

# The John Griss Charity

Registered Number 1193024

## Open Meeting of the John Griss Charity on 29 April 2026

Present:

Members of the Parish Council as Trustees: M Bendle, J Blackmore, J Kidner, N King, L Saunders and A Weekes.

Mr A Don (Fishery advisor)

Also in attendance: S McGeever (Secretary) and residents of Clayhidon Parish

### **1. Welcome by Chairman**

Lee Saunders, Chair of Clayhidon Parish Council, welcomed residents to the meeting. This was the second Open Meeting held by the Charity, the first being two years ago in 2024, and aimed to provide a greater understanding of the work the Charity had undertaken.

### **2. Introduction to the John Griss Charity and its Trustees and Update on its Activities**

John Kidner, Chair of The John Griss Charity

Good evening and welcome fellow Clayhidon Parishioners and Guests to this years John Griss Charity Open Meeting.

The following address is provided for your information and is intended to answer questions some of which have been sent directly to the Charity.

In order for parishioners to keep track of the Charity's progress, a page has been set up on the Parish Council and Hartsmoor Fishery's websites. This includes accounts, open meeting minutes and, going forward, a short report will be published following each Trustees meeting. Having revisited legal advice, there is not a requirement to publish minutes of every meeting although the Charity itself prepares and holds agendas and minutes for each Trustee meeting.

Susan McGeever, Secretary and Parish Clerk, presented the following financial information:

The John Griss Charity accounts can be viewed on the Charity Commission's website and on the Clayhidon Parish Council website.

The documents covering policies and procedures are also available on both websites including the grant application forms.

In 2021, the Parish Council became responsible for the assets left in John Griss's will - an opening balance of £18302.21 together with the Fishery, Land and Rose Cottage.

At the end of the financial year to 31 March 2026, the balance sits at £243193.18 together with the Fishery and the Land. The sale of Rose Cottage realised £279656.80 and there are two affordable properties in the village let through Devon Home Choice.

The Fishery and the Land provide an income through rent and grants which has been used to develop the assets for future generations.

Besides work on the fishery and the land, largely covered by grants received, other expenditure covers:

- Setting up the Charity
- Day to day expenditure including insurance and staff (circa £2k per year)

- Grants
- Assets (community tent/defibrillator)
- Open Days/Village events

If anyone wishes, there are copies of a year-by-year breakdown of income and expenditure available to pick up and take home.

John Kidner, Chair of The John Griss Charity, then outlined specific areas of the Charity's work:

The value of the Hartsmoor Fishery has increased year on year with revenue gradually increasing from the lease. This current year will see income of £4000 increasing to £6000 in Year 4 and £8000 in Year 5.

Land adjacent to the Hartsmoor Fishery is designated for agricultural purposes and commands an annual lease payment of £800.

The fishery has received grant money from the Environment Agency and the Angling Trust in excess of £20000 whilst the land has benefitted from Countryside Stewardship Payments.

In addition, funds from the sale of Rose Cottage site circa £250000 remain largely intact and has been invested in a deposit account and more recently investment in a bond account whilst a working fund to meet day to day expenditure has been held in a current account. This has been undertaken with financial advise and bearing in mind the FSCS protected limits.

The following grants have been provided for the Parish and related causes:

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|---|--------|
| - the village hall for kitchen improvements               | £10000 |
| - Hemyock Primary School for playground improvement       | £ 2000 |
| - St Andrew's Church for churchyard maintenance           | £ 750  |
| - Fishing coach training enabling in house youth training | £ 290  |

The following items have been purchased for the Parish:

- A defibrillator has been purchased and installed at the Rose Cottage site by kind permission of Mr Andy Lehner who has provided the complete installation, including electrical hookup and ongoing running costs.
- An event stretch tent which other Parish organisations such as the Village Hall and church can utilise;

The following are in progress:

- the Charity continues to work on allowing non-fishing public access through a permissive path at Hartsmoor Fishery bearing in mind the need to keep farming stock safe and the fishing lakes quiet for paying customers.
- the lower lake continues to offer free fishing for parishioners
- the scouts have been offered an area of land at Hartsmoor
- benches and a disabled picnic table are being obtained with grant money
- the Charity is investigating support for the Village Hall who are looking into the possibility of creating a Community Hub
- first aid/defibrillator training is being offered to parishioners and anyone interested can sign up
- the Charity is investigating the possibility of a children's playground in the parish

Those wishing to view the Charity's business plan and policies can do so on the website. The business plan covered the first 5 years and will be updated with a new 10-year plan which will provide future direction and stability for Hartsmoor Fishery.

Many suggestions were raised at the Open Meeting in 2024 and some of these have been or are being addressed.

Regarding student loans, grants and maintenance grants, the Chair advised that both the Clayhidon Charity and the Mary Waldron Trust provided bursaries.

The subject of rural broadband was also raised, and this is being addressed by the Blackdown Hills Parish Network which received support from the Parish Council.

The Rose Cottage site provides two affordable rented homes together with one affordable home that has been sold and is a result the Charity is justifiably proud. The rented homes are currently occupied by two local people who originate from Hemyock.

The John Griss legacy is a unique gift provided to the parish of Clayhidon and can provide financial support annually not only for this generation but future generations. Your children and your children's children will be able to enjoy the priceless area of Hartsmoor.

Thank you for your support.

### **3. The Fishery**

Andy Don, a parishioner of 26 years, Fellow of the Institute of Fishery Management, and a fishery expert for the Environment Agency, gave a presentation on Hartsmoor Fishery which is available to view on the John Griss Charity page on the Parish Council website.

The Fishery is a great asset to the parish and as it develops and grows will not only provide an annual income but also increase in value.

To recap, when the fishery was taken on it was in a run-down state. Initially fish stock assessments were undertaken, along with investigations to determine the state of the lakes. This latter included a survey showing the profiles of the lakes and assessing their water volume. All the lakes fell under the threshold of being deemed a reservoir.

The initial work taken on was to clear the lakes of forty years of silt and assess fish stocks and re-stock as necessary.

The first Open Day was held on 1 September 2024 with over thirty children giving fishing a try and remarkably everyone of them caught a fish. The day included a barbecue, band and guided walks of the lakes.

Since then, grant bidding has enabled otter fencing to be installed to protect the fish stock and two aerators purchased.

A successful planning application has allowed a car park and tracks to be put in and fishing platforms, both able and disabled, built. Future plans under the application include a bird hide and a reception building and enlargement of the existing toilet block.

A second Open Day was held in September 2025 with over forty children giving fishing a try and gain they all caught a fish. The Angling Trust provided coaches, and this led on to in-house training at a reduced rate that will allow the formation of a youth fishing group during the summer months.

Later that month a memorial service was held for John Griss and a magnificent piece of stone donated by Westleigh Quarry was set down with a plaque to our benefactor.

A local designer has produced a fantastic logo and website for Hartsmoor Fishery, and this will provide an easy booking system for parishioners to use the lower lake free of charge. The next project is to put in place the reception building and work is already underway to identify potential funding pots for these works with the support of the Angling Trust. The building will be able to be used as a training centre and a hub for the youth fishing group as well as provide wider community benefits. In keeping with its rural local, the building is looking to be off-grid and meet sustainability targets.

Discussions are ongoing for the best way to provide parishioner access outside of the free fishing already in place through a permissive path which due to the agricultural nature of the area will need to be designated 'dog free'.

John Kidner, Chair of the John Griss Charity, thanked Andy Don for his presentation and advised that questions could now be asked from the floor.

Questions:

Children's playground

This was in the early stages of negotiation and if the site being considered was given approval, then this would be reported on the John Griss Charity page.

Village Hall support

The Charity was working with the Village Hall on funding to assist with a Community Hub and structural improvements. The Village Hall committee were best placed to make the decisions whilst the Charity would look to provide match funding.

There were grants specifically for the refurbishment of village halls and it made financial sense to explore these avenues and obtain funding from more than one source.

Permissive path at Hartsmoor

The path would need to integrate with Hartsmoor Fishery and the usage of the agricultural land and it would be a careful balance to ensure the viability of both businesses alongside the enjoyment of the area. There would also be benches and picnic tables.

Affordable Housing

Once built, the rented housing stock was managed by Devon Home Choice. The S106 agreement looked for the housing to be assigned to local individuals but if no-one applied from Clayhidon, they would be offered to people from other parishes.

Sub-committee to consider ideas

The Charity was made up of volunteers who in the first instance had looked to achieve the suggestions put forward by the community through liaison with local groups and organisations. Many of those ideas had centred around the village hall and were being addressed. Others as stated were best served by others such as the Clayhidon Charity, the Mary Waldron Trust and the Blackdown Hills Parish Network. Match funding as part of the process made financial sense allowing more of the legacy money from Rose Cottage to be invested. Obtaining grants to carry out works at Hartsmoor also made financial sense. Improvements at the fishery would not only increase the annual rental to a potential £25k in ten years but also would see the value of the area increase.

#### **4. Closing Statement**

John Kidner, Chair of the John Griss Charity, noted the words of the Executor of John Griss's will, Richard Kalloway, who felt that Hartsmoor had been his life and the area being preserved for the community was a fitting legacy.

He then thanked residents for their input and for attending the meeting. The next Open Day would be on 13 September 2026, and all were welcome.