



# Spotlight On: Friends of Helmsley Railbed

Friends of Helmsley Railbed is a volunteer group of people and organisations who want to help to improve public access to the former railbed, whilst protecting the environment too.

## Q Who is involved with the Friends of Helmsley Railbed and what is the background to the 'pathway for all' initiative?

Friends of Helmsley Railbed are a small, friendly and hardworking group of volunteers. We also work in partnership with some other organisations, such as Ryedale Bridleways Group, Ryedale Cycle Forum, Duncombe Park Estate, local authorities and the Kirkbymoorside - Helmsley Path for Everyone Steering Group.

## Q What is the route for the proposed pathway and how long do you expect the transformation to take?

Friends of Helmsley Railbed help to look after 1.2km of the former railbed East of Helmsley, which stretches between Riccal Drive, Helmsley, and the Roman Villa field, near Pockley Gates. Volunteers have already made a good start on the new path. It will only take a few months to extend this path to the River Riccal, if we get enough donations in support. We also need funds to add a



wheelchair-accessible bridge at Spittle Beck.

## Q What is your vision for what the pathway will look like when it is completed?

'A Path for Everyone' is a national concept, supported by Sustrans.org. On the railbed, our vision is a lovely scenic route, on a pathway of rolled stone, that is wide enough and smooth enough to be enjoyed by wheelchairs and prams, as well as horse-riders, dog-walkers, rambles, and cyclists, including disabled cyclists. The path would be around 3m wide, so that path users can pass each other safely in both directions. For about 6m each side of the path, the existing natural habitats of oak trees, conifers, silver birch, blackthorn and woodland flowering plants are very pleasing to behold.

On shared paths, intended for people of all ages, there are different needs and abilities. We would need some natural-style signs, reminding all path users to consider and respect each other's needs. There would also be some passing places

and commemorative benches, for those who need, or want, to pause along the way.

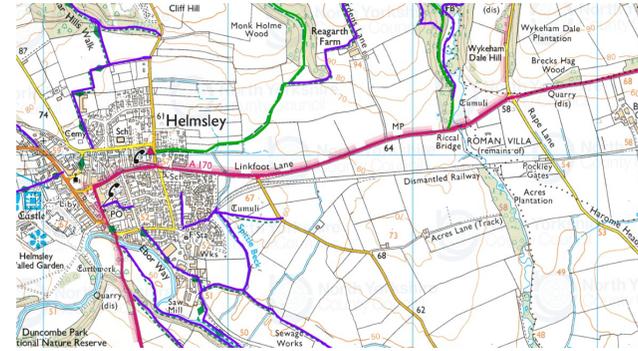
We would also like to connect the railbed, using very quiet roads and by creating similar pathways, to Beadlam Grange's cafe and shops, Ryedale School, the villages of Nawton, Beadlam and Wombledon, the viaduct and church at Kirkdale, and to Kirkbymoorside and Keldholme.

## Q Who do you hope will benefit from the path and in what way?

Ryedale has many lovely views and quiet spaces, but most people are afraid, and rightly so, to walk, take a wheelchair, cycle, or ride a horse on the roads between most of our towns and villages. We think things can be different, and we want to show that local people can work together to add safe, mostly car-free routes, to connect people and amenities. Aside from safety, there would be many other reasons to enjoy these routes; to make daily journeys cheaper; to improve physical and mental health; to reduce air pollution, parking problems and traffic jams; to give freedom to those who don't drive, and to cut our carbon footprint while also supporting our visitor economy.

## Q How will the proposed changes affect vegetation and wildlife?

In 2020 the Government changed the law, so that now all new shared-use paths must increase biodiversity along their route by at least 10%, on top of what is already there. We want to enable nature to develop as naturally as possible. Some members of



Ryedale Naturalists have already made a start to help us with this, by doing vegetation surveys along the A170 verge near Kirkbymoorside and along the Helmsley railbed section of the route. On the railbed, we have removed some perennial weeds to allow more varied wild flowers and fungi to grow. We are also creating water courses and dead-wood hedges, to support insects, birds and mammals. There will be many different things we can do to support and encourage biodiversity all along the whole route, and we would welcome help from anyone who is interested.

## Q How will the path be maintained once completed?

Once completed, all the sections of the route that become public rights of way or road verge paths, will be the responsibility of the new North Yorkshire Council. However, our Council are responsible for hundreds of miles of roads and paths, and budgets for other things may take priority. A local monitoring and volunteering network of local people will be needed to ensure



that the paths are well cared for.

Many people enjoy volunteering on path projects in good company and for good reasons.

## Q What support have you received so far and from whom? And what more do you need?

We have had lots of offers of help, big and small, along the railbed and along the longer proposed route between Helmsley and Kirkbymoorside. It is exciting to be involved in creating a route that can be of benefit to many in the next few years, but also by future generations.

## Q How can the local community help?

Helping is as easy as abc!

(a) We need some donations of stone, money and volunteer time. Please look at our website page <https://getryedalecycling.com/cycleforum/development-wishlist/friends-of-helmsley-railbed/> or email [friendsofhelmsleyrailbed@outlook.com](mailto:friendsofhelmsleyrailbed@outlook.com).

(b) Many farming families in Ryedale enable us to get great benefits from the countryside, by helping to keep open a few rights of way on their land, which still enable them to farm profitably and in privacy. To achieve a route that is safe for all, including families with young children, groups with special needs, and those with physical disabilities, we need the help of a few local landowners to add some small



sections of additional public rights of way. These will link up with very quiet public roads, and some verge paths, to make a fairly direct route between towns and villages. It is important to have a fairly direct route, because then our regular journeys, for shopping, appointments, commuting and to school, become practical.

(c) Do you know somewhere else in Ryedale that really needs a safe path? However long or short it might be, please add it to the Development Wish List on [getryedalecycling.com](http://getryedalecycling.com). You can get help to do this from Craig, the website administrator. It's good to know that this helpful website will carry on, thanks to the up and coming North Yorkshire Council!

## Q Where can people find out more?

Visit Ryedale Cycle Forum at [getryedalecycling.com](http://getryedalecycling.com) and Kirkbymoorside Environment Group at [kirkbymoorsideenvironment.wordpress.com](http://kirkbymoorsideenvironment.wordpress.com).

## Q What's next?

If you would like to be kept informed about this route, please subscribe (for free) to the [getryedalecycling.com](http://getryedalecycling.com) website.

*"This spotlight article is dedicated to the memory of Charlie Cornick, who died after being hit by a vehicle on the A170, when he was cycling between home and work. He was 18 years old."*



Spittle Beck Bridge