

Trustee Board Report for the period March 2022 to March 2023.

In March 2022 the Board began its AGM report to members by saying: “Looking back over the reporting period we can confirm excellent progress in so many areas.” Events since last March have really confirmed that theme of progress and has reinforced the concept of a Library Hub within Birkdale village forging links throughout the local area.

Our thriving group of volunteers has grown and formed its own internal friendship links, helping to manage and operate the activities of the charity and achieve our objectives. Those staffing the Station Master’s House (SMH) and the Birkdale Methodist Church (BMC) branch are the most obvious volunteers to the public, but behind the scenes we have volunteers raising funds, planning and organising events, ensuring good communications, and reaching out to the community.

We are a new charity and over the year have developed various teams to take our activities forward as we better understand how to operate efficiently in all we do. We have recognised that a growing need is to integrate these various teams so that everyone is clear who does what and understands the lines of communication between groups. This is work in progress and over the coming months we will be consulting volunteers as to the best way of ensuring that everyone gets a chance to be heard and everyone is clear where we are going.

I can report that our Trustee team, enlarged at last year’s AGM, has had a successful year in carrying out their duties. We are a varied group with a wide range of talents and we work well as a team. The Trustees each take specific roles: secretarial, financial, building management, events, technology, communications. All Trustees are actively involved in the charity’s operations, ably supported by our two co-managers who provide feedback about operations at the regular Trustee Board meetings.

Work to improve the facilities at the Station Master’s House has continued during the year, including better signage, improvements to the Sidings area at the rear of the building, and improved storage. Overall the house is standing up well to its new function but we will continue to make improvements and plan for regular maintenance. The branch library at the Birkdale Methodist Church has greatly improved its facilities during the year. We have been able to negotiate a doubling of space for book storage and the processing of unwanted books for sale. Nearly half our book stock is held at the BMC and regularly interchanged with books at the SMH.

As the operational side of the charity has stabilised, the Trustees have been mindful that the formal side of managing a charity is vitally important too. We have recently finalised various formal documents (including policies on financial management, safeguarding, complaints, data protection, health and safety) and agreed a strategic plan setting out what the charity is trying to do and how we can judge whether we are achieving our aims.

We took our over-arching charitable purpose and refined it into a single objective: to **create community cohesion**. This high-level objective is underpinned by four aims: fostering lifelong learning, creating opportunities to volunteer and making friends, providing facilities for recreation and leisure, and maintaining a sound financial structure and strong commercial partnerships.

Within each of these aims we have developed goals that spell out ways in which we can achieve each aim and we have identified evidence sources for measuring how we are getting on. As we develop these tools it is important to stand back and not to get buried in “management speak and processes”. So, a light touch overall is what we want, concentrating more deeply on areas that are proving more difficult. We will be using our regular Strategy meetings to take soundings as to how we are getting on. It’s early days in this process, of course, but we can make a number of initial observations on achieving our aims.

Our aim of **fostering lifelong learning** has goals about promoting books and borrowing, forging connections with schools and partners, supporting and encouraging work experience and providing computer training for volunteers and the general public. We can place ticks of various sizes against each of these goals. On books, for example, over the year our book stock has risen from 5000 to 6000, our members from 800 to 1200, with books borrowed from 500 to 700 per month and footfall has doubled per month. We know that our age profile of borrowers is heavily biased towards older members and younger members. There are missing age groups but that probably reflects the society we live in and our figures are very typical for libraries overall.

Our aim of **creating opportunities to volunteer and making friends** has goals for recruiting and retaining volunteers, providing them with positive experiences and opportunities to champion specific causes. Again, an initial conclusion is that we are succeeding in each of these goals but we recognise the importance of continuing to promote developments in these areas. Our volunteer numbers have risen since last year and our colleagues are continuing to work with us over the long term. We have

introduced regular volunteer activities and events and there have been several initiatives, such as the Lego Club, Knit & Natter sessions, Guitar for Beginners and Computer Helpdesk, where volunteers have taken the lead.

Our aim of **providing facilities for recreation and leisure time** has various goals which include not only the range of events that we offer but also acting as hosts for local councillors, the police, and even advice on bike maintenance. Over the winter months we have been part of the Warm Spaces initiative, offering local people somewhere warm and welcoming to come to on a Thursday morning and afternoon. Our goal of informing the public has been met by our regular online newsletter for supporters and the distribution of a free quarterly magazine the Birkdale Buzz.

Achieving our goal of providing meeting opportunities for organisations and businesses is an ongoing challenge: we have some regular users of our meeting rooms, but we know that we need to do more to attract business users. Our links with schools are growing. Farnborough Road Junior School has helped with gardening and displays at the Hub, and several students from Greenback High School have undertaken work experience with us. We hope to expand these relationships in the year ahead.

Our final aim of **sound financial structure** has been largely met, as you will see from the Treasurer's report but establishing the long-term strategy for financial reserves is work in progress. Our goal of **developing and maintaining financial links** with local businesses is barely addressed at present. One idea is to introduce a scheme for annual support from local businesses, a concept that will be explored in the coming months.

To sum up: your charity has had a successful year. We are largely achieving our various goals but have identified areas that need addressing, the way we organise ourselves is strengthening, our finances are sound and perhaps most important of all, our volunteers have created a positive environment that ensures a high morale and willingness to go forward together. The Trustees would like to thank all our volunteers for their work this year and wish them well for the months ahead.



J.P. Margham

Chair of Trustee Board