avenue with understory planting, improving the bankside vegetation at Hemplands through native planting, as well as managing Himalayan Balsam across both becks.

We have been working at Heworth Holme for three years to improve its habitat for wildlife after many years of neglect. The site's transformation has become more noticeable so to get an idea of what lives there, we held a BioBlitz event. This is a continuous period of ecological surveying to try to record all the living species within a defined area. On a cool and wet early June evening, armed with clipboards and ID guides, we started the 24-hour countdown. We were pleased to be joined by members of the public as well as local experts in finding signs of 243 types of wildlife, including otters, bats, frogs, owls, foxes, mice, beetles and water scorpions as well as trees, grasses and other plants, and birds including tawny owls and potential breeding blackcaps.

Grassland Quality Survey

Working with Ptyxis Ecology and the Stockholm Environment Institute York, we have been developing a citizen science accessible Grassland Quality Survey Pack to look at the structure and botanical value of grasslands. The pack provides both a current biodiversity health check and a baseline to compare against in the coming years. Comprehensive testing in 2019 led to improvements to the pack and survey, making it applicable for a wider range of grassland habitats. Due to Covid-19, the launch has been postponed until 2021. We are in discussions with the North and East Yorkshire Data Centre about them holding survey data for this region to ensure it is well governed and can be used to inform future conservation.



A water scorpion from Heworth Holme



Draft cover of the Grassland Quality Survey pack

What can you do?

First, what are green corridors?

The UK's nature is in trouble. Wildlife species have been disappearing and there has been a general decline in numbers due to habitat loss, intensive agriculture and climate change, amongst other causes. The aim of green, or wildlife, corridors is to bridge gaps between continuous habitats caused by human activities or structures such as roads. By connecting fragments of green space in cities to the countryside, these corridors enable access and reduce the isolation of wildlife populations so that plants and animals can flourish everywhere. Improving biodiversity by creating such corridors, also provides numerous benefits for humans. Green spaces increase urban ventilation and reduce the urban heat island effect, help provide flood resilience and, importantly, have lots of positive effects on our mental and physical health. Read more in our blog at stnicks.org.uk/?p=14737



Green Corridors Volunteer Becki

Top 5 wilding tips

Ease up on grass mowing

Plantlife charity's national survey has shown that pollinating insects and wildflowers thrive best in lawns mown only once in every 4 weeks or long grass cut just once a year.

Variety is the spice of life

If you can, grow a wide range of plants including annuals, perennials and shrubs and trees, to provide food and shelter to a great variety of wildlife from birds to bees.

Choose and grow organic

Avoiding chemicals in our food and gardens is good for our health as well as for wildlife

Avoid using peat

Peat extraction destroys precious wetland habitats. There are good alternatives to peat-based compost, including making your own.

Find more more tips on our 'Making space for nature' blog: stnicks.org.uk/?p=15481

Support or volunteer to help maintain the corridors

Making a donation to conservation organisations like St Nicks can help make a big difference in what they can achieve. This year we started offering gift certificates, such as the one below, so that you can mark a special occasion with an act of kindness. We raised several hundred pounds, which will help us plant more trees and wildflowers both at St Nicks and other sites in York.

Time is just as precious as money and we always welcome volunteers keen to help with our work. Read more about our opportunities and volunteers' feedback on pp.14-15.

Link up!

According to the Wildlife Trusts, UK gardens cover more land than all the nature reserves combined. This gives us all a huge opportunity to help nature in our homes by extending existing green corridors—even just a well-planted window box can provide an important stop off point for pollinators struggling to find food in the city. Private and community gardens as well as allotments can offer even more. Making them more welcoming to wildlife will give you lots of pleasure from watching it and knowing that you're helping UK's nature to recover.



Connect to nature for your wellbeing

Numerous studies now show how important it is for us to spend time outdoors, both for our mental and physical wellbeing. Our Ecotherapy programme makes extensive use of this fact but anyone can experience those benefits without being part of it. Nature is, or certainly should be, accessible to everyone from all walks of life in one form or another, and is always there as a constant even though it is continually changing. Even if you go on the exact same walk every day there will always be something new to notice. You don't even need to leave your house to feel the benefit from nature – just look out of your window or grow plants in your house. We can rely on nature to support us and we can gain the benefits from it every day if we only remember to take some time out of our day to connect with it.



Wellbeing through nature tips

Sit Spot routine

Choose a comfortable place to sit outside for 10 minutes once a day or week. Use all of your senses to gently focus attention on your surroundings. Listen to the birds, observe the patterns or feel the textures of grass and petals. Close your eyes if you wish.

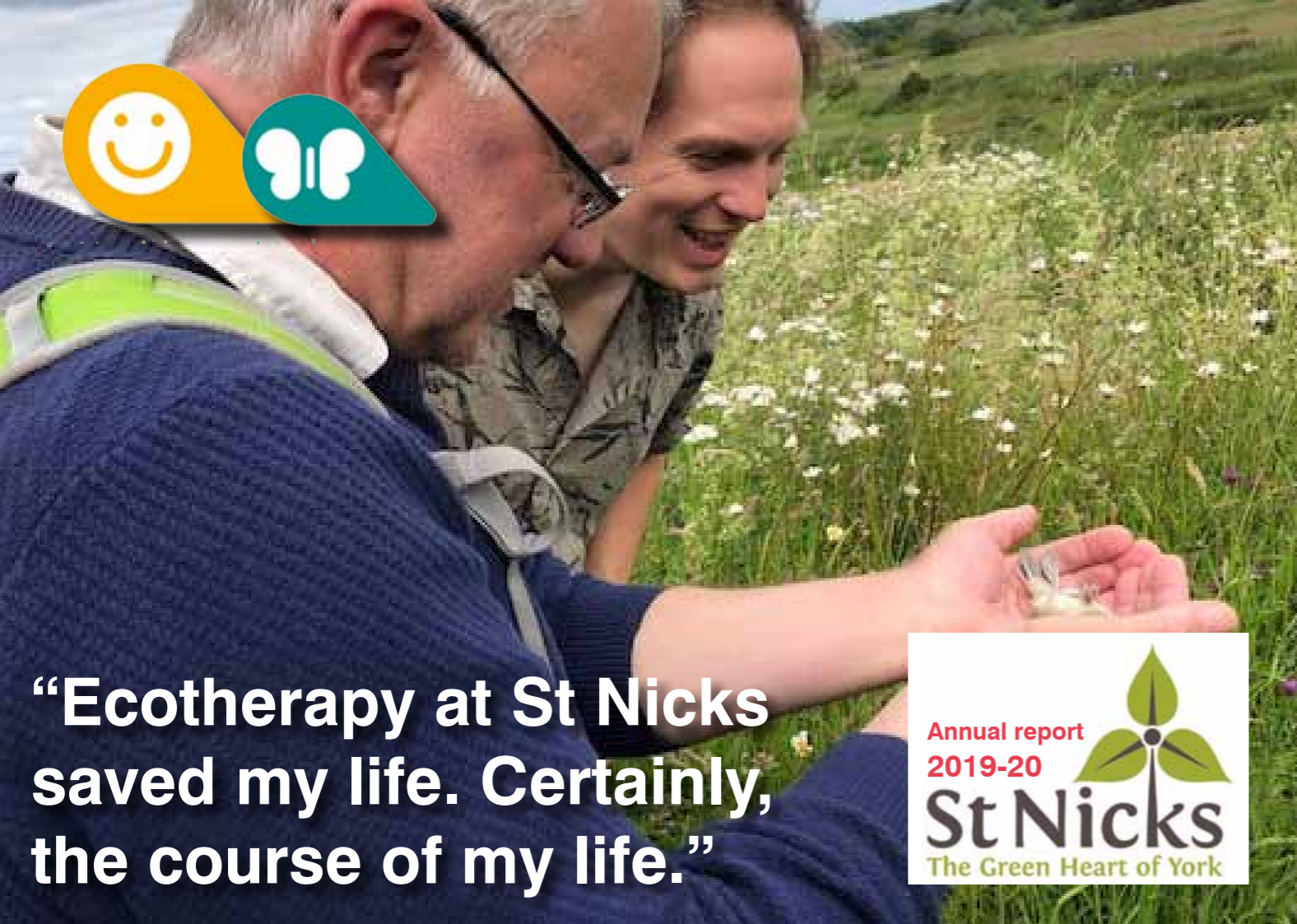
Create a Nature Journal

Use a sketch book to record what you notice and how you feel on your nature trips. Write or draw about the sights, sounds, smells or even the tastes. Make collages using petals, leaves or seeds, or add photos.

Mindful walking

During a nature walk, slow down and notice the sensation of your feet touching the ground, lifting off and swinging forward. Take your time. Now shift your attention towards what you sense from the natural surroundings. Walk for about 5 minutes and acknowledge any experience that arises.

Find more in the Ecotherapy category of stnicks.org.uk/blog



“Ecotherapy at St Nicks saved my life. Certainly, the course of my life.”



3,061 hours spent by participants on 7 types of nature-based group activities

Out of the total of 102 enquiries, **40** new participants enrolled this year.

320 hours of one-to-one booked in mentoring sessions, alongside additional ad hoc informal mentoring

“I’ve learned and experienced that nature is such a rebuilding setting for better wellbeing. When I’m at St Nicks I feel like great big green arms are wrapped around me, but I’m now ready to explore other green sites closer to home.”



Ecotherapy: wellbeing through nature



Over the second year of our 5-year Ecotherapy Programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, we have consistently raised the mental and physical wellbeing of beneficiaries experiencing mental ill health. We have achieved this by supporting participants through a variety of nature-based groups alongside bespoke one-to-one mentoring.

We’re immensely proud to have retained our place amongst the top three mental health service providers for people living in and around York, based on numbers of people engaging. We’ve gained recognition as a quality provider of a support programme unlike any other in the city and participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Thanks to an independent evaluation by Converge Evaluation and Research Team (CERT), we can confidently report that participating in Ecotherapy activities has led to statistically significant increases in wellbeing for every participant. Analysis showed improved mental health, physical health and social interactions, increased motivation and healthier lifestyle choices, alongside a decrease in stress and anxiety.

Due to the targeted marketing to local allied mental health services, coupled with a significant growth in ‘word of mouth’ recommendations, this year we had 102 new enquiries resulting in 40 new participants engaging for at least three months.

This year we have seen a 25% increase in participants’ engagement in group activities, totalling 3,061 hours of delivery, and a 40% increase in the total number of one-to-one mentoring sessions with 320 hours delivered. Additionally, ad hoc mentoring takes place regularly across the week. This approach has been overwhelmingly successful in reaching participants as and when they need support without having to wait for an appointment. Their feedback, alongside that from session leaders and the wider support teams, has been phenomenally positive and acknowledges the impact this level of support has on reducing dependency on primary and clinical services.

“Coming to Ecotherapy changed everything for me. I always feel lifted, like I’ve achieved something, after coming to St Nicks. This has been a real turning point in my recovery.”

“Mentoring with Kathy has helped me see that when I’m attending Bearing Fruit, I spend my time socialising and that I’m really a part of the St Nicks family. This realisation has had a major positive impact on my relationships outside of St Nicks.”

Over the summer months we were excited to host our first two Ecotherapy interns from York St John University. They were instrumental in the production of a Green Spaces Directory which included up to date, community based, volunteering opportunities at various green sites across York. Offering a pathway into the community supports a sustained recovery for those ready to move on from our supported service onto mental health friendly community-based venues.

Through community link partnership working with York St John University Converge and the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys (TEWV) Foundation NHS Trust’s Discovery Hub, we have continued to run two additional groups to meet the growing demand of people wishing to join the Ecotherapy programme.

The benefits of our programme at Peppermill Court (NHS inpatient psychiatric hospital) were recognised when the initial funding ended in the spring of 2019 and other sources were found to enable us to continue. We’re now working with Foss Park Hospital which is replacing Peppermill Court in 2020.

Another exciting new partnership has been developing with York Art Gallery. We ran highly successful Ecotherapy groups there during the April-June 2019 exhibition Ruskin, Turner and the Storm Cloud. The exhibition promoted the work of the artists, specifically around the relationship between nature and mental wellbeing. This was a unique opportunity for our participants to explore a new venue, including the gardens, as well as reflect and learn from the work of Ruskin and Turner.



Volunteering: helping each other

It's been another incredible year of volunteering at St Nicks; a huge thank you goes to our amazing volunteer team for all of the time and effort they dedicate to us. Thanks to the help of 243 volunteers contributing 7,700 hours (equivalent of four additional full time staff members), we have been able to continue managing and improving our beautiful nature reserve, as well as other green spaces across the city. We've continued to record the exciting wildlife that we find around the site, demonstrating the continually improving biodiversity and identification skills. Our volunteers also help us with data entry, administrative tasks, running events or education sessions, developing connections with other green spaces and more. They give us such a huge amount and we are very grateful for their time and dedication helping us. We couldn't ask for a better team!

Our volunteer programme is very inclusive and we're proud to host volunteers of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. From young children joining drop-in sessions to plant wildflowers or move grass clippings, to sprightly pensioners maintaining our paths, there's something to do for everyone. One of the biggest volunteering groups is our Student Action Volunteering team. Students from the city's universities are always a mighty force, helping us with great enthusiasm. This year we had even more students and not just volunteering but also using St Nicks as part of their research projects or dissertations.

We're still working with our friends from the Blueberry Academy, who specialise in supporting adults with learning difficulties, and have been really pleased to see learners joining our regular volunteer teams as well as working in their own groups. It's also been great to have businesses joining in with work on the nature reserve including Aviva, DEFRA, HSE, Nestle, Your Consortium, Network Rail and Sea Salt. A lot of companies now grant their staff a day or two of volunteering, which is very helpful to us and makes for a fun, rewarding team-building day.

Through the regional Action Towards Inclusion project, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and European Social Fund, we're also working with unemployed people to help them grow in confidence and feel job ready. We appreciate how hard this can be for some people and thanks to the project we are able to support our participants into further training. This year we've supported participants in species identification and habitat management training as well as in job searches, with two participants finding paid work.

GoodGym (runners who combine getting fit with doing good) have been regular visitors at St Nicks, really living up to their name and doing fantastic work on the various sites we manage across the city. They've battled with nettles to remove invasive Himalayan balsam, raked up and moved grass cuttings, created nursery beds by torch light, chopped wood to keep us warm in the winter and even created a water-proof wood store to keep it in. With over 40 dedicated runners helping out at times, they're like a tidal wave of positive action, getting tasks done quickly with a never-ending supply of energy.

Getting outside and active in nature has proven mental health benefits. Volunteering with us is a great way to immerse yourself in the great outdoors and enjoy our natural habitats whilst keeping fit and healthy – both the people and the charity benefit. Here's what one of our volunteers has to say about her experiences with us:

"Volunteering at St Nicks has been fantastic. I have learned some valuable practical conservation skills in the management of the reserve by improving the habitat for wildlife. The best part has got to be meeting and working alongside a wide range of people who take great pride in improving the reserve." Mel



GoodGym volunteer, by GoodGym



"Volunteering at St Nicks has been fantastic."

243 volunteers of all ages and abilities gave their time and skills to us

They gave **7,700 hours** to the nature reserve and our projects

4 extra full-time staff would be needed to achieve the same amount of work



"I like volunteering at St Nicks for the fresh air, exercise, working with a friendly group of people and the opportunity to put something back into a special local amenity which has given me pleasure for many years."

Keith



Working towards zero waste



Zero waste

Zero carbon

St Nicks Recycling Team are proud of providing a low carbon emissions service to households, businesses and events in York city centre. Using electric vehicles and load-bearing tricycles, the service is powered by 100% renewable energy and muscle. As everything is sorted by hand, the team ensures high quality materials are sent to be turned back into new items.

Altogether the total combined weight of recycling materials diverted from landfill was over 397 tonnes. Over the course of the year the team load and unload an average of 80 tonnes per person – it's no wonder our recycling team are able to stay fit! Our business waste collections have continued to grow in popularity so we now collect business waste every working day from different areas of the city. Partly due to recycling at eight external events, including York Pride and CAMRA Beer Festival, we saw the biggest increase in our business recycling volumes, collecting over 117 tonnes, a whopping 27 tonnes more than the previous year. Our residential recycling also saw an increase in volumes of recycling; a rise of over 25 tonnes compared to last year.

The 397 tonnes diverted from landfill this year doesn't even include the 550,000 individual plastic packaging items, such as pens, toothbrushes and crisp packets, sent off for recycling by TerraCycle. Our work with the company has brought in over £2,000 for St Nicks over the course of the year and we helped set up several drop off locations around the city, including at our business waste customers' premises. The collections help make people aware of how much waste they generate and bring new people to discover St Nicks.

The complex nature of the scheme, funded by packaging manufacturers, highlights the need for a major rethink of resource use and drive towards a zero waste, circular economy. This is something we've long advocated and there is certainly appetite amongst the public to see it happen – our Zero Waste York Facebook group continues to grow. As of April 2020 we had over 2,000 members who chat and support each other in our collective efforts to minimise waste.



Our Star Crew

Out of 300 nominations for 14 different awards, our Recycling Team placed in the top three of the 2019 Awards for Excellence in Recycling and Waste Management for Collection Crew of the Year. As the only community-run, and most likely the smallest recycling crew in the country, this is a major achievement. It certainly warranted sending two team members, Sam and Eithne, to the awards celebration in London. Although the top award went to a different team in the end, we know that our crew is the best.

York Pride – our pride

St Nicks strives to be inclusive and to champion equality in all our work so we were delighted when the York Pride committee got in touch. They asked for help minimising their non-recycled waste and the amount of litter left after the annual LGBT+ community festival on the Knavesmire. Despite the rainy weather, York Pride 2019 turned out to be the biggest event we had ever collected from. Our team set up several appropriately labelled recycling stations around the Knavesmire. The day was very different to our normal event recycling collections for which we tend to drop off containers beforehand and only go back to collect at the end. This time the team spent the day walking the site picking up litter, collecting recycling that had ended up in general waste (although generally not advisable without appropriate PPE) and dancing! The team also got to chat to lots of people about recycling, to see what was working well and what we could tweak for future events. We got lots of positive feedback from stall-holders, the event organisers and local councillors. It was great to hear that the volumes of general waste and litter were the lowest they'd ever been. This approach to minimise an event's waste proved really popular and we subsequently collected from more events last summer than we have before. This included school sports days, summer fairs, local fundraisers and races. The team are always keen to help reduce the environmental impact of public events so get in touch if you'd like their assistance.

Team of the Year



2,000+ Zero Waste York Facebook group members share tips for zero waste living

Our team sent off **550,000** items to TerraCycle to be up/re-cycled

80t the average amount handled by each recycling team member – all finalists of the 'Crew of the Year' award

286t of recyclables collected from 2,500 city centre households

Business recycling tonnage was **117t**, 25 tonnes more than the previous year

397t total of hand-sorted materials collected in a low carbon fashion and sent off for recycling

Not being in high vis for once, recyclers Sam and Eithne may be hard to spot in the awards photo





How do you tackle waste?

As landfill sites around the country close up, like Harewood Whin in York, we urgently need to rethink waste. Just like nothing is wasted in nature, a circular economy could keep materials cycling between their users and makers so that they don't need to be chucked away. A lot needs to be done, both nationally and locally, to achieve such a system and we need to be demanding it. In the meantime, we can also strive for zero waste at home and work.

Reduce

The easiest way to work out where you need to start is to carry out a waste audit, i.e. have a rummage through your bin. This will highlight the sneaky items of waste you generate without even noticing. Once you have carried out a waste audit you can pick one item a week, or a month, to try and find a zero waste alternative. This might be finding items in refillable packaging, swapping from single use disposables to reusables, or even cutting the use of some things altogether.

Reuse

Charity shops are still going strong for a reason. When you can, try and buy second hand. This works especially well for clothing, books, jigsaws and board games. There are also a number of online resources to enable people to swap or give away items for free. We run a "free stuff Friday" thread on our Zero Waste York Facebook group, where people have given away everything from baby items to furniture. Olilo, Depop and Gumtree are also great ways to find or get rid of second hand items.

Recycle (more)

Recycling saves virgin materials being used as well as the associated resource costs. The key to successful recycling is sorting and rinsing your materials as per your local instructions. There are, however, plenty of materials that require a bit more effort to recycle properly because they may not be economical to collect from your kerbside, such as food and beverage cartons. If that's the case, you will find a directory of bring banks for those at www.ace-uk.co.uk while TerraCycle runs many schemes for materials that wouldn't typically be recycled locally. This includes pens, toothbrushes, crisp and biscuit wrappers. Check the terracycle.co.uk directory to find your local drop off sites, or see our list of what St Nicks can collect in York at stnicks.org.uk



5 waste-busting tips

Avoid impulse purchases

Especially around holidays it might be tempting to buy a few extra things "just in case". How often do they end up in the back of a cupboard until you find them months later and throw them away unused?

Plan meals in advance

Make a shopping list and make sure your meal plan will use up all the produce you buy. That way you won't have any waste food. You'll also know what you've got in the cupboard so won't be buying items you don't need.

Choose reusables if you can

Keep your reusable bottle, coffee cup or bags with you when going out.

Say no!

Can you resist that freebie or bulk buy offer? You won't save money buying something you don't actually need.

Make do and mend

If there are no Repair Cafe events, find online courses and videos to learn how to mend broken items to make them last longer. When buying high value items such as washing machines or mobile phones, check how easy it is to find and replace components.



5 climate actions

Work out your carbon footprint

Energy use, transport and diet are likely to be the biggest factors. Pick one thing to start reducing and carry on.

Talk about climate change

Learn the facts and talk with your political representatives, as well as those close to you.

Support and connect

Find people and organisations working on the issues to address them as a community.

Make space for nature

You'll feel better for it, too.

Don't give up!

Acting on climate at home

One step and planet at a time

Climate change is but a symptom of how unsustainable humanity's impact on the Earth has become. We can all play our role in addressing it, be it directly or indirectly. Although most people would deny it, we do pay more attention to those around us than to scientists or other authorities. While that is a major problem in itself, it also means that we have a lot more power to change things than we often think. What you choose to do will affect your family, friends and colleagues so you can make a positive difference in a myriad of ways. You'll find plenty of benefits along the way too, be it getting healthier through active travel instead of driving, saving money or meeting new friends. Whatever you choose to do will count and the time is now.



Have a Housewarming Party!

Around a fifth of UK carbon emissions comes from heating poorly insulated homes. If you are DIY-minded and your home needs wrapping up, you could try hosting a "Housewarming Party". We facilitated one at our Outreach Officer's house in April 2019, under the expert guidance of Andy Walker of SURE Insulation. The concept is simple: rather than learning about insulation in a classroom, you invite like-minded people to learn together at a practical workshop in your house. It may be a bit nerve-wracking to start with but it's a great way to get help with making your house warmer and learn new skills. This party insulated under a suspended timber floor, an often forgotten source of great discomfort and heat loss due to draughts. Read more and see pictures of the finished floor at: <https://stnicks.org.uk/?p=14947>



Acting on climate



Zero carbon

The Environment Centre building was designed to be carbon neutral through sustainable design features, including renewable energy generation that should have provided for overall energy consumption. In 2000 it was a pioneer of its kind and has served us well as a base for a huge variety of projects and events aiming to engage York residents with environmental issues. Although our renewable installations have not quite met demand, reducing carbon emissions has always been on our agenda and we buy in 100% renewable energy to supplement our needs.

Increasingly running short on space due to the volume of activities, especially our Ecotherapy groups, we've spent this year consulting the Centre users – staff, volunteers, group participants and visitors – on the future of the building and the planned extension. Thanks to the funds raised through the Big Give campaign last year we were able to employ Native Architects to help us with the process and start drawing up plans. We chose the company for its expertise in using natural materials to create highly energy efficient and beautiful buildings. We were about to enter the next stage of the planning process when the pandemic hit. We hope to finalise the plans in 2020 and start raising the funds needed to make the Centre a great showcase of green building once again, as well as an even better place to work and visit.

In the meantime we've been working towards zero carbon in many other ways. As far as we know, we provide the only low carbon emission recycling collection service in the country. Starting with load-bearing tricycles in 2001 we now also have two electric vehicles, which covered around 6,200 miles this year. In our management of the nature reserve and other green spaces we've long favoured manual tools. Grasslands are usually cut with scythes, hedges laid with billhooks and trees coppiced with saws.

It's been heartening to see the rise of climate change awareness within the city as well as around the country this year, sparked by the school strikes and Extinction Rebellion. We may not condone all of the actions and would rather see school children learning about sustainable living instead of marching but their legitimate concerns about the future urgently need addressing. Climate emergency has been declared in many places, with City of York Council commendably aiming to become carbon neutral by 2030 while the UK aims for 2050, but not enough action has followed. This is why we've shown support at several of the strikes and provided a speaker at the Citizens Climate Assembly as well as the annual meeting of One Planet York, although we primarily focus on providing solutions and inspiring adoption of more sustainable lifestyles.

Around a third of all the UK's energy is used in homes, mostly on space heating, contributing almost 20% of all carbon emissions. To help raise awareness and inspire change, we held our fifth York Open Eco Homes. The event enables visitors from York and beyond to see living demonstrations of energy saving and other green living measures in several local homes. We were particularly pleased to see big interest in the guided cycle ride going round all the houses in a low impact and friendly way. We even had a small baby along, which may not have gained much from the explanation of the highly-efficient Passivhaus building principles but it's good to start learning young.

In conjunction with York Community Energy we facilitated a DIY Insulation or "Housewarming Party", whose participants learnt how to insulate a suspended timber floor. We also hosted a Draught-proofing Workshop as a smaller but very important step towards improved energy efficiency, home comfort and potential carbon savings.

We also took several City of York Council officers and others to visit the Climate Innovation District by Citu in Leeds – a highly inspiring example of integrating sustainability into housing. Our aim is to inspire as many people around York as possible to think about buildings, both new and existing, as an important way to reach zero carbon.



Planning for the future



100% renewable energy used to power the Centre and electric vehicles delivering a low carbon service

6,200+ miles covered by the recycling team on load-bearing trikes and electric vehicles, generating little air pollution

70+ people took part in York Open Eco Homes events



"In the week prior to the [Open Eco Homes] event we had decided to buy [and retrofit] a new house in York... Following the visits, we scrapped our plan...and are now actively looking for a building plot. Thank you for organising the event; **you've helped us reach what we believe to be the right decision.**"

Julia



“The best school trip I’ve ever been on!”



Céilidh Dance, by L. Outing



Eco-Crafter Pam and volunteer Imogen with her beautiful contribution to the community felt banner.



Autumn Fayre - a family-friendly woodland trail with willow crafts, by L. Outing

Other community engagement

We engaged around 800 preschool and primary school children in environmental education activities through school assemblies and site visits. The highlight of the year was hosting more than seventy year 6 pupils from Carr Junior School in one day. The children got stuck in learning about climate change and waste issues in between planting wildflowers and immersing themselves in nature. One of the pupils even called it: “The best school trip I’ve ever been on!”

Through the year we also created many other opportunities for families to connect to nature - from planting wildflowers and meeting a bunny rabbit during our Easter Egg Hunt to learning about wildlife on a popular series of walks, as well as through our Nature Explorers and Adventurers sessions. More than 300 people attended our annual Autumn Fayre celebrating the nature reserve with apple juicing, nature crafts, local group stalls, cake and music. It marked the start of our community felt project, which will create two new beautiful wall hangings in the Centre, depicting all the best things about St Nicks. The Eco-Crafters Club members have been helping alongside their usual upcycled craft activities and fostering a friendly, supportive group atmosphere enabling anyone to join in regardless of their abilities.

We love engaging with people through our events, talks and guided tours. This year we also held a record number of 27 stalls speaking to new audiences at venues and events across the city but we’re particularly grateful to those attending our fundraising events. Our Summer Concert is always a treat for music lovers. This time we’d like to thank pianist Matthew Palmer and cellists Sarah Sigsworth, Catherine Strachan and Frances Jones, The Stonegate Singers choir directed by Jon Hughes, and Brinley Price for donating their skills to provide a wonderful evening at the Unitarian Chapel.

Throughout the year we were also busy increasing our online, social media presence to connect to wider audiences, beyond the city limits. As the Covid-19 pandemic hit towards the end of the financial year, these efforts paid off through increased levels of positive response to our content. A special thank you goes to Lewis Outing for taking many of our wonderful photos of the year.

Thank yous

In 2019-20 we gratefully received individual donations as well as grants or financial support from the following bodies:

Funders

Betty’s Trees for Life Fund
The Brelms Trust
National Lottery Community Fund
(Big Lottery Fund)
European Social Fund
Patsy Wood Trust
Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation
Trust in partnership with Your Consortium
Garfield Weston Foundation
The Nineveh Charitable Trust
Neighbourly
Purey Cust Trust
Micklegate, Fishergate and Heworth Wards
Postcode Local Trust
Growing Green Spaces
Naturesave Trust
Tesco Bags of Help

Businesses donating funds or other support

TalkTalk
York Museums Trust
Waitrose & Partners
Illingworths Insurance & Financial Services
Persimmon Homes Building Futures
York Gin
York Beer and Cider Festival
Food Circle York
Melton’s Restaurant
The Bishy Weigh
Choc Affair
White Rose Tango

Our work is only made possible thanks to the support we receive from our funders alongside the generosity of our fantastic volunteers, members and supporters. Thank you all!

Financial activities 2019-20

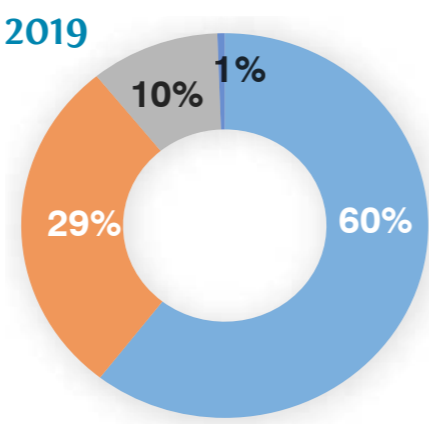
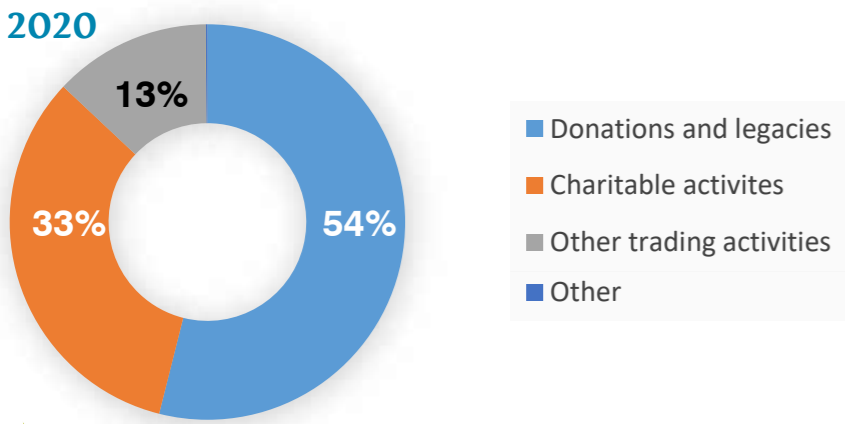
St Nicks changed its legal status to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) on 1st April 2014 with a new registration number of 1153739. The charity existed prior to that, for a period of 17 years, registered with the Charity Commission under no. 1068909. Although not available on the Charity Commission website, prior year Trustee Report and Accounts are available for inspection should interested parties wish to do so by contacting us directly.

In 2019-20 St Nicks generated income of £337,536 against £366,310 in the previous year. Total expenditure for the year amounted to £336,865 (2018/19: £366,045), a decrease of £29,180 compared with the previous year. The net result of the charity for the year is small surplus of £671 (2018/19: £265).

As anticipated, the charity has maintained income above the 2017/18 level for the third year in a row. It is unknown at this stage, how the Coronavirus Pandemic will affect the charity’s finances in 2020/21. However, we will work hard to ensure as financially stable position as possible for St Nicks in the coming year.

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended: 31 March 2020

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total 2020	Total 2019
	£	£	£	£
Income and endowments from:				
Donations and legacies	37,430	144,595	182,025	221,589
Charitable activities	14,012	97,627	111,639	105,032
Other trading activities	40,091	3,259	43,350	37,530
Investments	52	-	52	20
Other	470	-	470	2,139
Total income	92,055	245,481	337,536	366,310
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	1,194	-	1,194	816
Charitable activities	92,644	243,027	335,671	365,229
Total expenditure	93,838	243,027	336,865	366,045
Net income/(expenditure)	(1,783)	2,454	671	265
Gross transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds	(1,783)	2,454	671	265
Total funds brought forward	91,179	304,620	395,799	388,991
Total funds carried forward	89,396	307,074	396,470	389,256



Who we were during 2019-20

Trustees

Trevor Barlow (Chair)
 Adrian Lovett (Vice)
 Stuart Leslie (Treasurer)
 Judith Rigg (Secretary)
 Lars Kramm
 Jane Thurlow
 Rosamund Portus
 Nick Coad
 Sarah Middleton

Patrons

Anneliese Emmans Dean, local poet and performer promoting sustainability through creativity and learning through laughter, rhythm and rhyme

Kate Pickett, Professor of Epidemiology at the University of York and co-author of *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*

Chief Officer

Tom Waring

Other staff

Mark Claridge, Caretaker
 Graeme Dawson, Fundraising & Support Coordinator
 Jonathan Dent, Natural Habitats Manager
 Maria Gill, Volunteer Coordinator & Green Spaces Assistant
 David Hammond, Recycling Officer
 Charlotte Hanson, Recycling Officer
 Marc Hodgson, Recycling Officer
 Ivana Jakubková, Outreach Officer
 Hannah Kenter, Ecotherapy Assistant
 Eithne Phillips, Recycling Officer
 David Shepherd, Finance & Admin Officer
 Esther Smith, Projects Assistant
 Kathy Sturgess, Ecotherapy Project Manager
 Sam Taylor, Recycling & Waste Minimisation Manager
 Stuart Watling, Recycling Officer

Related parties

St Nicks works closely with a number of organisations including: City of York Council, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust and the Dales to Vale Rivers Network, River Foss Society, North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre, Stockholm Environment Institute/OPAL, Sustrans Greener Greenways, Yorkshire Mammal Group, Buglife, Converge and the Discovery Hub at York St John University, Blueberry Academy, York CVS, York Mind and TerraCycle.

The Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who work so hard to make St Nicks a success - the staff, volunteers and the many supporters and members of local communities who give their time and energy so freely, as well as to the many funding bodies who make it possible. Thank you!





Photo by Lewis Outing



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(a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered as Friends of St Nicholas Fields, charity no. 1153739)

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Connect with St Nicks
on our social media.

