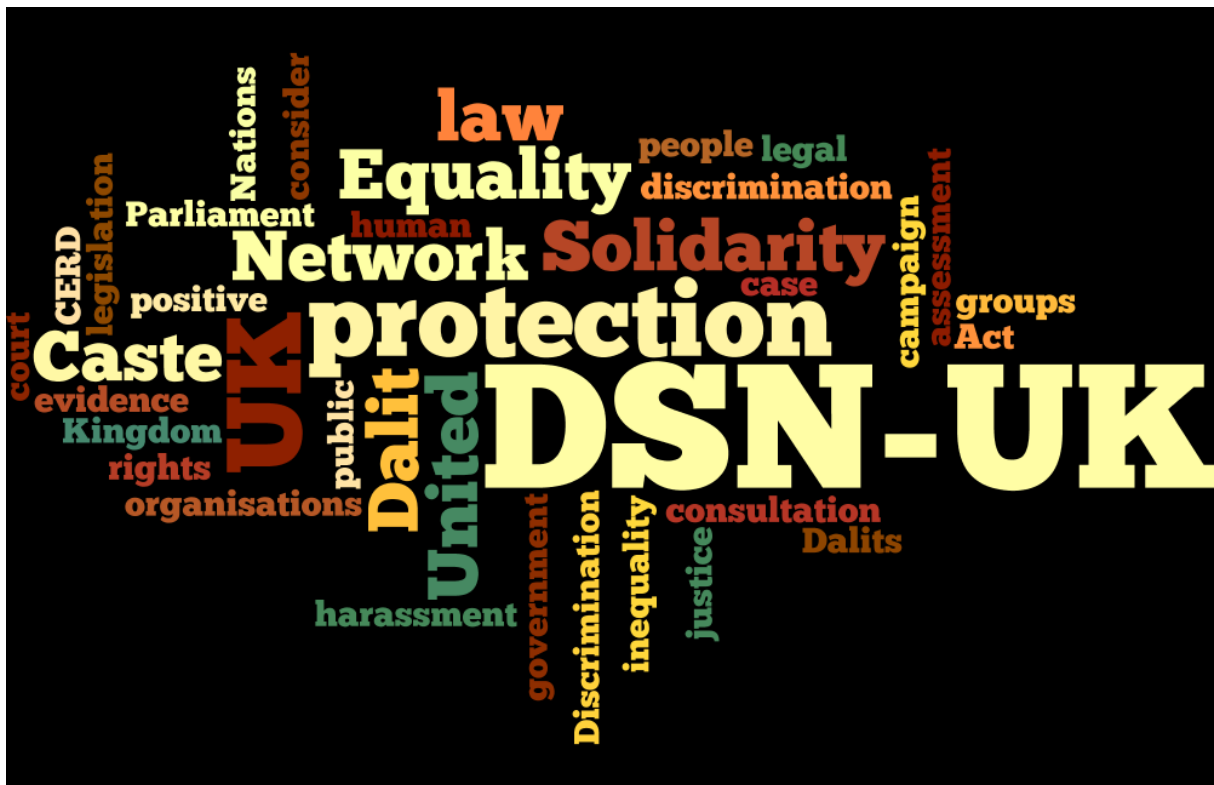




**DALIT SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK UK**  
A world without caste discrimination



## REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2015/2016

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## A word from the Director

### Dear Friends and Supporters of Dalit Solidarity Network UK

Caste discrimination remains one of the biggest human rights abuses existing today, which involves the abhorrent practice of untouchability and descent-based social and economic inequality. Caste discrimination still goes unchallenged and often unacknowledged. But the tireless work of activists and supporters continues to raise awareness of this issue.

We are a unique organisation in the UK, aiming to change values and practices through policy changes worldwide. We are making a difference and we add our voice to a growing global human rights movement campaigning for change on caste based discrimination.

We are very proud of what we have achieved this year as highlighted in this Review, but we have ongoing challenges – not least one of political will here in the UK. We achieved something remarkable in 2013. However the stalling tactics of the UK Government has meant the legislation we so welcomed in 2013 has yet to be implemented.

In September 2015, DSN-UK was pleased to welcome Danguole Kleinaityte – known to many of you as Danni – as Assistant to the Director. I would like to just say what an enormous difference she has already made.

As always I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Anti-Slavery International, without whose generous support DSN-UK would struggle to survive.

We warmly congratulate our own Jeremy Corbyn MP in successful and overwhelming election as Leader of the Labour Party in 2015 and are delighted that despite his many other important commitments he continues to be our Honorary Chair.

Special thanks to the trustees and patrons, who give so much of their time and energy.

Most of all our thanks to you as members and supporters. We couldn't do what we do without you.

I will continue to update you on our progress – both our successes and challenges. **We do hope you will be able to continue to support us in the years to come as we fight for a caste free world.**



*Nana Varnas*

## Summary

Dalit Solidarity Network (DSN-UK) began in 1998 and now brings together organisations and individuals in the UK, who are concerned with caste-based discrimination and aims to link grassroots priorities with international mechanisms and institutions to make an effective contribution to the liberation of those affected by caste discrimination.

DSN-UK registered as a charity in 2004 and since then has continued to grow as an effective campaigning and advocacy organisation working on caste discrimination in the UK. Our membership includes concerned individuals, development agencies, trade unions, journalists and academics.

We are working towards equality and social justice for Dalits both in the UK and worldwide in other caste affected countries. We are a small pioneering headquarters organisation in the UK, working jointly with other likeminded groups, building strategic alliances to maximise advocacy opportunities and build a stronger network of organisations. Our aims are to change values and practices through policy changes worldwide. We raise awareness and support Dalit demands for justice – through an effective advocacy programme.

In 2015, DSN-UK strategy and objectives were reviewed and updated by the trustees and the Director. We are happy now to share with you **our new five objectives**, as agreed by the DSN Board in May 2016, which will guide you through this report:

1. UK Parliamentarians actively and positively engage into Dalit cause worldwide;
2. Businesses operating in caste-affected countries introduce measures to address caste-based discrimination throughout their supply chains;
3. Support international advocacy efforts to address caste-based discrimination at the UN, EU and other international institutions;
4. Increase media attention on all aspects of caste-based discrimination;
5. DSN-UK seen as an expert and respected voice on caste-based discrimination.

## 1. UK Parliamentarians actively and positively engage into Dalit cause worldwide

### 1.1 Caste legislation in the UK

Despite the 2013 amendment to the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill (now Act), imposing a duty on the Minister to activate Clause 9 (5)(a) of the Equality Act 2010 [EA 2010], to make ‘caste an aspect of race’, the legislation outlawing caste discrimination is yet to be implemented.

In July 2013 the government published an indicative timetable setting out the process of evidence-gathering and consultation it intended to undertake prior to legislating, and anticipated that a Draft Order would be introduced to Parliament during summer 2015. The timetable was not put into action and a feasibility study completed in 2014 was never published.

The government continues to state that its position is now under review in light of the Employment Appeal Tribunal’s decision in *Chandhok & Anor v Tirkey* [2014] UKEAT 0190\_14\_1912, which found that caste discrimination may in certain cases already be unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. The government claims that the case implies there is an existing legal remedy for caste discrimination cases under the “ethnic origin” protected characteristic. However, this assertion is misleading and incorrect.

The founder of the Odysseus Trust, Lord Lester QC states: *'Employment tribunal cases do not create authoritative precedents - they only decide the case on the merits for the individual claimant. There is no guarantee that individual suffering caste discrimination will achieve the same outcome in a future case. Moreover, Tirkey was not determined on grounds of race discrimination (with the "ethnic origins" component incorporating caste), but on grounds of indirect religious discrimination. It cannot be said to have created a precedent by which caste discrimination is protected in UK law'*.

DSN-UK continues to work alongside Dalit organisations and groups as well as international human rights organisation, urging the Government to proceed without further delay, implement the legislation against caste discrimination and ensure protection to hundreds of thousands of its own citizens.

## **1.2 All Party Parliamentary Group for Dalits [APPG]**

In September in 2015, the Chair of the APPG, Jeremy Corbyn MP was overwhelmingly elected the Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of HM Official Opposition. He has since stood down as the Chair of the APPG for Dalits. In May 2016 Yasmin Qureshi, Labour MP for Bolton South East, was appointed as the new Chair of the APPG for Dalits. Lord Harries of Pentregarth was re-elected Co Chair of the Group.



*DSN-UK AGM 2015 at the Houses of Parliament*

On 10 September 2015 Lord Harries, Lord Lester and Cat Smith MP met with the then Minister for Women and Equalities, Nicky Morgan MP to discuss the timetable for the caste legislation but received the same holding response: 'HMG are currently assessing whether in the light of the Tirkey v Chandok judgement there is a need for specific legislation'. We are still awaiting the outcome of that assessment.

The Group also continues to raise the issue of caste-based discrimination and violence across South Asia. In December 2015, Lord Harries of Pentregarth asked Her Majesty's Government a parliamentary question on its assessment of the current human rights situation in India. DSN-UK provided a briefing and supplementary questions for the debate.

## **1.3 Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO]**

DSN-UK continues to engage with the FCO and briefs them on specific issues relating to caste discrimination across South Asia. DSN-UK Director Meena Varma, has continuous dialogue with India Desk Officer at the FCO, who is also the Human Rights lead on multi-lateral engagement at the EU.

## **1.4 International Development Committee**

DSN-UK made a submission to the International Development select committee inquiry on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The submission made with the Asian Dalit Rights Forum highlighted the need to add specific targets and indicators to the agreed Sustainable Development Goals.

## 2. Businesses operating in caste-affected countries introduce measures to address caste-based discrimination throughout their supply chains

### 2.1 The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)



DSN-UK Director, Meena Varma is a board member and the Treasurer of the ETI and took part in its strategy review process reframing the ETI work under the banner of the UN Principles on Business and Human Rights.

DSN-UK is a key member of the core Tamil Nadu Multi Stakeholder Advisory Group, which is now seeking to expand its work within the mills in Tamil Nadu and start to widen the scope of the training to address labour rights issues. The project has now reached its second phase, moving from addressing the health needs of the workers to awareness training on labour rights and access to benefits. The issues of exploited labour in this sector disproportionately affect Dalit women and girls.

DSN-UK is the lead NGO in the Rajasthan Stone Group, which aims to build a sustainable model and framework that can help this sector address core labour rights issues from processing yards to quarries. The Group has been working with various partners, including companies, NGOs, trade unions and local industry players, to better understand the labour conditions in Rajasthan's export sandstone sector. The programme will look to address some of the issues of bonded labour (mostly Dalits) by the provision of ID cards to all workers.

### 2.2 DSN-UK and Rights Education and Development Centre [READ] project on Sumangali

At the end of 2013 DSN-UK partnered with READ in a programme of work, funded by Textile Recycling for Aid and Development (TRAID), aimed at *Ending the Sumangali Scheme*.



In May 2015 a National Consultation meeting, mainly organised by READ, took place in Delhi. National partners included the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights and the Movements for Justice and Women. The plenary speakers included Shamina Shafiq, a recent member of the National Commission for Women. The event had over 90 attendees from grassroots activists, national campaigners and international Trade Unions, NGOs and international companies. The event discussed the problem of forced labour in the textile mills from a local, national and international context. At the end of the event it was agreed that a multi stakeholder, multi-pronged action would be the way to secure change in the sector.

The READ project has already started to deliver training on labour rights and access to benefits in their region of Erode to mill management. This has included presentations on state and national law and regulations concerning protection of the workforce.



Computer training programme at READ

In November 2015 DSN-UK Director visited READ as part of the Year 2 assessment, prior to submitting reports. She received an update on the project, met the team on the ground and 10 young women who told their stories of how READ had helped to transform their lives. One of the main successes of the project has been the consultations with mill management, reaching over 50 mills. Five mills that have had direct training from READ have instituted an Internal Complaints Committee and a



Committee to address Sexual Harassment in the workplace. Membership of the committees is predominantly young women workers and READ is the NGO representative.

In Year 2 a joint mill consultation was undertaken with the District Social Welfare Office. In total 487 mills were invited to participate and 250 mills attended. As a result, 30 mills registered with the District Collector's office under the Hostel Registration Act. Inspections are now taking place on the premises of sanitation facilities, nutrition and sleeping arrangements.

### **3. Support international advocacy efforts to address caste-based discrimination at the UN, EU and other international institutions**

#### **3.1 The United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC)**

**In June 2015**, Meena Varma spoke at a side event at the UN Human Rights Council, 'Caste and Gender-Based Forced and Bonded Labour', highlighting the work DSN-UK had undertaken with READ (see above). The event was sponsored by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), Minority Rights Group (MRG), Anti-Slavery International, Franciscans International (FI) and organised in association with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN).

Meena urged business across the globe to take greater responsibility for their supply chains. Other speakers included Urmila Bhoola, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery- via video link - and Coen Kompier from the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

**In November 2015** Meena attended the UN Forum on Minority Issues as a part of the Minority Rights Group delegation. The focus of the session was on the criminal justice system and NGOs interventions included presentations on Minority Rights Group International (MRG) and the Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN had also organised a side event with the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Ms Rita Izsák, on combating impunity and the need for effective justice system action on behalf of minorities.

**In March 2016** Meena was invited by the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to be one of the panellists for a side event with Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, following her [report](#) on caste-based discrimination. The side event opened with a short presentation of the main findings of the report by the Special Rapporteur, and was followed by an interactive dialogue with the invited panellists from different regions including Yemen and Mauritania. Meena spoke of the need to address discrimination in the UK and questioned the ongoing delays by the UK Government in implementing legislation that had already been agreed by the Parliament.



*The UN Human Rights Council, Geneva*

The International Dalit Solidarity Network delegation at the Forum also attended and made several [interventions](#) on crimes committed against Dalits, lack of legal protection and impunity.

#### **3.2 The International Dalit Solidarity Network**

DSN Director continues to Chair the International Dalit Solidarity Network's (IDSN) Board and Council. Last year saw the approval by the Council of a [new strategy and structure](#).

The IDSN Council (now known as the General Assembly) met in March 2016 in Geneva. The meeting was opened by the Chief of the Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He confirmed the Office support for the cause and gave us an update on the launch of the UN Guidance Tool to address 'discrimination based on work and descent'. The General Assembly had all its key members from across the globe attending and was extremely proactive and productive.

### 3.3 Minority Rights Group International (MRGI)

Meena is currently Vice Chair of the MRGI Council and Chair of their Management Committee. In 2015, the Council meeting took place in Geneva to coincide with the UN Forum on Minority issues.

At the Forum, MRGI held two side events – one on 'Combating Impunity' and the other on 'Looking forward, looking back on the Minorities Forum'. During both Dalits and caste discrimination were mentioned as an issue of violence against women and impunity. The UN rapporteur on Minorities, Rita Izsak, then pledged her support and commitment to address the issue and include it in her report to the Human Rights Council in March 2016 (see above).

## 4. Increase media attention on all aspects of caste-based discrimination



*A panel at the 'Caste out of Shadows' conference*

'Caste out of Shadows' conference, organised by Christian Aid, DSN-UK, Karuna Trust, Village Services Trust and Anti Slavery International with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the South Asia Institute was held in September 2015. The conference explored the persistence of caste-based discrimination and exclusion, in relation to gender and human rights, and addressed the role of INGOs in the eradication of caste-based discrimination, and the need to have a Dalit focus in their programmes in caste-affected countries.

Meena spoke at a number of different events and media broadcasts. She spoke at a Human Rights Watch event at the Royal Institute in October, on Caste discrimination in education in India. HRW had published a report '[They say we're dirty](#)' which was the main focus of the event. Meena also gave several interviews about caste discrimination in the UK, including to the BBC Asian Network, LBC 97.3 Drive Time and the [Economist](#).

At Human Rights Defenders and Corporate Accountability event hosted by the International Service for Human Rights and Business and Human Rights Resource Centre from the floor Meena managed to raise the issue of corporates in India and the necessity to address caste discrimination if they wish to address their labour rights issues.

During the weeks prior to the visit of the Indian PM, DSN-UK alongside the Awaaz Network and South Asia Solidarity sent a co-signed [open letter to the PM, Narendra Modi](#), promoted protests, and wrote [articles](#) and briefings to the press and media. As a result several press pieces highlighted the growing unrest of the Modi regime. There was an excellent piece featuring DSN-UK members on [Channel 4](#).



## 5. DSN-UK seen as an expert & respected voice on caste based discrimination

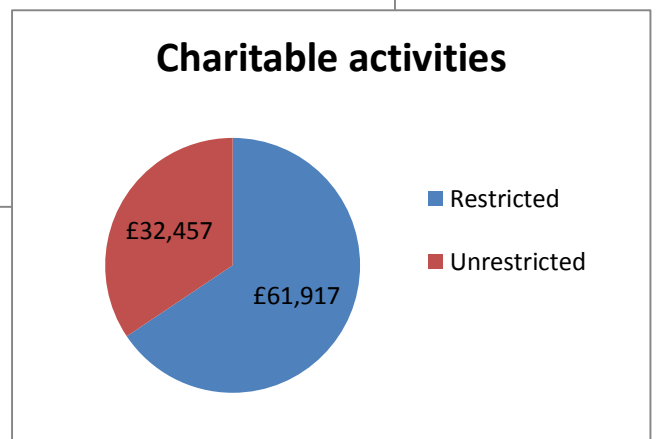
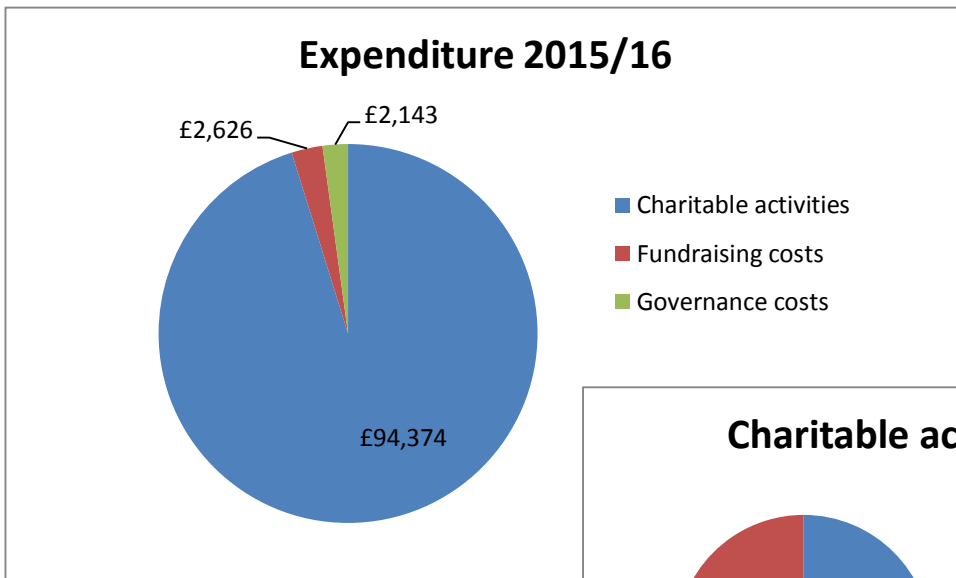
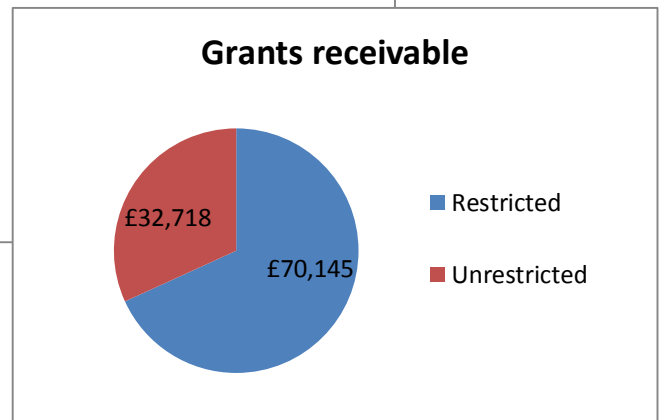
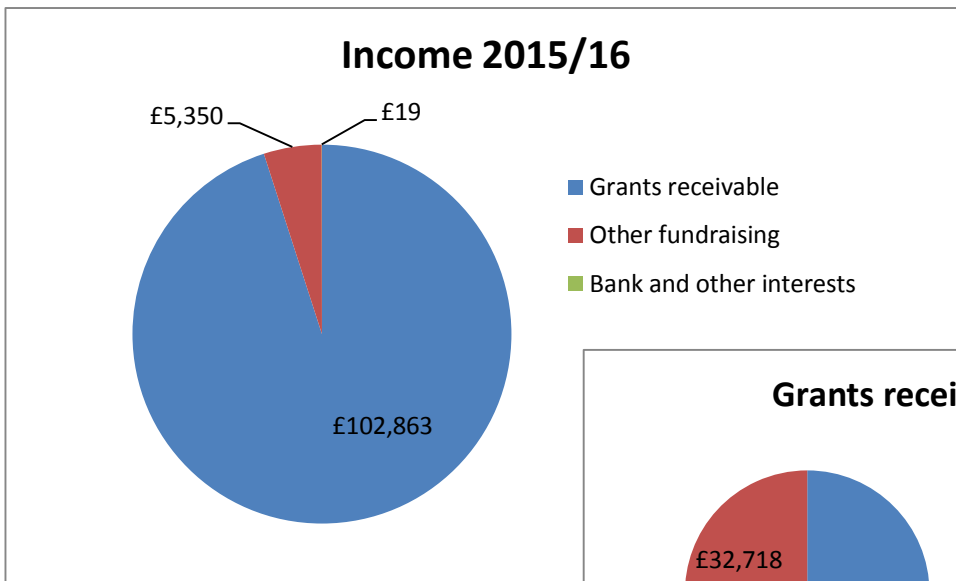
DSN-UK Director has been approached on several occasions by some lawyers representing Dalit asylum seekers to provide expert witness statements on the status of Dalits in caste-affected countries and the violence and abuses they face.

Since December 2015, a Working Group on Caste Discrimination and Dalits has been formed under the umbrella of BOND – British Overseas NGOs for Development. Among the key organisations are Christian Aid, DSN-UK, VODI, Village Service Trust and Anti Slavery International. The group meets regularly and is developing plans on working with international development organisations in addressing caste-based discrimination worldwide.

### Highlights and challenges of the year

- UK Government continues to stall over the implementation of the legislation to outlaw caste discrimination in the UK.
- A successful event 'Caste out of the Shadows' co-organised and held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).
- DSN-UK, in support of the Asia Dalit Rights Forum, made a submission to the International Development Select Committee inquiry on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the absence of attention to caste-based discrimination.
- UN SDGs fail to address caste discrimination in its goals or targets.
- Director, Meena Varma invited to speak about caste-based discrimination in the UK at a panel with the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.
- Meena gave several interviews about caste discrimination in the UK, including to the BBC Asian Network, LBC 97.3 Drive Time and the [Economist](#).
- Mainstream media, in South Asia in particular, fails to adequately cover caste atrocities.
- Prior to the Indian PM Narendra Modi's visit an open letter was sent, protests organised and press releases issued covering caste discrimination.
- In partnership with READ DSN-UK made a submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the contemporary form of slavery, on bonded and forced labour in supply chains.
- Yasmin Qureshi elected as the new Chair of the APPG for Dalits and Lord Harries of Pentregarth re-elected as a Co Chair.
- DSN-UK Board approve the adoption of revised strategic objectives.
- Twitter followers of @DSNUK reach over 4300

## Accounts at a Glance



# Thank you

Anti Slavery International

CasteWatch UK

Christian Aid

Ethical Trading Initiative

Evan Cornish Foundation

Farthing Trust

International Dalit Solidarity Network

Karuna Trust

Methodist Church in Britain

Minority Rights Group International

School of African and Oriental Studies

South Asia Institute

St Clare and St Francis Trust

Three Oaks Trust

TRAID

Village Services Trust

Wyndham Trust

*And again special thanks to all the trustees, members and supporters of the Network who give up their time to attend meetings, rallies and other events.*