



Richmond Parish Lands Charity, Richmond Upon Thames



Location

Richmond Upon Thames, London



Founded

1786



Legal structure

Registered charity (200069)



Description of activity

Richmond Parish Lands Charity (RPLC) administers a royal gift from 1786 to help the community in Richmond. It continues to do work that helps disadvantaged people in the Richmond such as: supporting people suffering ill health or poverty; providing recreational and leisure activities; promoting education and training; undertaking educational support and operating charitable housing.



Key assets

There is a portfolio of assets that includes: land, buildings for community use, housing, and – crucially – a permanent endowment.



Staff and volunteers

There are six members of staff (3.5 full time equivalent) in the office team. There are 16 trustees on the board (including two local authority nominees). Trustees are active in overseeing on-going activities within RPLC’s portfolio.

Overview

Richmond Parish Lands Charity (RPLC) administers a royal gift made in 1786 to support the Richmond community. Today the assets include:

1. An endowment (invested in property and the markets) that is worth around £100m and provides income.
2. Ownership of buildings that enables the charity to offer low rent housing for disadvantaged people (73 units of charitable and affordable rented housing), and also nominate one in three tenants for 362 properties managed by London & Quadrant Housing.
3. 10 older and valuable properties leased at market rent (to generate income).
4. Vestry Hall (for public meetings/events).
5. Dickson House: an investment property with workshop space run on a mix of commercial and subsidised lines with space for artistic start-up businesses, community businesses and a community centre.
6. Queen’s Road Estate (some currently underused land that may be used for community space and housing).

Land and buildings are the most significant physical assets. The endowment provides regular income.

RPLC has a small staff team. It undertakes local work through: engagement with other parts of the voluntary and community sector; collaboration with the local authority (two representatives from Richmond Council sit on the board at a strategic level), as well as schools and local community groups and organisations.



Financial health

The financial health of RPLC, with a £100m endowment, would appear to be strong by the standards of most local small- and medium-sized charities with which it works. RPLC was granted the land by a royal endowment in 1786, which could be viewed as an early asset transfer. The intention of the original gifting of land was to help the poor. RPLC still maintains this aim in a very different era – but the way of doing this needs constant attention. In addition, there are legal ties and regulations about how they can use their endowment and assets.

From the outside, RPLC may appear strong due to its autonomy and asset ownership, but *“don’t underestimate the legal and practical issues”* involved in having an endowment, would be the advice. The endowment and the long-standing ownership of properties in an area that, in parts, is now quite affluent, poses questions at a different level of analysis. Various conundrums arise: the asset value is high, but liquidity is not always so.

The endowment cannot ever be *“spent out”*, hence *“with an endowment you can’t – you have to even out the benefits over generations ... so benefits carry on in perpetuity.”* There is also a duty to ensure that it is wisely invested. Today, the main asset consists of a balance between investments and property. Managing the assets requires multiple skills from the trustees and small staff team, from financial and investment skills to understanding *“how to help those in need in Richmond.”* As one member noted *“property is very good but its not real money. It looks good on paper”* but it is not the same as liquid assets that can be spent. Keeping a balance between investments and invested money is importance. Currently about two thirds of the endowment is tied up in property and one third is invested. Management of assets such as endowments and properties requires, as well as highly professional skill sets, a connection and awareness about ever-changing community needs. The value of RPLC’s assets has risen significantly over the last few years due to increasing property prices. Recruiting trustees has to keep a balance between expertise in different areas, so RPLC recruits trustees with property, education and charity expertise. Severe and extensive poverty may have moved to other areas of London but RPLC remains obliged to support those in need and the organisations helping them in its own borough. It still asks itself *“What are we hear for, what should we be doing in five years’ time?”* and *“we are here to help vulnerable people in the borough but what do you want to in 10 years’ time?”*. In addition, there are conundrums about the low rents they offer - effectively it traps people - they can never move because prices everywhere else locally are so high.

In summary, for RPLC it remains important to build on the original historical purposes of the trust, interpreted to modern settings, and deal with the highly complex nature of managing property and investment.

Three key factors that support financial health

The endowment and properties combined with sound management of these resources are key to supporting the bedrock of organisations.

If pressed to offer three key factors that have supported RPLC’s financial strength, helped it towards meeting its ultimate goals, and may inform its future direction, these could be:

1. A board that contains a mix of members whose expertise encompasses: strong financial skills, social analysis of the local context, and an understanding of ways in which RPLC’s aims can be translated and furthered in the current context through partnerships, collaborations and experimentation. This involves periodic changeover of cohorts within the board to engage fresh approaches and to take some calculated risks.
2. Financial insight to challenge and explore existing and new options for investment and asset management within the legal and historical constraints.
3. Imaginative interpretation of current social ills combined with experimentation of new and old methods of addressing these in the current social context.

It is reasonable to suggest that RPLC ‘s practice already encompasses these approaches.

Future direction

RPLC seeks to respond to changing social needs and, in particular, the effects of current policy on people in Richmond. This includes social isolation, financial problems, health issues, unemployment, and the effects on households of the introduction of Universal Credit.

The following document should be consulted for a fuller picture of the charity’s activities and plans:

Richmond Parish Lands Charity July 2017–June 2018 (2018) Report of Activities (Supporting individuals and charities in Richmond since 1786), London: RPLC.



Financial information

The following table is drawn from the RPLC Accounts' balance sheet for year ended 30th June 2018.

Income	£2,189,672
Expenditure	£2,479,540
Difference between income and expenditure	-£289,869
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	Not available
Annual income from grant or subsidy	Not available
Fixed assets	£98,595,353 (total of unrestricted funds and endowment funds)
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	£904,588
Creditors	£112,992
Total	£791,596
Net assets	£99,386,949

Source: Richmond Parish Lands Charity Financial Accounts 2018, Charity Commission

NB The full and detailed Financial Statements for year ended 30th June 2018 should be consulted for a complete picture of the complexity of the RPLC accounts