

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE CLA CHARITABLE TRUST

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The CLA Charitable Trust (CLACT) is the charitable arm of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA). Since its launch it has awarded more than £1.75 million in grants to individuals, community organisations and registered charities. At present, the CLACT is facing a number of significant challenges including diminished donations and investment revenues. This raises significant questions regarding the future of the Trust.

In January 2014 the Trustees commissioned 3 Worlds Consulting to conduct an impact review of the Trust's activities over the last 20 years. This was conducted through analysis of grant data and recipient files, alongside telephone interviews with 14 funded projects. The findings from this review and her recommendations for the future of the CLACT are described in the consultant's report.

Overview of funded activities

Data relating to grant giving over the last 20 years was reviewed. A total of £916,000 was issued in small grants, equivalent to £1.23m in 2013 prices. Over this period the nature of grants made has changed, with a lessening emphasis on projects supporting disabled participants and a growing focusing on disadvantaged communities. The dominance of capital grants has been replaced by an increase in applications for project delivery costs. Further, there has been a shift away from broadly recreational activities and the restoration of sites towards innovative land-based education and training projects, primarily through care farms, actively engaging some of the most vulnerable and 'hard to reach' groups of services users.

Impacts of funded activities

A wide array of impacts has been noted amongst funded projects. This includes improving recreational opportunities and facilities for vulnerable people, particularly making activities accessible. Projects have provided a wide range of personal benefits for participants, particularly inspiring in the case of projects offering therapeutic support for the most vulnerable. A range of educational opportunities, reaching vast numbers of children, have been created including raising a greater sense of connection to and responsibility for responsible management of the land. Numerous projects have also developed alternative routes to education for young people who have failed to thrive in the traditional education sector. These projects are proving to be highly impactful vehicles to help young people access accredited vocational training and employment, offering a broader benefit to the wider rural economy. The Harper Adams Scholarships compliment this support to building specialist technical skills in relation to countryside management.

Further, a wide range of benefits have been noted for funded organisations themselves including building operational capacity, increasing financial resilience and sustainability, providing leverage to access broader funding and helping organisations to manage uncertainty. In some cases this support, which has reached beyond the financial, has been the catalyst in enabling organisations to achieve transformational change.

Review of operational practice

The CLACT is highly regarded by applicants. Its processes mirror national best practice in many ways, particularly in the manner in which it communicates and builds relationships with applicants. In 2013 the Trust received a total of 118 applications; 60% of all eligible applications were successful. However, two thirds of applications were ineligible, a problem common to small grant funders. A number of measures are suggested in the report to tackle this problem.

The Trustees are aware that the operational costs of the Trust are high and efforts are underway to reduce them. The report suggests a number of approaches to reducing costs in a staged manner, ensuring that the capacity of the Trust to engage with development opportunities is sustained.

Trends in the broader grant giving sector are reviewed in the report. This finds that organisations rely on small grants more than ever. The flexibility offered by the CLA is greatly valued particularly in light of the fact that many funders are becoming increasingly restrictive, the grant giving community broadly failing to respond to the changing financial landscape of the charitable sector.

Trends in popular culture are also reviewed in the report. There is evidence that the national interest in, if not longing for, the countryside continues to grow. The urgent need to protect this national resource is, of course, self-evident.

Recommendations for the future

Funded projects expressed great support for the CLACT and were keen to see the Trust develop and evolve in to the future. Grounded in the challenges of the day, a range of aspirations for the Trust were reported. Development opportunities include moving away from reactive support into a proactive strategy. Building strong collaborative relationships with other national bodies would be a key component in this approach. Further, the unique role of the CLA in relation to countryside management, and in particular to innovative practice in care farming, was noted.

On this basis, a new set of strategic objectives is proposed, objectives that aim to deepen the impact of the Trust and raise its profile in the national arena, enabling it to appropriately reflect the significance and legacy of the CLA at large. The objectives are:

1) **To re-establish the countryside at the heart of the nation** – through opportunities and educational activities that enable participants to build a relationship with the natural world. This strand would place a particular emphasis on disadvantaged, urban communities.

2) **To promote thriving rural communities** – with a particular emphasis on developing innovative pilot projects that support rural enterprise.

3) **To become a national champion for care farming** – including capturing and actively sharing the learning between care farms, providing training opportunities and changing the national discourse around the importance of care farms in meeting the most urgent needs of the day.

In order to achieve these ambitious development goals the Trust will need to make the most effective use of its resources, perhaps its greatest resource being the CLA members themselves. A number of approaches are proposed to enhance the awareness of members and reinvigorate their enthusiasm to engage directly with the Trust and its activities. It will also be important to increase the Trust's income to more accurately reflect the commitment of the CLA and its members towards its corporate social responsibility. **CLA**

Conclusion

Since its inception the CLACT has been committed to supporting projects that offer valuable opportunities for the most vulnerable in society. There is no doubt that the Trust has achieved a legacy to be proud of and the CLA Director and Trustees should be commended for their dedication and commitment to realising this vision over these many years.

The review finds that there is enormous potential for the CLACT. The Trust is uniquely well placed to champion the cause of care farming, to strive to enable rural communities to flourish and to educate the population, ensuring that our individual love for the land is permanently enshrined in our collective identity, for the benefit of ourselves and for the generations to come. The CLA and its membership are therefore invited to consider whether this is a vision that inspires them, whether this is a role they wish to play in the coming years.