

# St Nicks: York's centre for nature and green living



Did you know that there have been more than 1,000 wildlife species identified in a thriving green haven just one mile from the centre of York? [St Nicks](#) is a unique place. Not only is it a 24-acre nature reserve created from a former rubbish tip, but the Environment Centre is a base for a variety of projects and services that help people adopt more sustainable lifestyles and connect to nature.



**The charity's vision is for York to be a city where people value wildlife, the environment and each other equally to sustain a rich and healthy life for all. At a time of climate and ecological emergency, we're doing what we can to address those locally and help others to do so too.**

With the help of volunteers and other groups, our Natural Habitats Team are working on improving both St Nicks and other sites within the local green corridors network for nature. Restoring habitats brings benefits not just for wildlife but can help reduce risk of flooding, soak up carbon emissions and support good wellbeing. The nature reserve witnessed a big surge in visitors during lockdown who were able to get close to an amazing range of wildlife for an urban area including at least 30 species of birds, a huge variety of invertebrates and nocturnal mammals such as bats and foxes.



The benefits of spending active time outdoors are clearly demonstrated by our [Ecotherapy](#) programme, recognised as one of the top three mental health service providers in York. We've gained recognition as a quality provider of a support programme unlike any other in the city and *Many thanks to photographer **Lewis Outing** for all the images used in this presentation.*



## St Nicks: York's centre for nature and green living

participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Thanks to an independent evaluation we know that Ecotherapy leads to improved mental health, physical health and social interactions, increased motivation and healthier lifestyle choices, alongside a decrease in stress and anxiety. We have achieved this by supporting participants through a variety of nature-based groups, from Discover Nature to Nordic Walking or Creative Writing, alongside bespoke one-to-one mentoring. Over the lockdown, our team's continued support became a lifeline for many participants whose mental health was affected from its impact. We also provide a range of activities for children and families as well as popular community events – currently in socially distanced or online form – to keep us all connected with nature and each other.



The increasing evidence for the importance of connecting to nature for good health should hopefully lead to more action on nature restoration and careful management of finite resources. We've been at the forefront of action on waste, starting a kerbside recycling service several years before it became the norm. Using electric vehicles and load-bearing tricycles, the service is powered by 100% renewable energy and muscle. Last year alone our team collected over 397 tonnes of recyclable materials as well as over 550,000 individual plastic packaging items sent off for recycling by [TerraCycle](#). Reducing material usage in the first place is even better than recycling though so the team encourages that in various ways including through the popular Zero Waste York Facebook group.

[The Environment Centre](#) was designed to exemplify sustainability, energy conservation and energy production from renewable sources. It was a pioneer when it opened in 2000 and many lessons have been learnt since then. Plans are now under way to retrofit and expand it to better showcase zero carbon building practices. UK homes have an important role to play in addressing the climate crisis too. Making them much more energy efficient brings numerous other benefits, from improved health to lower carbon impact and energy bills. St Nicks promotes high quality retrofitting and new building through its annual [York Open Eco Homes](#) events, which provide opportunities to visit living demonstrations of energy saving and other green living measures, learn from and share experiences.

There is a lot more to St Nicks than this! We hope this taster whets your appetite to find out more by visiting [our website](#), following our social media - [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) - and exploring the green heart of York.



*Many thanks to photographer **Lewis Outing** for all the images used in this presentation.*