

Walberswick Common Lands Charity

Registered Charity No 206095

BACKGROUND TO WALBERSWICK COMMON LANDS CHARITY

In 1901, the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice approved and established a “Scheme for the regulation and administration of the Charity known as the Common Lands in the Parish of Walberswick in the County of Suffolk and for the application of income thereof”.

Under the Scheme seven Trustees, including the Vicar and the Chairmen of the Parish Meeting and the Board of Guardians, were to manage land comprising

- 84.5 acres of Heath Land
- 34 acres of enclosed marshes
- 40 acres of salt marshes
- 3.5 acres of marsh land.

The heath land is most of what we know as the Common, the enclosed grazing marshes lie SW of the River Blyth and the salt marshes are those behind the beach which are not owned by the Blois estate. Other land is what is now the Ferry Road car park and areas occupied by the houses and huts alongside the river and the Cliff Field area. A condition of the Scheme then, as now, is that “nothing shall be done or permitted ... by which any part of the land known as Walberswick Common ... shall become enclosed or cease to be an open space accessible to the inhabitants of Walberswick”. (Hence the low rabbit wire and numerous gates round the Sports Field.)

Since the original Scheme, two properties (The Potters Wheel and the building now known as the Lantern Gallery) and a few small pockets of land have been donated and the current Scheme stipulates that the property is to be managed in the same way as the land.

The income, derived from letting and grazing rights was to be applied as the Trustees “think fit” to make payments to village people in the form of “pensions or temporary allowances to bona fide inhabitants of the Parish of Walberswick”.

A Revised Scheme was approved in 1985 in accordance with the requirements of the Charity Commissioners and the Charities Act 1960. This was broadly similar to the original Scheme but it stipulated that all land and cash not needed “for working purposes” was to be vested in the Official Custodian. A subsequent change in the Charities Act has, however, removed this requirement and the Trustees, aware of the need to maximise income, now invest in the Charities Official Investment Fund.

The Trustees now comprise

1 ex-officio Trustee – the Vicar

4 Trustees “appointed by the Parish Council for a term of four years”

but not

necessarily Parish Councillors

2 co-optative Trustees appointed “for a term of four years”.

The Clerk is the administrative officer.

In the application of income of the Charity, the first duty of the Trustees is to pay for repairs, insurances and administration. Secondly they shall “establish and maintain a reserve fund to be entitled ‘Special Maintenance and Improvement Fund’ (held in the Charities Official Investment Fund) for use “as the Trustees think fit” for “extraordinary repair or improvement works”. The remaining income of the Charity is to be used for “relief in need” and for the “benefit of inhabitants”. “Relief in need” takes the form of quarterly donations and a Christmas bonus to individuals in the village; also, help with ‘one-off’ expenses such as gardening or veterinary expenses, replacement domestic appliances, emergency repairs, hospital visiting etc. Any resident may apply for financial assistance and the Trustees welcome approaches on behalf of others who would benefit. This aspect of the application of income is always confidential.

The “general benefit of the inhabitants of Walberswick” can be widely interpreted and recent allocations to this end have included donations to Halesworth and Southwold Hospitals, the Voluntary Help Centre, local schools, organisations arranging transport out of the village and the Easter Egg Hunt to name but a few. Any money not allocated in a year is now transferred to the Environment Fund. This will be available to support village projects designed to reduce erosion or improve flood protection that the statutory authorities cannot fund in full, eg strengthening the bank of the creek at Ferry Road car park, or to respond to serious emergencies.

By 1997, the Trustees had decided to take back from the County Council the management of the two, then free, car parks. This was part of a detailed Visitor Management Strategy which had become necessary owing to Walberswick’s increasing popularity. Measures had to be devised to ensure that visitors and inhabitants would continue to enjoy the village and its surroundings in safety and with minimal stress, especially during the summer.

The consequence of this move has been that the Charity’s income has increased considerably. It is the responsibility of all Trustees to “manage the charity’s affairs prudently and take a long-term as well as a short-term view” Failure to do so could result in Trustees being held personally liable. To this end, Trustees must ensure that no other statutory funding is available and that money is not going to be squandered. This means that checks have to be made and background information sought before funds can be donated to any

individual or project. Subject to the above, the Trustees do welcome suggestions about how the income should be spent.

Decisions about beneficiaries and donations are made at the meetings of the Trustees which are held every two months. Details of income and expenditure are made available to the public at the Annual Parish Meeting and audited accounts with a financial report are sent to the Charities Commission each year.

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