

Retreat House Chester Trustees' Annual Report & Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023

registered charity number 1163330
(Charitable Incorporated Organisation)

Contents

	page
1. Charity Information	2
2. Trustees' Report for the year ended 31 March 2023	3-13
3. Examiner's Report	14-15
4. Accounts	16-17

Charity Information

registered charity name

Retreat House Chester

registered address

Retreat House Chester
9 Abbey Square
Chester
CH1 2HU

contact information

email: admin@retreathousechester.co.uk

website : www.retreathousechester.co.uk

registered charity number

1163330

trustees (as on 31 March 2023)

Rev Preb Paul Towner (Chair)

appointed Feb 2018 for two years;
reappointed Feb 2020 for two years;
reappointed Feb 2022 for two years
appointed May 2019 for three years;
reappointed May 2022 for two years
appointed Oct 2020 for three years
appointed Nov 2022 for three years
appointed Nov 2022 for three years

Mrs Carol Bayliss

Dr Claire Egan

Rev Colin Mansley

Rev Robert Croft

Mrs Consilia Black stepped down as a Trustee in May 2022 after her term of office since May 2019

We are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), governed by Constitution. Trustees are appointed by serving trustees. We hold a strategic plan, a risk register and comprehensive policies. Our attention to regulatory requirements and good practice is thorough.

‘The object of the CIO is to advance the Christian religion for the benefit of the public mainly, but not exclusively, through the provision of facilities, education, training and personal support to enable the exploration and experience of spirituality.’

Our Year



Retreat House Chester offers ways to peace in the city. Rooted gently and deeply in Christian spiritual tradition, we offer a wide range of ways to retreat for all people as a part of living – in the midst of the city and the midst of everyday life.

This time last year, our Report outlined how Retreat House Chester ('RHC' or simply 'Retreat House') was facing the next stage of its growth with enthusiasm and encouragement. A careful discernment process – shared by Trustees, Friends and Volunteers (some 40 people) in 2021-22 - gave the reason and foundation for a Working Party project as Spring turned to Summer in 2022, the start of this reporting year. By the end of Summer, the result was a 3-Year Plan:

The aim of this plan is to move RHC from a period of seven years' foundation to a stable steady state, offering retreat activities that make a difference personally and socially, with a wide outreach and well known. 2025 will mark 100 years since the old retreat house was opened in Chester: inspired by that story but reinvented for our own times, we want to celebrate that year with a sustainable contemporary retreat provision, as a part of living.

from 3-Year Plan

With the decisions to employ a second part-time member of staff, as Administrator, and to maintain our small base in Abbey Square, and following the success of expanding our work with both faith groups and community groups, we set about 'A Time to Grow', branching out still further and sharing the fruits of 'retreat as part of living'.

For any growth, conditions need to be favourable. In the last part of this reporting year – the start of 2023 – we have been challenged by a changing environment. Part of this reflects a national trend of struggling charities: rising costs, rising needs, reduced resources and funds (as outlined, for example, in Charities Aid Foundation *UK Giving Report 2023*). Part of it is more local and particular: especially a watershed moment regarding premises here in Abbey Square when our lease expires or renews in November 2023.

Nonetheless, the key aims of our 3-Year Plan are clear and remain, even as changing seasons demand that that we adapt:

affirm the mission and character of RHC | make RHC known as a go-to provider of retreat activities | develop relationships across the community | inspire and equip others in providing retreat | encourage financial support

from 3-Year Plan

Vision and hard work have always fed our small charity, and have ensured its growth since it first put down roots in 2015. In the year ahead, as eight years turn to nine, we know that vision and hard work will mean that this imaginative version of a retreat house – innovative and worthwhile - will continue to be shared as its branches spread, offering shelter, new growth and fruit to those for whom it becomes part of living.

Who we are



Retreat House Chester is a grassroots not-for-profit community venture inspired and driven by local people and working to offer retreat as an essential part of living for everyone.



5	trustees
1	treasurer
2	part-time staff
20	volunteers
234	direct beneficiaries this year

Peace

To this house;
To those who enter;
To those who dwell here;
To those who depart,

Peace

our well-loved Retreat House blessing

Our Vision and Values centre on 'peace' and the wholeness it brings, inspired by...

... **hope**
... **human worth**
... **relationship**
... **the strength of gentleness**
... **roots & responsibility**
... **and being small in a big picture.**

Our roots are in Christian spiritual tradition and our ecumenical character in line with that of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland. We are a member organisation of the Retreat Association and of Cheshire West Voluntary Action and are glad of the networks this provides, enabling us to work with other retreat providers and other local charities. An ongoing connection to – and participation in – both our faith community and wider community is essential to our work.

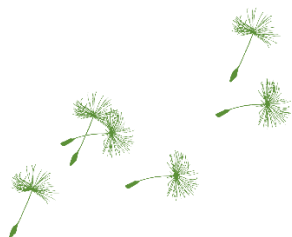


"The retreat house is very important to me because it offers something unique in Chester."

"Thank you for this very special provision."

"Always a warm welcome for everyone, accepting and respectful, not intrusive."

What we do



Retreat House Chester offers ‘retreat in the city – as a part of living’, to make the many benefits of retreat available to as wide a range of people as possible and to make it as accessible as possible.

We promote retreat in everyday living for all. This was the need we saw at our foundation in 2015, and it continues to be our motivation today.

We seek to build peace and fullness of life for individuals, within communities, and across the city and region.

We do this through a diverse programme, with a range of ways to be involved, inviting people to...

find a time of silence

experience different ways of being reflective and prayerful

explore spirituality in a Christian setting

connect spirituality & daily living, and **connect** with one another.

This invitation is drawn from the monastic way of silence, prayer, study, labour and community - a way which has inspired retreat across centuries and across cultures, and a way which is written into the history of Chester with the Cathedral’s origins as a Benedictine abbey and numerous monastic houses in the city’s past (including Franciscan, Carmelite and Dominican). Making retreat a part of life for ‘ordinary’ people – especially in the Ignatian tradition - inspired the foundation of Chester’s former retreat house in 1925. We show how the wisdom and spirituality of this monastic and retreat tradition is relevant today – rooted and re-imagined.



“a day of peace, reflection and contemplation in a friendly environment”

“I booked on these sessions because I wanted to discover more about the contemplative life... and I feel that need is being met. So thank you!”

affirm the mission and character of RHC

continue to help people deepen their spiritual life and their experience of Peace, as individuals and in communities

from 3-Year Plan

We make this offer through the following activities, online and in-person:

retreat days | conversation groups | prayer times | creative workshops | walks | Book Club | study courses | Reflective Chester with general public & marginal groups | team training | one-to-one spiritual accompaniment | off-site retreats with church communities | blog



We've noticed that our most popular activities this year have been off-site group bookings (retreats tending to reach people who would not otherwise come to us) and activities over a series of weeks (study courses and conversations tending to appeal to those already familiar with us).

Our own small rooms limit the number we can welcome there. Off-site venues and meeting people in their own places extends our reach. We know the value of combining the stability and identity of a base (currently Abbey Square) with the outreach of off-site activities.



"Lots of variety of things to do. Great to meet like-minded people."

"Just to say that I found both the events I attended last year to be defining moments in my spiritual journey... Thank you."

"I am very thankful for the opportunities provided by Retreat House Chester to step outside of daily life, pause and reflect on God's love and provision. I find the material and the conversation with others both give me new insight and encouragement."

"I got such a lot out of the course I did with you... You are offering a very special ministry."

"Thank you so much for today... I really felt it opened things up."

"The last two weeks have been so good. The time to reflect and the conversations are so helpful."

"This course has given me a desire to pursue what I have learnt."

"This has been a journey to the heart."

Who we work with



Engaging with spirituality is a fundamental human characteristic and need. Spiritual experience is frequently reported across all cultures, whoever we are. Retreat itself is common across cultures and through history; we like to say it is 'as old as the hills', mindful of the draw of the Welsh hills on the city's horizon.

Our work is with the general public

individuals booking onto our activities

faith groups mostly through our off-site retreats

marginal groups mostly through our Reflective Chester community project

groups of workers occasionally hosting or facilitating (a potential growth area)

general public inc NEW this year, '6 Women of Heart' interactive exhibition at Chester Cathedral

So we make the invitation to all to 'come as you are'.



WELL-ESTABLISHED

individuals booking in, anyone inc elderly, isolated, bereaved – mostly, people who book come from 'within' churches



GROWING

local faith communities – marginal groups – groups of workers – apart from the faith communities, mostly people in these activities come from 'beyond' church settings



"I have had people coming up to me to say how peaceful and enjoyable the morning had been... Thank you for all you gave us."

from a group we visited

"Being able to come to events at RHC has been an important part of my spiritual journey. I always come away feeling that I have gained something and with a sense of calm and being refreshed."

from an individual

**develop relationships
across the community**

**focus on groups currently
under-represented**

from 3-Year Plan

Why we do it



Retreat is not just personal. There are also social benefits to providing non-residential retreat in a city context.

Researchers say benefits of retreat include

- ✓ improved wellbeing
- ✓ improved relationships
- ✓ reduced isolation
- ✓ enhanced spiritual experience/depth experience
- ✓ improved community health
- ✓ improved workplaces
- ✓ increased knowledge of Christian spirituality
- ✓ the opportunity for dialogue between Christianity and the public realm

We know from feedback that we deliver on all of these with an emphasis on the personal benefits but not exclusively so.



We know that people need what we offer, because they tell us.

They tell us that RHC offers something distinctive: a neutral faith environment where spirituality, or depth to life, is not taboo and which offers encounter with others. They also value that this is local. We knew this from networking when we were starting out in 2015, and it's good to know that we are providing what people need.

Our discernment process in 2022 revealed the strength of positive experience and need, which underlined the motivation to develop a 3-year plan to establish a stable, steady retreat provision by 2025.



"I look forward to the programme; it is part of the framework which helps me through the inevitable challenges that each of us face in our day-to-day living."

"I feel that I'm being gently helped along in my journey."

"It's difficult when you're on your own – so much better and easier with others."

draw on our Vision & Values, centred on Peace, exploring and demonstrating how Peace is about wholeness

raise awareness of the benefits of contemplative living and retreat

from 3-Year Plan

Our success



We continue to be proud of our innovative way of offering retreat as part of living.

key achievements this year include

- expanding our ecumenical reach (including our first retreat in a Baptist church, and our second year of retreats in a range of local churches)
- expanding our Reflective Chester project and its community reach including marginal groups
- re-establishing our volunteer team after the pandemic
- Working Party and its draft of our 3-Year Plan – as a response to the discernment process
- employment of a 2nd part-time staff member (administrator) improving our resilience as an organisation
- improving our marketing drive
- two new trustees
- securing grant funding for certain activities

64 events across 10 months
(2021-22: 50 events across 10 months)

479 welcomes in 10 months

234 individuals: 86 in programme bookings (inc 35 new) + 73 in group bookings + 75 in pop-ups

increase our use of other locations

consolidate our established and successful programme, continuing activities for individuals and developing further activities for groups

from 3-Year Plan

We count **the quality of our offering** as a key achievement:

for groups: In offering Lent Retreats to churches, 100% of churches we visited last year want a return visit. In organising Reflective Chester for 2023-24, 100% of local charities / organisations we have already visited want a return visit.

for individuals: All of our programme activities have return visitors. Our study courses (online) and conversation groups are series events and very popular. Furthermore, people return now and again over the years, suggesting that RHC is a feature of their lives, and they want to come back, even if we see them only infrequently.



"It was obvious to me that careful preparation both in terms of resources and prayer had been made... food for the soul."

"All very well organised and presented."

"You are doing something very important. And in an exemplary manner."

"A huge thank you for such a wonderful exhibition of prayer stations – very well received and I thought you produced them beautifully and professionally."

Feedback



Good things happen on retreat – we know because people tell us.

needed start
huge different enjoyable
like-minded guided contemplative
given always reflect god love
special journey soul better good
wonderful opening preparation
warm life prayer thankyou
silence important provision others facilitation
peace spiritual feel new inspired
people helped

This report is filled with feedback, and our work is shaped by what we learn from what people tell us. It is overwhelmingly positive. Words which appear multiple times in feedback appear above. There are many many other such words appearing just once.

demonstrate the success of RHC, and use feedback and monitoring to support this

from 3-Year Plan

Targets



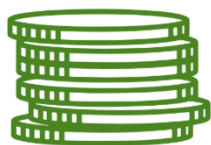
Our 3-Year Strategic Plan informs our targets.

Targets for 2023-24 include

- continue to extend our reach to individuals and groups
- investigate the best premises, recognising the 3-Year Plan to 'maintain a base, working both here and beyond it'
- 'create a sustainable organisational structure' (from 3-Year Plan) – financial, infrastructure and human resources
- 'demonstrate an imaginative version of retreat house' (3-Year Plan)

We recognise that achieving these targets may mean significant change for our charity.

Financial review



Our 3-Year Plan addresses the challenges of sustainability. We recognise the need to adapt to financial and practical circumstances.

Our 3-Year Plan aims to move Retreat House Chester to a stable, steady state by 2025. Key factors to recognise are:

- From 2016-2022 our main income stream is Founding Benefactors, donations + Friends; then grants; then programme income.
- Our main expenditure is staff and premises.

This year, we have more than met our 3-Year Plan target of increasing our programme by 25% year on year, largely thanks to a popular 8-week study course, an evening concert, and charges for retreats in churches.

In contrast, we have not met our target of increasing donations, in which there has been a slight downturn (Gift Aid income includes a claim for part of last year, including that year's £10,000 donation). This is despite an effort to renew our fundraising; it is also part of a national trend (Charities Aid Foundation *UK Giving Report 2023*).

Essential grant funding, for which we are very thankful – for both its financial support and also its support of our work – is as follows:

National Lottery	£4000	from 'Local Connections' Fund restricted to running costs of Reflective Chester (16 events)
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The Marjory Boddy Charitable Trust £2000	to support our retreat events
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These grants came in the last quarter of the year; £250 from Lottery fund was spent by 31/3/23 on workshop preparations. Please see next page for Summary of Funds.

We recognise for our own situation the case made by the Institute for Voluntary Action that unrestricted funds can help charities with longer-term solutions and better outcomes, and so our 3-Year Plan rests on such funding; our target of achieving such funding, however, has not yet been met.

While income is down, expenditure is up. This is due to renewed marketing, increased programme costs and the employment of a second part-time member of staff.

Alongside this financial situation, the term of our lease expiring in November 2023 gives a 'watershed' moment to consider our best options regarding our premises and how we operate while still fulfilling our 3-Year Plan for a stable, steady retreat provision by 2025. Recognising and reviewing the challenges, we are exploring ways to reduce the organisational and financial demands of running our small charity while also concentrating on expanding our work of 'retreat at part of living'.

encourage financial support

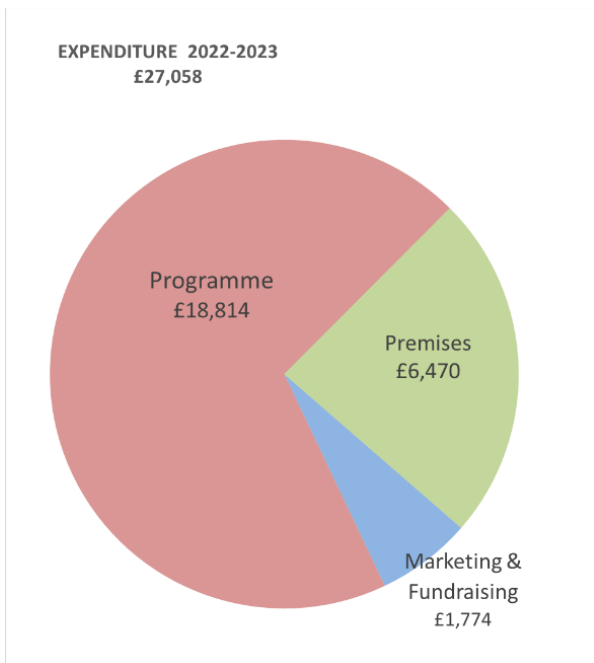
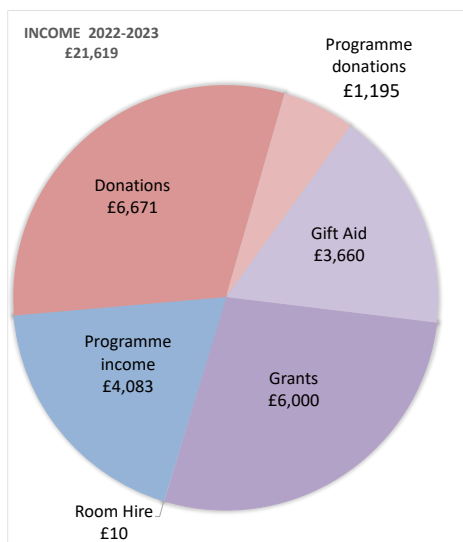
**demonstrate good financial
stewardship in all our
activity**

from 3-Year Plan

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Income	£6,537	£9,026	£26,558	£25,802	£21,619
Donations +Gift Aid	£ 3,158	£ 4,365	£10,985	£18,576 *	£11,526
Grants	£ 250	£1,500	£13,095	£ 5,770	£ 6,000
Programme	£ 3,095	£ 3,096	£ 2,478	£ 1,456	£ 4,083 **
Room hire	£ 34	£ 65	0	0	£ 10

* includes a single donation of £10,000 (2021-22)

**refers to ticket sales only; donations which came via programme events total £1194.70 and are included in donations figure



	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Expenditure: Charitable Activities					
	£28,340	£20,737	£19,004	£20,142	£27,083
Premises	£ 5,723	£ 6,594	£ 5,961	£ 6,197	£ 6,470
Marketing+Fundraising	£ 1,454	£ 804	£ 616	£ 735	£ 1,174
Programme	£12,828	£13,133	£12,427	£13,210	£18,838
Assets inc refurb	£ 8,335	£ 206	0	0	0

SUMMARY OF FUNDS	31/03/23	31/03/22
unrestricted – general	£13,494	£24,528
restricted	£ 5,750	£180
<i>Society of Retreat Conductors</i>	-	£180
<i>National Lottery Community Fund</i>	£3750	-
<i>Marjory Boddy Trust</i>	£2000	-

Conclusion



Our work continues to be innovative and imaginative, modelling what city-based community-focused Christian retreat can be.

The work we do makes a difference in people's lives and in the part retreat plays in local living. We know that the best future for our work is about further developing the best ways to reach people so that they may deepen their spiritual life in ways that are authentic, rooted and supported.

As a charity, we have spent 8 years developing this and learning from experience as we go. Now, our 3-Year Plan aims to establish what we have begun, growing from the roots that have been put down, and branching out. Funds are crucial; so too are the workers (the vineyard labourers) and the infrastructure to support the work, just as a plant needs the right conditions.

The challenge of 2023-24 will be how to bring together experience, plans, funds, workers and infrastructure in order to best continue the innovative, imaginative and – perhaps most of all – *essential* work that RHC has grown to do so well.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

signature

full name Paul Towner, Chair of Trustees

date 19 July 2023

signature

full name

date 19 July 2023

signed copy in the office



**CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES**

**Independent examiner's
report on the accounts**

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

**Report to the trustees/
members of**

Retreat House Chester

**On accounts for the year
ended**

31 March 2023

**Charity no
(if any)**

1163330

Set out on pages

16-17

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended **31/03/2023**.

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

**Independent
examiner's statement**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Date:

20/07/2023

Name:

Neville Kite

**Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):**

FCMA

Address:

Cheriton, Rowton Lane, Chester CH3 6AT

Section B**Disclosure**

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

NONE



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Retreat House Chester

1163330

Receipts and payments accounts

CC16a

For the period
from

01/04/2022

To

31/03/2023

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Last year
	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Voluntary donations	7,866	-	-	7,866	18,258
Gift Aid claimed on donations	3,660	-	-	3,660	318
Programme income	4,083	-	-	4,083	1,456
Grant funding	-	6,000	-	6,000	5,770
Room Hire	10	-	-	10	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	15,619	6,000	-	21,619	25,802
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	15,619	6,000	-	21,619	25,802
A3 Payments					
Marketing + Fundraising	366	6	-	372	141
Licences & Subscriptions	265	4	-	269	254
information Technology	1,115	18	-	1,133	340
Accommodation (premises)	5,229	85	-	5,314	5,332
Insurance	752	12	-	764	691
Office costs	387	6	-	393	173
Programme costs	1,320	21	-	1,341	924
Programme delivery: staff	17,219	278	-	17,497	12,287
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	26,653	430	-	27,083	20,142
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
For programme and refurb	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	26,653	430	-	27,083	20,142
Net of receipts/(payments)	- 11,034	5,570	-	- 5,464	5,660
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	24,528	180	-	24,708	19,048
Cash funds this year end	13,494	5,750	-	19,244	24,708

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Co-op adjusted bank balance	8,803	5,750	-
	Cash float	54	-	-
	HSBC adjusted bank balance	4,637	-	-
	Total cash funds	13,494	5,750	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
		Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets	Details			
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B3 Investment assets	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
				-
				-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B5 Liabilities	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
			-	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval	