

Broads Authority

17 March 2023

Agenda item number 16

Member report on outside bodies - Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Charitable Trust

Report by Paul Hayden

Purpose

Members appointed by the Authority to outside bodies are required to submit a written report on the organisation's work and activities.

Recommended decision

To note the report.

1. Function and purpose of the Norfolk & Suffolk Broads Charitable Trust

- 1.1. The Norfolk & Suffolk Broads Charitable Trust, more commonly known simply as 'The Broads Trust', was established in 2008 to support Broads-based bodies, including the Broads Authority. As a registered charity the primary role of the Broads Trust is to act as an enabling body to access charitable fund-raising and grant aided support to promote the conservation of the Broads and the well-being of the people who live in, work in, or visit this unique area.
- 1.2. In accordance with its charitable objectives, projects supported by the Broads Trust will be expected to contribute to one or more of the following aims:
 - protect biodiversity
 - conserve and enhance the natural environment, including its wildlife
 - provide appropriate facilities for residents and visitors
 - maintain and improve the navigable waterways of the Broads
 - promote the responsible use of land and water resources
 - interpret the unique ecosystem that is the Broads
 - create educational resources to promote better understanding
 - inform and engage the interest of young people

- sustain community life in the Broads area
 - maintain the cultural heritage of the Broads area
 - address the local consequences of climate change
- 1.3. The Broads Trust raises funds to distribute to appropriate projects within the area, including projects brought forward by the Broads Society, and other Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). Funding for public bodies or private entities, including the Broads Authority, is only provided for added value projects that assist in delivery of our charitable aims, and not for work towards delivery of their statutory duties. All projects, including those carried out on private land, will be required to demonstrate public benefit.

2. Current Operations and Projects

Visitor Giving Scheme – Love the Broads

- 2.1. The Broads Trust recognises that our unique Broads wetlands, their wonderful wildlife, and around 125 miles of waterways draw millions of visitors every year and support a diverse tourism economy. However, those visitors also impact on the environment and facilities upon which tourism businesses rely. In an effort to mitigate the impact of tourism on the local environment, and to improve access for visitors, the Broads Trust established a visitor giving scheme under the branding of “Love the Broads” ([Love the broads](#)).
- 2.2. This visitor giving scheme encourages voluntary donations from visitors and local businesses who feel inspired to make a collective contribution to looking after the places they love. The money raised through the Love the Broads giving scheme goes towards supporting projects across the Broads which are delivered by many committed organisations which are working hard to protect and support our beautiful landscape, our local communities and our traditional heritage. Since 2013 nearly £100,000 has been raised which has helped to provide grants to 54 projects to help wildlife, the environment and education on the Broads.

Large Scale Projects – Discovery Hubs

- 2.3. Responsibility for protecting and enhancing the unique and special environment of the Suffolk and Norfolk Broads rests with multiple public authorities, organisations, communities and businesses. Both public authorities and private businesses have their own funding streams that can be used to assist in delivery of projects that benefit the environment of the broads and to enhance visitor access and experiences. However, it can be difficult for those organisations to access other forms of funding such as sponsorship, grants, and charitable donations. One of the original intentions in establishing the Broads Trust was to create an appropriate vehicle that could be used to address this funding gap, working with partners to deliver our charitable objectives by

drawing down funding that may not be available to Public Authorities or private businesses. The Discovery Hub Project is a current case in point.

- 2.4. The idea of establishing a network of Discovery Hubs around the whole Broads area was conceived early in 2019 and was made public during the Trust's 10th anniversary meeting. The concept of these Hubs was described as:

"A Discovery Hub could be a destination in itself, a starting point for exploration and a point on the network of boating, walking and cycling routes. It would be a physical structure in keeping with the landscape with sensitive branding which would provide views of the surrounding landscape, information about the locality, historical and cultural information and space for relaxation. It might or might not have road or vehicular access. Where-ever possible it would have wi-fi or data connections."

- 2.5. The concept has received unanimous endorsement from many quarters and the design of the three types of Hub, small, medium and large, is now well defined. Agreements have already been made for locations of the Beccles Discovery Hub at Beccles Staithe, and the Great Yarmouth Seafront Discovery Hub adjacent to the Sea Life centre. The Salhouse hub is fully funded and is currently under construction. Hubs at Beccles and Gt. Yarmouth will not be far behind. Work is ongoing to secure locations and funding for additional hubs in various locations across the Broads Area.

3. Future Business Development

- 3.1. The 2019 Broads Trust Business Plan set out the challenges of raising funds through the visitor giving scheme, and reflected on the fact that despite best efforts since 2012, incomes had plateaued at around £25k per annum. It was recognised that at this level of income, the Trust was barely sustainable as the fixed costs of managing the scheme were around £10,000, meaning that the cost to income ratio was not acceptable at over 40%. The key performance indicators in the 2019 Business Plan were for income to grow to a minimum of £50k per year, with administration costs being no more than 20% of income. With the impact of COVID, this target has not been achieved through the core activities of the Broads Trust and its visitor giving scheme. Fortunately, the additional funding received for the Discovery Hubs Project means that these fixed overheads are now at a much more manageable ratio.
- 3.2. Notwithstanding the success of the Discovery Hub project, Trustees have determined that due to the impact of the COVID 19 emergency on the visitor giving scheme, and the current economic downturn, mean that the 2019 business plan requires fundamental review. Trustees and volunteers have commenced that review, with a workshop convened in December 2022 to discuss and consider the Broads Trust and its operating environment, with written inputs provided by Trustees and members unable to attend. During that workshop, facilitated discussions included a self-evaluation of the Trusts activities using the well-established S.W.A.T Analysis format.

This structure explores in turn:

- i. Strengths
 - ii. Weaknesses
 - iii. Opportunities, and
 - iv. Threats
- 3.3. The outcomes and discussion points from that S.W.A.T Analysis have been used to inform an updated business plan that will go to Trustees for adoption in Summer 2023. Whilst it is currently in draft form only, current indications are that the new plan will concentrate future business development aligned to the Broads Trust’s original prospectus that had identified the gap in the “Broads Landscape” for an organisation that could act as an “umbrella organisation” beneath which a range of partners could work to draw down grants and sponsorships that may be available to a charitable vehicle, but are not available to other public bodies or private enterprises. The updated business plan will also seek to address identified organisational gaps and challenges, these include:
1. Growing and diversifying the member, volunteer, and supporter base and putting in place succession planning for key positions.
 2. Continue to build on the success of the visitor giving and Discovery Hub Projects, maximising the income and impact of each operation.
 3. Identify and then secure grant funding for at least one further major operation or project within the 5-year planning period.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. Broads Authority Members are asked to consider ways in which they might wish to support the Broads Trust ongoing development, either as members or volunteers. Broads Trust would also welcome the opportunity to work with partners to identify and draw down funding for delivery of projects that deliver mutual benefits and align with our charitable objectives. Broads Authority Members can assist the Broads Trust by communicating this message and offer of support to any partner organisations with which they are associated.

Author: Paul Hayden, appointed by the Broads Authority

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