

**Walberswick Common Lands Charity**  
**REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF TRUSTEES**  
**April 2025**

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**Trustees**

1. I was re-appointed Chair of the Trustees with effect from 1 January 2025 (having started in that role on 1 January 2023).
2. The Parish Council re-appointed Hannah Sutton as a nominative trustee in March 2024 and myself in December 2024.
3. The Rev Russ Gant took up his role as *ex officio* trustee from April 2024.
4. At a meeting on 12 December 2024, Vanessa Tucker was re-appointed as a co-opted trustee with effect from 1 January 2025.
5. My fellow trustees are extremely dedicated, giving freely of their time in the interests of the Charity and the community as a whole. I am indebted to their experience and insight.
6. We are all equally grateful for the ongoing work of our clerk, Matthew Wetmore, whose diligence and knowledge of the affairs of the Charity is unequalled.

**Accounts**

7. At their meeting on 27 February 2025, the Trustees signed off the Charity's accounts for the year ended 31 December 2024.
8. The general income for 2024 was just over £25,000 higher than for 2023 (and around £5,000 more than for 2022). Around £15,000 of this increase came from the covenant from Walberswick Car Parks Limited. This is a tribute to the enormous work undertaken by the Directors of WCPL, dealing admirably with a range of difficulties so as not just to protect that source of income, but to build upon it by over one third. That is no small feat.
9. The balance of the higher income came from an increase of the funds which we have received by way of grants from the Rural Payments Agency through our Countryside Stewardship Agreement.

10. Our expenditure remained approximately level. The increase in the RPA grant came in in the latter part of the year, and so is ready to be used in the course of 2025. We are mindful that a number of potential matters may require increased expenditure in 2025.

### **Environmental Stewardship**<sup>1</sup>

11. A substantial proportion of the Trustees' time is spent on considering the management of the land and property for which the Charity is responsible. This includes the Common, but also the Town Marshes (running alongside the River Blyth) and some of the marshes and reedbeds running alongside the River Dunwich.<sup>2</sup> Much of this land holds a designation protecting it, reflecting the particular value in the wildlife and biodiversity in this rich area. As well as falling within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (or 'National Landscape'), much of the land is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Ramsar Site (wetlands of international importance).
12. Our vision is to steward the land in a world-class manner, following a nature-first philosophy, with the support of the village community and partners. We seek to explore priorities and then agree, deliver and monitor a stewardship programme which will protect and enhance the Charity's natural capital for the village and its wider communities. We do this by differentiating the various land types and areas for which we are responsible so that we can then plan their stewardship appropriately. We work with experienced contractors and partners in an environmentally sustainable manner. We are initiating and trialling formal monitoring systems, promoting safe and inclusive practice, and seeking further and stronger community interest in this diverse and accessible landscape.
13. As noted in last year's Report, a new 5-year Countryside Stewardship Agreement was reached with Natural England with effect from January 2024. This includes a detailed scheme setting out expectations as to the work required on the relevant land. In 2024 the Charity received almost £45,000 in funds (an increase from around £33,000 in 2023), the use of which is restricted to the stewardship of the land to which it relates.
14. The cost of the environmental stewardship work that we undertake is covered by these restricted funds, and any shortfall made up from the Charity's unrestricted funds.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst Natural England uses the term 'countryside stewardship', we prefer the term 'environmental stewardship'; there is no particular distinction between them.

<sup>2</sup> A fuller description of the land can be found at <http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/walberswick-common-lands-charity/>

15. In early 2024, the Charity engaged new contractors to undertake a lot of the heavy work that is necessary, in particular over the Common. This preliminary work was successful and a much more significant plan was developed for the winter of 2024/2025 (when the work must be done, to avoid disturbing the wildlife that makes the Common its home over the warmer months). This has seen, for example, a considerable amount of over-sized gorse being cut down and removed from the site (whilst leaving lower gorse which provides such a beautiful display, and smell, in the spring); and the cutting of reeds in the fen.
16. We have continued our engagement with volunteer groups for specific projects, such as the clearing of the top end of Bennett's Drift, and we are grateful to the hard work of all of those who have helped out in this way.

### **Charitable activities**

17. A core aspect of the Charity's purpose is the grant of relief to those in conditions of need, hardship or distress. This is done by individual grants or loans, and by general grants to charities and organisations that provide support (either generally or specifically) for villagers.
18. More information about how the Charity can assist individuals in need can be found on our website.<sup>3</sup>
19. In 2024, the Charity made grants in excess of £50,000. These included:
  - (a) The Sole Bay Care Fund, in relation to the vital support that it offers within the village.
  - (b) Payments are made to state schools attended by village children. In 2024, we made a one-off offer to the parents of eligible secondary school village children for the purchase of a laptop for study use (as an alternative to a payment being made directly to the school). We considered that this would offer direct and tangible support to those families; and currently intend to continue with this in relation to children as they reach secondary school.
  - (c) A contribution to the Village Hall, which allows for subsidised hire charges for local users.
  - (d) Ongoing support for the provision of the free mini-bus that runs villagers to Norwich.
  - (e) Grants to other local and national charities, whom we believe offer vital support to villagers.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/walberswick-common-lands-charity/grants-and-benefits/>

20. In addition, the Charity supports specific activities, such as the annual Easter egg hunt and the children's summer clubs.
21. As ever, the Trustees welcome suggestions as to appropriate charities, organisations and activities it might support in the future. Such suggestions are surprisingly limited in number.

### **Heritage Hut**

22. The successful management and use of the Heritage Hut continued throughout 2024. It is regularly used by various community groups including WPC, the PCC, the Scroll Advisory Group, and WALL, and we are keen to encourage wider community use.
23. As well as its use for meetings, the Heritage Hut is the depository for the village archives, so carefully curated by the History Group, and for the Walberswick Scroll, under the watchful aegis of the SAG.
24. Of particular note in 2024 was the very successful exhibition 'When the Seas Come In', which attracted almost 1,000 visitors, over various dates across the summer. Our thanks to the Heritage Hut committee, and all of those who helped them in putting on this excellent and informative display.
25. In September 2024 the Heritage Hut was the base for a 'heritage trail' as part of the national Heritage Open Days.

### **'LionLink'**

26. The proposals for LionLink continue and it is currently intended that the interconnector cable will go under land owned by the Charity. The Trustees have continued to engage with National Grid Ventures and its various agents and contractors (as well as with Natural England) with a view to ensuring that – if the work proceeds – the impact upon the Charity's land (with its associated protected habitats), and upon the village more widely, is mitigated to the greatest possible extent.

## **Conclusion**

27. The Trustees seek to continue the Charity's ongoing support for the village of Walberswick. This is most obviously through the maintenance and development of the lands under its charge, something that adds to the unique beauty of the area. But it is also through the support of individuals and of the myriad of activities which individuals arrange for the benefit of the community.

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**Richard Leiper KC**

25 April 2025

