

Walberswick Common Lands Charity
REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF TRUSTEES
May 2023

Chair

1. I was appointed Chair of the Trustees with effect from 1 January 2023.
2. The previous Chair, James Darkins, stood down at the end of 2022 following a lengthy period as a trustee and, latterly, as Chair. I wish to offer my sincere thanks to James for the enormous amount of work that he put into the Charity, engaging both in hands-on, practical matters, and in ensuring that the Charity was compliant with the up-to-date requirements and expectations of the Charity Commission and best practice in relation to the management and operation of charities. He has had a profound impact upon the Charity.

Accounts

3. At their meeting on 27 April 2023, the Trustees signed off the Charity's accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022. A few specific observations follow.
4. Reserves policy: The Trustees have recently reconsidered the level of (unrestricted) reserves which it is appropriate for the Charity to maintain as a minimum, in line with the Charity Commission's guidance (CC19). The Trustees decided to increase the level from £75,000 to £100,000. The full policy can be found on our website.¹
5. Asset valuation: In considering the preparation of the accounts, and in line with our five yearly review policy, the Trustees decided that it would be appropriate for the freehold assets held by the Charity to be revalued (the last valuation having been in 2018). The exercise was undertaken by Durrants, our surveyors. This is not a formal valuation; Durrants have confirmed that it was done on a conservative basis but one that was appropriate for the purposes of the Charity's accounts. The resulting (increased) valuation is reflected in the accounts. The very substantial part of these assets are in fact designated as functional permanent endowment land, which means that there are significant restrictions upon their disposal. Whilst of meaningful value, they do not represent assets that the Trustees can consider available for use.

¹ <http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WCLC/New-Website-Documents/WCLC-Reserves-Policy-rev-April-2023.pdf>

6. Income: the general income for 2022 was over £18,000 higher than for 2021. This was largely as a result of a specific property transaction (which will not repeat) and an increase in the covenant from Walberswick Car Parks Limited (an increase which we do not expect to continue in 2023). The covenant for 2022 was a notable £68,403 (up from £60,875 in 2021) and our thanks to the Directors, and to the Operations Manager, for their work over the year.

Incorporation

7. The process of establishing a corporate trustee continues. A company has now been formed, called WCLC Trustee Ltd. The current Trustees are each directors of the company. An application has been made to the Charity Commission for the approval of the new scheme, and the Commission has recently appointed a caseworker to deal with the application. We are hoping that the process can be completed over the next few months, when the company will become the corporate trustee.

Trustees

8. James Darkins' position as a trustee was filled by Graham Humphrey.
9. Mandy Erlenbach resigned with effect from the end of June 2022. The Trustees are indebted to her contribution, in particular her enormous knowledge of local environmental issues. Mandy has been replaced by Vanessa Tucker, and the timings meant that there was a valuable hand-over period.
10. In the course of 2022 both Stephanie Renouf and David Pelly were appointed trustees.
11. These various appointments mean that the Charity has an almost entirely new group of individuals as its trustees (I was appointed in November 2021). The one exception is Hannah Sutton, who has been a trustee for some 8 years and brings to us a great depth of experience, as well as an unrivalled knowledge of the village. That essential continuity is also provided by our clerk, Matthew Wetmore, to whom I extend our thanks.
12. The ex officio trustee:
 - (a) As many in the village will know, the Revd Simon Pitcher resigned from the Sole Bay Ministry at the end of last year to take up an appointment in Lavenham. As a result, he also resigned as a trustee. The Trustees are particularly grateful for the insight into, and care about, the community that he brought to our deliberations, and his thoughtful contributions are much missed.

- (b) Under the present Scheme, the position of the “ex officio trustee” can only be occupied by “the Vicar for the time being of the Sole Bay Team Ministry who has pastoral responsibility for the Parish of Walberswick”. The Charity will remain without a seventh trustee until someone is appointed to replace Simon. I would note that the Scheme is likely to change following incorporation, allowing the Board of the Charity (as it will be) to appoint a Church Director (unless and until an alternative is appointed by the Sole Bay Team Ministry).
13. I pay tribute to the work of my fellow trustees. They all work on an entirely voluntary basis, and put in long hours in order to ensure that the Charity’s purposes are met, in particular through the maintenance of the Charity’s land and in the relief of need, for the benefit of the inhabitants of the village.

Environmental Stewardship

14. 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, much of the land is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Ramsar Site (wetlands of international importance).
15. 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.
16. The Charity is the beneficiary of a 5-year Countryside Stewardship Agreement through Natural England, a key partner. This includes a detailed scheme setting out expectations as to the work required on the relevant land. In 2022 the Charity received over £23,000 in funds, the use of

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

which is restricted to the stewardship of the land to which it relates. The current agreement finishes at the end of 2023, and (with the support of Durrants as our agents) the Trustees are in the process of negotiating a renewal from January 2024 for a further period. 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. We continue to be very grateful for the work done on the land by our contractors, Paul Denny and Robert Mortley, in particular in maintaining the fragile ecosystem that continues to develop on the Common. This has allowed increasing numbers of 3 key species – nightjars, woodlarks and Dartford warblers – as well as allowing the continued reestablishment of the previous lowland heath.
18. One project that is in hand is the replacement of a sluice deep in the reedbeds, which is essential in maintaining an appropriate water level to ensure both the protection of the reeds and the wildlife that thrives within it.
19. We have planted a tree on the green off Palmer's Lane. It is a sapling which comes from King Offa's Oak on the Windsor Estate (which is reputed to be 1,500 years old), and celebrates the Coronation as well as serving as our tribute to Jayne Tibbles, who was invaluable as clerk to the Charity for many years.

"LionLink"

20. Another development of key importance is the identification of Walberswick as a potential landfall site for an international power cable, under the project now re-branded "LionLink". The proposed location would come on to land owned by the Charity. This provides us with a platform to ensure that National Grid Ventures understand the extreme difficulties presented by the Walberswick proposal,³ and the Trustees are actively engaging with the agents appointed by National Grid Ventures to ensure that the apparently universal opposition of villagers (and the entirely justified reasons underpinning that opposition) are understood. To that end, we are of course also liaising with the Parish Council.

³ Our response to the initial non-statutory consultation can be found at <http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/assets/WCLC/New-Website-Documents/WCLC-to-NGV-EUROLINK-181222.pdf>

Heritage Hut

21. The Charity's investment over the last few years in the refurbishment of the Heritage Hut on the village green is now paying dividends. It is today the main meeting point not only for us but also the Parish Council, the History Group and the Scroll Committee. Additionally, the site is being used for a programme of exhibitions and other events, as a resource for the use of villagers and visitors alike.

Charitable activities

22. 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.
23. In 2022, the Charity made grants in excess of £40,000. 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.
 - (c) A contribution to the Village Hall, which allows for subsidised hire charges for local users.
 - (d) The hire of the Village Hall to allow the Post Office outreach service.
 - (e) Ongoing support for the provision of the free mini-bus that runs villagers to Norwich.
24. In addition, the Charity supports specific activities, such as the annual Easter egg hunt and, in 2023, Coronation mugs given to all village children.
25. The Trustees welcome suggestions as to appropriate charities and organisations it might support in the future. More information about how the Charity can assist individuals in need can be found on our website.⁴
26. For well over a century, the Charity has tried to be a force for good within the village of Walberswick. I am confident that today it is an excellent position to continue be so in the future.

Richard Leiper KC

4 May 2023

⁴ <http://walberswick.onesuffolk.net/walberswick-common-lands-charity/grants-and-benefits/>