



Wensum Valley Trust



Annual Report 2009



Contents

.....

Page 3	Chair's Report
Page 4	The Wensum Valley Trust in 2008-9
Page 6	Acting Manager's Report
Page 12	WeVols - Volunteering for the Trust
Page 14	Membership
Page 15	Meet the Trustees
Page 17	Meet the Staff
Page 18	Finance and Funding

Front cover: Members of the Wensum Valley Trust enjoying a guided riverside walk in September 2008

Chair's Report

.....

This has been a year of ups and downs for the Trust. Our Manager Robin Goolden was ill for much of the year and was not able to contribute significantly towards fundraising or the work of the Trust. However, despite being quite new to the job, Steve Dalliston has proved his weight in gold. Steve was appointed interim Manager and has shown that he is more than capable of fulfilling the Trust's service agreements, recruiting volunteers and assisting with fundraising. To assist Steve and free him from spending time in the office as much as possible, Frances Collinson resigned as a Trustee and has been serving as an interim administrator.

On the subject of fundraising, we spent much of the year putting together a plan for the Wensum Wetlands, which was a joint partnership project. Meeting the requirements of the two main funders was a major undertaking with our limited administrative resources and it meant that other funding plans had to be put on the back burner. Unfortunately the plans were turned down by one funder and the other required guarantees which we could not provide.

The result was that we have consumed the reserves that were transferred from the Project when the Trust was formed. However we have agreed a three year funding plan which focuses on some exciting community projects and I am confident that with Robert Testro's guidance, Steve and Frances can both meet our core service level agreements and take us into the next few years in a more healthy financial state.

My personal background and experience is in practical countryside matters and farming and I feel that in current circumstances, the Trust needs a Chair who has specialised knowledge of fundraising. I am prepared to continue assisting my fellow Trustees although I am willing to stand down as Chairman should that be necessary.

I would like to record my thanks to Steve and Frances and also to my fellow Trustees for all their effort and hard work.

Roy Church, Chair, Trustees

The Wensum Valley Trust in 2008-9

.....

The Wensum Valley Trust is coming towards the end of its second year as a charitable trust. It has been a turbulent year, with uncertain finances and staff changes. We say farewell to Robin Goolden, Trust Manager, who retired in February this year. Robin has been the face of the Trust (and its previous inception, the Wensum Valley Project) for several years and many members, volunteers, and members of the public will no doubt wish to join us in sending him our best wishes for a happy and active retirement. Steve Dalliston, Trust Assistant, has bravely stepped into the breach to act as Acting Manager whilst we recruit a new Manager. We also said farewell to two Trustees in 2008. Frances Collinson and Lucy Evers both resigned due to work and personal commitments, but Frances returned to provide part-time administrative support and Lucy continues to provide advice and expertise through her work with Community Matters, of whom we are a member.

Our objective ‘to promote conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the River Wensum catchment’ continues to inform the work we do. However, alongside our aims to conserve the countryside of the valley and improve access and understanding of the river, is recognition of the need to develop a business arm which will enable us to survive in the future.

This will not detract from the aims of the Trust but enhance our profile and secure our reputation within the county as an organisation which has a holistic and inclusive approach to work. For example, we work in the heart of communities, often with local volunteers, and ensure that our conservation and preservation work has benefits that the people of the area can enjoy. However, some areas outside the catchment directly and indirectly impact on the valley and our work within it. Therefore, we have identified a need to extend our work outside the immediate borders of the catchment area. This will have obvious benefits for the habitats in these spaces and the communities who use them. It will also benefit the Trust by providing us with alternative funding sources and hopefully secure us enough work to survive in the long term without reducing our primary aim of working within the river valley.

We continue to identify and develop specific projects which require larger sums of external funding, as these will also be vital to our healthy future survival, and we continue to liaise with local communities on a variety of topics. We receive many enquiries about how people can enjoy the river and its environs, and this year have had several requests for our popular talks on the work of the Wensum Valley Trust. As always, we are grateful for the support of our members and volunteers and look forward to a challenging but exciting third year.



Volunteers from Broadland Housing Trust working at Ringland Hills in August 2008

The Aims of the Wensum Valley Trust

Our aims are:

- Conserving and enhancing the countryside of the River Wensum catchment, in particular its varied landscape, habitats and wildlife
- Facilitating the quiet enjoyment of the area for local people and visitors to the area in so far as this is consistent with the other objectives and with the needs of existing land users
- Promoting understanding of the area and the need for its conservation amongst local residents and visitors to the area through education
- Encouraging participation in all aspects of the Wensum Valley Strategy and other work of the Project
- Seeking to ensure that activities and development are appropriately assessed and implemented in line with the conservation needs of the area
- Promoting co-ordinated management which makes best use of resources and promotes partnership
- Contributing towards the local economy by providing an attractive, diverse and accessible environment.

Acting Manager's Report

.....

Despite having spent a lot of time in the office this year, I am pleased to report that we have made clear progress in achieving our objectives for 2008-9. It has been a busy year, laying down the groundwork for a lot of our core work, but next year proves to be an exciting time as we will be launching several new projects throughout 2009-10.

Conserving and enhancing the countryside.

We have worked up and down the length of the river this year to deliver a wide range of practical work. Grassland habitats have been conserved at Sparham Pools, Beetley Meadow and Ringland Hills. At County School Station, near North Elmham, we re-profiled a pond to improve its ecological value and planted native shrubs to increase the diversity of habitats, and nearby at Hoe Common we conserved heather heathland habitat.

Working with local communities is an important aspect of this work. For example, when Ringland Parish Council contacted us to discuss an unrelated matter, we saw a woodland glade which was being invaded by encroaching scrub, so we helped the parish council to apply for funding to restore the area. We then organised the various volunteers to fell trees, remove brambles, dig up gorse roots and mow the area. We used the dead wood to create habitat piles for insects and raked the cut grass into heaps to create ideal habitats for slow worms. Finally, bracken and leaf litter were removed to expose bare soil which was then re-seeded with a mix collected from nearby common land.

By becoming affiliated to us, parish groups can ensure support for the conservation of their local area. This is how the Gressenhall Environment Group managed to keep going after it folded last year. Although the group had a lack of committee members, it had plenty of volunteers and a willingness to continue managing the green spaces in the village, so affiliation with the Trust was the answer. Since then, we have removed willow scrub from botanically-rich wet grazing marsh at Gowards Meadow and have set up an agreement with the Community Payback scheme (Probation Service). Teams of offenders have removed vegetation which was choking a dyke system, cleared around a neglected pond and mowed an area of wildflower-rich grassland.

In Norwich, grassland habitats have been conserved by the removal of scrub, plus mowing to reduce rank vegetation. Encroaching brambles and scrub have also been removed along Marriotts Way, as it passes Heigham Street and Barker Street. This will improve the ecological value of the area. Also in Norwich, we tackled a non-native invasive plant known as Himalayan Balsam. Large amounts

were removed from the riverbank between Taverham and Norwich. At Train Wood, on the site of the former City railway station, woodland habitats were conserved, as the ground flora layer in this woodland is rich in wildflowers. By coppicing on a rotational basis, we can ensure that more light reaches the woodland floor.



The attractive but invasive non-native plant Himalayan Balsam
Working with landowners and contractors is also vital for any successful conservation project. This year we have given advice to a number of landowners on a variety of subjects including catchment-sensitive farming, countryside stewardship and management of woodland, grassland and riparian habitats; and we have employed contractors to remove scrub at Guist

Common, a fen that forms part of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation.

Facilitating the quiet enjoyment of the area.

Key to our work is ensuring that the public can benefit from the natural beauty of the river Wensum. This often involves ensuring that access is provided, maintained and improved. At Drayton Green Lanes we repaired a broken section of the boardwalk and also kept paths clear at Waterside Court, Dolphin Bridge, Train Wood, Sparham Pools, Beetley Meadows, Rushmeadow, and Hoe Common.

In Norwich, we inspected and repaired fishing platforms, and sought permission for the installation of new platforms at Drayton and further along the river at Swanton Morley. We also installed a bench at Sparham Pools and reinstated a popular picnic area at Ringland Hills.

Walking is one of the most enjoyable ways to enjoy the river valley. This year we have been progressing well with our plans to open and publicise an eight-mile walking route in the North Elmham area, and elsewhere we have held several guided walks, of varying lengths, including four in North Norfolk, four in Broadland, two in Norwich and three in Breckland.

Under the Countryside Rights of Way Act (2000), Guist Common is designated as open access even though this fen site is very fragile and forms part of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation. So, for public safety and to protect the balance of habitats, we designed an interpretation board to inform members of the public about safety and ecological precautions. We hope to help the Guist Charity Trustees, who own the site, to find the funding to install the board next year.

Last year we published an update to the popular 'Where to Fish in the Wensum Valley' leaflet. This aims to help anglers access coarse and river fisheries along the Wensum. We also helped to design and printed the 'Walking in Lyng' leaflet for Lyng Environment Group. Both these leaflets have proved popular and are available along with our other literature from the Trust office.

As advisors to Fakenham Area Partnership we submitted an access plan to Fakenham Town Council. As a result of this, limited public access is now enjoyed on Edmondson's Acres and when the site is re-fenced later this year a kissing gate will be installed to improve access even further.



Riverside path at Fakenham

Promoting Understanding

We took the opportunity to use many of our guided walks as tools to promote understanding on a variety of subjects, including general biodiversity, habitat management, species, wildlife law, geology and the valley in general. As part of Natural Fakenham's summer of events, held in conjunction with North Norfolk District Council, one of our guided walks looked at the diversity of wildflowers on Edmondson's Acres. Other opportunities to promote understanding throughout the year have included slide shows and talks. Illustrated talks were given to Costessey Society, Lyng Environment Group, Old Catton Society and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust (Norwich).

You may have seen us on our information stand throughout the year at a variety of events including Wild about the Wensum at Pensthorpe Nature Reserve, Wild about Norfolk at Notcutts in Norwich, The Royal Norfolk Show, and the Fakenham High School enrichment afternoon. At all of these events we promoted conservation, walks, angling and the special nature of the Wensum Valley.

We also reached a wide audience when I was interviewed by a reporter from the Eastern Daily Press for an article about the ecology of the valley, its need for protection and the recreation opportunities available.

A series of 'Secret Safaris' was held at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. These events teach children about the wealth of nature that can be found even in the smallest areas. During the series of 'Older People's Days' at Gressenhall, over-55s were led on guided walks exploring how Norfolk's countryside has changed throughout the years.

Finally, the Chair of the Trust led a guided walk in the Sparham area looking at river restoration and the projects that attempt to restore the River Wensum into a 'favourable condition'.

Encouraging participation

Getting involved with local communities at the grass roots level is a major strength of the Wensum Valley Trust. Not only do we have our own WeVol volunteer group, but we have also worked with the Norfolk Probation Service 'Community Payback' scheme. Other groups we have worked closely throughout the year with include the Wensum RiverCare group, Easton College, Lyng Environment Group, Hoe Common Management Committee, Gressenhall Environment Group and Broadland Housing Trust.



Children making 'Owl Scowl' masks at 'Wild about the Wensum'

2009-10 promises to be a particularly exciting time for community involvement, however, as we have now begun work on our Wensum Community Owls Project, WENCOP for short. In partnership with the Hawk and Owl Trust at Sculthorpe and the Wensum Valley Birdwatchers' Society,

WENCOP aims to help local communities conserve habitats and nesting sites for five small birds of prey. Further details about WENCOP can be obtained from our office and we will be encouraging parish councils, schools and other community groups to take part in this exciting project later in the year.

Assessing development

The Wensum Valley Trust provides a voice for conservation and public access in various consultation processes conducted by local authorities and statutory organisations. In 2008 we commented on *Green Infrastructure and Environment* in Norwich, Breckland District Council's *Minerals and Waste LDF*, Natural England and Environment Agency's *River Restoration Plan* and a planning application for a rendering plant in Lenwade.

Promoting co-ordinated management

Wensum Valley Trust advises the Fakenham Area Partnership on the management of botanically-rich wet grassland at Edmondson's Acres. This year, our support has included giving advice on fencing to allow grazing, scrub control, dyke management and pollarding, as well as assisting the Fakenham Area Conservation Team with practical management of the site, which forms part of the River Wensum SSSI.

We also act as secretariat to a group called Natural Fakenham (formally the Fakenham Open Spaces Group). This is an informal gathering of local landowners and conservation bodies with an interest in providing structured access and improving wildlife habitats in the Upper Wensum Valley. Natural Fakenham comprises representatives from several organisations, including Wensum Valley Trust, Hawk and Owl Trust, Fakenham Area Conservation Team, Fakenham Area Partnership, North Norfolk District Council, Norfolk County Council, Fakenham Town Council, Fakenham Racecourse, Pensthorpe Nature Reserve and the Norfolk Ornithologist Association. It is also attended by private landowners, and the group meets bi-monthly to discuss a holistic approach to improving habitats and access in the area.

There is also a good network of conservation bodies across the rest of the county and we aim to contribute to this wherever possible. In 2008 we supplied information to the Norfolk Non-Native Invasive Species Initiative on alien species of concern and in February we attended the NNIS Stakeholders' Forum. We also attend meetings of the *Community and Nature Biodiversity Action Plan Topic Group* who discuss and shape relevant species and habitat action plans. In March we took part in their first *Community Wildlife Conference* which was organised by the British Trust of Conservation Volunteers. And at a recent *Natural Neighbours* conference in Norwich, over 90 representatives, mainly from community groups, attended talks from external experts and various workshops.

Following a report on ecological networks in Dereham, the *Dereham Commons Forum* was set up. We advised this group on the best way to restore habitats at Neatherd Moor and Etling Green, led guided walks and gave illustrated talks to encourage support. We also led a conservation volunteering task restoring an area in preparation for the digging out of a pond.

Finally, the Wensum Valley Churchyards Project was launched in 2008. This project aims to improve the management of churchyards for native wildlife and so far six churchyards have benefited from educational presentations, advice and practical help with management.

Steve Dalliston, Acting Manager



Members of the Gressenhall Environment Group carrying out a wildflower survey at Gowards Meadow

WeVols – Volunteering for the Trust

.....

Without the sterling support of our volunteers, much of our practical work would not get done. Many of the tasks we did this year were only achieved thanks to our very own WeVols and other volunteers.

The WeVols are the Wensum Valley Trust's volunteer group who help our Acting Manager in a wide range of outdoor conservation projects throughout the river valley. At Sparham Pools and Beetley Meadow, the conservation of grassland habitats involved coppicing large willow trees and removing rank vegetation. At Sparham, volunteers also helped remove a layer of leaf litter to expose bare soil, which in time will regenerate into acid grassland. The Trust provides the tools and training for all these jobs and the WeVols help out with much-needed labour.

Other volunteer groups also get involved in our work. The WeVols were joined by volunteers from Broadland Housing Trust and Easton College in a project to restore acid grassland habitats at Ringland Hills. Work involved a variety of tasks from felling trees, to removing brambles, digging up gorse roots and mowing the area. Habitat piles were created for insects and slow worms using the dead wood and mown grass, and wildflowers were sown onto bare soil.

Elsewhere, volunteers helped the Trust to conserve open heather heathland at Hoe Common. Along with members of the Hoe Common Management Committee, WeVols removed bracken, gorse and birch saplings. The Committee is a voluntary organisation which manages the site and in the past it relied totally on the old Wensum Valley Project. However, the group is now affiliated to the Trust and we are currently engaged in seeking funding to get First Aid training for the committee's members. Once this has been achieved, the group will be able to organise and undertake some basic tasks without supervision.



Management of Hoe Common on a bright winter day in December 2008

In Norwich, protection of the environment can take many forms because it is an urban area with a high population. WeVols have helped to conserve various grassland and woodland habitats and also to improve the ecological value of Marriotts Way. But urban problems such as litter can also be a problem for the Wensum valley and some of the WeVols have helped to continue improving the area by regularly attending litter picks which have been organised by the Wensum RiverCare Group.

WeVols have many talents and practical skills are always useful. Whilst repairing a broken section of boardwalk at Drayton Green Lanes, it became clear that the boardwalk had broken because vegetation was accelerating the rotting of the wood. So WeVols strimmed both sides of the boardwalk and cleared all vegetation away from the edges in order to prolong its life. Finally, a Norfolk Probation Service 'Community Payback' team has worked hard with us to help improve habitats in Gressenhall, including clearing a pond and mowing a wildflower meadow.



A ditch at Gressenhall cleared by members of the Community Payback scheme

We would like to take the opportunity to thank all the volunteer groups and individuals who have helped us over the past year, with a special acknowledgement to our very own WeVols. For further information on joining the WeVols, contact Steve in the Wensum Valley Trust office.

Membership

.....

The Wensum Valley Trust relies heavily on the support of its members, through their subscriptions and active participation as volunteers. Membership figures for the first two years are:

	Individual/Family	Individual/Family Concession	Corporate	Corporate Concession
2007	30	6	2	0
2008	24	8	2	3

Membership of the WVT was free in our first year of operation, which may explain why our individual and family member numbers were down in 2008, but it is pleasing to see that we have increased our individual and family concessions and that three parish councils joined us last year as corporate concessionary members. We hope more parish councils in the area will join this year as there are many benefits we can bring to their communities.

The membership elects the trustees at the Annual General Meeting each year and approves our accounts. We are keen to recruit more members to secure not only extra vital income, but also so that we can expand awareness of the Trust to as wide an audience as possible.

Membership Fees

Individual/Family	£10
Individual/Family Concessions (under 16 / over 60 / unwaged)	£5
Corporate (businesses / local authorities / town and large parish councils)	£100
Corporate Concessions (charities and voluntary groups / small parish councils / small businesses)	£25

Members of the Wensum Valley Trust enjoy regular newsletters and admission to our annual AGM. We hope to extend the range this year to include free admission to more events for individual members and a suite of benefits for corporate members.

Meet the Trustees

.....

We would like to welcome two new Trustees to the board – Penny and Richard Hawker. The Board of Trustees now comprises:

Roy Church, Chair of Trustees.

Roy is a qualified Chartered Surveyor (Rural Practice) and has also been a District Valuer and Valuation Officer for Norfolk. He is a retired Magistrate, the Chair of the Wensum Fishery Action Plan and a former member of the Environment Agency Area Advisory Panel. Roy's interests include agriculture and travel and he is a founder member and Vice-President of the Norfolk Anglers Conservation Association.

Robert Testro, Treasurer.

Robert is a chartered management accountant. He has previous experience of managing large and complex public sector projects and is now involved in planning a diverse array of projects for the NHS. He will be responsible for overseeing the financial management and overall performance of the Trust.

Gordon Bambridge, Secretary.

Gordon is a local district Councillor and was the chair of the public sector group which managed the Wensum Valley Project, the forerunner of the Wensum Valley Trust. He is very familiar with the conservation objectives of the trust as we adopted the same aims as the previous project.

Penny Hawker, Trustee.

Penny worked formerly as a Training Officer for Norwich City Council in finance related matters and has nine years' experience. She will be responsible for ensuring that staff management policies and procedures are implemented. In particular, she will be responsible for overseeing the recruitment and induction of the new staff.

Richard Hawker, Trustee.

Richard is a chartered Electrical Engineer, currently working for a garden product manufacturer. He has a lifelong interest in wildlife, especially birds. He has been a parish Councillor for Hockering for 19 of the last 22 years, where a particular concern has been footpaths and transport.



Meet the Trustees: from L to R: Gordon Bambridge, Robert Testro, Penny Hawker, Richard Hawker and Roy Church.



Meet the Staff: Acting Manager Steve Dalliston and Administrator Frances Collinson.



Robert and Frances on the Trust's stand at 'Wild about the Wensum' at Pensthorpe.

Meet the Staff

.....

Steve Dalliston, acting Trust Manager. Steve has a Higher National Diploma in Countryside Management and several years of relevant work experience. He was initially contracted for three months in December 2007. His work with the Trust since then has included two long periods as Acting Trust Manager and this has revealed skills and aptitudes that prove him to be a great asset to the Trust.

Frances Collinson, part-time Administrator. Frances was the curator of the Norfolk Rural Life Museum until 2008 and has many years' experience of working for Norfolk County Council as well as a wide-ranging knowledge of the county. This, plus extensive office skills, makes her ideally placed to offer administrative support to the Trust.



Ladies Smock

Finance and Funding

.....

Our accounts have been prepared according to the Charities Statement of Recommended Practice. As we are a small charity with income of less than £100,000 we do not need a full audit. However the accounts have been presented for independent examination and have been approved without qualification. If you wish to see a full set of accounts or the independent examiner's report, please contact our office and we will happily send you a copy.

Our accounts are set out in summary form below. This is our first full year of operating as a charitable trust and the comparison figures are for only part of the previous year.

We rely heavily on the Service Level Agreements we have with Local Authorities and are confident of providing good value for money in the future. We also need to diversify our activities and our funding plan reflects this. Unfortunately a major project did not come to fruition this year which has led to us drawing heavily on our reserves.

Next year, as well as meeting our service level agreements, we will develop three exciting community-based projects which will give us the financial security we need to grow.

Wensum Valley Trust Accounts

Year Ended 31st March 2009

April 08 - June 07 -
March 09 March 08

Income

Balance Transferred		35,794
Grants	37,476	28,059
Membership	1,115	300
Interest on Deposits	363	66

Total income **38,954** **64,219**

Expenditure

Salaries	45,276	26,627
Office and Admin	11,718	4,394
Travel	1,151	582
Contractors and Equipment	1,170	361

Total Expenditure **59,314** **31,964**

Net Incoming Resources **-20,360** **32,255**

Balance Brought Forward 32,255

Balance Carried Forward 11,895

BALANCE SHEET

Fixed Assets 0 0

Current Assets

Debtors 445 664

Cash In Hand and at Bank 18,812 32,411

Creditors falling due in less than 1 year 7,362 821

Net Assets **11,894** **32,254**

Unrestricted Funds 1,725 15,538

Restricted Funds 10,168 16,716

Total Funds **11,894** **32,254**



Beech House
Gressenhall
Dereham
Norfolk NR20 4DR

Telephone: 01362 861183
Email: admin@wensumvalleytrust.org.uk
www.wensumvalleytrust.org.uk

Registered Charity: No. 1120524