



ORE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Saving and enhancing green space in the Upper Ore Valley

Annual Report 2025-2026

This report covers the period May 2025 – February 2026.

A Community Project to Protect Our Green Spaces



Morris dancers at the July 2025 Village Fete

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Reporting Period

This report covers the period May 2025 – February 2026. Our last couple of AGMs had been late, so we're bringing them back into the correct cycle. The AGM will be held on 28th February 2026.

Ore Community Land Trust Background

Ore Community Land Trust (OCLT) was formed in 2009 by local campaign group Ore Valley Action with the purpose of "Seeking to acquire land in the Upper Ore Valley to save and enhance urban woodland and green space for community use and to protect animal habitats."

It is a charitable (membership) organisation that has built up a considerable body of community support and has developed good working relationships with many local and borough-wide groups and organisations.

In 2017 the Trust registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and widened its remit to include any land in Hastings, and particularly the Ore Valley.

The Charity is a member organisation of Hastings Voluntary Action.

Objectives:

1. To acquire land to protect and enhance available urban green space, animal habitat and accessible open space for community use.
2. To acquire and manage community land, buildings and associated assets for environmental benefit and sustainable development of community amenities.
3. To advance the education of the public in conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.
4. To provide and assist in the provision of recreational facilities and activities for the public as a whole and for those who, by reason of their youth, age, infirmity, disablement, ethnicity, financial hardship or social or economic circumstances, have need of such facilities.
5. To organise and assist in organising community events and activities associated with the work of the Charity and to promote community development and social cohesion.
6. To help in the provision, improvement and maintenance of footpaths and cycle ways for travel to work and education and for leisure and exercise.
7. To contribute to the advancement of education, training, work experience and volunteering.
8. To involve the community in the development of the Trust and its work and in planning new projects and initiatives.

Board of Trustees as at the date of the 2025 AGM

Peter Chowney (Chair)
*Tony Polain (Secretary)
Becky Polain (Treasurer)
*Richard Street (Membership Secretary)
*Ian Sier (Projects Officer)
Jo Walker (Community Engagement)
Denise Ware (Trustee)

Those marked with an asterisk are trustees whose term expires at this AGM and will be seeking re-election.

Membership

Paid-up membership of OCLT has remained stable, with 26 paid members at the end of 2025. However, the number of volunteers working in the woodland has continued to grow (see below for details of volunteer activities). Income from membership fees has consequently not been a significant contributor to OCLT fundraising, although we have been successful at raising funding in other ways (as detailed in the financial report).

Chair's Report

This year, I've mostly been trying to secure the acquisition of land, as well as working with volunteers on the Thursday volunteering sessions. There are three areas of land we have been interested in: the Lower Ore Valley Greenspace, a project I've been pursuing since I was the leader of Hastings Council; the unregistered part of the woodland adjoining Frederick Road; and the potential purchase of land bordering



Volunteers from Let's Do Business on a corporate volunteering day

Victoria Avenue. For further details of these, see the projects section. The acquisition of Ore Village Green was completed in the last reporting year. We have been maintaining this since then.

I've continued to be impressed by the work carried out by our growing team of volunteers in Speckled Wood, dealing with fly tipping, littering, occasional vandalism, and generally maintaining the woodland paths, community garden and village greens. Vandalism has continued to be much less of a problem, which is welcome, and there have been no thefts over the last year. We have carried out more planting in the community garden, behind the village green and along Church Street. We also have continued our Forest School programme and other events for children especially in the woodland.

We have been maintaining Ore Village Green throughout the year, removing litter from the area and mowing with our Ego ProX electric mower. We are mowing much of the green regularly in spring and summer so it can be used for recreational purposes by

local people, while allowing the part of the green closest to the Salvation Army Hall to grow as a meadow, cutting it once a year. This area has been sown with yellow rattle seeds, which will parasitise the grass and weaken it, allowing wildflowers to grow.



Plant sales at the Spring Open Day

This year, as well as our Spring open day in May, we held our first event on the Church Street side of the valley. This was our summer fete, held on Saturday 26th July. The fete was our most ambitious public event so far, with hook-a-duck, a raffle, plant sales, a 'name the teddy' competition, a tombola, morris dancing, music, a dog show, and other activities. It was extremely well attended and raised over £500 for

the Trust. Special thanks are deserved for Wendy Gray, who organised the event, and John Ballantyne, who provided teas and coffees from his camper van, and all the other volunteers who helped. Several volunteers provided food, but special thanks again go to Kelly Pelaou for all the work she puts into preparing the excellent food we have all enjoyed at this and other events.

I would also like to thank the ward councillors in Tressell and Ore wards, as well as Julia Hilton as the East Sussex county councillor, who have been supportive and provide valuable assistance and information. In addition, I would like to thank the other trustees for their continuing guidance and wisdom, and of course all the fantastic volunteers for their hard work.

Major challenges remain, of course. Much of the land in the woodland is owned by private landowners who still harbour ambitions to develop the woodland as housing. As we suspected would happen, one of the landowners has put in a request to include part of their land, a plot in the southeast corner of the woodland, as a housing site for up to 45 new homes. The proposal will be in the draft local plan, which will soon be out for consultation – keep an eye on the council website for details. We have submitted a response to the proposal, providing planning policy reasons for why the site is not suitable for development. You can see that on our [‘Speckled Wood under threat again’](#) website page. Please use some or all of it on your own objections to this development. But be quick – the consultation closes six weeks after the plan is published.

Like any community organisation, OCLT is always looking for more funds. You can donate to OCLT simply through our website, or through the ‘Easy Fundraising’ app. Details are in the fundraising section below. And we continue to need new members and volunteers. I hope that you all enjoy reading the following pages describing our projects during the reporting period, and we thank you all for your continued support. Please look at our website and follow us on Facebook and Instagram. And tell your friends about us!

*Peter Chowney
OCLT Chair
February 2026*

Current Activities

Woodland Management

Our volunteer sessions are on Thursday mornings, weather permitting, from 10am to 1pm, as well as the first Saturday morning of the month.



A volunteer constructing steps in the woodland

Speckled Wood is actively managed through a programme of regular, community-led woodland management and conservation activity.

Volunteer sessions take place throughout the year and focus on practical tasks that support the long-term health, accessibility and ecological value of the woodland. This includes the maintenance of footpaths, steps and bridges to support safe access, alongside habitat management, removal of litter and invasive growth, and seasonal work to protect and enhance wildlife habitats.

Volunteers also carry out practical interventions to manage water flow and land stability within the woodland. This includes the installation and ongoing maintenance of leaky dams within the stream, which help to slow surface water, reduce erosion and support the long-term resilience of the site. These interventions are proportionate, site-specific and informed by an understanding of the woodland's natural characteristics. These measures demonstrate ongoing physical constraints and the need for careful, site-specific management.

Japanese knotweed still grows in parts of the woodland. We monitor this as part of our ongoing site management, with activity focused on preventing further spread and avoiding disturbance in affected areas.

These activities contribute directly to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity, while also ensuring that the woodland remains safe, accessible and welcoming for public use. Management activity is shaped by the specific characteristics of Speckled Wood, with volunteers developing knowledge of local habitats, species and conservation needs unique to the site.

Speckled Wood benefits from sustained stewardship by local volunteers who give time and skills to care for the site on an ongoing basis. This active management supports continued use of the woodland for environmental education, informal recreation and community wellbeing, and demonstrates its clear value as a locally important green space.

Ongoing woodland management is dependent on the continued protection of the site and the ability of the community to access and care for it. The loss or fragmentation of Speckled Wood would undermine the environmental, social and educational benefits currently being delivered through this sustained programme of stewardship.

Community Garden



Volunteers enjoy a coffee after a Thursday session

Work here has continued, with the regular weekly sessions as well as at weekends, with additional planting in the decorative beds, bulb planting, the creation of a bed for edible plants, and a strawberry bed.

The area between the village green and the community garden (acquired from Hastings Council with the village green) is being developed as an extension of the community garden. It has been planted with

a selection of shrubs and small trees, to the north side of the steps, including Buddleia, Euonymus, and Ceanothus, as well as larger perennials including Helianthus and Helenium. This programme of planting will continue. Thanks go to Great Dixter as well as local donors for plants in the community garden. Further planting of shrubs to hide the fencing around Winchester's yard will take place using money from the High Weald Nature and Community Fund, and the creation of a native hedge, with saplings from Woodland Trust.

Ore Village Green

We are intending to keep most of the green mowed again in the coming year but will continue to remove all the clippings. We do this partly to keep the area looking tidy, but also to reduce nutrient levels in the soil. We left the area of grass near the Salvation Army Hall unmown, cutting it to the minimum mower height in Autumn, before seeding it with Yellow Rattle. This will parasitise the grass,



weakening it and allowing wildflowers to grow. However, the soil here is very rich in nitrogen because of years of grass cuttings left on the surface to rot, meaning perennial weeds such as nettles, docks and burdocks continue to grow strongly. We will dig these out as best we can by hand. It will take several years for nutrient levels to fall and a meadow to become established.

The trench dug by the contractor to install the water pipe to the volunteer centre has now grassed over fully and is no longer visible, after reseeding and spread of the existing grass.

Shrubs on the London Road margin of the green were cut back substantially in December but will need further pruning to improve their shape and growth. Other shrubs elsewhere on the green still need tidying and rescuing. These include Berberis, Abelia,

Phormium, Cotinus and Lonicera. Brambles also need to be removed from various locations.

Weekly Forest School

The Parent and Child Forest School, which began in March 2022, continues to thrive, supported by funding from Big Local North East Hastings and National Lottery Community Funding. The sessions are well attended, and offer children and their families hands-on, outdoor experiences that encourage exploration, investigation and child-led learning in a woodland setting. Through these activities, children begin to learn about conservation, biodiversity and sustainability, while developing curiosity about the natural world. They particularly enjoy exploring Speckled Wood, learning the names of tree species, observing badger dens, searching for animal footprints and discovering newts. This is a place-based programme that depends on continued access to the woodland and its green infrastructure setting.



Families enjoying Speckled Wood Forest School sessions

Speckled Wood Trail

This is an annual nature themed trail with artwork made from willow, wood and clay, plus activities and workshops such as charcoal tree drawing, printing, clay firing and storytelling. During 2025, it ran throughout May.



Wildly Nurtured Women's Circle



The Wildly Nurtured Women's Circle continued to offer a welcoming and restorative space for women to connect with themselves, one another and the natural world. Led by Alice and held in the Community Garden at Speckled Wood, the sessions brought women together around a fire for moments of reflection, sharing and connection. Grounded in nature, with cacao, fire and community at its heart, the circle encourages participants to come as they are, feel supported, and reconnect with their wild, authentic selves.

Holiday Activities and Food

We ran sessions in school holidays for children. Free tickets were available for all young children eligible for income related free school meals. Children spent time during the school holidays in Speckled Wood, exploring and learning, as well as receiving lunch and snacks.



Volunteering

Our volunteer team remains small but enthusiastic, and we recruited several new volunteers during 2025, who join us for our Thursday morning sessions. The Saturday morning volunteer session (1st Saturday morning each month) at the Community Garden are now going well. These family-focused volunteer sessions enable people who work full time to attend, contributing time and skills throughout the year.

These sessions bring together local residents, families, and volunteers to take part in practical conservation work, including path maintenance, access improvements, habitat management, litter clearance, and seasonal tasks to support wildlife. Volunteers are supported to learn new skills and to understand why this work matters, from protecting biodiversity to ensuring the woodland remains accessible and welcoming for the wider community.

Other Organisations

Value in the Community - Hastings in Stitches

'Hastings in Stitches' is a community arts project celebrating the wide range of voluntary, grassroots and community organisations working across Hastings. Originally created in the 1990s and revived in 2025, the project features 68 embroidered panels, each



representing a different local group and telling the story of its contribution to the town. Created by local textile artists and community volunteers and showcased as part of the Coastal Currents Arts Festival, the stitched artworks form a collective portrait of community action, creativity and care.



Ore Community Land Trust was recognised as one of the 68 organisations featured, reflecting the Trust's growing role in community led environmental stewardship, shared spaces and local wellbeing.

Christ Church, Ore

Christ Church borders Speckled Wood, making it an ideal space for their community activities. Their annual summer club, attended by around 30 local children between the ages of 8 and 12 years, explore and play in the woodland. They also use the woodland for play activities for a weekly youth group of between 15 and 20 children during term time. Children from these groups, along with other children in the area, use the woodland in their own time too. The 4th Hastings Brownies (based in the church hall) also use Speckled Wood during their annual programme.

Current and Future Projects

Speckled Wood Land Ownership

Ore Community Land Trust owns little of the land in Speckled Wood, with ownership confined to the community garden where the volunteer centre is sited (bought from a local family), three plots on Church Street (two donated by Hastings Council, and one



purchased from a different local family), and Ore Village Green, also purchased from Hastings Council. The land owned by OCLT is shown (roughly) outlined in black on the map. A significant plot, adjoining Frederick Road and extending a couple of hundred metres up the valley, is unregistered, but probably belongs to the NHS as it was originally part of the old St Helen's Hospital site. We have been in touch with NHS Property Services, but they have so far been unable to find

any ownership records, although they would be prepared to transfer the land to OCLT if they could. So this land remains unregistered with no known record of ownership. The best way for OCLT to acquire it might be through 'adverse possession' (formerly known as 'squatter's rights'), which is what we're currently investigating.

The rest of the land in the woodland is owned mostly by two private landowners. One is a small landowner who bought up former allotment plots on the east side of the valley with a view to developing the land for housing before Hastings Council designated it as local green space. We do not have any contact with them however and are not sure where they now live. The other large land holding borders Victoria Avenue. This is owned by a local person. After some initial contact and proposals, from the landowner, we have been unable to contact them further. Although there has been a caravan on the site, and some trees have been cleared, nothing further has taken place. We understand however that East Sussex County Council has been pursuing the owner in connection with costs associated with the collapse of Victoria Avenue into the site, and damage to a sewer.

We shall continue our drive to acquire land in the woodland. Until all the land is in community ownership, protection for Speckled Wood in perpetuity can't be guaranteed.

Lower Ore Valley Land Acquisition

As part of the abortive Millennium Communities Project in the Lower Ore Valley, an area of land was designated as protected open space, with the s.106 planning agreement for the original masterplan specifying that the land should be transferred from Seaspaces (the local development agency who own the land) to an appropriate local charitable organisation. This land adjoins the railway line and is in two sections: one section

extends from Ore Station to Broomgrove Road, south of the old power station site, which is being developed for housing; the other section is on the other side of Broomgrove Road, surrounding the adventure playground and extending up to Chiltern Drive.



We have named the two woodland areas 'Broomgrove Wood' (the large area of woodland below Chiltern Drive that already has a network of footpaths created some years ago by local volunteers) and 'Railway Wood' (between the Old Power Station site and the railway, which is currently completely fenced off).

The original idea was to transfer the land to Hastings Council, but this proved to be difficult for technical and legal reasons. So we pursued the idea that the land could be transferred directly from Seaspaces to OCLT instead. The Seaspaces board of directors approved this transfer in December 2023.

After this approval (which would be a sale for £1), the conveyancing work around the transfer of what is a complicated parcel of land, made up of half a dozen different titles acquired through a compulsory purchase order, took a long time. Further delays ensued with Hastings Council, relating to the transfer of funding associated with the land to OCLT, but these now seem to have been resolved. Following that, yet further delays arose from an objection from East Sussex County Council to the disposal of the land, but this too has now been resolved. Seaspaces are now completing the transfer documents, including a covenant to ensure the land can only ever be used as public open space. Hopefully, all this means we will acquire the land and associated funding very soon!

Great Dixter have offered to work with us to develop a plan for future community uses of the land, for example, the possibility of creating a community vegetable-growing project on part of the land, along with broader community uses that preserve and protect the

ecosystems and habitats in the valley. The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) have also offered to help, particularly in creating better access to the land.

When we have acquired the land, we will develop volunteer teams to take on the necessary path clearance and woodland maintenance, with training and support from TCV. In addition, there will be some replanting and other work to enhance biodiversity and community use, with support and guidance from Great Dixter. The funding from Hastings Council will also enable us to employ a part-time project worker to help with community engagement, organising events and to identify further sources of funding to make the whole project sustainable. Hastings Voluntary Action and TCV will help with pay and administration for the post, as well as providing office space.

Ore Community Land Trust has been awarded a grant from the Broomgrove UK Shared Prosperity Fund, a Government funding source, to engage TCV to clear a corridor for the Greenway route (see later section) that is currently so overgrown that land levels cannot be seen. This vital initial work that will also create an informal footpath, is needed to allow land and ecology surveys to be carried out and for detailed route design and costing, so we can apply for funding to enable the unfunded parts of the greenway to be constructed. A second UKSPF grant has been awarded to contribute to the cost of installing gates in the steel palisade fencing around Railway Wood to allow access.

The trust has undertaken community engagement work on the Broomgrove Estate through 2025 and into 2026 with considerable success and very positive feedback about the plans for the woodlands. We have also set up a broad-based stakeholder group and have leafletted Broomgrove Estate to outline OCLT plans for the woodland, along with several drop-in and other sessions. The Oasis Community Hub and Development Manager, who manages the Broomgrove Community Centre and organises a range of activities for residents, and In2play that runs the Adventure Play facility have been particularly supportive and helpful. Local consultations will continue when we acquire the land.

Future Events

We hope to hold our two now established public events during 2026: the Spring Open Day based around the community garden in May; and the Summer Fete, based around Church Street in July.

Regular volunteer sessions take place on Thursday mornings, 10am – 1pm, and on the first Saturday of the month.

Forest School continues on Tuesdays 10am -12pm every week.

Now we have the village green, that also provides potential for more community activities and events. The slope of the green makes it a perfect venue for music or drama performances. If you would like to organise a public event on the village green, please get in touch.

Further events will be advertised on the website, Facebook and Instagram.

Ore Valley Greenway

One important project that is strongly supported by residents and organisations working in the area of the Ore Valley Greenspace is the construction of a greenway link between the Broomgrove Estate, Frederick Road, and Ore Rail Station and the East Sussex College Annex. This will be a direct link for active travel on foot, by cycle and accessible for people with disabilities to avoid the circuitous route that is currently the only way to make this journey. Parts of this greenway link will be provided by developers of the power station site and Frederick Road site through planning conditions. Other parts are on council-owned land, or land that will be owned by OCLT, joining the route along the old railway track at the bottom of the power station site to Ore Station.

The whole proposed Hastings Greenway would form a largely traffic-free network of leisure, amenity and utility, walking and safe cycling routes, which will also be accessible for people with disabilities. It would bring sustainable and cheap transport, health and fitness and social opportunities. The planned routes run from the Town Centre to Ore, Silverhill, Hollington and Mayfield and the Conquest hospital, and form part of the Hastings Local Plan and the Hastings Walking and Cycling Strategy.



These shared routes for walking and cycling run from Ore Station to the Ridge via the Broomgrove Estate on one side of the rail corridor and to Ore Village via Speckled Wood on the other.

Two design reports have been produced to cover the routes in the both the upper and lower valley. The report for the upper valley covered the Speckled Wood section and was commissioned by OCLT, courtesy of funding from Big Local North East Hastings.

We have continued to work with Hastings Greenway Trust (set up by Hastings Greenway group in 2020), Hastings Council and other interested parties to promote and achieve the implementation of these Greenway routes. This project remains a longer term one, although the parts of the route in the upper and lower Ore Valley look potentially more achievable than other parts of the route.

Potential Projects in Speckled Wood

Sections of Speckled Wood were historically used as allotments but fell into disuse during the 1950s and 1960s. Since that time, these areas have naturally reverted to woodland and are now overgrown, forming part of a continuous and established green space with ecological and community value. The long-term abandonment of these former allotments reflects both the physical constraints of the land and the challenges associated with intensive use.

Any future recovery of these areas for community food growing would require sensitive, small-scale intervention consistent with the woodland setting. Such use would be non-residential, community-led and dependent on long-term stewardship rather than redevelopment. It would not be compatible with housing development, particularly given land stability issues, the presence of Japanese knotweed and the need to avoid significant disturbance to established habitats.

In 2014, a landscape-led concept for a Village Green was commissioned from landscape architect Jeremy Linden, identifying land below the existing Ore Village Green, off Old London Road, as suitable for informal community use. This work further demonstrates that the most appropriate and sustainable future for this land lies in open, accessible green space rather than built development.

Both projects would depend on land currently in fragmented mixed private ownership, with landowners showing no intention to release land for community use and only limited interest in sale at values other than those associated with housing development. Combined with the environmental constraints, land stability considerations and established community use, this creates a clear barrier to deliverable residential development on this site.

These factors underline that Speckled Wood is not suitable or viable for housing and that its long-term value lies in continued protection, active management and community-led use as a locally important green space.

Fundraising and Donations

Grants and donations over the period of this report include:

- £99.21 from Easy Fundraising;
- £743.63 from donations (online, in person, and sales of plants, etc);
- £711.60 from East Sussex County Council;
- Grants from the High Weald Nature and Community Fund and the UK Sha Woodland Trust – sapling native hedge plants;
- Plant donations from Great Dixter;
- Plants and trees donated by various volunteers and local residents over the year.

Nb: These amounts do not correlate with the amounts shown in the financial report because the accounting period is different from the period covered by this report.

We are subscribed to a project called 'Easy fundraising'. With this, supporters can sign up via the app or website to nominate Ore Community Land Trust as their chosen charity. Then, when shopping with a wide range of retailers (including Morrisons, Sainsbury, Tesco, Ocado, Waitrose, M&S, Dunelm, Pets at Home, and many more), the retailer will make a donation to OCLT. You can see how it works and sign up at the Easy fundraising website at <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/>.

Anyone can also donate directly to OCLT via the website.

Communications

We continue to promote our cause and activities via the OCLT Website, Facebook and Instagram. We also make use of several notice boards around Ore, including the OCLT notice board above the Village Green. As previously mentioned in this report, we held open days during the year and also produced various newsletters delivered door-to-door in the Speckled Wood area, updating members and the public with details of our activities, events and plans for the future. These were also posted on social media and our website.

Partner Organisations

Organisations we have worked with, and continue to work with, include:

- Big Local North East Hastings;
- Hastings Borough Council;
- Seaspaces;
- East Sussex County Council;
- Let's Do Business Group;
- Great Dixter Trust;
- Hastings Voluntary Action;
- Salvation Army (Ore);
- Hastings Greenway Group;
- Ramblers;
- Ore in Bloom;
- Friends of Ore Station;
- Oasis Community Centre;
- Orbit Housing Association;
- Hastings & Rother Disability Forum;
- Hastings History House;
- Hastings Sustainable Transport Forum;
- The Conservation Volunteers (TCV);
- Greener Futures;
- Groundwork South;
- Nature Connections;
- National Lottery;
- Woodland Trust.

We would like to thank all of the organisations that we work with for their support and help and look forward to future co-operative partnerships.

Taken together, the Forest School programme, volunteer conservation sessions, and wider intergenerational community involvement demonstrate that Speckled Wood is a well-used, actively managed and highly valued local green space. These activities are ongoing, place specific and dependent on continued access to the woodland itself. The work carried out by families and volunteers supports biodiversity, improves accessibility and contributes to health, wellbeing and environmental learning within the local community. Protecting Speckled Wood is therefore essential to ensuring this long-term community benefit can continue.

