



Annual Review 2008-2009

Annual Report of the Trustees for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009

From the Chair

The Project's work this year has been focused on the continuing restoration of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank, our most ambitious fen restoration and re-creation initiative so far. A project of this scale requires much preparatory work in obtaining relevant permissions, formulating management plans, and ensuring the correct financial arrangements are in place, before anything can be done on the ground. I would like to express my thanks to all of those who have been involved in this time-consuming work. While some delays were caused by very wet ground conditions over the winter, by the end of the year we were confident that the major works could still be completed within our original timescale.

Our major event of the year was the Summer Fayre on The Frith in June – a fitting celebration of the completion of the Heritage Lottery Fund element of our restoration work on The Frith and The Lows. The HLF funding was critical to the initial establishment of the LOHP, so we were pleased that the event was such a success, allowing us to demonstrate our work to the hundreds of people attending.

Despite the difficult economic conditions this year, the LOHP's fundraising appeal continued to be successful in obtaining financial support for our work from a wide range of charitable trusts, and the achievements of the LOHP have again been recognised with an award – at the Suffolk County Council 'Creating the Greenest County 2009' awards we were presented with the Greenest Community award for outstanding work to protect landscape and biodiversity.

As ever, our success is due to the combined efforts of many people: supporters and volunteers, fundraisers and contractors. I am grateful for all the support we have received over the year.

Restoring Habitats

The restoration of fen habitats on Parkers Piece and Bleyswyck's Bank has continued throughout the year, despite high water levels and difficult working conditions at times. Livestock fencing was installed in preparation for the eventual introduction of grazing as part of the management regime, but, in the absence of livestock this year, parts of the site were mown during the later part of the summer. Part way through the year we were invited to apply for additional funding from Natural England's "Wetland Vision" initiative – this allowed us to revise our plans for the site and extend the area to be returned to wet fen conditions. However, this new funding was not confirmed until close to the end of the reporting year, so some of the work originally planned for this year was delayed. Part of the Natural England funding also allowed us to commission an archaeological survey of the site, to ensure that our restoration work would not damage any evidence of historical interest – in the event nothing of significance was found, but as part of the process peat cores were taken and are being analysed for pollen and other biological remains. This will provide evidence of past plant communities at the site, which will help to inform future management. During the winter, volunteers planted hedging along the southern boundary of Parkers Piece to restore a former hedge line. Wide-access kissing gates were installed in preparation for the creation of footpaths through the site, although public access had to be limited while major work was being undertaken. In March, we were finally able

to begin work on the major task of lowering the surface of the central areas of the site by removing surface layers of peat that have been enriched and degraded by past agricultural activities. The lower, wetter surface that this work is creating provides much more suitable conditions for the re-establishment of many of the rare fen species that still occur on near-by sites. The Trustees would like to express their thanks to Peter Frizzell, our contractor, for his hard work in ensuring that the project continued to progress despite various unavoidable delays.

On our other sites, more routine management work continues to result in improvements in the quality of the habitats and the biodiversity they support. In addition to the now familiar grazing regime with sheep and cattle on The Lows, a new culvert was installed to improve access to the lower part of the site in wet conditions. On The Frith we have continued to manage the vegetation by grazing with sheep and additional cutting of nettles and removal of thistles by hand. We are now seeing a considerable reduction of the density and height of nettles on this site, although it is likely to be a number of years before they cease to be a problem. On our fen sites at Hinderclay and Blo' Norton the annual regime of mowing part of the site and raking off the vegetation continued. Volunteers dug new turf ponds at Hinderclay, establishing small patches of open water within the fen area, which provide important habitat for amphibians and insects such as dragonflies which need open water to lay their eggs and for their early life stages to develop. At Betty's Fen the wetter areas around the scrapes were mown again to encourage the re-establishment of a mixed fen vegetation.

Involving people

We have many regular volunteers helping out with practical tasks on our sites, and we ran work parties on the second Sunday of each month during the year. In addition, regular mid-week work parties organised by Reg Langston have completed many of the smaller jobs that are so important to the maintenance of our sites. The mowing of our footpaths on Betty's and Blo' Norton Fens has again been undertaken by local resident John Dixon, keeping these paths in excellent condition for walkers. In March a team from the Environment Agency's Head Office undertook a day's 'Environmental Leave', working on Betty's Fen.

As well as these practical tasks, we have a number of local naturalists who are regularly contributing their expertise and providing us with biological records for our sites. From September we began fortnightly collection of water samples from various locations on the river, for analysis at the Environment Agency's laboratories. This will continue for 12 months, giving us a better picture of the state of the river. During the year, volunteers contributed over 900 hours of their time to tasks on the LOHP sites.

Activities

During the year we organised a major event to celebrate the completion of our Heritage Lottery Fund grant for the restoration of the Frith and the Lows, with a Summer Fayre on the Frith in June. This event was a great success, with hundreds of people attending, including a very encouraging number who took advantage of our offer of free entry for those arriving by bike or on foot. It included demonstrations of bird ringing, birds of prey, and working sheep dogs, together with music and Morris dancing, local crafts, guided walks, nature-related activities for children and a very popular beer tent! Many thanks are due to all of those who helped us to organise and run this event.

The AGM this year was attended by 43 members plus guests. The Annual Talk was given by Tim Pankhurst, Fens Officer for the charity Plantlife, which has helped to fund the restoration work at Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank. His talk on the nature and origin of fens illustrated very clearly the rarity and importance of our sites in the Little Ouse valley.

Our traditional winter walk in early January was well attended, and we have been in increasing demand to give talks and provide guided walks to local groups interested in wildlife, landscape and history. This is a reflection of the increasingly high profile of the Project, both in the local area and further afield.

Membership

At the end of the year our membership stands at **115 with** many members being Friends of the Fens and signing the Gift Aid declaration, which allows us to reclaim tax at no expense to the member. These funds continue to be an important component of our unrestricted funds. The Board is very grateful to Lindsay Medus for her work as membership secretary during the year.

Members of the Board of Trustees

The Honorary Officer posts remained unchanged during 2008/09. At the end of the year the composition of the Board was as follows:

Jo-Anne Pitt (Chair and trustee nominated by Blo’Norton Parish Council)
Reg Langston (Honorary Treasurer and trustee nominated by Hinderclay Parish Council)
Nigel Clark (Vice-chair)
Helen Smith (Honorary Secretary)
Rowena Langston
Bob Hayward (trustee nominated by Redgrave Parish Council)
Dan Haskin (trustee nominated by Thelnetham Parish Council)
Peter Coster (trustee nominated by South Lopham Parish Council)
Paul Brown
Lindsay Medus (Membership secretary)

Funding our work

Grants

This year saw the end of our five-year Heritage Lottery Fund ‘Your Heritage’ grant: funding for restoration management of the Frith and the Lows is now dependent largely on our Countryside Stewardship Scheme Agreement. The Single Payment Scheme provides an income that covers some of the management costs on most of our sites and a generous donation from the Will Charitable Trust is funding additional elements of our routine summer management work that are beyond the scope of our volunteer work force. The restoration of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank is funded by a large number of grants and donations, including major grants from Biffaward, the Tubney Trust, Natural England and Plantlife. We are indebted to all of our funders for their generous support for this exciting project.

The River Link Appeal

Despite the difficult economic climate, our appeal has continued to provide a very important source of income for the charity, and particularly for the restoration of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank. Much of this income comes from small charitable trusts and is the result of many letters of application throughout the year. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Sarah Grieveson, our very successful Appeal Director. Sarah is supported by the appeal’s Honorary Vice-patrons, The Most Hon the Marquess of Cholmondeley, Her Grace the Duchess of Grafton, GCVO and Dr Frederick Ratcliffe, CBE, JP, to whom we are also indebted.

Acknowledgements

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project is a voluntary, charitable organisation whose work is dependent on the 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.

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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

Little Ouse Headwaters Project Summary of Accounts for the period April 1 2008 to March 31 2009

| Income | restricted in | unrestricted in | total 2009 | total 2008 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Riverlink Appeal | £38,975.00 | | £38,975.00 | |
| Bonus sale | | £1,454.62 | £1,454.62 | |
| Donation | | £770.41 | £770.41 | |
| Countryside Stewardship grant | £2,873.70 | | £2,873.70 | |
| HLF grant | £2,470.00 | | £2,470.00 | |
| Biffa funding | £10,153.77 | | £10,153.77 | |
| Other grants | £5,000.00 | £300.00 | £5,300.00 | |
| Rural Payments Agency | | £2,202.26 | £2,202.26 | |
| Miscellaneous | | £15.00 | £15.00 | |
| Subscription | | £754.25 | £754.25 | |
| Bank interest | | £4,177.52 | £4,177.52 | |
| Total | £59,472.47 | £9,674.06 | £69,146.53 | £140,017.00 |

| Expenditure | restricted out | unrestricted out | total 2009 | total 2008 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Access and Education | £1,973.23 | | £1,973.23 | |
| Riverlink Appeal | £4,962.71 | | £4,962.71 | |
| Habitat management, new land | £39,432.55 | | £39,432.55 | |
| Insurance | £426.75 | | £426.75 | |
| Professional fees/wages | £9,164.68 | £1,229.46 | £10,394.14 | |
| Promotion/volunteer recruitment | £834.43 | £81.46 | £915.89 | |
| Rent | £1,878.00 | £1,030.00 | £2,908.00 | |
| Small tools/parts | £1,524.19 | £86.51 | £1,610.70 | |
| Stationery/stamps/printing | £79.74 | £123.94 | £203.68 | |
| Training | £66.00 | | £66.00 | |
| Water/drainage | £90.44 | £7.06 | £97.50 | |
| Total | £60,432.72 | £2,558.43 | £62,991.15 | £36,681.00 |

Assets

| | | | |
|--|--|-------------|-------------|
| Land | | £61,275.00 | £61,275.00 |
| Tools and equipment | | £5,522.00 | £1,446.00 |
| Balance brought forward at 31 March 2008 | | | £104,293.95 |
| Balance carried forward at 31 March 2009 | | £116,653.98 | |

Reserves and Investment Policy

The Trustees have reviewed the needs for reserves in line with 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 in this way 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, conservation management obligations on designated sites and basic maintenances such as keeping paths open and safe. The Trustees believe that at 2008-09 prices this reserve should be £4300.

Trustees believe that reserves need to be at this level to ensure that the Charity can continue to function should there be a shortfall in grant revenue. This will be reviewed annually.

The annual accounts were approved by the LOHP Board of Directors on 16 November 2009.