



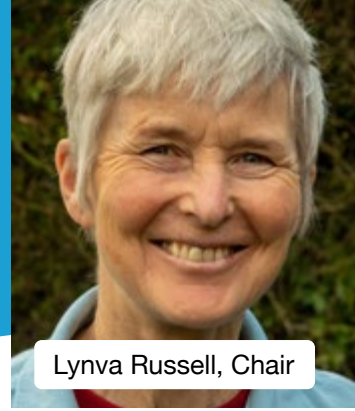
RIVER HOLME  
CONNECTIONS



# Annual Report 2023

[www.riverholmeconnections.org](http://www.riverholmeconnections.org)

# Chair's Report



Lynva Russell, Chair

**Water quality has been at the heart of our work since we were founded in 2015.** A healthy river should be clean of physical and chemical pollutants, well oxygenated and free-flowing to give a variety of physical features including meanders, quiet pools and shallow rapids. We are trying to restore our rivers and streams to this natural state. This is good for wildlife and good for us. Most of the rivers in the UK are not in a good state at all, and no rivers in the country were classed as in good health in the last Environment Agency survey (2020). ([www.wcl.org.uk/not-one-river-in-england-in-good-health.asp](http://www.wcl.org.uk/not-one-river-in-england-in-good-health.asp)).

We work with a variety of partners to monitor and ultimately improve the water quality in the Holme catchment. We have a team of volunteers who collect samples of river invertebrates once a month (from spring through to autumn) from various places in the catchment and record what they find. The types and numbers of invertebrates such as caddisflies and freshwater shrimps tell an important story, and these records add to a bigger picture. The records which have been collected since 2010 are stored on the Calder Rivers Trust database, which in turn is part of the national Riverfly Partnership. We'll be expanding our monitoring work going forward to include chemical tests, including nitrates and phosphates.

We are also working with the University of York on their Ecomix research. This scheme is

introducing a testing programme for new and different chemicals. For example, it has been found that a chemical called fipronil is widespread in our rivers. Fipronil is a commonly used flea product for pets but it degrades into compounds that are more persistent and more toxic to insects, seriously damaging our waterways.

With the wetter winters we have experienced recently and which are likely to increase in the future there has been a significant increase in surface water runoff into drains and rivers. This will include rubber from tyres, heavy metals from catalytic convertors, mud and other pollutants. Less than 30% of pipes that empty in to the rivers belong to Yorkshire Water. Other trends are also increasing this runoff including the many new houses that need to be built on previously green spaces and an increase in tarmacked gardens to help with off road parking.

As well as our monitoring and educational work, we are engaging with more businesses and continuing to carry out physical improvements to help nature help us. Over the next few years this will include creating eight new meadows, 22km of new hedges, a number of woodlands and four new wetlands. Stopping green waste being dumped, stopping litter being dropped and thinking about our own garden management – we can all do a bit. Nature is important to us all, let's help it out.

**Lynva Russell, Chair**





# Supporting Healthy Rivers



Riverfly Sampling

Clean water is a vital resource for all living things. A clean and healthy river supports a wide range of species and it provides us with clean water to drink and bathe in. Clean rivers help boost mental and physical health and they provide an amazing space to enjoy the outdoors. We carry out a wide range of work to help improve water quality in the Holme catchment.



Process Packaging Volunteers

Our volunteers regularly monitor river invertebrates. These invertebrates are very good indicators of the water quality in the river.

- Recorded eight groups of invertebrates across 12 sites – 9,953 invertebrates were recorded and 58 reports submitted
- Trained seven new volunteers
- Added four new monitoring sites



Other water quality work:

- Carried out 24 river clean-ups in 2023 and collected over 80 bags of litter
- Our Green waste and Yellow fish projects helped raise awareness of pollution issues
- We regularly report environmental incidents (pollution issues) to the local Environment Agency team

## Looking forward

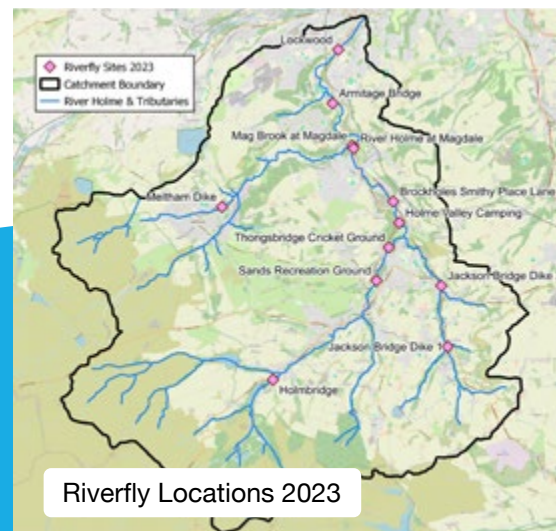
- Train more riverfly volunteers and add new monitoring sites
- Set up a new chemical water quality monitoring programme in the catchment
- Continue with our river clean-up work
- Continue to work with the Environment Agency to improve water quality in the catchment



Riverfly Training

*"I enjoy having an active part in monitoring the river quality and helping to improve the local river and environment. Riverfly volunteering allows adults to re-find their inner child. It is a scientific version of pond dipping, and there is always a sense of excitement to see what you've collected in a kick sample."*

- Helen S, Riverfly volunteer



Riverfly Locations 2023

Please call the Environment Agency incident hotline to report Environmental incidents such as pollution events and fish kills.

Telephone: 0800 80 70 60 (24-hour service)



# Improving Biodiversity



Six-spot Burnet, Pye Flatts

There are many opportunities across our catchment to improve biodiversity. For example, RHC is leading Nature's Holme, one of 22 pilot projects funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), to develop a range of conservation actions across multiple landowners.

## Progress this year

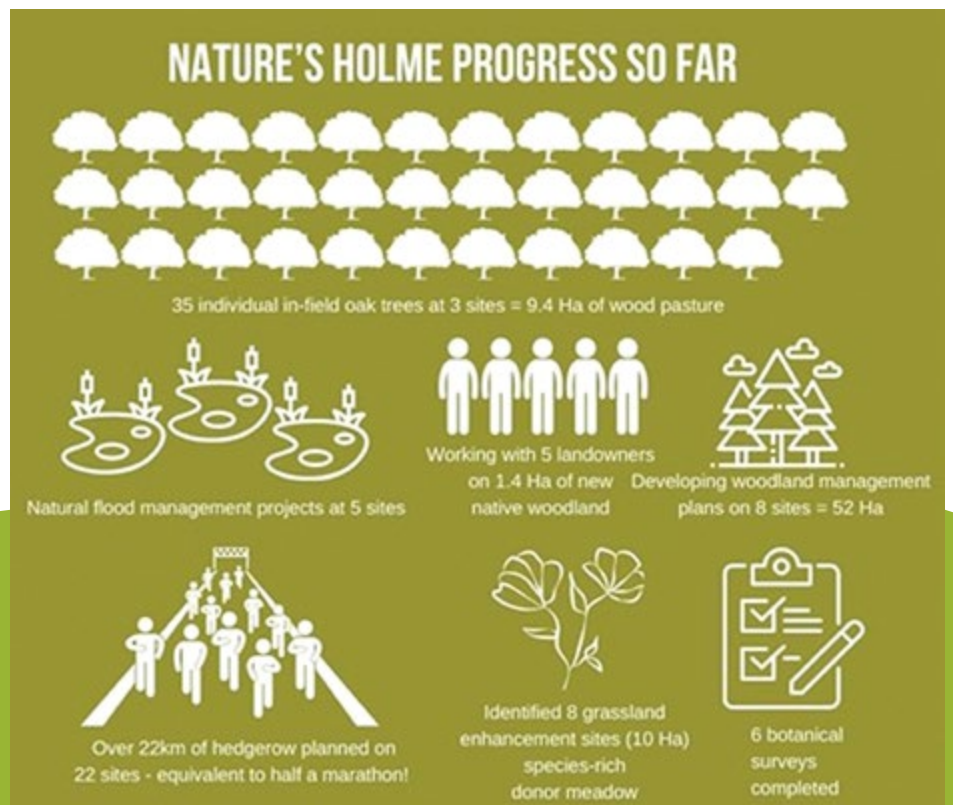
- Created 3.6km of hedgerows and planted 24,929 trees
- Carried out Japanese Knotweed control work along 21km of river
- Himalayan balsam control work was carried out along more than 4km of river
- Thirty people attended our family nature walk at Magdale, Honley and a kingfisher was spotted flying down the river corridor, a fantastic treat for families to see
- Completed water vole signs and habitat suitability survey

## Looking forward

- Develop plans for the reintroduction of water voles in the upper catchment
- Create or enhance 2.5 ha of wildflower hay meadows
- Begin to implement the plans developed for the Nature's Holme project (see infographic)
- Continue planting trees and hedges – the aim is to reach 100,000 trees planted in total since RHC was established, we're close!



Water vole



*“The UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. But the reasons for the decline are clear and we know conservation actions deliver results for nature.”*

State of Nature Report 2023



# Accessible Riversides



Finger Post Installation in Honley

Improving access throughout the Holme catchment is an important part of our work. Connecting people with the river and the wildlife along it is key to improving and conserving our watercourses. Our biggest project to make the riverside more accessible is the Riverside Way – a 15.5km footpath stretching from Digley Reservoir near Holme village downstream to Snow Island in Huddersfield.

## Achievements in 2023

- Ten new waymarker posts installed along the Riverside Way
- Improved 3.7km of paths including resurfacing a section along the Spa Wood, resurfacing behind the Cattle Market in Holmfirth and replacing the boardwalk in the woodland above Thongsbridge Recreation Ground
- Gathered stakeholder feedback on potential routes which could be made fully accessible
- Forty people joined our walks and talks along the Riverside Way



## Cattle Market – revetment boards and resurfacing

*“Great job! This is my walk to work. It was getting a little treacherous there so was delighted to see the embankment shored up and the new surfacing. Love it.”*



Resurfacing behind Holmfirth Cattle Market

## Flexipave at Spa Wood

*“I walked on this yesterday it’s a great improvement on the muddy puddles! Thank you for the great work.”*



Flexipave at Spa Wood

## Looking forward to 2024

- Clear up sections of the Riverside Way and cut back encroaching vegetation
- Work with Experience Community to identify routes in the Holme catchment that can be made fully accessible
- Develop Riverside Way Phase II to deliver further improvement work



Digley to Magdale Walk



# Engagement and Education



Holme Valley Camping River Session

Engaging with young people is vital for us as it involves young people in conservation and nature, helping them to find out what is on their doorstep and how they can help to support their local environment.

## Achievements in 2023

- Visited nine primary schools and 1,014 pupils took part in our sessions
- At River Explorer sessions children learnt about river bugs, their importance in the river and took part in fun educational river and nature activities
- In our Mayfly in the Classroom sessions, pupils learnt about the mayfly lifecycle, the food chain and river quality
- Seven scout groups participated in River Explorer sessions, tree planting and Himalayan balsam bashing
- Greenhead College, Kirklees College and Honley Cubs helped to plant trees
- Attended six local community events
- Held four Nature's Holme events for stakeholders and landowners to inform our future work



Brockfest

## Looking forward to 2024

- Increase the number of primary schools involved in our education programme (from 9 in 2023 to 12 in 2024)



Nature's Holme Landowner Event

- Increase the number of Scout groups involved in educational activities
- Nature's Holme Landowner Events to discuss surveys and an update on the achievements and plans for the remainder of the development phase
- Consultation work to develop a plan for a river festival promoting Nature's Holme
- Develop a Nature's Holme Conference



Sangam Mela

***"A big thank you for coming to cubs last week with the river bugs and activities. It was very good, and the cubs were really engaged with the activities. Thank you for all your hard work."***  
 – Carolyn, Holmfirth Cubs





# Our Volunteers



Bottoms Mill to Holmbridge volunteers

We have a dedicated and hardworking bunch of volunteers at River Holme Connections, who continue to amaze us with their support and enthusiasm for creating a better River Holme and a better Holme Valley. Their work contributes to a variety of projects every year.



Sands Balsam Bashing



Pontey Farm-Miry Lane hedge planting

## Looking forward

In 2024 we hope to continue working with our volunteers so we can:

- Deliver more conservation projects, including the creation of new meadows
- Expand our INNS work to the Meltham area
- Upskill our volunteers with training courses e.g. hedgelaying
- Involve more corporate groups in our projects
- Attract more volunteers who are enthusiastic about improving their local wildlife areas

## Achievements in 2023

- Volunteers contributed an additional 5,412 hours of work
- Volunteers from industry contributed 316 hours of our total volunteer time, allowing us to expand our Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) control to new sites, and get even more trees in the ground
- Volunteers help with administration, to run events and deliver education programmes
- Volunteers spent 179 hours being trained in areas such as riverfly monitoring, brushcutting, safe application of pesticides, habitat surveying, and first aid

*“I love doing volunteering work with River Holme Connections as it gives me a sense of purpose and achievement, physical exercise and connection with like-minded people.”*

- Sue H, volunteer

*“What’s not to like about being a small cog in the River Holme Connections machine, helping in the physical and visual improvements in the area I love to walk and cycle in, whilst working with a great group of like-minded volunteers.”*

- Dennis S, volunteer

*“Volunteering with RHC gives me a great opportunity to really improve the valley environment, and to meet up with a diverse and entertaining team - it doesn’t rain every time!”*

- Ian I, volunteer

## Volunteer questionnaire in Jan 2024

Most important to volunteers when they are involved with RHC	
To improve the local environment	84.85%
To make a difference in your local community	69.70%
Increases my sense of being able to make positive change	84.85%
Increases my feeling of being part of the community	78.79%



# Our Partners



In river litter pick with Central Co-op Food

We have continued to strengthen our strategic partnerships with organisations and communities that are vital to our work. This joined up and co-ordinated approach makes a real difference to the rivers in our catchment and beyond.



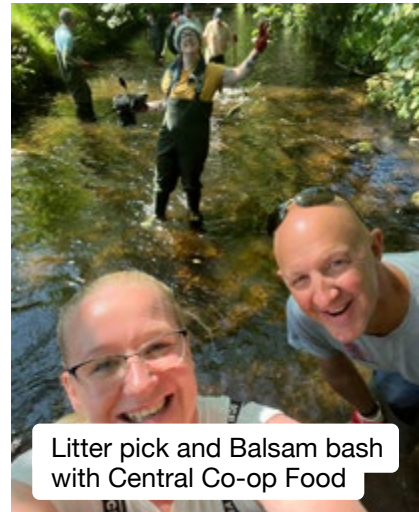
Shelterbelt at Longley Farm with MCC Digital, Jamf and OtterBox

## Achievements in 2023

- Active member of the Calder Catchment Partnership which is a community-led approach that engages people and groups from across society to help improve our precious water environments
- Work collaboratively with more than 20 organisations - working together towards common goals enables us to play an effective role in improving the whole river system
- Work with more than 100 landowners and several local businesses

## Looking forward to 2024

- Continue to foster new partnerships to achieve more for the environment
- Plan to work with more landowners and businesses in the Holme Valley to achieve our aims
- Working to promote natural flood management techniques with the Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme (iCASP)



Litter pick and Balsam bash with Central Co-op Food

*“It’s great to work in partnership with River Holme Connections. Year on year they do more vital work to improve the environment of the Holme valley. Calder Rivers Trust is proud to work alongside RHC”*

- Dr Andy Bray, General Manager, Calder Rivers Trust



Calder Catchment Partnership Meeting

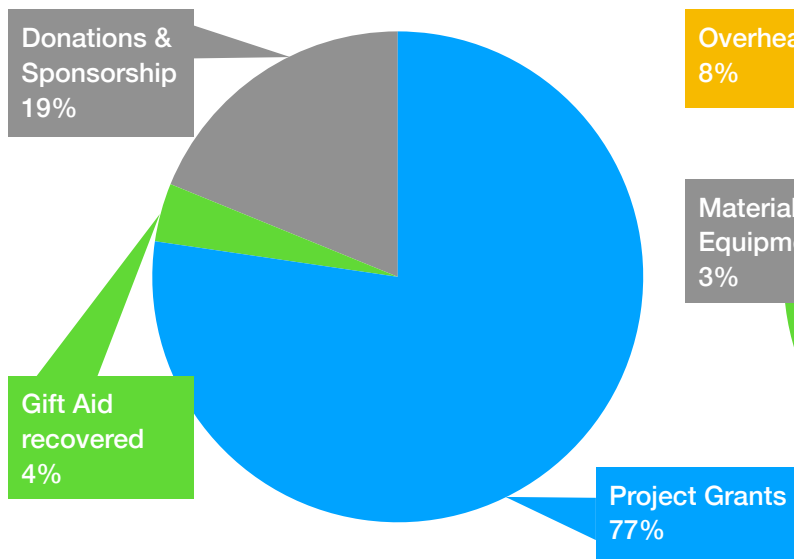
# Finances



This year River Holme Connections continued to work on many projects to improve the river and its environs but it also took on a new and significant pilot project working with DEFRA on Nature's Holme - a Landscape Recovery Project. This meant significant investment from

## Income in 2023

Income was £330,729 (26% more than in 2022) which was mainly due to funding for Nature's Holme.

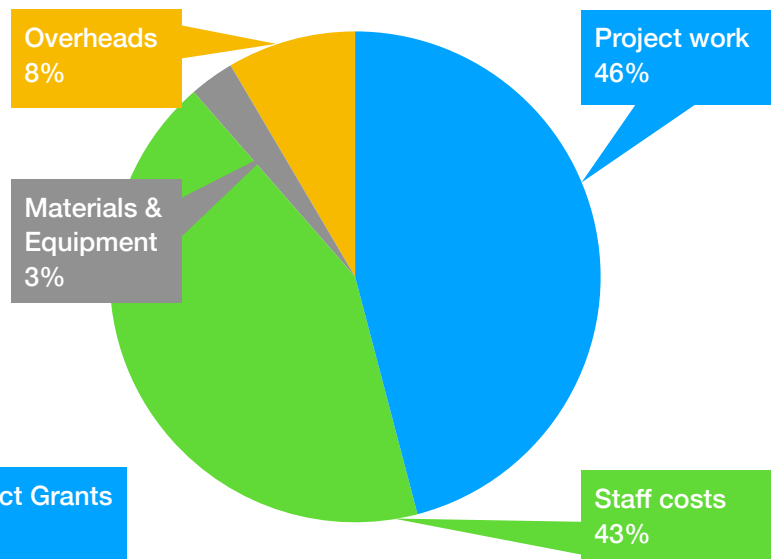


Income	
Project Grants	£255,707
Gift Aid recovered	£12,726
Donations & Sponsorship	£62,296
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£330,729</b>

the charity to grow the staff team, invest in new equipment and more office space. As a result, the charity has had to use some of its reserves to set up Nature's Holme and progress it quickly. However, River Holme Connections remains in a strong financial position at the end of 2023.

## Expenditure in 2023

Expenditure was £333,316 (88% more than in 2022) and a large part of this was due to an increase in costs associated with Nature's Holme.



Expenditure	
Project work	£153,015
Staff costs	£142,215
Materials & Equipment	£9,837
Overheads	£28,249
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>£333,316</b>

A full set of accounts is available to view at the River Holme Connections office. Please call 01484 661756 to arrange an appointment.



RIVER HOLME  
CONNECTIONS



### River Holme Connections

Unit 4 Honley Business Hub

13/15 Westgate

Honley

West Yorkshire

HD9 6AA

Tel: 01484 661756

Email: [info@riverholmeconnections.org](mailto:info@riverholmeconnections.org)

[www.riverholmeconnections.org](http://www.riverholmeconnections.org)

 @riverholmeconnections

 @holmeriver

 @riverholmeconnect

Charity registration number 1163873