ACLE LANDS TRUST: CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2022

**Trustees & Co-opted Members 2021-2022**

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|  |  | *Appointed by* |
|  Adam Fisher\*  | *Secretary* | Parish Council  |
|  Ken Gale\*  | *Treasurer* | Parish Council  |
|  Nigel Robson\*  | *Chairman* | Parish Council  |
|  Richard Powell\*  | *Parish Councillor* | Parish Council  |
|  Dennis Fisher\* |  | Parish Council  |
|  David Savory\*  | *Fund-raising* | Acle Society Representative |
|  Martin Greenland\* |  | BVCG Representative |
|  Barry Brooks\* |  | AGM Appointment |
|  Peter Cawley |  | Co-opted |
|  Anna Rodriguez  | *Acle Tree Warden* | Co-opted |
|  |  |  *\*Trustee (8)*  |

With the easing of “lock-downs” we were able to catch up with all maintenance work that had been “on hold” due to the Covid restrictions.

In **DAMGATE WOOD**, many more dead Ashtrees beside the footpath were felled in November, the cost being met by the Parish Council. 27 Ashes close to the railway were identified by Network Rail as dangerous. After prolonged negotiations, Network Rail arranged their removal.

Coleman’s Drain became obstructed by fallen trees. Most have been left there because it’s now considered beneficial to slow the flow and allow the wet woodland to act as a flood alleviation system. It’s also good for wildlife including our Water Vole population.

Japanese Knotweed remains well controlled but not entirely eradicated yet.

The footpath was maintained and trees alongside regularly inspected for public safety.

A major operation within the wood by Cadent, relocating a section of mains gas pipeline from the railway reserve, is expected to start soon, possibly entailing closure for the duration.

In **ROMAN WOOD** Bure Valley Conservation Group (BVCG) volunteers cut & raked the wildflower meadow in two sections, one in August and the other in October. In January BVCG trimmed the laid hedge beside the A1064 and carried out general coppicing and pollarding. Also in January the Trustees resumed the annual thinning of the growing woodland.

Throughout a wet summer we cut the paths, and in winter laid wood chippings on muddy sections. I must acknowledge the sterling work, largely unnoticed, that local resident Chris Peacher does removing litter from the site, and also from Damgate Wood and the Weavers Way.

In **CONSTABLE DOLES** BVCG undertook an extensive cut & rake in August to remedy the limited cattle grazing we were able to arrange. February’s “Storm Eunice” brought down a large bough from our tall willows which blocked the Weavers Way. We chainsawed a passage through, leaving the Environment Agency to clear it from the adjacent dyke.

We kept the **WEAVERS WAY** round Acle cut & passable, and in February BVCG widened the section between the railway crossing and the Acle Straight by coppicing encroaching scrub.

At the County Council’s **JUBILEE WOOD** within the Parish, with BVCG we have now removed all plastic tree guards and carried out urgent coppicing.

I **THANK** all BVCG volunteers for their continued help, my fellow Trustees (listed above) who are the enthusiastic management team, and the Parish Council for their generous support.

**FINALLY**, I shall be retiring after nine fulfilling years as a Trustee, the last seven as Chairman, and I would like to record that during that time with my fellow Trustees we changed a few things, increased our scope of work and got results. Notably we:

* Put a greater emphasis on conservation of our Trust Lands with wildlife in crisis.
* Entered into a 10-year Higher Level Stewardship Agreement with Natural England in 2014
* Had Damgate Wood designated a County Wildlife Site for added protection in 2015
* Instigated professionally-vetted management plans for each Trust Land.
* Produced a detailed inventory of biological taxa for each Trust Land for their capital value.
* Formed the partnership with BVCG in 2015 to help with much of our management work.
* Acquired a range of tools and machinery with BVCG, and built a large store for them.
* Re-routed the Damgate Wood footpath and gave an all-weather surface in 2017.
* Removed all encroachments into Damgate Wood from its southern neighbours in 2019.
* Took over responsibility for maintaining the Weavers Way round Acle in 2018.
* Increased the Trust’s funds to cover the extra commitments.

Some of the challenges we, as Trustees, face ahead are clear: climate extremes, more diseases affecting our trees, and a collapsing ecosystem. We must add to these the steady rise in our community population putting extra pressure on our Trust Lands and their wildlife – lockdown gave us a clear indication of this. We need to increase the land set aside for recreation and conservation if we are to maintain a healthy balance with building and infrastructure developments.

Be optimistic and go for it!

*Nigel Robson 7th April.2022*