



Little Ouse Headwaters Project Annual Review 2011-2012

From the Chair

The LOHP is made up of its volunteers. Every year our achievements are a tribute to their hard work but this year has seen both more, and more diverse, activity in the project than ever before. More people have joined us both as members and volunteers and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of them for their support, enthusiasm and, in many cases, long hours of hard work for the project. Our Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant, in addition to enabling us to purchase Webbs Fen last year and undertake major restoration work on our newly acquired sites, has provided us with exciting new opportunities to diversify our activities and to share the beautiful landscape and exciting wildlife of the valley with new audiences. It has also provided us with new and more effective means of providing information about all aspects of the project through our new website and the very well-received newsletter that we have been able to deliver to all households in the project area.

Although the LOHP's volunteers still undertake most of our work, we have needed to contract in additional help to ensure effective delivery of the Heritage Lottery Fund project. Mike Harding has overseen management and reporting of the project and Nicky Rowbottom has masterminded and edited our newsletter. As in previous years, Peter and Tim Frizzell's team have undertaken much of the major restoration work on our sites. All of these people have made a huge contribution to the project this year for which we are extremely grateful.

This year saw a very important development for the LOHP that has secured funding for much of the routine management work required to maintain and improve the condition of our sites for wildlife over the next ten years. We applied successfully for Environmental Stewardship Schemes covering all of our sites. Environmental Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme, funded by Government, which provides funding to land managers in England to deliver effective environmental management on their land. We are grateful to Henry Walker, formerly of Norfolk FWAG, for his invaluable help in preparing our very complex applications for this scheme.

To enable us to enter the Environmental Stewardship (ES) Scheme, we needed security of tenure for its duration on the six sites that we lease from the village charities. Our trustees were involved in long negotiations with five of the village charities to secure leases of this length. We very much appreciate the hard work that went into this on all sides, as well as the expert input from our solicitor, Colin Wright.

The LOHP has been very fortunate this year in being able to move forward with our work despite challenging economic circumstances. In addition to our HLF and ES schemes, this has been made possible by the skill and dedication of our River Link Appeal director, Sarah Grieveson and the generosity of our donors. We move into a new year very aware of the economic challenges that face us and the environmental pressures that face our valley's wildlife and landscape, but confident that we can meet these with the continuing support of the many people who make the LOHP possible.

Restoring Habitats

Much of the major restoration work and development of public access on our newly acquired sites (Scarfe Meadows and Broomscot Common in Garboldisham, and Webbs Fen in Thelnetham) was completed this year, funded primarily by our HLF grant. Webbs Fen was transformed, with the belt of non-native trees removed and replaced by a scrape, providing open water for many of our rare, aquatic, fen specialities. The internal ditches were in-filled to raise water levels within the site, and a new fence was installed to allow much-needed grazing. On Broomscot Common recent scrub was removed to allow restoration of the spring-fed flushes and was rapidly rewarded by the appearance of marsh orchids on the cleared areas. The common was re-fenced to allow grazing to be resumed and part of the extensive stand of gorse was cut to promote new and dense cover for the site's breeding linnets and yellowhammers. On Scarfe Meadows work began on a staged programme of reprofiling the internal ditches to make them more suitable for a wide range of aquatic and marginal species, including water voles.

On our other sites, the routine management tasks that help to maintain their unique wildlife included controlling scrub encroachment on open fen areas, coppicing or pollarding trees and scrub on the fen margins and planting new hedges to provide a wide diversity of habitats. Summer mowing of fen vegetation was continued on all of our wet fen sites. Grazing remained the primary management tool on the Frith, the Lows, Parkers Piece and Bleywycks Bank, although some supplementary cutting was needed to continue to reduce the high soil fertility and resulting weed problems that still remain from these sites' agricultural past. Our routine work also included the maintenance of our many public access routes and structures that enable people to enjoy walking in the valley.

Our grazier Denis Jenkins continued to be a vital part of our site management operation, providing his beautiful animals, including rare breed Norfolk Horn sheep and redpoll cattle. The livestock are not only our most effective tools for restoring rich and rare communities of plants but also enhance the landscape of our sites.

Monitoring of the wildlife on our sites by both amateur and professional naturalists continued to be a vital part of our work, enabling us to assess the impact of our management and other environmental changes on our sites. The regular bird ringing by volunteers as part of the BTO's Constant Effort Site scheme at Hinderclay Fen continued to provide valuable evidence of the breeding bird populations in the valley as well as contributing to understanding of bird populations at a national level. The 2011 ringing totals were topped by blackcaps and sedge warblers, both beneficiaries of LOHP management work there. The wildlife highlight of the year was the very welcome recolonisation of our fens by water voles, after a long absence.

Early spring 2012 saw the exciting arrival of three pairs of displaying lapwings on Webbs Fen but despite their recognition that LOHP management work was providing them with much needed habitat, their nests were sadly lost to predators. Several other birds of the LOHP area have also followed national patterns of decline, with the absence of breeding woodcock one of several sad losses.

Involving people

Practical work remains at the centre of the LOHP's conservation work parties and both our monthly Sunday parties and weekly Wednesday parties continue to be very well attended and attract people of all ages. The Trustees are extremely grateful to Reg Langston for the enormous work he has undertaken in organising the Wednesday, as well as many of the Sunday work parties. 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. During the year, volunteers contributed over 1000 hours of their time to practical tasks on the LOHP sites.

Our grant also enabled us to communicate our work more effectively. Thanks to the skills and hard work of volunteers Stephen Baillie and Sue Brooks, working with web designer Laura Smith who we contracted to help, our website was upgraded and relaunched. The new site provides a platform for new learning resources and an archive that will be written during the remainder of the HLF programme. Our new and very well-received newsletter also brought the LOHP's message to every household in the headwaters villages. On our newly-acquired sites, unique oak truck sculptures commissioned from local chainsaw sculptors Hearts of Oak, were installed, as on our other sites, with embedded panels to provide on-site interpretation.

The trustees were very grateful to Bev Blackburn for taking on a major voluntary contribution to the project as our volunteer co-ordinator and events manager.

Activities

The new activities provided for by our HLF grant took off with the development of a wonderful partnership with Garboldisham Primary School led by the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts and inspired by the enthusiasm of school staff, governors and children, with help from LOHP trustee Reg Langston. The children's regular reports have been a great feature of our newsletters.

Our oral history project, recording the precious memories of older residents of the valley, started with volunteers receiving training in interview techniques and the use of our new recording equipment. Our thanks are due to Stewart Orr, and to Jonathan Draper of the Norfolk Sound Archive, for their invaluable guidance, as well as to our interviewers and the interviewees who contributed their memories.

An undergraduate project on the history of the Blo'Norton and Thelnetham Fen complex was completed as the first stage of our landscape history project in collaboration with the University of East Anglia History Department's Landscape Group.

The year saw three well-attended walks, two forming part of our HLF programme of Heritage Walks. A fascinating walk to explore the geomorphology of the valley, from Garboldisham to Redgrave and Lopham Fen, was led by Tim Holt-Wilson with much appreciated input from Jonny Stone and Professor Richard West. Tree Sculptor Andy Manning led the second walk to explore the inspiration behind the LOHP's oak sculptures. Our annual New Year walk attracted 70 people who enjoyed a brisk walk around the LOHP sites in the Garboldisham area.

Our AGM, members' evening and annual talk held at Hinderclay Village Hall on 6th December was, as ever, well attended with 53 members plus friends and family. The annual talk by Mike Sutton-Croft from the Norfolk Biodiversity Service was entitled 'Stop the alien invasion!' and highlighted the threats to native plants and animals from the increasing numbers of alien species colonising in this area. The evening was also marked by our presentation to retiring trustee Dan Haskin, of a beautiful photograph, by Arthur Rivett, of Thelnetham windmill. Dan was one of our founding trustees and we remain very grateful for the huge contribution he made to the development of the LOHP, particularly in Thelnetham.

We continued to invest in our volunteers, increasing their skills and helping to ensuring safe working practices at our work parties. In addition to a first aid course, we provided training in the safe and effective use of hand tools for volunteers attending the March work party.

We were delighted that the hard work of our volunteers and the success of the project once again received national recognition, this time from the prestigious Biffa Award prize scheme. The LOHP won the 'Restoring Biodiversity' award for the restoration of Parkers Piece and Bleywycks Bank. Selected from nearly 90 applicants, we were named award winners at a ceremony in Covent Garden on 3rd November. Biffa Award is a multi-million pound fund which uses landfill tax credits donated by Biffa Waste Services to award grants to community and environmental projects across the UK. The LOHP received a £45,000 grant to fund major elements of the work to restore fen habitats and create public access on these sites between 2008 and 2010.

Membership

Numbers of member increased by 18% this year, with 166 paid up members, of which 116 were Friends of the Fens at the end of March 2012. This very welcome increase in membership was largely attributable to the new audience reached by the distribution of our new newsletter to all households on the headwaters parishes.

Members of the Board of Trustees

With the expansion of our activities into Garboldisham, the Board welcomed Mr John Sears as our trustee nominated by Garboldisham Parish Council. Founder member and nominee for Thelnetham Parish Council Dan Haskin retired at the last AGM and has been replaced by Martin Ward. Pete Fox was co-opted by the Board of Trustees at our April meeting and has been acting Honorary Secretary.

The Board members were:

Nigel Clark (Chair)

Reg Langston (Honorary Treasurer and trustee nominated by Hinderclay Parish Council)

Rowena Langston (Vice-chair)

Pete Fox (co-opted member and acting Honorary secretary)

Jo-Anne Pitt (trustee nominated by Blo'Norton Parish Council)

Helen Smith

Bob Hayward (trustee nominated by Redgrave Parish Council)

Martin Ward (trustee nominated by Thelnetham Parish Council)

Peter Coster (trustee nominated by South Lopham Parish Council)

Paul Brown

Lindsay Medus (Membership secretary)

Norman Groves

John Sears (trustee nominated by Garboldisham Parish Council)

Funding our work

Much of our work during the year has been funded by our award from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This secured the purchase of Webbs Fen in the previous financial year and this year helped with the major restoration work not only there but also on Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows in Garboldisham. The award also funded the redevelopment of our website, the launch of our new newsletter and the development of our programme of new activities (above).

This year also saw our successful application for Environmental Stewardship Schemes covering all of our sites. The scheme replaces previous agri-environment schemes, such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme that funded much of our restoration work on the Frith and the Lows over the last ten years. Our new Schemes, a combination of the Entry and Higher Levels of the scheme, will fund our routine management work for the next decade, as well as some specific capital projects.

The LOHP's summary accounts are appended to this report. Our full accounts can be viewed on our website.

The River Link Appeal

Despite the continuing economic uncertainties, our Riverlink Appeal continued to provide significant income for specific projects, contributing almost £50,000 during the year. Most of this income comes from small charitable trusts and is the result of many letters of application throughout the year. We remain very grateful to Sarah Grieveson our Appeal Director and to 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, who support her work.

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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 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012

Income	restricted in	unrestricted in	total 2012	total 2011
Riverlink Appeal	£49,890		£49,890	£62,100
Bonus sale		£349	£349	£42
Donation		£196	£196	£332
Countryside Stewardship grant	£2,879		£2,879	£3,7690
Biffaward funding				£8,933
Scarfe Appeal				£2,760
Heritage Lottery Fund	£152,389		£152,389	
Higher Level Scheme	£2,259		£2,259	
Other grants				£1,000
Rural Payments Agency				£4,107
Gift Aid		£1,302	£1302	£209
Subscription		£1,624	£1,624	£1,598
Bank interest		£421	£421	£384
Miscellaneous		£2025 ★	£2025	
Total	£207,417	£5,917	£213,334	£85,233

★ includes Biffaward prize

Expenditure	restricted out	unrestricted out	total 2012	total 2011
Access and Education	£7,018		£7,018	£9,108
Riverlink Appeal	£4,061		£4,061	£6,387
Habitat management	£65,827		£65,827	£16,708
Insurance	£545		£545	£490
Miscellaneous	£84		£84	£52
Biological monitoring	£954		£954	£3,802
Land purchase				£88,900
Professional fees	£56,092	£1,041	£57,133	£5,266
Promotion/volunteer recruitment	£3,421	£142	£3,563	£2351
Rent	£1,554	£330	£1,884	£14,491
Small tools/parts	£1,615	£89	£1,704	£978
Stationery/stamps/printing	£1,729		£1,729	£399
Training	£1,260		£1,260	£313
Water/drainage	£144	£12	£156	£167
Total	£144,303	£2,126	£146,429	£149,412

Assets

Land			£199,275	£199,275
Tools and equipment			£3,932	£3,567

Balance brought forward at 31 March 2011

Balance carried forward at 31 March 2012

£134,961

£68,631

Reserves and Investment Policy

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 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 2011/12 prices this reserve should be £5000.

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 LOHP Board of Directors on 12 November 2012.