



Little Ouse Headwaters Charity

Annual Review 2004-2005

Annual Report of the Trustees for the period 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005

From the President

This has been an exciting and challenging year for the Charity. We embarked on major restoration projects for both Hinderclay and Betty's Fens using our EU funding, while on the Frith and Lows we continued to see dramatic improvements as our Heritage Lottery and DEFRA funded restoration programme entered its second year. Although we have used local contractors for the major restoration programmes, and are delighted with the quality of their work, volunteer work parties remain central to the long-term management of all of our sites. We continue to be an entirely voluntary organisation: we literally *are* our volunteers. Our first public open day, on the Frith and the Lows this summer, was a massive team effort and its success demonstrated that there is very considerable public interest in, and support for, the project.

One of our major concerns this year has been financial planning for the future. The Charity is currently very dependent on the generous support of major but short-term grants and so we are actively seeking new sources of funding to guarantee our core activities in the medium and long-term. To this end we have launched a major fundraising appeal, and registered all of the land that we manage for the new DEFRA Single Payment Scheme.

Our trustees continued to negotiate with landowners to purchase more land in the valley. The progressive acquisition of land from willing vendors, to allow the fenland remnants and historic landscape to be reconnected and restored, remains one of our prime objectives. This objective can equally be realised by encouraging our neighbouring landowners to adopt more sympathetic management practices, and we hope that the funding available through the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme will make this a financially attractive option.

In addition to our land management, we carried out a busy programme of guided walks and other events, bringing the work of the project, and the special nature of the area, to the attention of a wider audience. We see this as an important part of our work, as the long term protection of the valley will always be dependent on the interest and activities of local people.

Restoring Habitats

The Charity continues to manage six sites, comprising a total of over 36 hectares. In the project area we have a mosaic of different habitats, requiring various approaches to be taken to their restoration. On the Frith and Lows, regular topping of the nettles and thistles together with sheep grazing continues to help to restore, progressively, the former acid grassland and heathland vegetation. The wide ditches on the middle section of the Lows, which had become completely infilled by pond sedge were cleared and re-profiled by a local contractor, to restore open water for aquatic invertebrates and plants.

On Hinderclay Fen, local contractors cleared an area of recently established willow and alder scrub at the western end of the wet fen, to allow the rich fen vegetation to re-establish. A

further area of spindly willow scrub was removed near the river in preparation for infilling of the deep, sterile pools and removal of the bund created when they were excavated in the early 1990s.

On Betty's Fen, cutting and clearing scrub from an area that will become a large shallow pond, has been completed, as well as the pollarding of some of the superb old crack willows that form such a tangle here.

The Environment Agency cleared trees along the river bank through Betty's and Blo' Norton Fens, to enable them to cut weed in the river. This work has benefited us both by clearing an access along the river bank, linking Betty's Fen to the boardwalk at Blo' Norton Fen, and by pollarding and coppicing some of the river-side crack willows. Because these two sites are designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) the cut weed could not be dumped on our side of the river bank, as it would raise the nutrient levels and lead to more nettle growth. The EA were able to spread the weed on farmland outside the SSSI.

Scrub-clearance work on our sites, whether by volunteers or contractors, can only be done during the winter: no work is done during the spring bird breeding season. The excavator work, planned for both Betty's Fen and Hinderclay Fen awaits the drier ground-conditions of late summer.

Involving people

We are delighted with the numbers of volunteers who turn out for work parties and events, especially when families can join in. Since we have no paid staff, our dependence on volunteers, and our indebtedness to them, cannot be over-emphasised.

This year six of our regular volunteers gave up a weekend to be professionally trained to use brushcutters, and ten volunteers had a day's basic First Aid training.

Volunteers planted another hundred metres of hedge and a variety of individual trees on the Frith and planted up a large gap in the hedge on the Lows. On our new site, Betty's Fen, volunteers coppiced a clump of blackthorn, to maintain dense cover for nesting birds, and cleared reed and sedge in preparation for a contractor to begin work. In the summer a group had particular fun digging a shallow turf pond on Blo' Norton Fen to attract invertebrates and amphibians. Before they had finished four species of dragonfly had visited. Eight species have now been recorded on this one small pond. On both Blo' Norton and Hinderclay Fen volunteers cut and cleared sedge and reed and cut back invading birch and willow scrub.

We continued to add a variety of nest boxes to our sites and were pleased that some of the established boxes have been used. We had to settle for a pair of stock doves in the first barn owl box, but have high hopes that barn owls will nest on one of our sites in the future.

As well as those who volunteer to help restore the sites that we manage, many other people contributed expertise and time to help run the project. We are very grateful to everyone who makes a contribution to the success of this project.

Activities

July Open Day

Our most ambitious event so far was a resounding success with over 500 people, including County and District Councillors and other dignitaries, turning up despite poor weather. We had to continually extend the car park on the Frith as more and more people arrived to see and enjoy guided walks, a falconry display, working sheep dog demonstrations, flint knapping and many stalls with local crafts and produce for sale. The Open day was part of the programme of events linked to our Heritage Lottery Fund 'Your Heritage' grant. Organising the day took a huge amount of work (so we can't hold

one every year, despite popular demand), and we are particularly grateful to the many volunteers who came to help out.

Walks and talks

Our guided walks are becoming more popular with over fifty people and six dogs enjoying the slightly longer walk at New Year. We now have now more than 4.5km of paths and these are being used increasingly by local people as well as visitors to the area. Our September Fungus Foray with local experts John and Judy Geeson was very successful. A new event for the year was a Cycle Ride around the whole site. This was arranged to combine with Thelnetham windmill and Thelnetham and Blo' Norton Churches opening. Everyone who came has asked for a repeat and we would like to thank Bob Hayward for organising the event.

Local ramblers groups are making the most of the new footpaths on our sites. Both the Lopham Ramblers and the Redgrave History Groups have organised walks in the project area this year.

Biological Recording

We have benefited again this year from visits to the Headwaters by local natural history groups who continue to add to our wildlife records for our sites and enable us to monitor changes in their biodiversity over time. The Lowestoft Field Club and the Norfolk Moth Group as well as many independent specialists contributed to this process this year.

Biological highlights for the year included sightings of glow-worms on several sites during the summer, water rails, as well as increasing numbers of reed and sedge warblers, breeding in the wet fens, a big increase in sightings of bearded reedlings and regular sightings of barn owls, as well as little and tawny owls. We were able to confirm that the rare little mammal, the water shrew, is present on Blo' Norton Fen although, sadly, the river appears remains unsuitable for water voles, primarily because of the presence of mink.

TEN (Transnational Ecological Network)

As one of the partners in this European river corridor restoration initiative, we have had an invaluable opportunity to be involved in reciprocal visits to other projects to exchange ideas and expertise. Two of our Trustees have visited the projects in the Netherlands while Dutch, German and Danish colleagues have visited our project and its partner projects along the Little Ouse and Waveney Valleys. These exchange visits are funded by the wider TEN project and do not impinge on the TEN funding available to the LOHP.

Membership

Our membership has remained at about 80 with many members becoming Friends of the Fens and signing the Gift Aid declaration which allows us to reclaim the tax at no expense to the member. These funds are an important contribution to our unrestricted funds.

Members of the Board of Trustees

Our Officers and Trustees remained unchanged during the year:

Reg Langston (President and trustee nominated by Hinderclay Parish Council)
Jo-Anne Pitt (Vice-President and trustee nominated by Blo'Norton Parish Council)
Helen Smith (Honorary Secretary)
Mike Wraight (Honorary Treasurer)
Paul Brown (Membership Secretary)
Nigel Clark

Rowena Langston
Bob Hayward (trustee nominated by Redgrave Parish Council)
Dan Haskin (trustee nominated by Thelnetham Parish Council)
Rob Webb (trustee nominated by South Lopham Parish Council)

Funding our work

Grants

Our major grants from the Heritage Lottery 'Your Heritage' Fund and the European Union Interreg Fund (through the TEN project), together with our Countryside Stewardship scheme, continue to fund our core habitat restoration work and improvements to access and interpretation. Together with most of the farming community, we applied in April for financial support from the new Single Payment Scheme. This scheme is the mechanism by which radical changes in the farm support mechanism, from production based subsidies to land-based payments, will be implemented. Although payment through the scheme is likely to be small in 2005, it will increase on a sliding scale over the next five years.

The River Link Appeal

Although the Charity has been extremely successful in securing grants to enable us to work on specific projects, the Trustees are aware that fund raising for both capital and maintenance work on our sites, and for our running costs, is a continuing fact of life. We have therefore commissioned Sarah Grieveson from Spectrum Capital Services Ltd., a professional fundraising company, to run an appeal, the 'River Link Appeal', on our behalf. The appeal is primarily to grant-providing Trusts and our fund raisers are paid entirely on a commission basis. We look forward to reporting Sarah's successes to members.

Acknowledgements

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project is a voluntary, charitable organisation whose work is dependent on commitment, goodwill and financial support of individuals, partner organisations and sponsors. It does not employ any staff and so is entirely dependent on the volunteers who contribute in many different ways to its success. We gratefully acknowledge their hard work and support. We are also grateful to the following for their substantial financial support in 2004-2005:

Heritage Lottery Fund
DEFRA
European Union Regional Development Fund (North Sea Interreg Programme)
W F Southall Charitable Trust
The Manifold Trust
Sir Timothy Coleman

The Little Ouse Headwater Charity (also known as the Little Ouse Headwaters Project- LOHP) is a company Limited by guarantee and is governed under company law by Memorandum and Articles of Association. The Company's registered number is 4684054 and its charity registration number is 1098232. Its registered office is Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, Norfolk IP22 2JN.

Summary Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2005

	Unrestricted Fund £	Restricted Fund £	Total Funds 2005 £	Total Funds 2004 £
Incoming resources				
Donations	219	-	219	-
Appeal	-	1,850	1,850	-
Grants	-	-	-	51,857
NHLF Lottery Fund grant	-	22,230	22,230	-
Interreg grant (via NCC)	-	11,917	11,917	-
RPA G&S grant	-	2,553	2,553	-
Subscriptions	283	-	283	-
Bank interest	118	-	118	-
Bonus sale	630	-	630	-
Rent	75	-	75	-
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Total incoming resources	1,325	38,550	39,875	51,857
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Resources expended				
Habitat management, access & monitoring	-	22,417	22,417	20,161
Rent, rates & water	2,603	-	2,603	2,591
Small tools	-	6	6	1,304
Insurance	-	447	447	320
Training	-	1,106	1,106	982
Promotion & recruitment	-	796	796	213
Legal & professional	918	-	918	987
Stationery & postage	-	190	190	172
Sundry expenses	30	-	30	-
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Total resources expended	3,551	24,962	28,513	26,730
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Net movement in funds	(2,226)	13,588	11,362	25,127
Balances brought forward	14,579	10,404	24,983	(144)
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Balances carried forward	12,353	23,992	36,345	24,983

ACTIVITIES

The Charity's activities maintain and enhance the fragmented fen habitats along the headwaters' of the Little Ouse River and take measures to join up these fragments to create a continuous corridor of rich conservation value with access for public enjoyment.

OBJECTIVES

The charity promotes, for the public benefit, the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Upper Little Ouse Valley and environs in the parishes of Redgrave, Hinderclay and Thelnetham in Suffolk and the parishes of South Lopham and Blo'Norton in Norfolk, collectively known as the "Area of Benefit".

RESERVES AND INVESTMENTS POLICY

Total funds of the Charity as at 31 March 2005 amounted to £36,345 (2004 - £24,983). The Trustees have reviewed the needs for reserves in line with the guidance issued by the Charities Commission. The Trustees seek funding from various sources and are grateful to the many Trusts and grant providers who have contributed so far. As most income is generated from grant providers and varies widely, and regular membership income is insufficient to meet regular ongoing costs, the Trustees will endeavour to set aside sufficient unrestricted funds to enable the Charity to meet its basic commitments for one year. These funds will be kept in an interest bearing account.

These basic commitments include the cost of rent, insurance, health and safety requirements and basic maintenances such as keeping paths open and safe. The Trustees believe that at 2004/05 prices this reserve should be £3,000.

ACCOUNTANTS

These summarised accounts are an extract from the accounts for the financial year 31 March 2005 which have been examined by Larking Gowen who reported on them on 14th December 2005. The examiners have confirmed to the Trustees that the summarised accounts are consistent with the annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 2005. The annual accounts were approved on the 30th November 2005. These summarised accounts may not contain sufficient information to gain a complete understanding of the financial affairs of the charity. The full accounts may be obtained on request from the Honorary Secretary at the Charity's Registered Office at Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, Norfolk.