

Walberswick Common Lands Charity
REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF TRUSTEES
May 2026

Trustees

1. With effect from 1 January 2026, the function of the trustees has been transferred to a corporate trustee, WCLC Trustee Limited. This has been a drawn out process, requiring the detailed approval of the Charity Commission. It will in particular streamline the Charity's property transactions, but will have little practical impact on those who engage with the Charity.
2. By convention, the individuals will continue to refer to themselves as trustees, though technically they are each Directors of the Board of the Corporate Trustee.
3. I was appointed Chair of the Board of Directors of the Corporate Trustee with effect from 1 January 2026 (having been Chair of the trustees since 1 January 2023).
4. The Parish Council has re-appointed Stephanie Renouf as a nominative trustee.
5. My fellow trustees are extremely dedicated, giving freely and generously 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 are vital to our successful operation.

Accounts

7. At their meeting on 26 March 2026, the trustees signed off the Charity's accounts for the year ended 31 December 2025.
8. The general income for 2025 was almost £200,000 higher than for 2024.
9. The vast majority of this increase was due to particular property transactions (lease premiums and easements). We do not anticipate any similar income in the near- or medium-term. Equally, the trustees reasonably foresee a need for significant capital expenditure, for the upkeep of property for the benefit of the village, which will off-set this income. This includes essential work for the upkeep of Wally's Bridge.

10. Around £5,000 of this increase came from the covenant from Walberswick Car Parks Limited. The trustees are indebted to the enormous work undertaken by the Directors of WCPL so as to maintain this important source of income.
11. There was also a slight increase in the income from the funds which we have received by way of grants from the Rural Payments Agency through our Countryside Stewardship Agreement. This reflects the significant work (led by Vanessa Tucker and David Pelly) that has been undertaken both to engage with the appropriate agencies and to ensure that the protected areas of the Charity's land are maintained to the highest standard.
12. Our expenditure remained approximately level.

Environmental Stewardship¹

13. 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.² 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).
14. 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.
15. The 5-year Countryside Stewardship Agreement (which was reached with Natural England with effect from January 2024) includes a detailed scheme setting out expectations as to the work

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

² A fuller description of the land can be found at <https://walberswick-pc.gov.uk/walberswick-common-lands-charity/>

required on the relevant land. In 2025 the Charity received over £45,000 in funds, the use of which is restricted to the stewardship of the land to which it relates.

16. 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.
17. In early 2024, the Charity engaged new contractors to help us with our environmental stewardship of our lands and, in particular, over the Common. This has led to a successful partnership. We recognise that there are some concerns about the equipment that is used, but it is closely monitored and enables essential clearance work that allows the land to flourish for the benefit of flora and fauna. 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. We are guided in this work both by our Agreement with Natural England and a detailed management plan provided specifically for this purpose by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.
18. We have continued our engagement with volunteer groups for specific projects and we are grateful to the hard work of all of those who have helped out in this way. Significant work has been undertaken at Bennett's Copse, including the planting of a number of new trees (including oaks) to ensure that this area remains a healthy 'green lung' in the long-term. We are also grateful to the volunteer villagers who ensure that its watering needs are met.

Charitable activities

19. 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.
20. More information about how the Charity can assist individuals in need can be found on our website.³
21. In 2025, the Charity made grants in excess of £58,000. 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 (or, if needed, to the parents of village children entering secondary school for the purchase of a laptop for study use).

³ <https://walberswick-pc.gov.uk/walberswick-common-lands-charity/grants-and-benefits/>

- (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.
22. In addition, the Charity supports specific activities, such as the annual Easter egg hunt and the children's Christmas party and summer clubs.
23. The trustees are extremely grateful for the generous commitment of The Tuck Shop to make donations to the Charity in two streams: first, from the sale of bags and books; secondly, from its profits generally. That contribution has already been brought into effect and will make a valuable addition to the funds available for our charitable activities in support of the village.
24. 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

25. The successful management and use of the Heritage Hut continued throughout 2025. It is regularly used by various (and increasing numbers of) community groups including WPC, the PCC, the Scroll Advisory Group, the Walberswick Players, the Planning Advisory Group and WALL, and we are keen to encourage wider community use.
26. 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, which arranges for regular viewings of the Scroll.
27. Of particular note in 2025 was the very successful exhibition 'Wood Brick Glass', which celebrated the architecture – old and new – within the village. Our thanks to the Heritage Hut committee, and all of those who helped them in putting on this excellent and informative display.

'LionLink'

28. 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. This included a response to the statutory public consultation exercise.⁴

Conclusion

29. 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.

Richard Leiper KC

7 May 2026

⁴ <https://walberswick-pc.gov.uk/assets/WCLC/WCLC-Response-to-LionLink-March-2026.pdf>