

Yare Valley Society Newsletter



The objects of the society are to protect the natural landscape and wildlife habitats of the Yare Valley south and west of Norwich, principally between Harford and Bowthorpe. We oppose any development that would detract from its natural qualities and support projects which would preserve the valley for the benefit of all.

Issue 109 May 2021

Spring in the Valley



Swans nest on the Yare

Hilary Hann

After some false starts, it seems that Spring is now underway.

Planning at National, Local, and Site level features largely in this edition, but other items range from Slow Ways to floods, from the Dasgupta Review to the Environment Bill, and from pollution to a missing goddess. More background information on items in the Newsletter is on our website <https://yarevalleysociety.org.uk/> , and don't forget our Facebook Page for your photos and comments about the Valley.

Important items on AGMs, **the need for committee members**, and subscriptions are at the end of the Newsletter.

John Ayton 1933-2021

It was with great sadness the committee learned of the passing of John Ayton. Until recently John was with us as Vice-Chair. It was in the last Newsletter that we had announced his retirement from the committee.

John had many interests: history, archaeology, sport and rambling, and creative arts including pottery and sketching. John's professional career was in Planning, holding a number of senior posts at Norfolk County Council. Over many years, his wide-ranging experience has been invaluable to the Society in formulating responses to numerous planning applications, and in preparing for Planning Inspectorate Public Enquiries. His friendly calm and rational presence at committee meetings will be sorely missed.

His son has created a memorial site, where you can read more about his full and interesting life, at <https://johnbowdenayton.wixsite.com/memorial>



John's poster for the 2019 AGM



John Ayton

Lockdowns, Floods and Pollution

There are some upsides!

Lockdown provided time and impetus for many to discover the value of the green space of the Valley. For some it was the first time they appreciated what was on their doorstep. Our thanks to Eaton Golf Club who helped to ease the burden of foot traffic on our valley by opening up their golf course to walkers during lockdown.

Floods demonstrated another important role of the Valley, that of storing floodwater and so reducing the chances of inundation downriver.

Pollution brought a quick response from the Environmental Agency (EA), and a local initiative alerted us to other pollution and dangers in the depths of our river.



Broad, path, and river are united

Hilary Hann

Although extensive, the flooding did not beat records. In 1912 the flood was much higher, as evidenced by the plaque at Keswick Mill. In that year there was devastation along the Yare and Wensum. On the Yare, the road bridge at Lakenham was undermined and collapsed, and there was serious damage to Trowse bridge. Although the recent floods raised concerns about the undermining of the Mathematical Bridge and it was closed, this was only for a short time. The new Bridge of Dreams was unscathed, although flooding on the Bowthorpe Southern Park causeway rendered it inaccessible from that direction.



Flood level August 1912 at Keswick Mill

Thanks to swift reporting from the public, oil pollution on the river was acted upon promptly by the EA, although it took them some time to track down the source and stop it. The oil entered the river from a storm outflow upstream of Chancellors Drive. Oil pollution is recognised as having a serious impact on wildlife, and in this case oil was seen as far downstream as Marston Marsh.



Danger for Ducks

Jennifer Oey

River pollution and dangers of a different sort was found by a team of scuba divers. Limited in their activities by the lockdown, they ventured into the cold depths of the pool below Cringleford bridge. Over a few hours they successfully retrieved eight shopping trolleys, three bicycles, a single bed frame, two road traffic cones and an assortment of metal and scaffolding poles. The team reported that their haul was only a quarter of the rubbish in the pool, and that the river bed was strewn with rubbish. The pool is a popular spot for wild swimming – look before you leap.



From the depths

The Diveline Podcast

Valuing the Valley

In February, HM Treasurer published the Dasgupta Review. The review highlights the flaws in using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of the wealth and growth of national economies. The blind spot of GDP is the way that it almost completely ignores the rate at which a nation's natural resources are depleted, and its biodiversity is degraded. The report identifies an urgent need to have better economic measures in place if we are to avoid environmental catastrophe.



Water Storage in the Valley – the Christmas Floods

The Valley deserves economic recognition for its key roles: storing large quantities of water and so reducing flooding and damage downriver; slowing the rate of water run-off by its vegetation; acting as a carbon sink in its marshes; providing a wildlife corridor for flora and fauna; and in conferring on all of us the mental and physical health benefits of its green space ecosystems.

The Environment Bill

The bill was first launched in July 2018, but has been repeatedly delayed. The bill should be setting long-term binding targets for improving the UK's natural world: tackling air and water pollution and protecting wildlife. In January the bill was delayed yet again when the government claimed the pandemic had left too little time to scrutinise it properly. It is rescheduled for the legislative programme for this session, but don't hold your breath.

Planning

There is an urgent need for affordable homes, and there is an urgent need, highlighted by the pandemic and global warming, for their occupants to be able to enjoy good access to green space, and for local biodiversity to be safeguarded. Recent and proposed changes in Planning seem to be reducing the chances of these urgent needs being met.

Planning: National

The White Paper "Planning for the Future"

This is serious. The government plans to sweep away many of our planning controls as part of their "Build Build Build" strategy. The proposals in the White Paper have met with widespread dismay, not only amongst environmental groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and the Wildlife Trusts, but in the wider community, including local councillors and a number of prominent Conservative MPs. Theresa May described them as "ill-conceived" and "mechanistic", and Jeremy Hunt said they risked "eroding local democracy, reducing affordable housing and encroaching on our beautiful countryside" The White Paper pays little attention to protecting our green spaces or to securing the links between them. Local democracy and local knowledge are side-lined.

We know several of you responded to the complicated consultation on the White Paper. A big thank you - it was not an easy task. The YVS response is on our website.

A Planning Bill based on the White Paper (and hopefully on the consultation responses to it!) is scheduled for the new session of Parliament. If the government persists with its stated intentions, and the bill is passed unaltered, you, and the YVS, could find it very difficult to defend our green space in the future. Be ready to lobby MPs and take other action.

Planning: Local

The Local Plan: two Policies unsound?

At the outset of the drawing up of the new Greater Norwich Local Plan, there were numerous sites in the green space of the Valley put forward for development. Again, a big thank you to all who, in the early consultations, wrote in to object. Your efforts succeeded in whittled the number down to a last two, both at UEA!

The greater Norwich Local Plan entered its final Consultation Stage in February to March. Representations at this stage were of a technical nature, and could only be made on the "legal compliance and soundness" of the Local Plan.

We argued that the two Policies that relate to the UEA sites, should be removed from the Local Plan because they are unsound. One site is between Suffolk Walk and Bluebell Road and the other the Grounds Depot Site, Bluebell Road. The reasons the Policies are unsound are twofold. Firstly, the policies mark a step back from the commitments to the green infrastructure of the Yare Valley contained in previous local plans, and so could be argued as not conforming to the environmental section of the National Planning Policy. Secondly, the Policies are inconsistent with overarching environmental policies contained in other parts of the Local Plan.

Our case will be examined by a Local Plan Inspector, and we await the decision.

Planning: Sites

1. Colney Burial Site

In January, YVS joined with Colney Parish to express concerns about possible pollution at times of flood, and a lack of protection of wildlife in a proposed extension of the Colney burial Site. Pollution is a concern for all, including children, who wild swim, or paddle in the river. We each had a representative who spoke at the South Norfolk District Council Development Committee Zoom meeting. After questions and some discussion, approval was given for the extension, but subject to conditions. There will be checks put in place for pollution levels, and protection of the landscape and ecology will be addressed by a Landscape and Woodland Management Plan - to include a commitment to increase the proportion of native trees, and to safeguard local wildlife, including the protection of a heronry.



Flooding near the existing Colney Burial Ground

2. Dandelion Day Nursery at Eaton Vale Activity Centre

This was an interesting case, it showed how recent changes to Planning Rules could lead to possible unintended consequences. Unusually, the full text of the YVS objection was placed before the planning committee.

The Dandelion Day Nursery at Eaton Activity Centre is an outdoor “Forest School” nursery that has been in operation since early 2018 under land use Class F2. The Nursery applied for retrospective change of use from outdoor sports or recreation (Use Class F2) to day nursery (Use Class E). This seems straightforward enough, but recent government changes (September 2020) have increased the range of Class E enormously. It now covers many uses ranging from “...retail sale of goods ...” to “Industrial processes”. Most importantly, changes of use within the new Class E do not constitute development, and so do not require further planning permission, e.g., a subsequent change of use from Day Nursery to “industrial processes”. YVS objected to the application, because it opened the door to possible undesirable developments.



Gateway to Valley green spaces

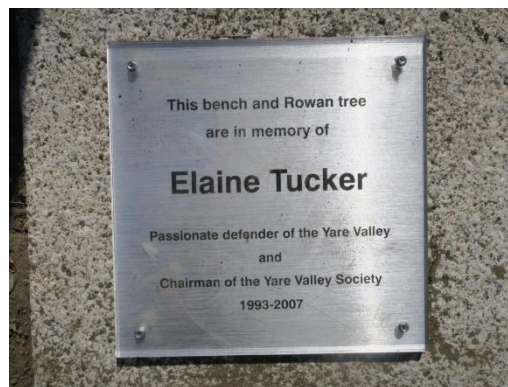
YVS also expressed concern about pedestrian/vehicle conflict on the narrow part of Church Lane. The Nursery is reached by way of a very narrow section of Church Lane. Church Lane is a popular recreational access route for pedestrians and cyclists to Eaton Common, Marston Marsh, Keswick Mill, and the network of bridleways, paths, and quiet roads beyond. There is little room for cars and other vehicles to pass pedestrians in this section, and there is often a need for pedestrians (if able) to squeeze to one side. The access road is certainly not suitable for anything but occasional vehicular use, and, bearing in mind the rural setting of this entrance to the Yare Valley Character Area, widening of the road is undesirable.

Norwich City Council approved the application, but with conditions. The conditions include restricting change of use to Class E(f) (Creche, day nursery or day centre), requiring, should the use cease, removal of perimeter fencing and structures, and implementing an information travel plan. The latter will hopefully reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflict, but is less than our requested pedestrian priority.

Elaine Tucker Plaque Restored

You may have noticed that the memorial plaque to our past Chair, Elaine Tucker, near the Mathematical bridge at UEA had become detached from its base. YVS funded a replacement Plaque and it has now been installed. The wording on the plaque is the same as the original.

Elaine Tucker took over from John Thurman as Chair of YVS in 1993, and served as Chair until her death in 2007. Elaine was a very active campaigner for protecting the Yare Valley against undesirable development, including representing the Society at Planning Enquiries. She was fortunate to have the support of her husband Frank, who was very experienced in planning matters. The Plaque was erected, a Rowan tree planted, and a bench installed in memory of her contribution to the Society and the wider community.



Elaine Tucker Plaque

Our thanks to John Thurman for making the arrangements for restoring the Plaque. Our thanks also to the UEA who provided the stone slab, and to their staff who fixed it, having removed the old steel plinth by pulling it out with a chain attached to truck!

Slow Ways in the Valley



B1113 to Keswick Mill bridleway

We all enjoy our slow ways in the Valley, but a new project involving large scale public collaboration aims to create a national network of “Slow Ways”. “A Slow Way is a route for walking (or wheeling) between neighbouring cities, towns and villages, using a variety of existing paths, ways, trails and roads.”

Slow Ways from Norwich cross the Yare at Cringleford, Harford and Lakenham Bridges, but only one route, Norwich-Mulbarton, passes along part of the length of the Valley. It uses the Bridleway from the Mulbarton Road (B1113) across to Keswick Mill, before turning south west to head past Keswick Hall, to pick up the bridleway beside the Southern Bypass. On reaching Intwood Road, a left turn takes you through some of the prettiest parts of the Norfolk Countryside to reach Mulbarton.

Where is the Rabbit Goddess?

We ended the last Newsletter announcing the forthcoming arrival of a Rabbit Goddess at the Sainsbury Centre Sculpture Park. Unfortunately, the Goddess has been delayed by Covid and is now expected in early autumn.

Rabbit Goddess is only a rough translation. Its proper title is Usagi Kannon. It will form part of the Japanese-Swiss artist, Leiko Ikemura's exhibition "Usagi in Wonderland" open from 11 July to 12 December 2021. The Sainsbury Centre press release says: "... Usagi Kannon (Rabbit Bodhisattva of Mercy), produced in response to the Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011, emanates compassion, engendering hope rather than despair."

The sculpture is in bronze and three metres high; sufficiently large to provide a place for visitors wishing to shelter beneath the generous skirt. The picture probably does less than justice to how it might appear when viewed in the landscape of the Valley.

Another addition to the Sculpture Park, expected in July, is Anthony Caro's "Goodwood Steps". This is a large steel structure 33 metre long and 6.5 metre high. The Society is generally supportive of additions to the Sculpture Park, but in this case, it did have reservations about siting the sculpture on the open green space between the Ziggurats and the Broad. We asked for the Sculpture to be positioned closer to the Ziggurats and so to interfere less with the green sweep of grass by the broad. One Councillor agreed with us and voted against, but approval was granted without change. The sculpture will be in place for a limited time of three years.



Usagi Kannon 2012/19

Leiko Ikemura

Photo Andreas Lange ©Leiko Ikemura and VG Bild-Kunst

AGM, Committee Members and Subscriptions

In the extraordinary circumstances of last year and after receiving no objections to proposals in the Newsletter, the decision was made to cancel the AGM and for the existing committee to remain in office. This year we hope to hold an in-person AGM in September, when the position on meetings might be clearer. Failing an AGM in person, a Zoom AGM will be arranged.

We desperately need committee members!

Please give careful thought to whether you can play your part in protecting and enhancing the Valley Green Space by serving on the committee. It is not an arduous task and you give as much as you feel able. As a first step please email yarevalleysociety@gmail.com with your name and telephone number. We will then get in touch by telephone to explain what is involved and answer any questions.

There remains one last thing. With all else that has been going on, quite a few members have not renewed their subscriptions for 2021. Please check you have renewed yours. Your subscriptions ensure we can continue to work for the good of the Valley.

To renew, please complete the Membership Form below and mark it RENEWAL. Return the Form and your subscription to the address given at the bottom of the form. If you are paying by bank transfer, or by standing order, you may wish to return the form as an attachment to yarevalleysociety@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support

The Committee

Yare Valley Society



Shy water vole: help keep me safe

Jill Liley

Yare Valley Society

Membership Form

Name (Please Print)	Mr/Mrs/Miss/ ...
Address	Post Code:
Telephone No.	
Email Address	
Other Family Members	
Are you interested in giving active support to the Society e.g. with administration, IT, Planning, Ecology, or other? If yes, please indicate your area of interest:	
<p>Membership Subscriptions (Please delete as appropriate)</p> <p>Individual: £5 per year or £20 for 5 years</p> <p>Family: £7.50 per year or £30 for 5 years</p> <p>Payment may be made by cheque payable to "Yare Valley Society"</p> <p>Bank transfer or by standing order to Yare Valley Society, Sort Code: 20-62-53, Account. Number: 30994286. Please reference your payment by your name.</p> <p>Please still return this completed form as directed below.</p>	
<p>Permission to store and process your personal data</p> <p>To enrol you as a member of the Yare Valley Society, keep you informed of the activities of the Yare Valley Society and enable you to actively participate in supporting the Society, we need to record some of your personal details.</p> <p>To comply with the GDPR we must ask for your permission to store and process your personal data for this purpose. Please see our privacy policy at https://yarevalleysociety.org.uk/about/join-us/</p> <p>I give my consent to the Yare Valley Society recording personal information about me</p> <p>Signature: Date:</p>	
Please forward your completed form by email (yarevalleysociety@gmail.com) or post to Hilary Hann, Treasurer, 18 Bluebell Road, Norwich, NR4 7LF	
Office Use: Date returned:	Subscription renewal date: