



Registered in Scotland as Charity No. SC 029992

North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust Annual Report (covering the period 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024)

Introduction

North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust (NBEHT) was established over 50 years ago and is a registered charity (SC029992). It is run entirely by volunteers interested in conserving and enhancing North Berwick's historic, cultural and natural environment, and fostering understanding and enjoyment of the town. The Trust has had a very busy and successful 2024, hosted a series of events and activities, and made significant progress on all of our main projects.

Trustees

The Trustees and Committee members in 2024 were as follows:

Olwyn Owen	Chair (and lead on the St Andrew's Kirk Ports project)
Jane Thomas	Vice-Chair
Dorothy Barbour	Minutes Secretary
Rob Tinlin	Treasurer
Kirsty Towler	Trustee (and lead on planning matters)
Katrina Crossley	Trustee (and lead on heritage guides)
Julia Zeller-Jacques	Trustee (and lead on pARTicipate)
Don McKee	Trustee
Jacq Cottrell	Trustee (until October 2024)

As we attract more members and continue to grow the work of the Trust, **we are looking for more people to play an active role in our work**, including as part of the Committee. We are especially looking for a volunteer to take on the role of Membership Secretary and another to lead on digital communications (website and social media). In addition, we will shortly need a new Chair and Treasurer. In general, we are looking for new Committee members with skills in communication, managing website and social media content, and in fundraising. There are a host of ways to get involved – so if members would like to help with any of our projects, please do get in touch.

Treasurer's report

Over the year ending 31 December 2024, the Trust accounts showed a reduction of £3,247 in the monies held. This was primarily due to spending on projects, such as St Andrew's Kirk Ports and the heritage guides, utilising grants received in 2023 from North Berwick Trust Ltd, the Stella Moffat Trust and the UKSPF Regeneration Development Fund (via East Lothian Council).

The Trust's General Fund, which amongst other things meets the costs of administering the Trust (such as venue hire, public liability insurance, website costs, marketing and publicity), has seen a drop in its reserve of some £600 in 2024. The principal reason for this fall is a decline in donations received – from £583 in 2023 to £105 in 2024.

During the Covid emergency, the Trust decided not to seek a membership fee and asked instead for donations. It is proposed to reintroduce a membership fee in 2025 following the winding down of NBEHT and the launch of the new charity, NB Heritage, as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO).

During 2024 the Trust commissioned MKA consultants to undertake research on the economic impact of short-term lets in North Berwick. The cost of this work was funded in full by North Berwick Trust Ltd and North Berwick Community Council. The Trust was also successful in gaining grant funding of £1,000 from Tesco/Groundworks from its in-store blue tokens scheme for further work on developing our heritage guide series. The Trust intends to utilise a generous grant offer from North Berwick Trust Ltd in 2025 for further development work on the guides.

We continue to be extremely grateful to all of our funders for their very generous and continuing support.

We are also grateful to Mr James Meston who has continued to act as Independent Examiner of the accounts in terms of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), which allows us to finalise the accounts and report to OSCR on a yearly basis.

At the year end (31 December 2024), the Trust had reserves as follows (2023 figures in parenthesis):

- The Trust's General Fund has a closing balance of £3293.78 (£3,924.69).
- The St Andrew's Kirk Ports project has a closing balance of £1340.92 (£3,362.68).
- The pARTicipate arts project has a closing balance of £1423.81 (£1,330.13).
- The Heritage Guide project has a closing balance of £1171.47 (£1,858.76).

A full Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2024 is appended to this Annual Report.

A change in status for North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust

SC053977 During 2024 we worked towards changing our status to become a **Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO)**. Following a community conversation in February, which revisited the purpose and aims of the charity, a draft new mission statement, aims and objectives were approved in principle by the membership at the AGM in April. A sub-group of the Trust then finalised the mission statement and work began to develop a Constitution for the new charity,

ably assisted by Kevin Gibson to whom we extend grateful thanks.

In September, with the help of Sallie Bale

(www.monumentmarketing.co.uk), we carried out a consultation

to help us choose a new name. Over 40 members responded and the most popular suggestion was chosen: **NB Heritage**. Our new

name reflects our new mission statement: **'To conserve, enhance and celebrate North Berwick – its townscape, heritage and setting'**. In December we submitted an application to the Office of

the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and the new charity was approved and registered by OSCR in February 2025. The new charity number is SC053977.



NB Heritage is a legal entity and a corporate body in its own right, which will provide greater protection and confidence for Trustees, funders and contractors alike. This major change in status will be especially important for undertaking a large project like St Andrew's Kirk Ports. We have now begun the process of winding down North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust and transferring all of its assets and liabilities to the new charity, after which NBEHT will be removed from the OSCR Register. Meantime, both charities continue to run in parallel.

St Andrew's Kirk Ports



The St Andrew's Kirk Ports project has continued to make good progress this year. We need to raise around £750,000 to consolidate the 17th-century kirk as a 'picturesque ruin', reinstate the iconic bell-shaped roof on the tower, install a new floor in the nave and make the kirk accessible for a range of community uses. The end of the project would see this important feature of our historic town much better appreciated and enjoyed, and better integrated into the townscape.

*The kirk and graveyard at dawn
Photo taken by Pat Christie in March 2025*



In February we received the Structural Engineer's report on the **high-level survey of the kirk** carried out with the help of steeplejacks and rope ladders in late 2023. This work was funded by a grant of £3,000 from the UKSPF Regeneration Development Fund. The report demonstrates that the kirk's condition is not as bad as we had feared – good news indeed. The **next stage of project development** will take us to RIBA Stage 2 and is costed at c £25,000. In December we were awarded a grant by North Berwick Trust Ltd for half the cost and extend heartfelt thanks to them. We are applying elsewhere for the rest of the funds. This work will help us hone and cost our plans for the kirk more closely and

is the final stage before we can begin fundraising in earnest. We already have the very welcome **promise of £100,000 from North Berwick Trust** if we can raise the rest of the money. This promise gives the project added credibility and should turbocharge our fundraising efforts with major funders, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In June we responded to a report from David Rose that the **fine gravestone** of his great grandfather (also called David Rose) was missing. The whole site is scheduled, which means it is illegal to disturb or remove anything. We reported its loss to the *Courier* and to East Lothian Council (ELC), who reported it to Historic Environment Scotland, and were about to report it to the Police – when it was found (left). The Council's Amenity Services team had moved the stone and turned it over.



In other graveyard news, our member Gerry Taggart has drawn attention to the plight of one of the two **Commonwealth war graves** in Kirk Ports. The gravestone of Private James Alexander Edington Smith, who died 15 May 1915 aged 22, was badly damaged many years ago and its cross-head has been broken off. Gerry, who is also part of a local Veterans' Group, is trying to enlist the help of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to restore the grave, an initiative supported by the Trust.

Private Smith's damaged gravestone



August saw the town host another fabulous **Fringe by the Sea**, where



the Trust held two events, including one about the St Andrew's Kirk Ports project.

In the 'Wild Side' tent, Joy Dodd (historian) and Olwyn Owen (archaeologist) were interviewed by member Ruth Wolstenholme about our hopes for the future of the site. We also spent an enjoyable afternoon at the 'Encounter Stand' where we invited visitors to tell us what they love about historic North Berwick – greatly helped by a wonderful drone photo taken by Tobi Trügg . The harbour and historic High Street won this 'people's vote'.

Poster at the Encounter Stand, with drone photo by Tobi Trügg



In September, we led **three tours at St Andrew's Kirk Ports** – as part of East Lothian Archaeology and Heritage



Fortnight and Scottish Archaeology Month.

The first two tours were led by historian Joy Dodd, who recorded the gravestones in 2007 with a team of volunteers. Joy has researched the fascinating stories of many of the people and families buried here and it is always a joy to hear her speak about them. The third tour focused on the kirk itself and was led by conservation architect, Fraser Bell, and Olwyn Owen. As well as telling the story of the kirk, we discussed the conservation challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Fraser pointing out some of the conservation issues

In late June, we finally received a **Letter of Intent to Grant a Lease** for St Andrew's Kirk Ports from East Lothian Council, which owns the site. We have waited for this for a very long time – not having a lease has delayed our fundraising efforts as the major funders require a lease to be in place before they could consider grant applications from a local Trust. We are delighted to report that Eddie Danks of Paris Steel has kindly agreed to act as our solicitor in this matter. We are now waiting to hear from East Lothian Council's legal department. Securing a lease for the kirk will be a very important step forward.

pARTicipate and the phone cabins

The Trust leases the phone cabins from Royal Mail Group and manages a rolling programme of installations and exhibitions each year. The restoration and development of the **phone cabins**, known as the 'Telephone- Exchange art space', and adjacent verandah was led by Trust member



Geraldine Prince for over 5 years. We extend huge thanks to her for pioneering this unique town-centre micro-gallery. Geraldine has now handed the baton on to NBEHT Trustee, Julia Zeller-Jacques, owner of the Rock & Bird art shop.



The **phone cabins**, were once again a riot of colour and interest throughout the summer, helped by a display of art by the children of Gullane Primary, while the middle cabin hosted an exhibition by Michael James Lewis on his 'Liminal stone – walking geologies' project. We are grateful to the Bass Rock Community Group who helped to keep the phone boxes in tip-top condition; and to member Gary Watson who took this photograph.

In November, pARTicipate and the Bass Rock Community Group once again coordinated acts of remembrance for **Armistice Day**. A magnificent array of memorial pebbles were painted with poppies – by children and older people from no less than 12 different groups – complemented by a poppy-themed cabin in the ‘Telephone Exchange’. Many thanks to Trust members Geraldine Prince and Gary Watson for all their help with this.



The phone cabins also took part in this year's wonderful '**Window Wanderland**'. Huge thanks to Julia Zeller-Jacques for all her hard work on this – and all year. One of the phone cabins is being used to showcase the St Andrew's Kirk Ports project, with a banner designed by Julia as the centrepiece. A major project for next year is to install a door on the third phone cabin, so that all three cabins are lockable. 'Quick release' hinges will enable the new door to be removed for community engagement projects requiring open access. This final phase of the 5-year refurbishment of the phone cabins is being part-funded by the Stella Moffat Trust.

We are keen for other local groups and charities to use the phone cabins and have recently **published guidelines** to help groups make their plans. Please do get in touch if you or your group would like to display your work in the 'Telephone Exchange' at the west end of High Street. Volunteers who wish to help with pARTicipate's work are always welcome. You do not need to be particularly 'arty', but any creative skills or DIY experience can always contribute, as can a willingness to help with basic housekeeping at the phone cabins – which can be more fun than it sounds, as people

who pass by are so encouraging and engaged. pARTicipate activities can be followed on Instagram: @participate_nb.

Heritage Guides



The Heritage Guides continue to be very popular with residents and visitors alike. Two new guides were published in the summer: ***Fitzroy Barometer*** (at the harbour), and ***Four things to see on the Bass Rock***, bringing the total in the series to 14.

The guides were developed originally by our former Secretary, Jonathan Best (seen here), and are edited and produced by Trust member Eddie Clark, to both of whom we extend grateful thanks. We are also very grateful to Sallie Bale, who has been working to improve the presentation of the guides on our website and make them more accessible – for instance, you can now turn the pages digitally, as well as download copies. Printed

copies are available in the Library (and the Coastal Communities Museum when it opens during the summer). Further Heritage Guides are in production, together with a town map to accompany the Guides. Other ideas to develop the project include providing QR codes at some of the sites so that visitors can access the guides on their phones while out and about.

We are very grateful to North Berwick Trust, the Stella Moffat Trust and Tesco for grant-aiding the series. We were delighted to come second in **Tesco's 'blue buttons' scheme** this summer – which awarded the Trust £1,000 towards the costs of the guides. We welcome ideas for new guides and would also welcome new authors, so if you'd like to research and write a guide on a favourite aspect of the town's heritage, please do get in touch.

New NBEHT leaflet

In the summer we also published a new general leaflet about the Trust (again with thanks to Sallie Bale). The leaflet aims to encourage people to join the Trust and get involved, and had its first outing at Fringe by the Sea. The leaflet is now being updated to reflect our changed status and new name: NB Heritage. Please let us know if you'd like some leaflets to display or give to your friends and family.

Planning, place and housing



NBEHT continues to **monitor all planning applications** for North Berwick on a weekly basis and responds on behalf of members where we believe applications raise concerns. Our work on planning applications is led by Trustee Kirsty Towler, to whom we also extend heartfelt thanks. Many proposals and issues could affect the North Berwick Conservation Area, which is a particular focus for the Trust, but we also consider applications that might affect the wider townscape. Occasionally, we also write to the Council about other matters affecting the built environment, and we respond regularly to consultations on a wide range of relevant topics. The Trust is represented on other relevant local groups, such as North Berwick Coastal Area Partnership.

This year (2024) has been something of a rollercoaster on the planning front for NBEHT. The high points included commissioning an independent consultant in the summer, **MKA Economics**, to research and compare **the economic impact of short-term lets and residential properties in North Berwick**. This is the first and so far the only research study to have been undertaken utilising local data (rather than extrapolated from national and other data). The report conclusively demonstrated that the economic benefit to the local economy is greater for properties occupied by permanent residents than for those used as short-term lets. It confirms that residential letting not only provides more homes for people to live in, but is also economically better for the town. We commissioned this work as we had been concerned for some time that the economic benefit to the town of short-term lets is over-stated, and that this colours the Council's response to planning and licence applications for short-term lets. We have shared the report with East Lothian Council. We are very grateful to North Berwick Trust and North Berwick Community Council who grant-aided this work. The full report (July 2024) is available on our website:

www.nbenviromentheritagetrust.com/news-events/short-term-lets-mka-economics-report.

Other high points include the Council's decisions to refuse a proposed new house on West Bay Road and another proposed new house on a tiny gap site on St Andrew Street – both of which the Trust had objected to.



heritage.

NBEHT also took an active part in the delivery of the **North Berwick Local Place Plan**, a community-based document and statement of community aims going forward. Kirsty Towler and Ruth Wolstenholme sat on the Steering Group for NBEHT; and Trustee Don McKee (in his capacity as a Community Councillor) brought the final Plan together and ensured that it took adequate account of the town's

The low points of the year are sadly numerous and relate primarily to East Lothian Council's failure to listen to local voices and legitimate concerns. NBEHT, together with many others, twice objected to the proposed **parking management scheme**. In total, well over 1000 comments were submitted by local people and community groups about this scheme, the vast majority of them objecting to its imposition for a range of reasons, not least that it is too complex for this small town and takes no account of the seasonality of the problem; but all of our objections were ignored. Due process was then subverted by Council officers and Councillors who thwarted a public hearing into the scheme. The parking scheme will be introduced in early 2025 and we, along with many others, will need to monitor its impact. As well as sharing the concerns of many that the scheme will impose unnecessary expense and inconvenience for residents and businesses, and may threaten the viability of the High Street, the Trust also remains very concerned about the impact of the parking infrastructure (meters and signs etc), which will add to street clutter and have a deleterious effect on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Councillors also failed to listen to the concerns of NBEHT and many others about the loss of a substantial **mature hedge at North Berwick High School**, which had been a haven for biodiversity and wildlife and was a significant landscape feature. It was possible both to retain the hedge and provide the school with more playing fields, but again, officers and Councillors ignored legitimate concerns and

did not consider options that could have saved the hedge – as required by the Council's own adopted Local Development Plan policy.



Unfortunately, the Council's tendency to ignore considerable local objections is continuing in 2025. Most recently, in spite of their own planning officers' recommendation for refusal, Councillors have indicated they wish to approve the demolition of the former **Golf Hotel on Dirleton Avenue**. This interesting 19th-century sandstone villa is an important building on a prominent corner site in the Conservation Area, and is significant enough to be mentioned in heritage textbooks on East Lothian. NBEHT is very concerned about this

decision, which will not only see the demolition of another important historic building, but also redevelopment of the site with a significantly over-scaled, over-dominant and poorly designed block of flats.

During 2024 the lists continued to be dominated by **applications for short-term lets**, both for planning permission and for Certificates of Lawful Development. The various applications relating to short-term lets mainly pertain to town centre properties, but we are also seeing cases in the modern housing developments. We are continuing to monitor the situation and routinely comment on STL-related applications.

We are pleased to record that appeals on short-term let applications to the Scottish Government (DPEA) have been consistently rejected. However, the approach taken by East Lothian Council under delegated powers appears to have been less consistent. This perception may partly be due to the Council's failure to share all planning application information with the public. We hope that East Lothian Council will soon join every other local planning authority in allowing all information to be made public – for what is, after all, a statutory process carried out in the public interest. We remain concerned that some planning applications are submitted with incorrect information, especially on ownership, which affects the certification and validity of planning applications. Two such cases have given rise to serious concerns from neighbours; NBEHT continues to assist with the provision of advice and guidance to members of our community experiencing these and similar problems. The Council is now considering charging for access to information on planning cases, and a similar proposal by another authority is currently being considered by the Information Commissioner. If charging for information is permitted, given our limited resources this would limit the ability of NBEHT and other local groups to access historic files.

North Berwick Buildings at Risk Register

On a more positive note, the Trust launched the North Berwick Buildings at Risk Register in November 2024. The Register is intended to raise awareness of buildings and monuments of historic significance (such as the **remains of the Abbey** in the grounds of the former Abbey Care Home), which merit protection, maintenance and interpretation; and other buildings in the town (such as the **County Hotel**), which face an uncertain future and would benefit from raised awareness,



scrutiny, constructive promotion and possible intervention. The lists, particularly the second list, will be dynamic as circumstances change, both for those buildings in the list and others which may merit inclusion in the future.

Just to prove the point, we are delighted that the two **viewpoint shelters at Tantallon Terrace and Glasclune Gardens** (both listed in the Buildings at Risk Register) now being restored. During 2024, and prompted by Trust member, Gerry Taggart, NBEHT has worked with a local Veterans' Group to ensure that the Glasclune Gardens shelter was also repaired. Once the work is complete, the plan is to rename this upper shelter 'Veterans' View'.



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As far as possible, these historic structures are being returned to their original appearance. This includes replacing the rare cedar shingles on the roofs – shown here being added to the Tantallon shelter. The project is funded by North Berwick Trust and North Berwick Rotary Club, with help in kind from East Lothian Council – to all of whom we extend our thanks.

Website and social media developments Good communications and community outreach are vital to our work. We are therefore pleased to report that this year, with help from Sallie Bale, the Trust has continued to develop its website: www.nbenvironmentheritagetrust.com. The aim of the improvements is to make it easier to navigate the website and access the Heritage Guides online, and easier to join the Trust. We also have a Facebook page (NB Environment & Heritage Trust) which we use occasionally, especially to advertise events and meetings. pARTicipate has had its own Instagram account since 2018, which has attracted almost 400 followers and thousands of 'likes'. Members who use the internet and social media are encouraged to follow these pages as they are regularly updated with news and events.

NBEHT contact details

Email: nbenvironmentheritagetrust@gmail.com

Website: www.nbenvironmentheritagetrust.com

Facebook: NB Environment & Heritage Trust



North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust

Accounts for Year Ended 31st December 2024

<u>2023</u>			<u>2024</u>
	<u>General Fund:-</u>		
£ 440.00	Subscriptions		
£ 582.96	Donations	£ 105.00	
	North Berwick Trust	£ 3,000.00	
	North Berwick CC	£ 1,800.00	
	Stella Moffat Trust Grant - Planning Fee		
<u>£ 1,022.96</u>	Bank of Scotland Compensation	<u>£ 4,905.00</u>	
-£ 105.51	AGM & Christmas Social	-£ 75.83	
-£ 25.00	Independent Examiner Honorarium	-£ 25.00	
	MKA Economics re short-term lets	-£ 4,800.00	
	Fringe presence	-£ 146.92	
-£ 138.00	Scotways - Signman		
-£ 221.60	Insurance	-£ 231.40	
-£ 100.80	Website	-£ 121.19	
<u>-£ 375.30</u>	ELC (Sundry Accounts)~	<u>-£ 135.57</u>	<u>-£ 5,535.91</u>
<u>£ 56.75</u>	SURPLUS / DEFICIT for YEAR	<u>-£ 630.91</u>	

	<u>St Andrew Church, Kirk Ports, Restoration Fund</u>		
£ 3,000.00	ELC Grant Award		
<u>£ 30.00</u>	<u>£ 3,030.00</u>	Donation	<u>£ -</u>
-£ 1,692.00	M Hüssel -Pendrich Height Services		
	NARRO re structural survey	-£ 2,021.76	
-£ 768.00	Harrison Stevens--CSY Architects		
<u>-£ 10.00</u>	ELC-Kirk Ports Walk Around	<u>-£ 2,021.76</u>	

£ 560.00

SURPLUS / DEFICIT for YEAR

-£
2,021.76

pARTicipate

	NBCDC	
	St Andrew Blackadder - Donation	
<u>£ 3,692.83</u>	<u>£ 3,692.83</u>	NBT Grant
		<u>£ -</u>
-£	NBT Applications	
3,168.82	1&2	
-£		
68.00	JS Electrical Serv - Morton Fraser	
-£		
5.60	RT Rogers-Rock & Bird	
	Donation	
	s	£ 145.46
	Incidental expenses	-£ 50.78
		-£
-£ 74.11	Rachel Hussel - Royal Mail	1.00
-£		
597.83	Wm Anderson & Sons	
-£		
<u>58.09</u>	<u>-£ 3,972.45</u>	Geraldine Prince
		<u>£ 93.68</u>

-£ 279.62

SURPLUS / DEFICIT for YEAR

£ 93.68

Heritage Guides

£ 22.59	Donation	£ 23.00
£ 2,160.00	<u>£ 2,182.59</u>	Stella Moffat Trust
		<u>£ 23.00</u>
	Website (Monument/Flipsnack/Honeybee)	-£ 1,335.12
	Tesco / Groundwork	£ 1,000.00
-£		-£
323.83	<u>-£ 323.83</u>	ELC Sundry Accounts
		375.17

£ 1,858.76

SURPLUS / DEFICIT for YEAR

£ 687.29