

# Futurescapes



## Dearne Valley Green Heart

### An amazing place for people and for wildlife

The Dearne Valley is characterised by a fantastic mixture of wetland, farmland and woodland and is situated in the proud heart of a former Yorkshire coalfield. Within easy reach of two million people, the Dearne Valley Green Heart (DVGH) is made up of nature reserves, ecological buffer zones and farmland, owned and managed by members of the DVGH partnership.

This partnership consists of Natural England, the Environment Agency, the RSPB, wildlife conservation organisations, local authorities and communities. So important is this partnership and the natural value of this beautiful landscape that it has been made one of only 12 Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) in England. This recognition will help to protect the valley's precious spaces and wildlife, ensuring that this is a place where people and nature thrive together for generations to come.

We are working hard to preserve elements of the Dearne Valley's industrial heritage, while at the same time building homes for a rich variety of birds, plants and animals. We are, for example, creating wetlands in areas of subsidence and a mixture of woodland and grassland on spoil heaps.

This landscape makes a significant contribution to national Biodiversity Action Plan targets, supporting nationally-important numbers of breeding and wintering wading birds and water birds. The vital habitats here also act as flood storage areas and buffer zones, protecting valuable land and housing from flooding.

### Our work so far

We have a long history of developing strong partnerships and restoring vital habitats throughout the Dearne Valley. Over the years we have transformed wetland sites owned by Barnsley Council and the Environment Agency into a series of thriving nature reserves, creating safe and sustainable homes for all kinds of wildlife across the valley. But people love it here too. We've renovated the traditional sandstone farm buildings at Old Moor to create a visitor hub in the heart of the Dearne Valley – our reserves now receive over 100,000 visitors every year.

In 2006 the vision for a collaborative approach to preserving this landscape was realised in the form of the DVGH partnership. Only a year later we undertook an earth-moving project to restore derelict arable land at Bolton Ings to a 30-hectare wet grassland and reedbed habitat. A vital renovation at Edderthorpe Flash swiftly followed. This involved the restoration of the drainage system on this sparse washland, providing valuable wet grassland for breeding and roosting waders while increasing flood storage capacity.

It's not all about birds though! We're also managing habitats for rare plants and butterflies like dingy skippers. We're working with partners and schools to reintroduce globally-threatened eels to our washlands and to improve access over the weirs on the Dearne by installing fish passes. Our partnership water vole surveys have identified regionally-important colonies of this endangered mammal, which we will help to protect.



### Securing a future for lapwings

There are few more evocative sounds in the countryside than the calls of lapwings defending their territories. They favour flat, open, arable land and grassland with muddy margins and pools as nesting sites. Sadly, these once-common farmland birds are now in decline and the national picture is a worrying one. But these perky birds are faring better in Yorkshire and the Humber. Throughout the Dearne Valley we are securing important breeding and roosting habitats. Our wet grassland sites act as safe, food-rich havens for chicks that are hatched on nearby arable land. By working together we can help this bird to flourish in the Dearne Valley and beyond.



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“ Our family has farmed in the Dearne Valley since 1953. Over the past 30 years, environmental management has become increasingly important to us. The RSPB’s farmland advisor helped us to develop elements of our Higher Level Stewardship to both support existing birdlife and encourage other species. We are delighted to be part of the ‘greening’ of the Dearne Valley and look forward to continuing to work alongside the RSPB. ”

**Mrs Helen Rhodes, Newhall Farm, Ardsley**

### What’s next?

We will continue to work closely with other partners of the DVGH partnership on a range of projects to help improve and extend core areas of natural importance, while creating and enhancing wildlife buffer zones to improve ecological connectivity across the valley.

The NIA programme consists of a suite of exciting projects that range from habitat creation to activities with local landowners, policy makers and communities. It is only by working together that we can make a real difference for wildlife and people throughout the Dearne Valley.

### Get in touch

We want to hear your ideas about how we can work together to make the Dearne Valley Green Heart even better for people and wildlife.

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The RSPB is a member of BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world

