



Annual Review 2009-2010

Annual Report of the Trustees for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010

From the Chair

I feel privileged to have been elected chair of what can only be considered as one of the country's leading community charities. The hard work over the last three years by Jo Pitt the outgoing chair has meant that I have taken over a well oiled machine that is going from strength to strength. The ever increasing involvement of volunteers from all walks of life is heartening and it has enabled us to take the restoration of our sites forward very rapidly. Increasingly people are taking on responsibility for tasks, spreading the load of organization that increases as our charity matures. One example is the regular mowing of the paths in Blo' Norton and Betty's Fens that John Dixon has taken on. His efforts enable many people to have easy access rather than having to fight through the rapidly growing summer vegetation.

Although we are a charity that is rooted in volunteer action there are many tasks that need professional work, and we are lucky to have had excellent contractors to do the jobs that are too big for us. This requires ever increasing amounts of money and our supporters small and large have continued to ensure that we have the funds to do the work needed to restore the valley.

The finishing of the peat scraping of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank enabled rapid colonisation of the newly scraped area through the summer and we can now visualise the habitats that will develop over the coming years. It is really pleasing to see cattle and sheep grazing the meadows again.

The most dramatic feat of the year was the building of our second bridge linking Norfolk and Suffolk. This one was designed and project managed by Bob Hayward and put up by a group of volunteers on what must have been the wettest day to the year. Its oak cladding is already mellowing into the background and I am sure it will be used for many years to come. The first time I walked over the bridge after its completion I stopped to consider what the valley would look like when the restoration is complete. Suddenly there was a flash of blue as a kingfisher shot down the river and in the distance a barn owl was silently gliding across the valley in front of the Thelnetham windmill, showing that all the work done by so many volunteers can really achieve positive changes to our local environment. I hope that many of our members will have such inspiring experiences for many years to come.

Restoring Habitats

The restoration of habitats and development of public access on Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank continued this year. The major groundworks were completed resulting in a lowered surface and deeper pools on parts of the site, and the resulting mound of peat was deposited and landscaped on the southern edge of Parkers Piece. Although the year began with high water levels, it became much drier during the summer and early autumn, but our deepest pond continued to hold water throughout. With the completion of the main works we were able to introduce grazing on the site, although we also needed to supplement this with cutting. We were able to remove the cut vegetation from the site for green composting – this has the advantage of removing nutrients from the site, reducing the past enrichment and improving the conditions for re-colonisation by a variety of native species. Volunteers planted hedging on the southern boundary, and groups of tree and shrub species on the peat mound – these will eventually provide habitat and nesting sites for a range of bird species, replacing some of the scrub that was removed from the wetter fen areas. There were encouraging signs of fen plant re-colonisation on the scraped areas and in the pond on Parkers Piece, although the dry summer limited the extent of this. We continued to monitor the site to assess progress and adjust the grazing and cutting regime accordingly.

On our other sites we continued with many of the now routine management tasks, including digging small ponds by hand on Blo' Norton and Hinderclay Fens, and enlarging a ditch on the Frith to provide

more open water for amphibians and aquatic invertebrates. Volunteers also planted more hedging on the Frith boundaries, and cleared encroaching scrub from the open fen areas at Blo' Norton and Hinderclay Fens. During the summer, after the bird breeding season, we mowed and raked off vegetation on the fens.

We have continued to graze with sheep on the Frith, and a mixture of sheep and cattle on the Lows. On both sites we have seen real changes in the vegetation over the past few years, with a significant reduction in the density of nettles and thistles on the Frith in particular.

We are grateful to our volunteers, to our contractors Peter and Tim Frizzell, and our grazier Denis Jenkins for all their help with our site management work.

Involving people

Our practical work parties continue to be well attended, and attract people of all ages. We ran work parties on the second Sunday of every month during the year, with the exception of January when the very severe weather forced our first ever cancellation. In addition to the Sunday events, smaller work parties were held on most Wednesdays, undertaking a range of essential maintenance tasks. A number of our volunteers attended training courses during the year, including first aid, use and maintenance of brushcutters, and application of pesticides. 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 November staff and students from Easton College visited for two work parties, providing the students with valuable practical experience.

LOHP Trustee Bob Hayward led a team of volunteers in constructing a new footbridge across the Little Ouse, linking Bleyswycks Bank with Betty's Fen. We are very grateful to Bob for the time and expertise he invested in this work. In total over 320 hours of volunteer time was donated to the project for the bridge, which was completed in October.

As well as these practical tasks, we have a number of local naturalists who regularly contribute their expertise and are providing us with biological records for our sites. There is regular bird ringing at Hinderclay Fen which provides valuable evidence of the breeding bird populations in the valley. In September members of the London Freshwater Group visited the LOHP for their annual field day, and recorded freshwater invertebrates and plants on a number of sites. We also completed the 12 months of water sampling on the river and its tributary drains that we undertook in conjunction with the Environment Agency.

During the year, volunteers contributed over 1600 hours of their time to tasks on the LOHP sites, a significant increase on the previous year.

Activities

During the year we held 2 guided walks to introduce local people to the new footpaths on Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank, including our traditional Winter Walk in early January which attracted over 30 people despite icy roads and snow. In April we opened the Frith to visitors as an extension of the National Gardens Open Scheme being held in Redgrave, and we held an open evening at Hinderclay Fen in August, with a display about the LOHP and guided walks.

LOHP trustees gave 6 talks over the winter months to a variety of local groups. The AGM was held at Blo' Norton Village Hall, attended by 51 members and additional guests, who heard an entertaining talk by Mike Linley.

Membership

Membership numbers remain stable. At the end of March 2010 there were 124 paid up members, of which 66 were Friends of the Fens.

Members of the Board of Trustees

At the 2009 AGM Norman Groves was appointed as a trustee. Helen Smith stepped down as Honorary Secretary but remained as a trustee. Nigel Clark, formerly Vice Chair, was elected as Chair, and Jo-Anne Pitt became Honorary Secretary. At the end of the year the composition of the Board was as follows:

Nigel Clark (Chair)

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

Rowena Langston (Vice-chair)

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

Helen Smith

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)

Norman Groves

Funding our work

Grants

There were no significant new grants during 2009-2010. The continuing restoration of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank was funded from grants previously awarded to the project, including from Natural England, the Tubney Charitable Trust, Biffaward and Plantlife. We are grateful to all of our funders for their generous support for this exciting project.

The River Link Appeal

The continuing difficult economic climate has had an impact on our fundraising, but our appeal secured £27,375 during the year. This provided additional funding for elements of the restoration work and public access at Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank. Most of this income comes from small charitable trusts and is the result of many letters of application throughout the year. We are grateful to Sarah Grieveson, our 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 2009 to March 31 2010**

Income	restricted in £	unrestricted in £	total 2010 £	total 2009
Riverlink Appeal	£27375.00		£27375.00	£38975.00
Bonus sale		£103.06	£103.06	£1454.62
Donation		£420.58	£420.58	£770.41
Countryside Stewardship grant	£2623.70		£2623.70	£2873.70
Biffaward funding	£21816.52		£21816.52	£10,153.77
Other grants	£44488.75		£44488.75	£5300.00
Rural Payments Agency		£3819.39	£3919.39	£2202.26
Miscellaneous		£7.98	£7.98	£15.00
Subscription		£742.75	£742.75	£754.25
Bank interest		£831.32	£831.32	£4177.52
Total	£96303.97	£5925.08	£102229.05	£69,146.53

Expenditure	restricted out	unrestricted out	total 2010	total 2009
Access and Education	£30.00		£30.00	£1973.23
Riverlink Appeal	£2917.65		£2917.65	£4962.71
Habitat management	£44051.90		£44051.90	£39,432.55
Bridge costs	£13583.66		£13583.66	
Insurance	£466.75	£23.60	£490.35	£426.75
Miscellaneous		£100.70	£100.70	
Monitoring	£2299.30		£2299.30	
Professional fees/wages	£5795.69	£1204.50	£7000.19	£10,394.14
Promotion/volunteer recruitment	£828.26	£109.71	£937.97	£915.89
Rent	£1628.00	£330.00	£1958.00	£2908.00
Small tools/parts	£1891.88	£172.95	£2064.83	£1610.70
Stationery/stamps/printing	£186.30	£397.20	£583.50	£203.68
Training	£2001.52		£2001.52	£66.00
Water/drainage	£124.41		£124.41	£97.50
Total	£75805.32	£2338.66	£78143.98	£62,991.15

Assets

Land	£61,275.00	£61,275.00
Tools and equipment	£3844.00	£5522.00
Balance brought forward at 31 March 2009		£116,653.98
Balance carried forward at 31 March 2010	£134534.40	

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 2009-10 prices this reserve should be £4800.

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 October 2010.

Registered charity no 1098232
Registered office

Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, Norfolk IP22 2JN

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