

Chairman's Report 2026

Welcome to the 2026 Raincliffe Woods Community Enterprise Annual General Meeting. It is now just over a year since I took over as Chairman and it has certainly been a steep learning curve for me. It has also been a time of significant change within the organisation. Not long before I took over the Chair, we employed four people, a full-time forester and a full-time woodland manager and two event organisers. Sadly, as funding depleted, these posts disappeared, to be replaced some months later by a sole Woodland Ranger working three days a week. His name is Adam Copeland and, as an experienced tree surgeon, he has been doing a sterling job dealing with the many fallen trees in the Woods which have been blocking public rights of way as well as the many other tasks which the post entails. We look forward to him remaining with us for a long time to come.

As you can conclude from the above, funding, or the lack of it, has become a significant issue of late. The funding we have received for the last several years from the Government expired in December 2025. This was anticipated and we began the process of applying for funding under the new government scheme set up to support woodlands such as ours over twelve months ago, but in spite of the numerous hoops we have already had to jump through, we are still waiting. This is because, apart from the considerable paperwork involved, our geographic and legal position mean that we have to gain approval from North Yorkshire Council, the North York Moors National Park Authority, the Forestry Commission and Natural England before our funding application is approved. I mention this so that members and supporters can better appreciate the environment in which organisations like ours have to operate in the modern world.

This does not mean that we lack optimism or ambition for the future. Quite the reverse. The basic aim of RWCE in a nutshell (forgive the pun) is to provide a community woodland which is as accessible as possible to local residents especially, but also to occasional visitors. Raincliffe Woods is the largest such woodland in the country. We are rightly proud of that and what we already provide. However, there are numerous ways in which the current facilities can be improved, ranging from repairing the existing aging infrastructure of bridges, steps, boardwalks etc to introducing things such as shelters, toilets, wheelchair access and even a community hub. Work is also under way to obtain planning permission for and then to construct a traffic-free cycle/walking path parallel to Lady Edith's Drive from Scalby Road to Throxenby Mere so that the Woods can be more easily accessed by bike or on foot.

Due to our staffing difficulties events in the Woods have been few and far between in the last twelve months. However, we have met with a number of potential partners recently with a view to addressing in the coming year.

We also wish to do as much of any work in the Woods using the resources of the Wood itself and by bringing in more volunteers from the local community. As in previous years, our existing team of volunteers continue to do valuable work in their own time on a variety of

tasks such as coppicing, constructing fencing, controlling invasive species, litter picking (rubbish left in the Woods being a perennial problem), replanting with native species and even putting up pine marten boxes in the hope that these elusive creatures, which have been seen in nearby woods, will find their way into ours. However, there is always room for more hands to assist.

Although in the past, the sale of timber has brought in some significant income, this resource has probably now been exploited to its maximum, the remaining trees not offering the income potential generated by those already removed. Our plan is therefore to continue to reduce the density of the Woods in places, such as those areas which are currently coniferous plantation, in order to let in more light and so encourage more birds, wildlife, wildflowers etc. This will be done in a sympathetic and low impact fashion. To this end we have recently purchased a light tractor and are even looking at the option of horse logging, a traditional method of forestry which has the least impact of any on the land. It is intended to use as much of the wood cut as possible within the Woods for any repairs and construction that we undertake (a kind of circular economy), or to process in order to enhance its value to sell locally and generate income.

I mentioned above that several members of staff left in the preceding year. One of those was Claire Rodway who many of you will have known as our Woodland Wellbeing Officer. In this role Claire introduced many people to the wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature. So it was with great sadness that we received the news of Claire's passing late last year. To celebrate Claire's life and her time working in the Woods, one of our Board Members, Pete Wilson, constructed a commemorative bench which has now been installed beneath Claire's favourite tree in the Woods not far from the Raincliffe Gates car park.

As happens periodically, we are currently experiencing an outbreak of mountain bike digging in the Woods. Whilst we wish to encourage as many activities as possible, including mountain biking, unrestricted digging is illegal without permission and, in the National Nature Reserve in the Forge Valley, where much of this has taken place, carries a potential fine of up to twenty thousand pounds. The reason for this is that these are fragile and unique environments which the digging of ditches, berms and ramps can significantly damage, as well as disturbing wildlife, as when a trail is dug through a badger sett! There are already numerous bridleways and other trails in the Woods so it is hoped that those doing this work will desist and come and talk to us about how we could build trails in a sympathetic manner with a minimum impact to the environment and wildlife.

I would finally like to thank all of you who have contributed in any way over the last twelve months to making the Woods a better place for us all to enjoy and hope that you have been able to take advantage of what they offer at some time in that period. The Board and I are looking forward to the challenges and opportunities which the next year presents and we look forward to meeting you in the Woods at some time.