

Gallows Hill Nature Reserve

We have been contacted by Andy Bolton who is an Ecologist on the Steering Committee for Gallows Hill, which manages the site on behalf of the Otley Town Council. The Steering Committee has representatives of the Council, along with representatives from Friends of Gallows and other interested groups.

Here is Andy's information about the survey work required for the site and who to contact if you are interested.

Gallows Hill occupies a strip of land to the east of Otley, on the south bank of the River Wharfe. The site is 14 acres in size and consists of areas of trees, scrub and nettle beds with two ponds. This provides a variety of habitats important to birds, amphibians, butterflies and dragonflies and is recognised as one of the most important breeding sites for the common toad in West Yorkshire. The site also contains a network of paths covering approximately 1,430 metres.

In the 1980's the Gallows Hill site was a redundant sewage works and was in a poor condition. The site was owned by the Yorkshire Water Authority and was being considered for disposal. However, the site was designated as floodplain, as such restricting future uses.

In 1986, Otley Town Council resolved to purchase the site from Yorkshire Water. Considerable investment took place between 1989 and 1991 in the removal of toxic materials and to 'naturalise' the old sludge beds. This was followed by a programme of development including construction of a pond, extensive tree and hedge planting and paths.

The Friends of Gallows Hill community group was set up in 1995 to assist with the management and maintenance of the site. Given the area is a Nature Area, the intention of the Friends of Gallows Hill is to enable a 'managed wilderness with grass cutting mainly restricted to paths'. After 30 years, the site is approaching maturity and provides a rich environment for various types of wildlife.

Today, the Friends of Gallows Hill continue to manage the environmental aspects of the site despite fewer and fewer volunteers. The area is well used by families as well as walkers, but mainly by dog walkers. It is intended that the site should provide access for wheelchair users but exclude access to horse riders and motorbikes.

In the last year a new five year strategy document has been written. The continuing aim is to protect, enhance and conserve Gallows Hill, its habitats and wildlife, alongside seeking to develop the educational and recreational potential of the site, by increasing the involvement of the local community.

In order to facilitate this change there is a hope to engage local organisations to undertake periodical surveys of key groups, such as birds with the aim to shape the future work at the site. For further information, please contact Dr Jason Knowles community@otleytowncouncil.gov.uk or Andy Bolton Andy.Bolton@fraudscreen.co.uk



A creche of Goosanders on the Wharfe near Gallows Hill - Phil Matthews