



From a sand quarry to the best campsite in the country



On the eve of its 50th birthday, St Helens in the Park has been awarded AA England & Overall Campsite of the Year for 2025/26.

"We are so proud to be setting the standard for English caravan sites with our first-class service and facilities," says manager Simon Roe. "Everyone on the team pitches in – pardon the pun! So it is fantastic that their hard work has been recognised. We would also like to thank our loyal repeat guests who take as much care and pride in St Helens as we do."

Founded on the flowing contours of a former sand quarry, St Helens in the Park started welcoming campers and touring caravanners in 1976.

"There are over seven thousand campsites in the UK so St Helens was up against some stiff competition. I felt terribly nervous as the inspector bombarded me with questions. But I was pleased by the end of her visit that she seemed to have a smile on her face. So I must have said something right!" recalled Simon.

"St Helens in the Park was one of the Estates' first steps into rural diversification," says David Steel, the Chief Executive of Dawnay Estates. "Its success encouraged the establishment of other businesses, such as Wykeham Mature Plants, our office and light industrial business parks and more recently the North Yorkshire Water Park just down the road. We look forward to celebrating with everyone at the Birthday Party in the Park next year!"

Half a Century in the Making



Late 70's



Early 80's



Late 80's



Late 90's



1984



1976

In 1974, work began to adapt the terrain of a sand quarry into a leafy caravan park. Rather than level the site, the existing undulations were incorporated into the design to give caravanners more privacy and enjoy the incredible views over the valley. Facility blocks were built to resemble farm buildings, and have been continually adapted and refurbished. Around 90% of the trees now providing shade and wildlife habitats were planted back in 1975.

"From the start, there was a determination to make it a really good site," remembers the current Lord Downe. "For example,

my father insisted on top of the range Habitat tiles to ensure the amenities did not resemble an institution."

The site takes its name from the St Helen's spring which had been at the heart of the quarry. "An impromptu pool formed during drainage works so I had a great time paddling in it," says Lord Downe. "However the builders were probably less happy about my antics! The local children, including myself and Katherine Hutton, the daughter of the then Agent Paul Hutton, were paid £2 a day to gather up the large stones that covered the site"



Secure Storage Compound

Solar panels

Dog Walk



ST HELENS

CARAVANS, PODS & CAMPING



Glamping Pods



Café and Decked Seating Area



Camping Pods



Tent Field



Adventure Playground



Forest School



Bedale Lodge



Licensed Shop & Launderette



Bike & Dog Wash

Why "St Helens" in the Park

The natural spring that flows through the centre of the caravan site is called St Helen. St Helen was the unmarried mother of Constantine the Great who in 306AD, in York, was declared Emperor of Rome. This strong and determined woman who was canonised in 326AD has churches, mountains, towns, Rugby League Clubs, and a small spring just outside the village of Wykeham, named after her.

1970's



3.1m



2020's



7.9m

★★★★★ **Our Happy Place** 2026 will be our 36th year as seasonal customers here at St Helens. Back in 1991 our site fees for March to October were £520, how things change. We really do call St Helens our Happy Place, with all the improvements to the site and facilities, it must be one of if not the best in North Yorkshire. Well done TEAM ST HELENS. Looking forward to the next 35 years!!!!
Kathryn and Ian Marchbank



Summer shindigs in the sun

2026 sees some rather special celebrations to mark the 50th year of welcoming guests. On the 13th June, Birthday Party in the Park will welcome guests, staff and their families. There will be a 1970s disco, a themed lounge in browns and yellows, and an exhibition of past plans, photo and old receipts from guests. As well as tipi tents, children's entertainment and a hog roast.

A 70s-themed street party is planned for the weekend of the 10th and 11th July, exclusively for seasonal guests. "To capture a seventies vibe, there will be a retro band", says manager Simon Roe. "The food is bring your own so we expect a mountain of salmon paste sandwiches and cheese & pineapple on sticks!"



A green outlook

Two years ago, 300 ground-mounted solar panels were installed in a well-screened field. These now produce a third of the site's electricity needs, including charging the cleaning team's electric mini-van.

Excess solar power also preheats water for one of the shower blocks, reducing gas use. Since installation, the solar panels have produced 350,000+ kilowatt hours of energy. This could power around 80 homes for a whole year.

"We take our environmental responsibilities to heart," says manager Simon Roe. "We're members of the David Bellamy 'Pledge for Nature' scheme, and also a North York Moors National Park Champion." Across the site there are pollinator-friendly flowers, perennial planting schemes, un-mown grass areas, wild flower strips and bug hotels.

Dahlias, mud dough and dens

St Helens in the Park lies on the edge of the village of Wykeham, and has always had strong links with its local community. In 2025, staff and guests raised more than £4000 for charity through activities ranging from an on-site dahlia sale to sponsored runs.

The Forest School site is also very popular with local primary schools and nurseries who use it to help better connect young people with the natural environment. Activities include playing with mud dough, orienteering and toasting marshmallows on sticks they've whittled themselves.

On Saturdays and during school holidays, Little Explorer Squad often runs sessions including bug hunt adventures, forest quests and den building. These are open to younger guests and the public alike.



Cleaning up on comfort

When it comes to modern, spacious shower and toilet facilities, a recent major refurbishment means St Helens in the Park offers a deluxe experience. As well as underfloor heating, there are free-to-use hairdryers and even the sound of local radio playing softly in the background. Access routes include a resin gravel ramp, set around drought-tolerant colourful landscaping.

"We are keen to make camping and caravanning as accessible as possible", explains Manager Simon Roe. "There is now a third disabled compliant wet room, adding to our two existing rooms." Guests can also hire an accessible family friendly private bathroom during their stay. For a special treat, the site has an indoor Jacuzzi Relaxation Suite for two, complete with Brazilian black slate walls.

A 'once in a generation' renovation

Built as a farmhouse in 1656, the Downe Arms in Wykeham became a coaching inn during the 1800s. In 2024, it was closed pending a full refurbishment. Since then a lot of planning has been done as it is a Grade II listed building, and planning and listed building consent has been lodged with North Yorkshire

County Council. A decision is expected very soon. It is hoped to begin the extensive refurbishment works in March 2026. Anticipated opening of the new-look hotel, restaurant, bar and event spaces is in spring 2027. The Estate thanks everyone for their patience during this major project and are as keen as everyone to have their local watering hole open again!



Paul Hutton - a tribute 1940 -2025

St Helens in the Park owes much of its success to Paul Hutton OBE, FRICS, the agent for Wykeham from 1965 to 1978. He was almost the same age as the late Lord Downe and the two went on to form a strong working relationship and an enduring friendship. The caravan site was the first major diversification they worked on together, followed in 1977 with the large extension to the Downe Arms. In 1978 Paul left Wykeham to become the agent at Blenheim Palace, a hugely prestigious post. Despite reaching the pinnacle of his profession, Paul retained an affection for Wykeham, advising Lord Downe on all major issues until his death earlier this year. He will be sadly missed by all who had the good fortune to know him. (Paul Hutton, 3rd from left, at the opening of the Park, 1976)

Wake up and smell the coffee

There is a new face at the tearooms in The Hillyard, Wykeham - specialty coffee experts Forge Valley Roasters. A local, family run business and a Champion Producer of the North York Moors National Park.

"We're incredibly proud of this significant partnership with The Dawnay Estates," says co-founder Christopher Brett. "The Hillyard offers an idyllic new home for the business. We plan to move our roastery operation here too in the coming months."

'The Kitchen' offers speciality coffee, cakes and delicious food made with locally sourced ingredients. It is open seven days a week, with evening dining on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Find out more at:

▶ forgevalleyroasters.com

