



Bury Water Meadows Group CIO
Charity Number: 1185321

**Trustees' Annual Report & Financial Statements
for the Period
1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025**



Bury Water Meadows Group CIO

Trustees' Annual Report

for the Period from 01-01-2025 to 31-12-2025

Section A: Reference & Administration Details

Charity Name	Bury Water Meadows Group CIO
Registered Number	1185321
Principal Address	27 Victoria Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3BB

Names of the charity trustees who manage the Charity

Name	Office	Date Appointed (if during year)	Resigned (if during year)
Richard Counihan	Chair		
Elizabeth Ranzetta			25/04/25
Ian Campbell	Treasurer		
Julian Case	Secretary		
Jillian Macready	Secretary		
Iain Carruthers-Jones			25/04/25
Christopher Cross			
Gillian Evans			
Susan Feuerhelm			

Names of trustees holding title to property belonging to the charity

NONE

Funds held as custodian trustees on behalf of others

NONE



Section B: Structure, Governance & Management

Description of the charity's trusts

Type of Governing Document	Association model constitution with voting members other than its charity trustees
How the Charity is Constituted	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Trustee Selection Methods including details of any constitutional provisions	There must be at least three trustees under the Constitution. We aim to maintain a minimum of six members on the CIO management committee and periodically ask the members via newsletter if anyone is interested in adding their expertise. The member would then attend and participate in the management committee for a three-month trial period and subject to this being successful they are invited to become a trustee. No body external to the charity has any entitlement to appoint trustees.

Additional information (optional)

Policies and procedures adopted for the induction and training of trustees	In accordance with the Constitution a copy including any amendments made to it along with a copy of the latest trustees' annual report and statement of accounts will be made available to each new trustee. Having already served on the management committee the new trustee will be familiar with all discussions regarding the running of the CIO.
Other Governance	<p>The CIO management committee normally meets once per month and the secretary maintains minutes of each meeting's actions and decisions.</p> <p>Policies & procedure in respect of the following areas are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ internal charity financial controls ➤ safeguarding ➤ financial reserves ➤ complaints ➤ serious incident reporting ➤ internal risk management ➤ trustee expenses ➤ trustee conflicts of interest ➤ equality & diversity ➤ volunteer management

Statutory declaration on public benefit

The trustees declare that they have complied with their duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Charity Commission in exercising their powers or duties.

Section C: Objectives & Activities

The purposes of the charity as set out in its governing document are

To conserve, preserve and improve the rivers Lark and Linnet in Bury St Edmunds and adjacent areas for the benefit of the public in particular but not exclusively by:

1. Improving access and encouraging the appropriate use of the rivers and their environs by members of the public
2. Educating the public about the rivers and their environs
3. Facilitating community involvement in the conservation of the rivers Lark and Linnet, Bury St Edmunds' water meadows and critical other local green spaces
4. Improving the biodiversity of the Lark and the Linnet
5. Working in partnership with like-minded organisations

Summary of the main activities in relation to these purposes for the public benefit by Bury Water Meadows Group CIO (BWMG):

➤ Access to the rivers and their environs:

Chalk streams are one of England's most important natural habitats and are globally rare. Both the Lark and the Linnet are chalk streams which flow through the town's floodplains and green spaces but the water that is in the rivers does not derive from the aquifer as it should but is often run-off and polluted both upstream and downstream of the town. This is essentially due to over-abstraction for public water supply along with pollution from agriculture, roads, and water treatment works.

With there being limited scope to impact on the rivers themselves BWMG's main focus here is to maintain and improve the existing accessible green spaces adjoining the rivers through activities including pro-active plant & vegetation management, ditch clearance, footpath maintenance, redundant fence removal, invasive species removal, and litter picking.

➤ River path access:

Public footpaths run alongside the river Linnet from Westley Bottom through Holywater Meadows to the Green King site with further footpaths through the water meadows along both sides of Cullum Road. There are also footpaths alongside the river Lark from Rougham Road past the Abbey Gardens and through Ram Meadow to Compiègne Way. There is then no access before the 13-mile Lark path which starts from Mildenhall Road in the town and continues downstream to Mildenhall.

Progress by Suffolk County Council (SCC)'s Rights of Way dept on the completion of the necessary actions to open a new public river path from the A14 at Fornham Road to Barton Hill is slow but on-going. This would open up green space through wood and meadow areas alongside British Sugar's land, accessed at the Barton Hill end via a strip of land owned by BWMG.

➤ Education and communication:

Our website contains features on work taking place in the various water meadow habitat locations, members newsletters, and a monthly column written for the local press. It also has a link to view the new short film "A Year in the Life of Bury Water Meadows Group". Our active Facebook page educates and informs readers on the regular activities of the group.

➤ Wildlife Festival

The Wildlife Festival event is the annual flagship for BWMG's efforts to increase community involvement in its work on habitat conservation and the maintenance of biodiversity in the water meadow locations in the town. From a tented hub-zone in the Abbey Gardens this was a free, fun and informative event for the public who were invited to come and explore the biodiversity of the water meadows with a series of interactive walks, talks, trails, and art with local

environmental organisations, experts and enthusiasts. Two schools took part on the Friday and the general public was welcomed on the Saturday.

➤ **Habitat conservation management and maintenance:**

The main activity of the charity is to facilitate community involvement in conservation in Bury St Edmunds' water meadow locations through our volunteer work parties. Written management plans that have been agreed with West Suffolk Council (WSC) are in place for the Crankles, No Mans Meadow and Ram Meadow. These provide the framework under which BWMG develops its programme of maintenance and management for these green public areas through the year. The group also ran a monthly programme of litter picking / rubbish removal throughout the town.

➤ **Invasive species control:**

An invasive species is one that out-competes other species in a new environment where it is not native. Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) has become one of the UK's most invasive weed species, colonising riverbanks and reducing native biodiversity. As an annual plant Himalayan balsam dies back in the winter and it can leave riverbanks bare of vegetation and liable to erosion. BWMG's volunteers led by trained in-channel leaders continued their annual summer activity of surveying and pulling these plants from the riverbanks.

White poplar is non-native but naturalised in the UK. It is fast growing and spreads rapidly by suckering. Hemlock is a native poisonous plant that spreads in huge colonies along riverbanks and ditches. It germinates in autumn as a low rosette and then from the spring develops a tall flowering stalk. BWMG's volunteer work parties attempt to restrict the spread of both these invasive species through digging and cutting.

➤ **Biodiversity surveying:**

BWMG's survey volunteers continue to record species of flowering plants, birds, butterflies, moths, mammals, insects, invertebrates, lichen and fungi found across the town's water meadows. This covers Ram Meadow & Ram Meadow East, North and South Crankles, No Mans Meadow, the Abbey Gardens, the Great Churchyard, Saxon Gate Nature reserve, the Butts and Harp Meadow. The surveys continue throughout the year, yielding useful data about the change in species through the seasons and year-to-year.

➤ **Partnerships:**

The charity's role is to work in partnership with other organisations who are set up and structured to engage on river and environmental policy. BWMG is an associate member of the River Lark Catchment Partnership (RLCP), a group of organisations and individuals that have come together to promote a cohesive approach to the environmental challenges facing the Lark. The charity has also built strong links with Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT), both on habitat conservation and in working with their planning officer on planning matters.

BWMG works with WSC to help manage and maintain council owned and leased green spaces and with other conservation groups and local organisations to contribute to their plans. The group has formal links with the Bury Society, the Friends of the Abbey Gardens, Bury in Bloom, and is a member of the Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership.

➤ **Planning Policy:**

The charity continues to work with the Abbey of St Edmunds Heritage Partnership and with the landowners in connection with the West Suffolk Local Plan process focusing on safeguarding the Leg of Mutton as amenity public open space within the town's River Lark corridor.

BWMG also looks to review planning applications that it considers will impact on the rivers Lark and Linnet and adjacent areas from an environmental perspective. Currently this sees the group engaging with SWT's planning officer in relation to the ongoing matter of satisfaction of the River Lark corridor planning condition affecting the Abbots Vale site, and the proposed residential development of the St James School site which overlooks both the River Lark and the landscape setting of the Abbey Ruins Scheduled Monument.

Section D: Achievements & Performance

➤ Membership:

The charity saw an increase in its membership to 241 members at the renewal date of 1st November 2025 compared with the previous year's 238. 35 new members came on board in the year, usually attracted via personal contacts with existing members, through seeing volunteers in action, and from seeing the group's press & online posts.

➤ Education and Communication:

BWMG seeks to engage more residents in the appreciation and recognition of nature and the environment. The main focus of its efforts to increase community involvement was the successful hosting of the fourth Wildlife Festival event (previously called Bioblitz). The group contributed a monthly feature to the local press and continued to publicise its informative newsletter to members and on its website.

One of the trustees, supported by other members with production and music skills, produced a short film "A Year in the Life of Bury Water Meadows Group" which showcased the activities of the charity through the seasons. The first half of the year had its debut showing at the AGM and then at the Wildlife Festival with the full year version shown at the members social event to great acclaim. It's also available to view on the BWMG website.

➤ Wildlife Festival:

The fourth BWMG Wildlife Festival event took place over the weekend of Friday 16th & Saturday 17th May in the town's Abbey Gardens. The overall objective was to continue to raise the status of the Lark & Linnet for the town, and specifically to showcase, explore and raise awareness of the diversity of life in the adjacent water meadows.

Friday was schools' day when students from St Edmundsbury and Sebert Wood schools took part in a programme of guided activity including a species and bug hunt followed by a participatory art drawing activity. Saturday was the public day when visitors had the opportunity to join guided expert nature walks, attend a range of talks from local experts, and visit the tented hub zone staffed by enthusiastic volunteers and supporters from a variety of environmental organisations. The whole event was free, fun and informative and attracted huge numbers. 29 BWMG volunteers contributed 258 hours over the weekend (plus unrecorded planning time).

➤ Habitat conservation management and maintenance:

BWMG volunteers continued to support the charity's activities in the conservation, maintenance and the management of the rivers Lark and Linnet and their surrounding water meadows in Bury St Edmunds. Volunteer work parties typically lasting 2 to 4 hours took place throughout the year with activities including ditch clearance, meadow scything, vegetation & invasive species removal, planting & sowing and path maintenance. 43 work parties were run in the year with 58 members plus 4 non-members taking part clocking up 1171 hours.

Volunteering brings benefits to the individual, to the local community, to wider society, and to the environment. It's good for the mind and body, providing a sense of purpose and helping people stay physically healthy. The social contact aspect of helping and working with others benefits overall psychological well-being and provides a solid support system for people to be in regular contact with other like-minded people.

➤ Litter picking:

Beginning in December 2024 two of our members organised monthly litter picks across the town. These proved to be very popular events with 38 different volunteers contributing 154 hours over the year. The volume of rubbish collected was vast with bagged dog waste and alcohol cans & bottles being the most common items along with abandoned tent encampments. WSC supported the effort by providing bags and importantly by picking up for disposal afterwards and Fornham Parish Council gave funding to buy equipment including a folding trolley. Sadly some areas needed a return visit later in the year to do the job all over again.

➤ Invasive Species:

The annual programme to control Himalayan Balsam (HB) continued on 7km of the accessible sections of the rivers Lark & Linnet in the town. On summer evenings volunteers worked

downstream along the riverbanks, usually at water level, pulling up plants individually by their roots before the seed is set. This effectively kills the plants but the scale of the task and the nature of the habitat with steep riverbanks and nettles makes this very labour-intensive work. The process is working as where they have been pulled HB plants return significantly less abundant in the following year. Volunteers spent 67 hours over 4 sessions on this activity.

BWMG volunteer work parties also undertook hemlock removal along riverbank paths through digging them out in the spring before the plant flowers, and cutting back poplars and digging out suckers which spread through the water meadows.

➤ **Biodiversity:**

The group's dedicated team of volunteers continued with a monthly biodiversity survey programme across the town's green spaces with the observations being collated into monthly summaries and submitted to the national iRecord site. The volunteer time over the year from this small core group of 10 supported by other members equated to 550 hours. The results have identified an astonishing variety of flowering plants, birds, mammals, insects, butterflies & moths, molluscs, fungi and lichen across the year. In a single month there were up to 156 varieties of flowering plants and grasses, 56 species of bird, 92 types of insect and spider, 29 moths and butterflies and 52 different fungi.

The solar-powered remote wildlife trail cameras delivered images of several species of birds and mammals, excitingly including otter and water vole, and a bat detector device was acquired for use in 2026. The group also monitors open fronted bird boxes installed in Ram Meadow and owl boxes in No Mans Meadow.

➤ **Partnerships:**

BWMG is a member of the Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership's Core Group, which works to care for, conserve and enhance the Abbey Precinct (including the Crankles & No Mans Meadows). The Heritage Partnership aims to help people to experience the significance of St Edmund and the historic Abbey whilst BWMG speaks up for the rivers and the associated water meadows. The aim is to help to raise the status of the Lark and Linnet within the Abbey Precinct, with a particular emphasis on influencing the natural environment and biodiversity elements within the Abbey of St Edmund's National Lottery Heritage grant project.

➤ **Access to the rivers and their environs:**

The charity's trustees conducted several meetings in 2025 with the landowners of the Leg of Mutton farmland adjacent to the river Lark to discuss their ideas for a farm shop and permanent public open space habitat. The charity's trustees are supportive of the concept as it is considered that the current local plan site designation of open space / informal recreational is unlikely to be upheld in future plans in which case the alternatives could be potentially worse. The next step is for the landowners to work up a proposal to discuss with councils and planners. There were also further meetings with SCC Rights of Way on site at Barton Hill to progress the actions needed to open up the new section of the Lark river path.

➤ **Water quality & habitat improvement policy:**

Using grant funding BWMG commissioned a habitat survey report and ecological advice for wetland restoration works at the Ram Meadow scrape. This led to the identification of a programme of works and subsequent successful grant bids to fund this though the work has been delayed to the autumn of 2026 to avoid the spring bird breeding season.

➤ **Purchases & Equipment:**

Aside from grant expenditure the major expense in the year was £3,726 for the Wildlife Festival event which was fully 3rd party funded, £1,056 on chainsaw training and £710 on work party tools and PPE.

➤ **Training:**

During the year one BWMG volunteer completed chainsaw use refresher training and a second volunteer completed chainsaw maintenance and cross-cutting training.

Section E: Financial Review

Review of the financial position at the end of the period

The charity held a total of £20,191 in funds at the end of the period, of which £8,992 was held as restricted funds and £11,199 as unrestricted funds.

The corresponding sum last year was a total of £9,811 comprising £3,000 held as restricted funds and £6,811 as unrestricted funds.

Principle sources of funds

The charity's total income in the period was £19,304, compared with £8,617 last year.

The charity received grant contributions totalling £7,000 from WSC & the HD Wills 1965 Charitable Trust to mechanically increase the open water area of the Ram Meadow scrape and £250 from Fornham Parish Council to support litter picking.

Funding of £3,867 was received from Abbey 1000 CIC to cover the costs of the 2025 Wildlife Festival event and the balance of income of £8,187 was received from membership dues, donations & gift aid.

Statement of the charity's policy on reserves

The charity's aim is to broadly match its annual income with its expenditure but it will keep financial reserves on the following basis:

The charity's operational spend is mostly discretionary with a low level of fixed overhead (eg insurance). This spend is more than covered by the annual membership income, gift aid and donations which can be reliably expected to be in the range of £3,000.

However, there is also the intention to maintain a commitment to annual public events with the centrepiece being the Wildlife Festival. These event costs have so far been covered by 3rd party funding but this is not expected to be the case for 2026. The group is also aware of the risk of having to meet the cost of an unexpected need (eg the replacement of the storage container or high value equipment), or of the need to spend money ahead of funding being received.

The total reserve target to cover these requirements will be held equivalent to a regular annual membership, gift aid and donations income of £3,000 plus event funding for 2026 of £3,000.

The actual level of reserves at £11,199 has increased from last year primarily due to a significant one-off donation received near to the end of the year and a multi-year gift aid reclaim and so remains higher than the reserves policy target. The trustees are confident that this excess will be spent on activities in line with the group's charitable purposes.

Details of any funds materially in deficit

The Trustees declare that the charity had no funds which were materially in deficit at the date of the statement of assets & liabilities.

Particulars of any outstanding guarantee given by the charity

The trustees declare that the charity has given no guarantee where potential liability is outstanding at the date of the statement of assets & liabilities.


Particulars of any outstanding debt

The trustees declare that the charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of the statement of assets & liabilities.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature	
Full name	Ian Campbell
Position	Trustee & Treasurer
Date	16 th March 2026