



The Longlander

DECEMBER 2021 ISSUE 05

Welcome



Photo Credit: Ben Skinner

May Midwinter find you well!

After some months of relative quiet on the site following the Summer's Annual General Meeting, we're soon about to start seeing a lot more development.

We have recently had confirmation that our first three newt ponds have been granted planning permission, which means we can now look forward to excavation and landscaping works early in the new year.

In addition, a portable workshop is about to be ordered, for storing tools in onsite, and for use by our Site Rangers... and speaking of Site Rangers, you'll be wanting to check out Barry's Newsletter article on this new Long Lands Common volunteering opportunity!

As if that wasn't enough, we have also been hosting Permaculture Workshops, which has given an opportunity for our members both to learn about the Permaculture-based development principles we are following as Long Lands Common develops, and to contribute to the steadily developing design plan for the Common.

For the future, by February we hope to be in the position of having finalised and submitted our site plan to various involved authorities, and thereby meet the last few legal requirements before more major site works can commence, including the laying of paths, construction of facilities, and of course, planting thousands of trees!

On the administration side, we have now printed and delivered one hundred and fifty revised membership certificates; if your own previously issued membership certificate has an error on it, please contact us and we can still provide you with a corrected version.

Overall, I am simply stunned every day, that we are making such fantastic progress on the evolution of Long Lands Common. This project is a light in the darkness for me, both literal (This is our Winter Equinox issue!) and more existential (I need not elaborate on that), and long may it continue to shine, brighter every day.

If you would like to contribute to The LongLander by writing an article or want to send us your letters and photographs, then get in touch at: thelonglander@yahoo.com

Ben Skinner - Chair of Long Lands Common

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Contributors



Artemis Swann, Editor



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The Long Lands Common Team

News From Long Lands Common

Certificate Update

Following our call in the last newsletter, 147 new or amended certificates have just been printed and delivered last week after our third print run.

We know there are still people out there who have paid for shares but haven't received a share certificate because their application form was not submitted successfully. If you are one of these people, please get in touch. As previously stated, we will keep going with issuing certificates until everybody has got what they paid for!



Photo Credit: Ben Aston

Great Crested Newt Ponds

We have recently received some much anticipated good news that the planning application we submitted for the ponds has been approved!

This means we can now start building the new homes for Great Crested Newts in January when the excavation and landscape work will be carried out by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust contractor.

News From Long Lands Common

CPRE North Yorkshire Enterprise Award

Long Lands Common has been awarded the CPRE North Yorkshire's Enterprise Award for 2021.

The charity was impressed by Long Lands shareholder purchase and likened the community share purchase to the early pioneers of the National Park movement. They were impressed that Long Lands is ensuring long term countryside access with community involvement and that the community share purchase went ahead during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pictured right is board member Angela Jex accepting the award.

You can find out more about the work of the CPRE and about the charity [here](#)



Photo Credit: Long Lands Common



Photo Credit: H0erwin56

Container Purchase

We are pleased to finally be able to move forward with the purchase of a portable container that will be transformed into a workshop.

It will be used for storing of tools and act as a base for our Site Rangers.

If you are interested in becoming a Site Ranger, you'll definitely want to check out Barry's Newsletter article on this new Long Lands Common volunteering opportunity!

News From Long Lands Common

Fallen Ash Tree

We are sad to report that Long Lands has received it's first casualty courtesy of Storm Arwen and Barra.

The wonderful Ash tree is no longer standing. If you are visiting the site, we ask that you do not climb on it as it may not be safe.

However, we can give the tree another lease of life by using the wood around the site.

We would love your suggestions on what to use it for so please send your suggestions to: info@longlandscommon.org

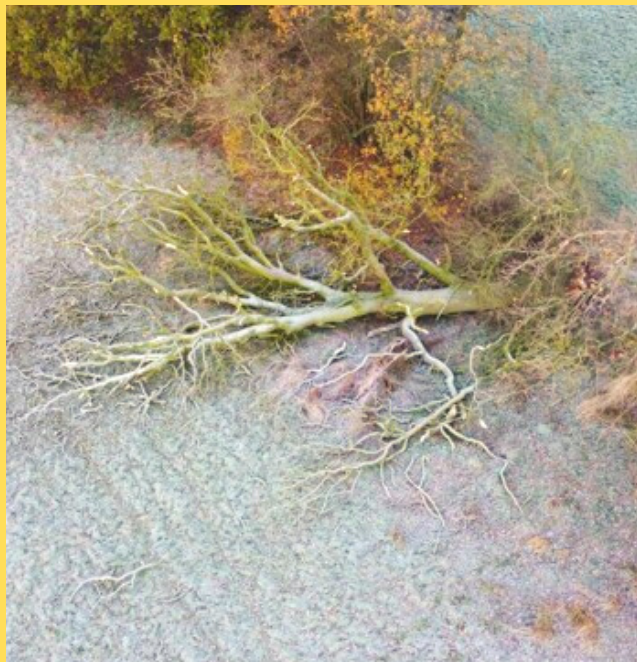


Photo Credit: Ben Skinner



Metal Detector Weekend

On the 30th and 31st of October twenty-eight enthusiastic metal detectorists scanned Long Lands Common. A mixture of families, keen amateurs and serious professionals braved the wet weather and searched the land for possible treasures hidden beneath the earth. As we begin to plan for pond creation and tree planting, the weekend was a unique opportunity to get an insight into the history of the land. A fantastic selection of finds were made, some of which were captured on film and photographed by Ed Lee. You can view the gallery on [Facebook](#).

Thanks to Geoff, Rick and Chris for organising the event.

Thanks also to all of you who attended and made it such a memorable weekend.

Just a friendly reminder that metal detecting at the Common is by invitation only. We know you will understand this, as our valued members and supporters, because we have to be clear on the matter in order to protect the best interests of the nature reserve.

Permaculture Workshops

Three practical workshops took place in November and December to introduce members to the concept of Permaculture and give people a chance to participate in the land design process.

For members unfamiliar with the concept – and of its potential, as both a sustainable design approach and as a growing movement for positive change around the world - the Permaculture Association provides two useful short introductions to the ethics and principles that can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

At the recent workshops, held at Dene Park Community Centre over three consecutive weekends, 60 people came along to learn about Permaculture design principles, how we are applying them to the design of Long Lands Common and hear about our progress so far.



Photo Credit: Long Lands Common

Part of the workshop involved a walk to the Common to 'observe and interact' with the land before contributing ideas for three of the human zones at Long Lands: the greenway entrance area; the hub/workshop area; and the event/large gathering space area around the mound.

Out of the sessions, came many ideas and a great deal of enthusiasm for the project and the potential opportunities that our community land-ownership presents. It is now our challenge to feed these ideas into the design process and also to apply the same design principles to the organisation of the people power - our large membership and volunteer base - and build on the momentum created in these sessions.

The positive energy generated at these workshops has again demonstrated the potential power that lies within our community to affect positive change. When people are given the opportunity to come together, talk, share ideas and organise, great things can happen - new connections are formed, new actions are started and the positive movement grows.

If Long Lands Common has demonstrated anything so far, it's the power of community action. It's our challenge now, as collective owners of the land, to design and create a green space that cares for all our people, and continues to harness that community power, whilst also caring for the Earth and providing our non-human inhabitants with their fair share of the yield. Many thanks to Tom and Kate for helping organise this!

Guided visits to Long Lands Common

Those of us on the Long Lands Common Board are acutely aware that most of the subscribers will be wondering how things are progressing with the site, and how soon it might be before we have something to show for all the hard work and financing of the land purchase.

We do try to keep you informed through this newsletter, and a lot of work goes on week by week by your Board (all volunteers and most with full-time jobs!), and we are as frustrated as you may be with how long things take when dealing with planning and access issues, and the procedures necessary to begin the transformation of the site to a community woodland.

A progress report elsewhere in this newsletter will help to get you up to date.

We are also conscious that many of you will not have had an opportunity to visit Long Lands Common. The AGM in July attracted quite good numbers, and despite poor weather the metal-detecting weekend saw some keen participation.

The recent Permaculture workshops have also given participants the opportunity to take part in a guided site visit. However, these occasions may not have been convenient, and Covid restrictions are also a factor in deterring attendance.



Photo Credit: Ben Skinner

In order to remedy this, we will be organising a series of hosted visits over the next few months to show you around and to explain what is being planned. We are proposing to do this with groups of maybe up to ten people to walk around the site, explain some of the features, tell you where we are with the plans, and give you a general orientation of the location, the vision, and the timescales of what we have taken on.

If you are interested in visiting on this basis, please get in touch giving any preferences of when you might be available (days & times of the week) so that we can get a schedule organised.

There is a form on our [website](#) to log your interest. If you are unable to use the website, please write to us at our business address: 12B Regent Street, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4BE. Please mark the envelope 'LLC visit'.

Volunteer Opportunities

Become a Site Ranger at Long Lands Common

Do you relish a purposeful walk? Maybe you enjoy talking to visitors? Would you like to learn more about wildlife at Long Lands?

We have just the job for you!

Become a Site Ranger at Long Lands Common.



Photo Credit: Long Lands Common

The role: to survey the site on a regular basis, chat to any visitors about the site and what is going on, feedback on any comments, log interesting wildlife sightings and note any issues that need attention.

The commitment: an hour or two on-site every couple of weeks

The skills & attributes: an ability to move round the site and to make observations; a keenness to engage with visitors in a friendly manner; an enthusiasm for wildlife; a willingness to work in a team.

This is a great opportunity to contribute to the development of our community woodland at an early stage and to help us all learn from what nature will teach us.

We will be running some workshops to fully brief you on progress with the design of the site and ideas for improving access, together with opportunities to develop your wildlife identification skills.

We envisage that Site Rangers would work in pairs (or more) according to preferences and availability.

We plan to begin the Ranger duties in the Spring of 2022 after some initial workshops.

If you are interested in helping us please register on the [Get involved](#) pages on our website specifying 'Site Ranger'. We will then send out more details with invitations to attend an initial meeting (which may be online).

Volunteer Heroes



Photo Credit: Harrogate Advertiser

Our December Long Lands Common Champions!

The Fantastic Pupils of Starbeck Primary Academy

Recently the school's year 5 class visited the site to plant Bluebells and Wood Anemone bulbs along the hedgreow. They were supported by a team of helpers from the Long Lands shareholders and also Starbeck in Bloom members.

Starbeck Primary School have been developing their own green projects, with a wildlife walk, allotment and innovative use of green spaces to support social, emotional and mental health.

Geoff Foxall, our Board member and past governor at Starbeck School, said: "Long Lands Common will be a marvellous outdoor classroom as we transform the site from grazing pasture to community woodland and nature reserve.

"A gift of native woodland bulbs provides an early opportunity to involve children from our neighbouring school in the project and we are delighted to have their help in planting the bulbs.

When our plans for woodland are approved later next year, we hope to work with both Starbeck and other local schools in practical activities like tree planting, as well as learning about the increasing wildlife that moves into the new habitats. Long Lands Common is a precious resource where we can all learn from its development."

Outdoor learning is an integral part of the Starbeck Primary Academy's curriculum offer and the school says it is delighted to be one of the first groups of people on-site to start supporting the vision of Long Lands Common.

The school is part of Northern Star Academies Trust, whose vision is clearly set on being a 'Green Trust'.

The trust believes that the global challenge of how we live sustainably on the planet requires local action and is a fundamental responsibility of schools to tackle through education.

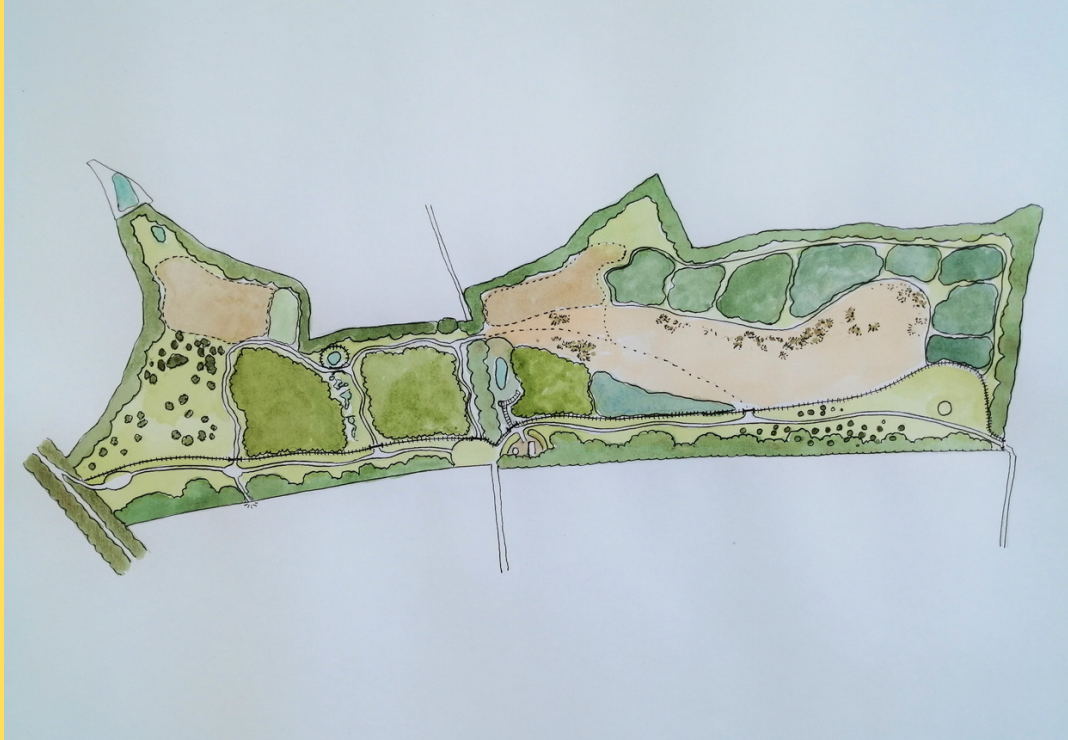
Its schools are focused on preparing children and young people to lead a sustainable life; our actions today will have a lasting impact on the future of our Trust, schools, community and, the planet.

We look forward to inviting the children back to the site in the spring when the bulbs will be in flower for the 1st time!



Photo Credit: maanson - Getty Images

Site Development



Artwork: James McKay

What is the Long Lands Common team doing at the moment, and why can't we plant any trees yet?

I recently went into a local primary school to give a talk about Long Lands Common, and asked the children (aged 5-10) what they thought you would need to do when creating a nature reserve. They were spot on! You need to know:

- What animals and plants are there already
- What the soil is like (incl. geology) – i.e. which plants and trees are best for the site, what kind of environment is it, or could it be?
- Where the water is/could be – ponds, streams, marshes
- How people will access the site? Do you need to provide paths, gates, noticeboards, toilets etc?
- What effect will the site have on the local area and people?

We've been working on all of these things both before, and since, we purchased the site back in April 2021. In order to do this, we've had help from experts who have carried out ecological surveys (plants and animals), and topographical surveys (working out the shape and elevation of the land, and special features).

The help that we've been able to access is really remarkable – in a lot of cases this has been volunteered, or provided at a heavy discount. We're really grateful to those who have helped and are continuing to help.



The Woodmeadow Concept

In particular, Dan Carne from the Woodmeadow Trust has not only provided excellent advice on ecology but also introduced the team to the concept of the 'woodmeadow'. This is a woodland habitat, but mixed – so there are areas of open space like wildflower meadows, thorny scrub, wetland, and generally lots of complexity and edges (Permaculture emphasises the importance of edges or boundaries where habitats meet).

A dense woodland provides fewer of these 'edge' opportunities for animals and plants than the more complex woodmeadow so we think that the woodmeadow idea is the way to go for Long Lands Common. In fact, it's close to the map/vision that we produced for the campaign flyer. In addition, this vision could well be an approximation of the ancient Royal Hunting Forest habitat that Long Lands Common was part of in the medieval period.

Woodland Creation and Planning Permission

We have had so many volunteers offer to plant trees, and so many organisations/groups offering to give us trees, seedlings and other plants, that we could in fact create the nature reserve without any outside help.

However, our aim is to protect the site in the long term, and this involves linking Long Lands Common into a network of established regional initiatives, in particular the White Rose Forest, part of the Northern Forest, which is a scheme to plant millions of trees as part of the strategy to combat climate change by drawing down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

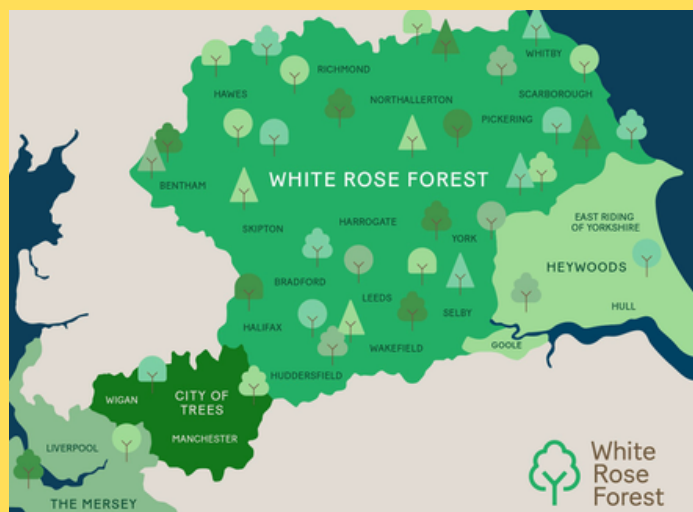


Photo Credit: <https://whiteroseforest.org>

As a flagship 'White Rose Forest' site, Long Lands Common will potentially have an added layer of protection from any future development threats e.g. housing and roads, and in the future this status will also help us maintain the site more effectively, by accessing further grants for treeplanting and maintaining accessibility.

To access White Rose Funding for the site, we have to create a 'Woodland Creation Plan'. A 'Site Design sub-group' including some of the board members, plus various experts, has been meeting to draw up the rough plan for the site, that we need to submit as part of the 'Plan'. We now have this plan*, incorporating blocks of woodland, wildflower meadow, wetland, hedgerow, coppice areas, orchard, wood pasture, and with our infrastructure of paths and gates indicated. This should enable us to get to submit the plan and eventually access grant funding that will allow us to start tree planting in autumn 2022.

Needless to say, all this is extremely complicated and we are reliant on the help we've received from experts who have kindly donated their time, or given it at a discount.

An additional complication is that we also need planning permission for the accessible paths, gates, entrance way, disabled toilets and toolshed. This stuff goes through the local authority system, and is even more complicated, not to say exasperating. It's ironic that we're having to provide the sort of information that you would need in order to get a housing or road development approved!



A more exciting development is that Yorkshire Wildlife Trust will be creating 3 new ponds for the benefit of Great Crested Newts, a protected species.

With these on-site, we will become a flagship for biodiversity in the area.

Staff from University of Leeds have advised on soil sampling, and have taken samples that will be used for research into how a site's soil composition (and carbon storage) changes from farmland to more natural woodland or woodmeadow habitats. This may enable scientists to run research projects on the site in future.

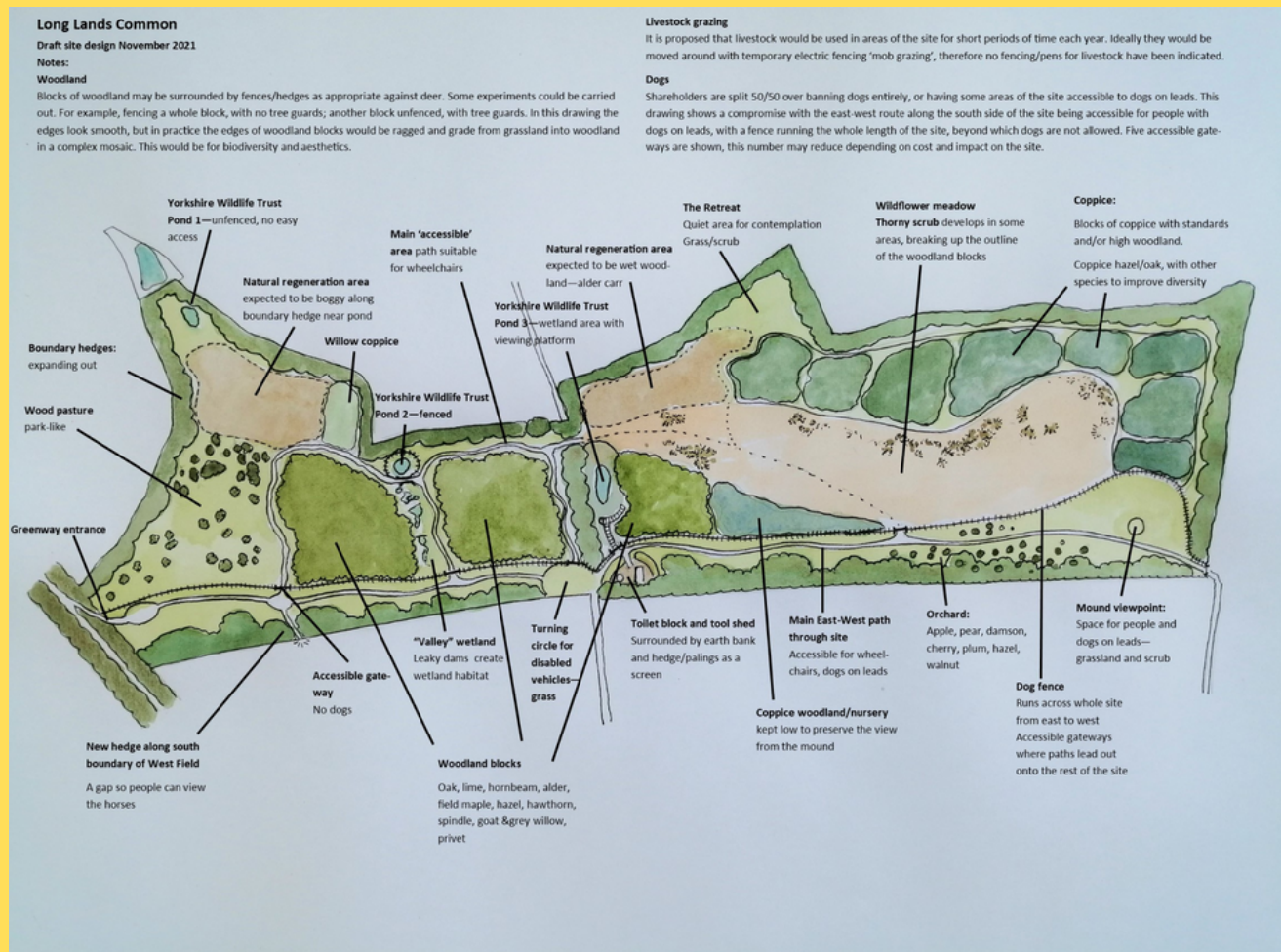
All these developments take time, and we appreciate that we have a legion of local volunteers itching to get stuck in with tree planting, and generally helping out to create the reserve.

In the meantime, Long Lands Common remains as a quiet field, slowly and subtly changing through the seasons.

We ask everyone to be patient, the time for action and hard muddy work will come!

*It is important to note we will be consulting on the site plan with everyone in the community. The rough plan developed so far is for the purpose of progressing the grant application through the first stages.

Below is an illustration of proposed are layout. Zoom in to read the text!



Art Work: James McKay

Tree Species Spotlight - Elm



Photo Credit: Yoska87 - Getty Images

From Ian Murdie

My first memory of an Elm tree was in 1976 when Dutch Elm Disease was rampant and local councils were obliged to pay for the removal of any affected trees. We had a dead one in our back garden. Harrogate Borough Council told us the drought had killed it, so dad had to pay for it to be taken down.

Many years later, I'd moved away from Yorkshire, and I was working for a tree surgeon. One day he stopped the van, grabbed a leaf off an enormous tree at a busy junction and said, "right lads - what's that tree?" We all looked blank. "It's an Elm. It's the only one in the district." We all marvelled at how it had survived the plague. A few months later, a developer chopped through the roots to make way for the foundations of a new block of flats, and the tree died.

Since then, I moved back to Harrogate. On a walk with my wife, I suddenly stopped "Wow – see this? – this is an Elm – it's really rare". She raised her eyebrows. 100m further "Wow here's another one!" I soon came to realise they're ten a penny around here. Pretty sure I spotted one at Long Lands.

There are a number of species of Elm that can be found in this country, but only the Wych Elm is truly native. Others are naturalised introductions, some having been here since the bronze age. A hundred years ago huge Elms trees were a plentiful sight across the British countryside. One of our largest common trees, they shaped the landscape.

Dutch Elm disease is caused by a fungus that is transported from tree to tree by the Elm bark beetle. The fungus is not from the Netherlands – it originally comes from Asia, but the scientists who identified it were Dutch. A new virulent strain of the fungus hit the southern shores of the UK in the late 60s and rapidly swept through England and Wales. Over the following decade, more than 25 million mature Elm trees were wiped from British soil.

It slowed as it went north – there are still some parts of Scotland where it has not reached. All British Elm species are affected. Most trees die quickly once infected, however often small root tips remain untouched in the soil.

From these root tips and from scattered seeds, new trees sprout. The beetle that carries the fungus can only survive on big trees – more than about 15 years old, so these saplings are safe for a while, hence you often see hedgerows that are dominated by young Elm.

It is estimated there are now more Elms in this country than there were before the epidemic, but they rarely grow to anywhere near their full impressive potential before the bark beetles move in again.



Photo Credit: Multiart- Getty Images

Along with the demise of a specific plant, all species that are dependent on that plant also suffer. In the case of the Elm, the most notable is the beautiful white-letter hairstreak butterfly. Its caterpillars feed exclusively on Elms, so their numbers have plummeted in the UK in the last 50 years.

There was a time when Elm was used as a fodder crop – the leaves were fed to livestock. Elm timber used to be a very popular wood with many uses. It is strong with well-defined grain and warm colour. In particular, it was the favoured wood for coffins – ironic now, given the recent fate of the species across Europe and North America.



Photo Credit: Greenlapwing - Getty Images

On a brighter note, a few hardy specimens survived the storm, somehow resistant to the fungus and some Elm enthusiasts are trying to breed new trees from these individuals to repopulate the countryside.

So, it is possible that future generations once again will be able to shelter in the shade of these green giants.

Species Spotlight - Great Crested Newts



Photo Credit: WitR - Getty Images

From Ben Aston

With the fantastic news that we can proceed to build newt ponds on the Long Lands Common site, we take a look at Great Crested Newts and their protected status.

Amphibians and reptiles at Long Lands Common

You will have seen in the local news that the upgrade to junction 47 on the A1(M) has been delayed by another 6 months due to the presence of newts. This is a common story that crops up periodically, along with arguments that they have too much or too little legal protection, so we thought we would talk through a few facts, what has been found so far at Long Lands, what our plans are and what you can do to help.

Ignoring non-native invasive species, there are 6 species of reptile and 7 species of amphibian in the UK, which are often grouped together under the term Herpetofauna. Many are endangered, and even common ones like toads are still of conservation concern and listed as being a priority species for government agencies and local authorities to conserve where possible.

Whilst not presently ideal habitat for amphibians and reptiles, Long Lands Common is situated within a landscape context which means it holds good potential. Within 2 km there are records of the common toad, common frog, smooth newt and Great Crested Newts. Whilst no records are submitted to the local data centre, there are also anecdotal records of grass snakes in the area.

In spring 2021, amphibian and reptile surveys were undertaken following Natural England and Froglife reptile survey guidance, using around 40 artificial refuges spread across southern facing hedgerows that would attract cold blooded animals under suitable weather conditions. A low density of common toad was recorded, with a maximum of three animals on any one occasion, but continuous presence across the 7 visits.

District licensing and the ponds

A pond count in the UK is always going to be an underestimate, but it is likely there were around 800,000 ponds in England and Wales in 1880 (Rackham, 1986), and around 500,000 today (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021). Of those ponds, work by the Freshwater Habitats Trust has shown only 1% of ponds outside of nature reserves were found to support even a single uncommon plant species, and this trajectory of reducing water quality and species diversity has been continuing since at least the 1990s when their surveys started.



Photo Credit: Ben Aston

Natural England, the government regulator with a duty to safeguard a healthy natural environment, has recognised both the reduction in good quality ponds across the country and also the impacts that then has for species conservation. Separately, there is recognition that the currently fragmented and site-specific approach to managing risk to Great Crested Newts, in particular, is not always in the interests of the animals themselves.

Through fieldwork and mapping, Natural England have identified strategic opportunity areas where they seek to promote new ponds, safeguard habitat for existing populations and provide corridors to join and make more resilient, isolated populations of Great Crested Newts. Long Lands lies within a high priority area due to the presence of local populations around Knaresborough and west Harrogate in particular.

In North Yorkshire, Natural England gave the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust the task of identifying suitable locations within their priority mapping, to work with landowners to create ponds that would be a welcome resource for local amphibians and where the landowner would be happy to safeguard those ponds for nature. Given the ethos behind Long Lands, we were glad to help play our part.

Three ponds are being created at Longlands, in locations that already have seasonal flooding and semi-wetland communities and where toads have previously been recorded.

Animals like Great Crested Newts use the ponds to breed between March and June, but then need suitable terrestrial habitat for the rest of the year, which the woodland planting and other schemes at Long Lands Common will provide.



Photo Credit: piola666 - Getty Images

Given the situation of the site close to an existing pond, and with the landscape corridors provided by the railway cutting and Bilton beck, once habitats on-site start to become more natural, it is very likely that this baseline will increase in both diversity and absolute numbers as well as the additional benefits for species diversity and human enjoyment of the site that the presence of the ponds will bring.

What you can do at home

As with most species, a key factor is a diversity of habitat. For example

- **Trying to mix areas of tall/thick/open plants and ground to create areas for reptiles to both bask in the sunshine but also have quick access to cover to feel safe. Rockeries and log or brash piles provide a similar environment. For amphibians in particular, making sure that log piles have plenty of small and not just big gaps helps provide additional cover (for example filling areas with wood chip)**
- **Having areas of longer lawn is not only good for plants and pollinators, but helps provide cover for amphibians, reptiles and their invertebrate food source**
- **If safe to do so, putting a pond in your garden, be that as small as sinking in washing up bowls, will have a significant impact. Ideally for amphibians, ponds should have sloping sides, plenty of vegetation in and around the pond and no fish.**
- **Accessible compost bins in sunny locations are an important habitat, especially to reptiles, and if your lucky you may find eggs in late summer, or animals using the bin overwinter to hibernate**

Your Nature Finds

The winter months may mean darkness and bare trees but it's still a great time to be out and about for a spot of nature watching and photography. It's always exciting to see what you can discover and there is so much to see no matter what you're into.

In this issue, we feature frosty aerial photographs taken by Chairman Ben Skinner of Long Lands Common.



We would love it if you sent us your captures of what you've found and we'll do our best to feature them!

Email your photographs to: thelonglander@yahoo.com

or

Tag us in your pictures on Twitter [@LongLandsCommon](https://twitter.com/LongLandsCommon) or over on our [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/LongLandsCommon) page



**Sending you all seasons greetings and
best wishes for the new year!**

**from
The Long Lands Common team**