

# **Valu-Trac Administration Services**

# Annual Assessment of Value Statement as at 31 March 2023

# VT AJ Bell Income & Growth Fund

# **Fund Information**

| Investment Manager:      | AJ Bell Asset Management Ltd.   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Authorised Fund Manager: | Valu-Trac Investment Management Limited (Valu-<br>Trac)   |
| Investment Objective:    | The investment objective of VT AJ Bell Income & Growth is to achieve capital growth in line with the Consumer Prices Index) whilst also generating income over a typical investment cycle (5-10 years) through a focus on exposure to equities (particularly those with above average dividend yield). The Fund has a target average yield of 3-5% per annum (over a trailing three-year period), which is not guaranteed and may be subject to change as the assumptions on which the target was calculated may change.  |
| Investment Policy:       | The Fund will seek to achieve its objective by investing mainly in other collective investment schemes (especially in the early stages of the Fund's growth) (including those managed or operated by the ACD and those with both passive and active strategies) and so provide exposure to equities (particularly those which the Investment Manager considers to have dividend yields above the average for the relevant regional stock markets and including investment trusts) and bonds as well as alternative asset classes (such as property and infrastructure). The Fund is also expected to invest directly in equities and bonds. The Fund may also invest in transferable securities, money market instruments, deposits, cash and near cash. The Fund will not have any particular geographic, industry or economic sector focus although, as the Fund has a dual mandate of both capital growth and sustainable income there will be a focus on higher income generating assets as well as those which are expected to generate capital growth. Lower yielding assets will also be used to ensure diversification. The Fund may have exposure to emerging markets through its investments in e.g. collective investment schemes or direct equities. Derivatives (that is sophisticated investment instruments linked to the rise and fall of the price of other assets) are held only for efficient portfolio management purposes. |
| AUM (£):                 | £47.4m  |
| 1.7                      | ± 17 1 1111   |

Our assessment has been conducted against the seven criteria outlined by the FCA and the fund has been rated via the "traffic light" system. This has been summarised within the table, below:

| VT AJ Bell Income & Growth Fund | AUM (%) |   | Quality of<br>Service | Per | formance | FM costs -<br>general | Eco | onomies of<br>scale | mparable<br>rket rates | ( | Comparable services | Clas | ses of units | Overall |
|---------------------------------|---------|---|-----------------------|-----|----------|-----------------------|-----|---------------------|------------------------|---|---------------------|------|--------------|---------|
| Overall                         | 100.0%  | • | G                     | 0   | А        | G                     |     | G                   | G                      | • | G                   | •    | G            | G       |
| I Net Accumulation              | 43.1%   |   | G                     | 0   | А        | G                     |     | G                   | G                      |   | G                   |      | G            | G       |
| I Net Income                    | 56.9%   |   | G                     | 0   | А        | G                     |     | G                   | G                      |   | G                   |      | G            | G       |

The table below shows the overall summary for the previous assessment i.e. carried out as at 31 March 2022:

| VT AJ Bell Income & Growth Fund | AUM (%) | ( | Quality of<br>Service | Per | formance | M costs - | Eco | nomies of scale |   | mparable<br>rket rates | ( | comparable services | Class | ses of units | Overall |
|---------------------------------|---------|---|-----------------------|-----|----------|-----------|-----|-----------------|---|------------------------|---|---------------------|-------|--------------|---------|
| Overall                         | 100.0%  | • | G                     | •   | G        | G         | •   | G               | 0 | G                      | • | G                   | •     | G            | G       |
| I Net Accumulation              | 44.2%   |   | G                     |     | G        | G         | •   | G               |   | G                      |   | G                   |       | G            | G       |
| I Net Income                    | 55.8%   |   | G                     |     | G        | G         |     | G               |   | G                      |   | G                   |       | G            | G       |

A new methodology for determining an overall fund rating has recently been implemented. This updated methodology looks to arrive at a notional, average rating, considering the individual ratings for each of the discrete assessment criteria. This approach may differ from the approach taken previously.

# **Previous Remedial Actions**

None

# **New Remedial Actions**

• To consider an alternate benchmark for the assessment of the Capital Growth within the fund.

## **Detailed Assessment**

#### Quality of Service

The AFM has chosen to outsource the following services to third party providers:

- Investment Management services: AJ Bell Asset Management Lt.
- Depositary services: NatWest Trustee and Depositary Services Limited
- Custodian services: RBC Investor Services Trust, UK branch (RBC)
- External audit: Frame Kennedy

Other functions such as fund administration, fund accounting and transfer agency are undertaken by Valu-Trac, and all outsourced services are subject to continuous oversight.

As part of our assessment of service providers, no systemic issues have been identified as part of our ongoing due diligence, including an assessment of investment breaches, pricing errors, complaints, fund liquidity and ongoing adherence to the investment policy.

#### Conclusion:



Green

The AFM has concluded that all services being provided in relation to the on-going management and administration of the fund, including those provided directly and those currently being provided by third parties, are operating as unitholders may reasonably expect.

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value, in relation to Quality of Service.

#### **Performance**

## Objective:

The investment objective of VT AJ Bell Income & Growth is to achieve capital growth (in line with the Consumer Prices Index) whilst also generating income over a typical investment cycle (5-10 years) through a focus on exposure to equities (particularly those with above average dividend yield). The Fund has a target average yield of 3-5% per annum (over a trailing three-year period), which is not guaranteed and may be subject to change as the assumptions on which the target was calculated may change.

# Constraining Benchmark:

None

#### **Comparator Benchmark:**

Net Total Return: IA Mixed Investment 20%-60% Shares Sector Average

#### Target Benchmark:

Capital Growth: UK CPI

Income Generation: An annualised yield of 3%

# Peer Group:

The VT AJ Bell Income & Growth Fund Custom Peer Group\*

\*derived from the IA Mixed Investment 20%-60% Shares Sector, with the VT AJ Bell Income & Growth Fund, incorporated subsequently.

# Minimum Recommended Holding Period:

Income Generation: 3 years

Capital Growth: 5 years

# Management Approach:

Active Asset Allocation, Passive Implementation

The change in capital value for each available share class within the fund, is shown below:

| Change in Fund Value | 1 year<br>to<br>Mar-2023 | 1 year<br>to<br>Mar-2022 | 1 year<br>to<br>Mar-2021 | Since<br>Inception<br>to<br>Mar-2023 |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Benchmark*           | 10.1%                    | 7.0%                     | 0.7%                     | 20.4%                                |
| I Net Accumulation   | -4.1%                    | 4.9%                     | 24.5%                    | -0.5%                                |
| I Net Income         | -4.1%                    | 4.9%                     | 24.0%                    | -0.8%                                |

Source: Valu-Trac

The income generated (percentage yield) by each available share class within the fund, is shown below:

|                    |          |          |          | Since           |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
|                    | 1 year   | 1 year   | 1 year   | Inception       |
| Yield              | to       | to       | to       | to              |
|                    | Mar-2023 | Mar-2022 | Mar-2021 | Mar-2023        |
|                    |          |          |          | (avg. per-year) |
| I Net Accumulation | 4.3%     | 3.7%     | 3.7%     | 3.6%            |
| I Net Income       | 3.8%     | 3.7%     | 3.8%     | 3.4%            |

Source: Valu-Trac

The net total return and peer ranking (where available) for each available share class within the fund, together with the return of the relevant benchmark, is shown below:

| Net Total Return*  | 1 year | 3 years<br>(avg. return<br>per-year) | Since<br>Inception<br>(avg. return<br>per-year) | Since<br>Inception<br>Peer Rank |
|--------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Benchmark~         | -5.0%  | 5.1%                                 | 1.6%  | -                               |
| I Net Accumulation | -0.3%  | 5.0%                                 | 3.5%  | Highest 14%                     |
| I Net Income       | -0.3%  | 5.0%                                 | 3.5%  | Highest 13%                     |

<sup>\*</sup>To 31 March 2023

Source: Morningstar

The AFM has referred to both internal and external data sources for performance statistics, where the AFM has deemed this to be appropriate.

<sup>\*</sup>The UK Consumer Prices Index (CPI)

 $<sup>^{\</sup>sim}$  The IA Mixed Investment 20%-60% Shares Sector Average

#### Conclusion:



# Amber

Both share classes within the fund have failed to generate capital growth in line with the UK Consumer Prices Index (UK CPI), since inception. However, in mitigation, over recent periods, the UK CPI index has approached levels not seen for forty years or more. Taken in absolute terms, the loss in capital value within the fund would appear to be relatively modest. Where the AFM may feel that a benchmark may no longer be appropriate for a fund, the AFM will seek to select an alternative.

Both share classes within the fund have generated a yield in excess of the target yield over each of the last three, discrete years and also in aggregate, since inception.

The fund has out-performed its comparator benchmark, on a total return basis, since inception.

The AFM has also assessed the investment risk within the Fund and has concluded that the level of investment risk taken is not out of keeping, for an actively managed Fund of this type (further details on how the AFM arrived at this conclusion may be provided upon request).

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving reasonable value, in relation to Performance.

# **AFM Costs - General**

Each share class within the Fund has its own Annual Management Charge (AMC). The AMC may be thought of as being the amount deducted from a share class's average net assets to pay for the investment management of that share class; this charge will typically include a proportionate allocation from the Investment Management Fee, ACD fee and other, ancillary fees.

The current AMC of each share class, together with the current, average AMC for the relevant, selected peer group, is shown within the table below:

| Annual Management Charge (AMC) | Current |           |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|--|--|--|
| Amua Wanagement enarge (Awe)   |         | Peer Rank |  |  |  |
| Peer Group                     | 0.85%   | -         |  |  |  |
| I Net Accumulation             | 0.39%   | Lowest 4% |  |  |  |
| I Net Income                   | 0.39%   | Lowest 4% |  |  |  |

Source: Valu-Trac / Morningstar

# Conclusion:



#### Green

The Investment Management Fee is proposed by AJ Bell Asset Management Ltd. Owing to the limitations of the host ACD model which the AFM operates, the AFM is unable to comment upon the specific profit margin this fee may generate for AJ Bell; instead, the AFM will focus upon ensuring that this fee appears reasonable, in the context of the overall AMC.

The AFM fee is payable to Valu-Trac to cover the services undertaken by Valu-Trac as outlined in the Quality of Service section. The AFM will set fees based on the overall cost of operating the business. Most of the AFM's costs are fixed (such as staff and property costs), and the AFM will set its fees in such a way that ensures the costs are apportioned fairly across the range of funds which it operates. The AFM reviews its fee model via various means, such as

through external independent consultancy and market benchmarking reviews against similar firms in the market. The results of these reviews are incorporated into the AFM's governance arrangements, up to Board level.

Other notable, ancillary fees may include the depositary, custodian, and auditor fees. The AFM regularly reviews these fees compared to other funds operated by the AFM and, where the information is available, other funds within the wider marketplace, to ensure that they remain competitive.

Unitholders are currently paying an AMC lower than the market average for similar funds.

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value, in relation to AFM Costs - General.

# **Economies of Scale**

The fund currently has assets under management (AUM) of less than £250m, which is the threshold we consider reasonable to consider if economies of scale have been passed on to investors.

The fund has a tiered depositary fee, subject to a minimum amount, alongside other fixed fees, such as audit fees. Therefore, as the fund AUM grows, the proportion of such costs, relative to overall fund size, will decline, in percentage terms.

#### Conclusion:



Green

Although the fund is smaller than £250m, we note the fees charged are already comparable to funds with a similar objective, but a larger amount of assets, indicating the fees are already representative of a much larger fund.

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value, in relation to Economies of Scale.

#### **Comparable Market Rates**

The current and historic On-going Charges Figure (OCF) for each unit class within the fund, together with the current, average OCF for the relevant, selected peer group, is shown within the table, below:

| On-Going Charges Figure (OCF) | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | Current |            |  |  |  |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|------------|--|--|--|
|                               |       |       |       |         | Peer Rank  |  |  |  |
| Peer Group                    | -     | -     | -     | 1.14%   | -          |  |  |  |
| I Net Accumulation            | 0.88% | 0.75% | 0.80% | 0.65%   | Lowest 17% |  |  |  |
| I Net Income                  | 0.88% | 0.75% | 0.80% | 0.65%   | Lowest 17% |  |  |  |

Source: Morningstar

# Conclusion



Green

The ongoing charges includes the costs of underlying funds held. This is currently estimated at 0.23%, but can change as the underlying investments made change.

Unitholders are currently paying an OCF lower than the market average for similar funds.

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value, in relation to Comparable Market Rates.

# **Comparable Services**

Valu-Trac act as AFM for nine funds, for which AJ Bell Asset Management Ltd. are the Investment Manager. Six of these funds are 'growth' funds designed for long term wealth accumulation, two aim to achieve a combination of income and growth, and one overlays a responsible investment objective. This fund is one of the two income targeting funds, and it priced consistently with the other fund in the range.

The services provided in respect to this fund are also aligned with the AFM's normal operating model.

#### Conclusion



Green

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value, in relation to Comparable Services.

# **Classes of Units**

There is only one type of share class in this fund (albeit with an accumulation and income variant) and all investors are offered the same level of service; therefore, all shareholders of this fund are treated equally in all respects.

#### Conclusion



Green

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value, in relation to Classes of Units.

#### **Overall Assessment**



Green

The AFM has concluded that unitholders are receiving good value in respect to six of the seven, discrete criteria assessed above i.e. each has been assessed as green.

With regard to performance, both share classes within the fund have failed to generate capital growth in line with the UK Consumer Prices Index (UK CPI), since inception. Where the AFM may feel that a benchmark may no longer be appropriate for a fund, the AFM will seek to select an alternative.

The AFM has concluded that the unitholders within the VT AJ Bell Income & Growth Fund are receiving good value, overall.

01/08/2023