





## Chair's Message



**While at the time of writing (autumn 2022) we are thankfully returning to a sense of normality after two years of Covid, during the period covered by this annual report – the year to 31st March 2022 – we were very much still experiencing the pandemic.**

At the start of the year in March 2021 the country was still in full lockdown, and the Omicron variant presented us with further challenges towards the tail-end of 2021 and into 2022.

The continued pandemic meant ongoing restrictions on how we could deliver support to vision impaired people throughout the county; it meant once again focussing on keeping staff, residents in Thomas Tawell House and tenants of Hammond Court, and everyone we interact with safe; and it resulted in another year when fundraising was once again really tough.

It is testament to the dedication of our staff, volunteers, partners and my fellow trustees that Vision Norfolk emerged from another difficult year in a strong position to face the future, and as determined as ever to provide the best support for those living with sight loss in Norfolk.

I also want to pay tribute to my predecessors as Co-chairs of the Trustees, Richard Hanson and Simon Stokes, who guided the charity through one of the most testing periods in its history before they stood down at the end of 2021.

Just as I took up the reins as Chair, we were also delighted to appoint a new chief executive, Andrew Morter, who joined us in January. He brings wide experience in the charity sector, and a vision, energy, and enthusiasm for building partnerships which is already bearing positive results for Vision Norfolk. We are extremely grateful to Karen Knight, who interrupted her retirement to step in as our interim CEO.

The process of looking forward to a post-Covid future started long before the pandemic was over. An important decision was taken to sell our care home, Thomas Tawell House, to Black Swan, a highly-

respected local care home operator, and that process is now well-advanced – at the time of writing the transaction is being scrutinised by the Charity Commission.

We see this as a very positive outcome; TTH will be in the hands of a highly-respected, locally-based care group; the future of its residents is secure; the future of its staff is secure; the home will receive the financial investment which it needs in the coming years; and the ongoing partnership with Vision Norfolk means that vision impaired residents will continue to receive specialist care.

The deal will also allow the charity to focus resources on providing community support to enable vision impaired people across Norfolk to live independent lives, which is overwhelmingly what they tell us they need and want from the charity.

We were also very fortunate to learn during the year of a substantial legacy being left to Vision Norfolk, most of which we have now received. This has enabled the charity to emerge from Covid on a firm financial footing, to embark on a major and much-needed refurbishment project of our Hammond Court sheltered accommodation, and to start to create enhanced community outreach services to support more people in our county.

Legacies have always been a very important part of our income, and at a time when both community fundraising and Trust and Foundation grant-giving is as stretched as ever, we are extremely grateful to those who choose to remember us in their wills.

Just as I started my new role of Chair of trustees I was told by my cataract surgeon, “I can do nothing about the vision you have lost, but I can give clarity to the vision you still have.”

I think this is an excellent metaphor for Vision Norfolk as we emerge from two years of pandemic. Like all charities, Covid has limited our ability to provide support and to fundraise. We can do nothing about that; what we can do is move forward with a clear vision, a clear direction, and a clear sense of purpose.

I am delighted to report that this is what is happening, and I would like to thank staff, trustees, volunteers, funders and fundraisers, and our wonderful clients for the part that you have all played in getting us to a point where we can once again say: “it’s all systems go!”

**Karen Norton,  
Chair of the Trustees.**

## Chief Executive's Message



I was delighted to be appointed as chief executive of Vision Norfolk, taking up my post in January this year. I would particularly like to thank Karen Knight, who 'held the tiller' as interim chief executive before I arrived, and thanks to whose safe hands the charity remained in good shape despite the challenges of the pandemic.

At the end of the year covered by this annual report (i.e. 31st March 2022), we were still facing considerable uncertainty after another year which was shaped by Covid.

It is a tribute to the resilience of the charity that we emerge from the pandemic in a good place, well-respected in the county. But it would be disingenuous to claim that the past two years have not taken their toll, both on our financial position and on our ability to deliver the breadth and depth of services which we aspire to do.

However, thanks to some prudent stewardship by trustees, and the support of our staff and volunteers, we are now in a position to move forward with confidence, and my priority in the coming years is to do just that.

Although not strictly part of the year we are reviewing in this annual report, that process has now begun. We are taking steps to provide our

services to a much greater number of vision impaired people, across a much more diverse geography within the county, and also across all ages.

The long-awaited opening of our regional hubs, in King's Lynn, Norwich and Great Yarmouth, has enabled us to take great strides forward to placing our services much closer to the people who are using them.

At the time of writing, we are working to relaunch our community outreach service, with a new focus on supporting people of all ages living with sight loss across a broad range of needs, from employment support to transport issues, living independently in their own homes to tackling the social isolation which can so easily result from sight loss.

We have also already embarked on a major refurbishment of Hammond Court, our sheltered accommodation in Norwich. This move will bring

the flats up to a standard which its residents deserve.

Alongside this, we are starting to seek out and build new and deep-running partnerships with other organisations whose objectives overlap with our own. This has a number of benefits: delivering services more efficiently through removing duplication; reaching out to people who currently are not engaging with Vision Norfolk; and creating new services which both we and potential partners would not be able to do on our own.

None of this is going to happen overnight. Fundamentally reimagining how our charity meets the ever-changing needs of vision impaired people right across Norfolk is a process which will take time. But we are determined and enthusiastic, and with the support of our staff – who like all of us have been through some tough times in the last couple of years – we have already made a good start.

I am very much looking forward to reporting on progress on all of these ambitions in next year's annual report. 2022/23 will be the first year for too long that things will be anything like 'ordinary'. I am determined that the support we offer vision impaired people in Norfolk is genuinely 'extraordinary'.

**Andrew Morter, Chief Executive**



**We were deeply saddened to hear of the death of Her Majesty The Queen. Her Majesty was our Patron and a long-time supporter of the charity. We were honoured that she graced us with her presence in 2010 to open the Bradbury Activity Centre in Norwich.**

**We pay tribute to Her Majesty's deep devotion to service and duty, and give thanks for her long reign which has greatly enriched the life of our nation. In common with people across the nation, we mourn the passing of a truly remarkable woman, who was a friend and supporter of vision impaired people across Norfolk.**





943

support calls made by Vision Norfolk staff to vision impaired people in the county



3900

calls made by volunteers via our Telefriends service during the year



24

parents benefitted from virtual support and social sessions



235

families attended events in the Children, Young People & Families programme



20

referrals received for children newly diagnosed with sight loss



5

families received direct support



303

new referrals received for adults newly diagnosed with sight loss



257

activity sessions completed during the year  
audio book clubs, heritage group, theatre visits, coffee mornings, sports including yoga, archery, boccia and darts, arts and crafts including knitting, weaving, art and photography, creative writing, games mornings, walks and rambles

“I joined the West Norfolk Men’s group several years ago, as I was living alone and missed the banter that male friends throw around. I enjoy our meetings immensely; if it wasn’t for the group, my life would be a lot less rich.”

“Sometimes in life we have the chance to do something which is absolutely outside our ‘normal’ lives. The event you organised for us was such an uplifting experience. It took me into a magical world of dreams which restored my body and soul to balance. I shall feel the benefit for a long time.”

“Many thanks for your hard work and helping to make lockdown an enjoyable and easier time for us all.”

“There was a real camaraderie between the youngsters, all encouraging each other to do their best. It was lovely to see the children making friends with each other.”

“It’s been an absolute lifeline. Without Vision Norfolk, it would be quite isolating to not know anyone who is going through the same things. It’s empowering, I’ve been able to talk to other parents who kind of get the things which we are going through.”

“I feel the group helps to keep me in the loop and gives me an opportunity to meet up with friends. It also helps me to feel the love and enjoyment of books.”



# Delivering our services more locally



Norwich Hub



King's Lynn Hub



Great Yarmouth Hub

As we emerged from the pandemic, we were finally able to fully open our regional ‘Hubs’ in King’s Lynn, Norwich and Great Yarmouth, with the aim of delivering our services in a way which more accurately reflects the needs of individual communities across the whole county – and which enables them to access all relevant services in a seamless way.

The aim of the hubs is to enable Vision Norfolk to reach out to people within their communities at a more local level, and to create ‘one stop shops’ which provide easy access to the whole range of Vision Norfolk’s services: support via eye clinics, community workers, basic equipment, activities and social contact, volunteering and signposting to other relevant organisations.

Opening the hubs in King’s Lynn and Great Yarmouth has ensured that the charity remains a genuinely ‘whole county’ organisation.

The hubs consist of staff and volunteers, working together as teams across disciplines, including eye clinic liaison officers, activity co-ordinators, volunteer co-ordinators and volunteers. They are also able to advise on equipment and specialist

adaptations designed to help vision impaired people lead independent lives.

Each hub arranges its own programme of activity according to local need, providing a variety of services and opportunities, both in the hubs themselves and off-site in the wider community.

The hubs are supported by our Central Support Services Team, whose work includes creating an inclusive activities programme that can be applied across the county, within the hubs and beyond; building partnerships with other services which support vision impaired people in Norfolk; overseeing the telephone and wider befriending services; and supporting the staff and volunteers with personal development opportunities.

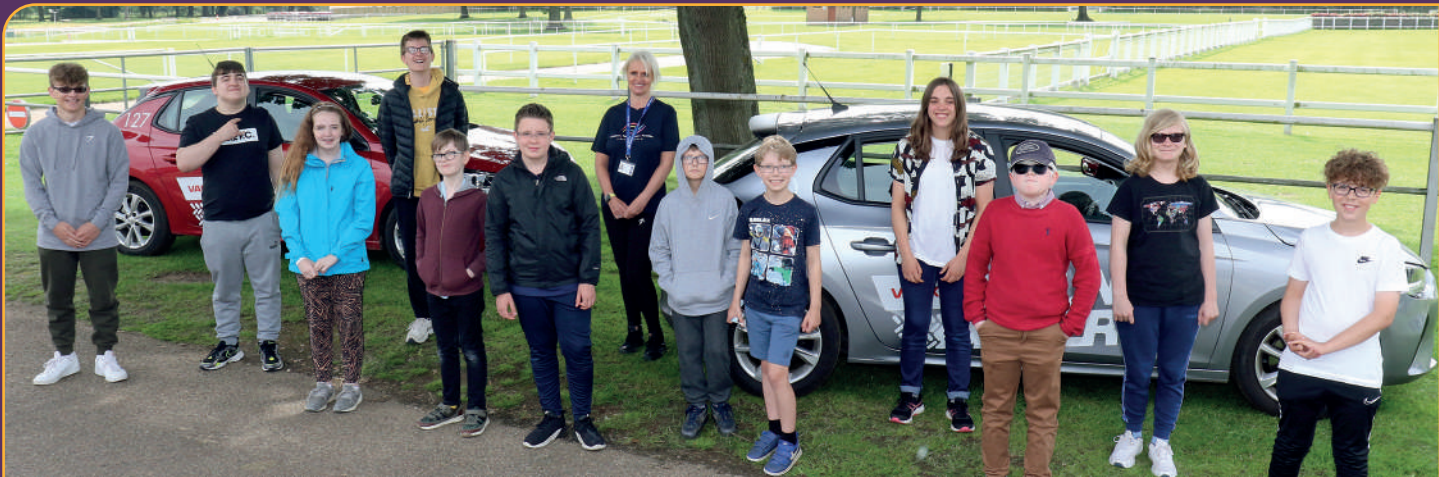
## Each hub undertakes the following:

- Provision of a timetable of activities both within the hub and in the wider community (including Blind Clubs, lunch clubs and the like, where the invitation is open to Vision Norfolk clients)
- Provision of advice and support, both face-to-face and via telephone and video link
- Access to eye clinic liaison officers, providing a link between the clinical environment and the support available in the community
- Advice regarding equipment and access to equipment
- Co-ordination of volunteers
- Co-ordination of community fundraising activities





A team of 11 staff, volunteers and clients raised over £4,800 for Vision Norfolk after tackling the gruelling Broads Walk Challenge. The fundraisers tackled 25km, 50km and 90km walks around the Broadland area – a particular challenge over rough terrain for those taking part who were vision impaired.



A dozen vision impaired youngsters had the chance to take to the wheel and drive at real-world road speeds after Vision Norfolk teamed up with national organisation Young Drivers. The twelve, aged between 10 and 18, had a one hour one-to-one driving lesson at the Norfolk Showground.



Seven different audio book clubs meet monthly around the county. The Gaywood club marked World Book Day discussing 'The Button Box' by Lynn Knight – an acclaimed story of women in the 20th century told through the clothes they wore.



Vision impaired runner Bradley Burrows tackled the Sandringham 10K race, guided by volunteer Ian Haigh, raising £1,280 for the charity in the process.



The West Norfolk Men's Group meets monthly for chat, friendship and fun. The group gets together for tea and coffee and lively conversation, with regular special activities including fish and chips and even a full Christmas dinner.



Members of the Vision Norfolk Heritage Group enjoyed a visit to Norwich Castle Museum, where they were able to get to grips with some of the exhibits in a special hands-on session.



We partnered with Norfolk Nature Stories to put on an event of breathtaking beauty at the Plantation Garden in Norwich.



Vision impaired children had the chance to get up close and personal with Dippy the dinosaur at a specially-arranged VIP visit at Norwich Cathedral, including the chance to handle a replica of Dippy's skull.



# Vision Norfolk Volunteers

**Volunteers are the lifeblood of any charity, and Vision Norfolk is very lucky to be supported by over 100 volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds. The charity’s team of volunteers undertake a huge range of activities, including helping at sports and leisure activities, advising at eye clinics, being Telefriends, driving, fundraising, escorting and guiding, as well as working in the charity’s three local hubs.**



Vision Norfolk could not provide anywhere near the range of services for vision impaired people in Norfolk without our army of volunteers, and we are extremely grateful to all of them. The contribution made by volunteers to Norfolk’s sight loss

charity was celebrated with a special Broads boat trip. Around 40 of the more than 100 volunteers who support Vision Norfolk were treated to drinks and lunch aboard the Southern Comfort Mississippi River Boat during a special two hour cruise from Horning.



Vision impaired people in the east of the county are able to access Vision Norfolk activities thanks to a small team of volunteers who drive the charity’s minibus which is based in Great Yarmouth.

Tony Knights from Hemsby was the first to step up to help out. A 59 year-old maintenance engineer, Tony became a volunteer in 2021. As well as providing an invaluable service to vision impaired people across the area, Tony says that volunteering has been very rewarding for him personally, too.

“I have always like helping people, and I get a great deal of satisfaction out of providing a service for people who might otherwise be very isolated,” he says. “You meet some absolutely fantastic characters.”

Tony has some definite advice for anyone who might be considering becoming a volunteer for the charity. “Do it! Until you do, you don’t realise how rewarding it is. Like most charities, Vision Norfolk relies on volunteers to be able to deliver its services to those who need them.



Known by all as ‘Chuckles’, Steve Halford’s volunteering has covered many different areas, but his two standbys are driving the King’s Lynn minibus and working the phones as part of the Telefriends service.

Over time Steve has gained the confidence of his Telefriends clients to the extent that he can sometimes be chatting to one person for over two hours without really noticing the time passing.

“It’s a humbling experience for me, some of these people are in their late 80s and live without sight in very rural locations. If I can put down the phone knowing they have enjoyed the chat and are looking forward to the next call, that is immensely rewarding,” he says.

Steve spends most of Friday each week on these calls. “They often contain light-hearted humour, but sometimes people do cry. At the end of the day, I am there to listen to provide a friendly and supportive ear.

“I don’t have a personal connection to sight loss, I wanted to give something back. I live alone, so I have a bit of time.”



# The Financial Year



After several years of deficits, our financial position was transformed this year by a large one-off legacy, for which we are hugely grateful.

At a time when all charities are finding fundraising challenging, and when costs are soaring, Vision Norfolk would be facing a significant year-on-year deficit without this legacy. It underlines just how important legacy income is – and has always been – to the financial well-being of the charity.

During 2021/22 our investment income decreased, both due to continued low investment returns, and a reduced levels of investments as we have dipped into our reserves to maintain our services during the Covid pandemic.

During the year we incurred exceptional legal and redundancy costs totalling almost £200,000, which should not recur in future years. These costs were necessary to allow us to restructure the charity and enable us to make more sustainable plans for the future.

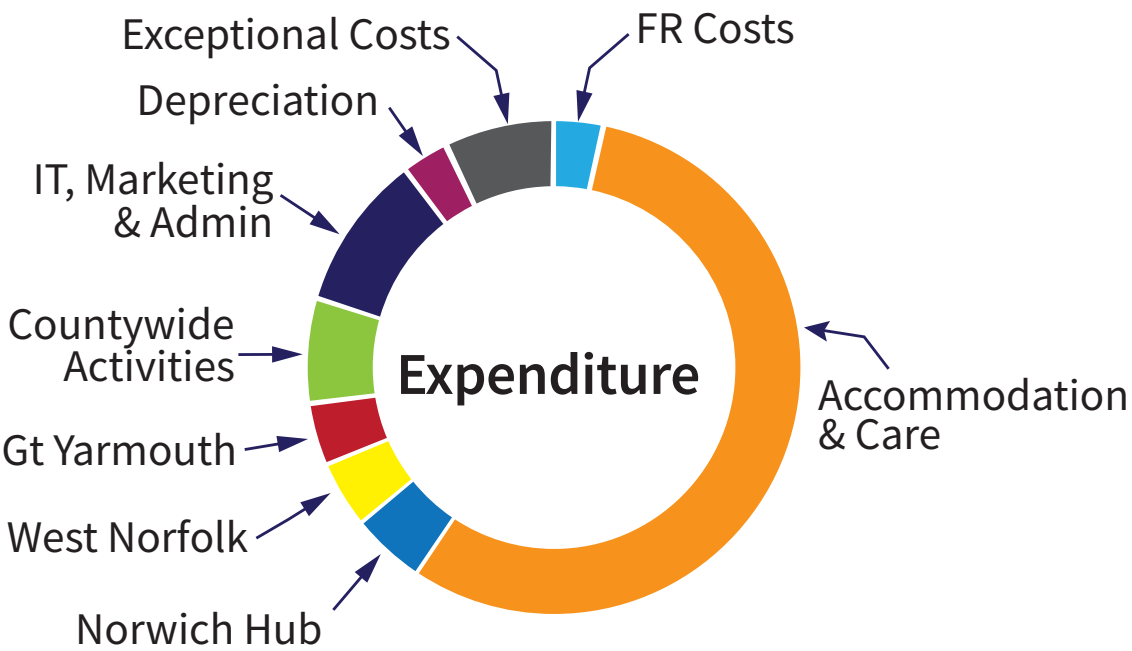
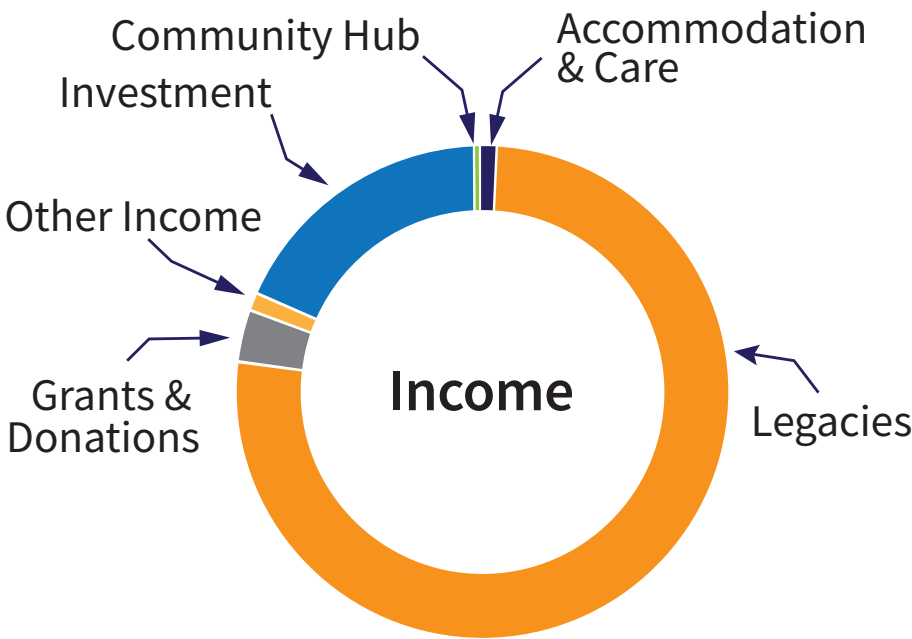
A declining trend in income from traditional fundraising sources (in

common with the entire charitable sector) has resulted in us running a significant underlying deficit. The trustees are aiming to correct this over a period of time to put the charity on a more sustainable footing.

Both legacy and investment income are quite volatile; the economic situation in the coming years is difficult to predict, and legacies are by their very nature not something we can plan for. We have to allow for this volatility in our future plans.

In tough economic times we remain acutely aware of our financial position, but the generosity of all our donors – and one in particular this year - has put us in a position to look to the future with a significantly higher degree of optimism as we seek to maintain and expand services for vision impaired people in Norfolk.

**Julian Foster, Treasurer**



- Financial position transformed by one-off £5.3m legacy
- Income increased by 231% to £7.2m (due to the legacy)
- Expenditure increased 2% to £2.6m
- This includes £0.2m of exceptional costs not expected to recur in subsequent years
- Investment income and gains down by 23% to £232,000
- Net income was £4.8m, after a deficit of £100,000 last year
- The underlying deficit for the year (ignoring the one-off legacy) was £600,000
- Charity funds increased by 116% to £8.9m





# 216th Annual Report 2021-2022

## **NORWICH HUB**

Magpie Road | Norwich | NR3 1JH  
**01603 573000**

## **WEST NORFOLK HUB**

Unit 3 Dundee Court | Hamburg Way | King's Lynn | PE30 2ND  
**01553 660808**

## **GREAT YARMOUTH HUB**

12 Hall Quay | Great Yarmouth | NR30 1HP  
**01493 745973**

Full financial accounts, details of Patrons, Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Trustees, Executive Staff and other officers, along with other statutory information, can be obtained by downloading the charity's 2020/21 Financial Statements from [www.visionnorfolk.org.uk/about-us/reports](http://www.visionnorfolk.org.uk/about-us/reports)

Printed copies can be requested by calling 01603 573000.

To receive this report in other formats (Braille, larger print, audio CD & USB and email) please contact: [info@visionnorfolk.org.uk](mailto:info@visionnorfolk.org.uk) or 01603 573000

**Vision Norfolk** is the brand name of  
Norfolk and Norwich Association for the Blind

Registered charity No. 207060

(front cover): Volunteer Matt Lawley (left) and blind fundraiser  
Ed Bates get in training for the Broads Walk Challenge