

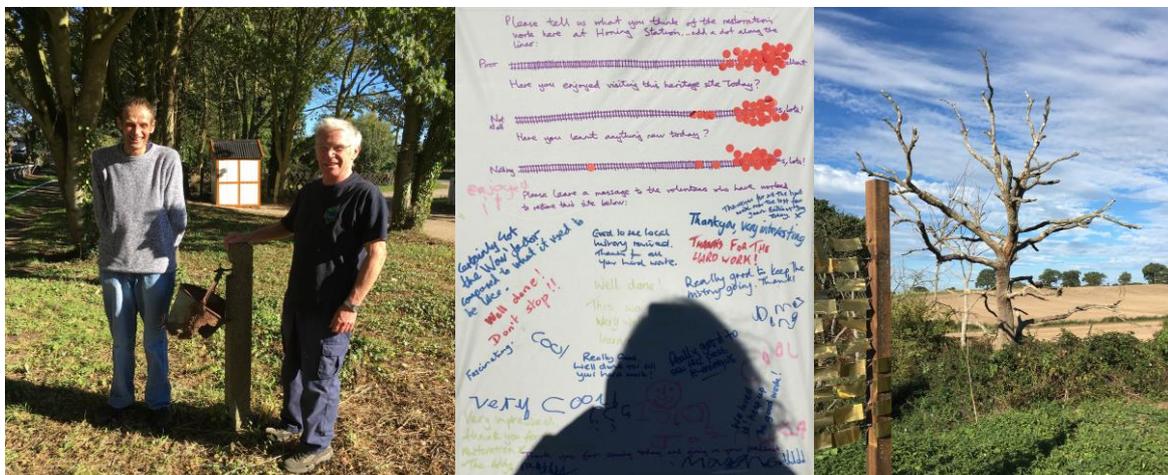
Thriving Countryside Award

Shortlisted: North Walsham's Natural Riches

The North Walsham Conservation Group was started up by local people in November 2016, with the aim of making improvements to the condition of built heritage, wildlife habitats, and access to the countryside around the town. This was achieved by providing a weekly volunteering opportunity allowing almost anyone over 16 to just turn up and join in with a friendly welcoming group. The group's key initial



aims included the recovery of two patches of wildflower-rich grassland along the former railway lines at Knapton and Felmingham; and the uncovering and restoration of the remains of the old Honing train station. After decades where it has been disappearing under earth and vegetation, the old Honing station has been brought back into daylight. A wide range of features have been discovered, from 600 million year old cobblestones to a well with a motorbike in it and an antique toilet! Volunteers have been working hard to reveal the fascinating remains of the old station buildings, signal box and cattle pens. Artwork by local schools is being installed on site, along with an interpretation trail showing people where to find its historic features.



(Pictures top: Honing Railway Station left: two of the volunteers centre: public comments right: amazing view)



(Picture: Hay Meadow North Walsham)

The Knapton and Felmingham sites are designated Local Nature Reserves for their wildflowers (including the scarce small-flowered catchfly) and butterflies. However they had become almost completely overgrown. So, with advice from Norfolk Wildlife Trust, volunteers from the local community worked carefully on the slopes to cut back bramble by hand. The effect of their work has been dramatic, providing hundreds of square metres of new space for wildflowers and grasses. New interpretation will also be added as part of the project to explain to visitors about the biodiversity of the sites.

Over 50 local people, from teenagers to pensioners, have worked side by side on the project. By sharing knowledge and experiences, all have learnt a lot about their local landscape. Site owners Norfolk County Council (Norfolk Trails) are keen to continue to work with the volunteers to protect and enhance the sites in the long-term. The Trails team will also be promoting the long-distance paths to tourists who will bring money into the area, with the sites at Honing, Knapton and Felmingham becoming destinations to attract visitors.

All three of the sites mentioned above have their own car parks but can also be reached from North Walsham town on foot via the traffic-free routes of the old railway lines themselves; they are open every day during daylight hours and provide access to high-quality green space within 1-2 miles of thousands of people's doorsteps. The wildflowers & butterflies, and the restored and newly interpreted built heritage, will make these places much more attractive and interesting for both local people and tourists to visit.

The group has also worked to improve several other sites in the area, including a pond, wet meadows, and a churchyard, as well as restarting coppicing at Pigneys Wood and repairing crumbling steps in several places along the Paston and Weavers Ways to improve public access.



What is the North Walsham Conservation Group

North Walsham Conservation Group is a new FREE project, helping you to become healthier and find out more about your local environment and railway history by taking part in heritage activities such as:

- Restoring station buildings
- Meadow management
- Identifying wildlife
- Restoring ponds
- Repairing fences and gates

As well as reducing stress levels, you can meet new people, learn new skills and become more self-confident as you explore beautiful green spaces as part of a friendly organised group. There is also the satisfaction of making a positive contribution to your local environment.

Activities take place on Wednesday afternoons from 1pm. Minibus transport to and from the sites is provided FREE from meeting points in North Walsham and Aylsham.

Can anyone join?

People over 18 can join in, permission from an adult will be required if you are 16 or 17. You don't have to turn up every week, come when you can.

Do I need to be physically fit?

No, not at all. We usually have a range of tasks to do so that there is something that everyone can usefully do. We welcome people with a wide range of health conditions and disabilities.

You can join in for just an hour, or up to 3 hours, working at your own pace. Some sessions focus on learning and fun, whilst others include opportunities to try gentle or more challenging physical tasks.

Do I need to know how to do anything?

No experience is necessary, our leaders will give you all the training you need.

Do I need to bring anything with me?

Please wear outdoor clothes and reasonably sturdy boots or shoes if you have them. We suggest that you bring along your own snack or packed lunch. If you need to take medication please bring it along with you.

We provide:

- An experienced, trained, DBS-checked leader
- All the tools and equipment needed for each task, including suitable work gloves.
- Tea & coffee for the mid-session break time
- First Aid cover
- Public liability and personal accident insurance

Where will I be working?

All the project's work sites are near North Walsham, we will often be working mainly on old railway lines and station buildings at Honing, Felmingham and Knapton.



