

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 111 February 2022



Steps and steps

Quite a lot about the University of East Anglia in this edition: examination by the Planning Inspectors of UEA development site proposals, additions to the Sculpture Park, and restoring and extending the Lasdun Wall. The Lasdun Wall is beyond its design life of 50 years, and if it is to be there for the next fifty years, work urgently needs to be done.

Other Newsletter items include the creation of a digital Newsletter Archive, the East Norwich Master Plan, industry in the Valley, an evolving wildflower meadow, and some good news on the government white paper “Planning for the Future”.

Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) Hearings

The National Planning Inspectors examining the GNLP will be holding hearings in February and March. The March hearings will look at “Matters Issues and Concerns”. Two Issues (under matter 14) relate to Valley green space:

The first issue raises questions about proposed development in the Valley on the University Campus between Suffolk Walk and Bluebell Road (Ref GNLP0133DR) and at the UEA Grounds Depot Site, Bluebell Road (Ref GNLP0133E). A thank you again to the many of you who wrote in under the earlier consultations. In spite of our efforts the two sites were included in the plan. In a final step the YVS made detailed representations to the inspectors under what is known as Regulation 19 on these two sites, making the case that their inclusion in the plan was “unsound” because it conflicted with environmental policies in other parts of the GN Local Plan.

The second issue looks at the inclusion of the Bawburgh and Colney Lakes as a Country Park in the local plan. YVS argued that the lakes should continue to have this as a long-term aim, and in the shorter-term the Yare Valley Walk should be extended to include the lakes, having regard to safeguarding their biodiversity.

Find out more at <https://www.gnlp.org.uk/>

Have a say on the Lasdun Wall

The UEA hosts some of the most architecturally significant buildings within the Yare Valley, none more so than its Grade 2 listed Ziggurats and the Lasdun Wall. The latter is the building that forms the backdrop to the Ziggurats and is the central component of the UEA campus. However, since Sir Denys Lasdun designed it in 1962-1964, it has deteriorated significantly and now needs refurbishment.

The UEA is currently consulting on proposals for this and for an extension of the Lasdun Wall. The UEA argues “the primary purpose of the Phase 1 Project is to de-risk the Lasdun Wall. The deteriorating condition of the building and its services puts specialist science facilities at severe risk. Successful delivery of the Project will de-risk the Lasdun Wall whilst achieving as close as possible to zero asbestos legacy within the building, it will also provide an essential contribution, and the only feasible route, to the University achieving its Net Zero Carbon targets.” It is anticipated that full refurbishment of the Wall through 4 phases may take up to 15 years to complete.

The Phase 1 proposals also include the building of two extension spurs to provide new science research and teaching space. These spurs would be at the eastern end of the Wall, the end that is adjacent to Chancellor’s Drive to the north, and near the large car park. The Yare Valley Society attended the consultation exhibition and after speaking with project team members has no particular concerns at this stage.

The extension is at the Fellows Green end of the Lasdun Wall (near the Chancellors Lodge) on its northwest side (increases the width of the wall). You can view the pre-planning consultation until 18 February at www.uea-lasdunwall-phase1.co.uk, where you can leave comment.

Goodwood Steps

Complementing Lasdun’s brutalist architecture are “The Goodwood Steps” that have now made their appearance on campus:



Brutalism to the fore

Something to ponder about on the Yare Valley Walk.

Rabbit Goddess Appears

Another addition to the Sculpture Park, after several delays, is the intriguing Isagi Kannon or “Rabbit Goddess” by Leiko Ikemura which has finally arrived in the Sainsbury Centre Sculpture Park at UEA.

The Sainsbury Centre says “This hybrid, mythical bronze figure was created in response to the Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima disaster of March 2011. Like the Buddhist divinity Bodhisattva Kannon, Ikemura’s ‘Rabbit Goddess’ emanates compassion and mercy”



Inside the Rabbit Goddess

The Rabbit Goddess is located to the west of the rear of the Sainsbury Centre and makes an interesting detour from the Yare Valley Walk. The sculpture invites children to explore inside and out.

New Masterplan for East Norwich emerging

The Yare Valley Society is keeping a watching brief on the new Masterplan emerging for East Norwich and has engaged in a Zoom consultation with other stakeholders. The Masterplan will impact on the Yare Valley, and the Society’s objectives in relation to the Masterplan are:

- To safeguard the green infrastructure corridor of the Yare Valley.
- To promote biodiversity in the Valley
- To promote walking and cycling routes along the valley to Whitlingham Country Park and to link them with the River Wensum walking and cycling routes.

Information on the developing Masterplan is at <https://www.norwich.gov.uk/masterplan>.

Industry in the Yare Valley

A new display board at Danby Wood casts light on its industrial past:

Flora and fauna

The wood contains a variety of trees, including some very old oaks, woodland wildflowers and is home to a wide range of wildlife. There are many mammals and birds to be found in the wood. See if you can find the bees' nest in a walnut tree halfway down the main path.



Sweet Violet



Scarlet Elfcup fungus



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Industrial history

The site was used for chalk and flint quarrying and mining for many years up to the 1930s. This has resulted in undulating banks of chalk spoil and steep paths in parts.

Chalk was formed during the Cretaceous period from the remains of microscopic marine plankton including algae, deposited as a sediment on what was then the sea floor. Flint was formed within the chalk sediment and being a hard rock was an important building material used across Norfolk. From the late 18th century, lime kilns

were used at the Danby Wood site to burn chalk to make quicklime for use in mortar and agriculture.

Chalk was also ground up to make whiting, used in making toothpaste, cosmetics, crayons and whitewash paint. A roller, powered by a mule continuously walking around a vertical shaft, would grind the chalk. Chalk from the lime works was mixed with linseed oil to make putty. The business was owned by the Pearce family from the 1860s with the proprietor aptly nicknamed "Putty Pearce".



Image believed from 1850s - Lime workers standing above one of the kilns



1921 - Limeworks from Eaton golf course, showing seven worker cottages to the left



1926 survey pub 1928

1928 - Ordnance Survey map showing position of the lime works buildings

Danby Wood Display Board

The chalk and flint were extracted via an extensive network of tunnels that still exists. The tunnels are not open to the public, but some accounts of past explorations of the network are to be found on the web. Danby Wood is one of five Norwich Local Nature Reserves in the Yare Valley. Details of the other nature reserves are on our Yare Valley Walk page.

Creating a Wildflower Meadow

In the coming years we are looking to see the Strawberry Field evolve into a Wildflower Meadow. The Strawberry Field slopes gently to the river from Bluebell Road and lies next to the McCarthy and Stone retirement homes site.

In July and October of 2021, volunteers worked, first to remove ragwort before seeding, and then to remove cuttings after mowing. Both activities were directed at promoting the growth of wildflowers. Our thanks to Matt Tomlinson for organising the working parties.

There are still some doubts on the detail of future management of the Strawberry Field and YVS are seeking clarification from the City Council.

Newsletter Archive created

Building on John Thurman's extensive collection of past Newsletters and other sources, and after much scanning, we have created a digital record of all the Society Newsletters back to Issue 1 in June 1989, when John was the first Chair.

A copy of the archive has been lodged with the Norfolk Record Office. A start has now been made on making the archive available on our website on the Newsletter Page.

“Planning for the Future” paused – but threat remains

In December of 2020 YVS thanked members who had responded to what was a difficult government consultation document on proposals for reforms to the local planning system contained in the White Paper “Planning for the Future”. YVS and its members joined many environmental groups in expressing concerns about the adverse impact many of the reforms would have on green space and biodiversity.

It was with relief among environmental groups and many of our elected representatives that, following a government reshuffle, it was announced the proposed reforms were being paused.

The CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) saw this as a campaign win, and it was, but paused is not the same as stopped. “Planning for the future” is still there and retains its threat to inhibit the Yare Valley Society, other environmental groups, and democratically elected local bodies to effectively comment on and influence the details of developments having a direct impact on our Valley. We must not let down our guard, and must continue to emphasise:

The Yare Valley is not just a pretty place

The Yare Valley is a key part of our country's ecological network and plays important roles in combatting and mitigating climate change. It confers on all of us the mental and physical health benefits of its green ecosystems.

We must be vigilant and active if we are to sustain and improve the ability of the Valley to fulfil its important roles.

If you need to renew your membership, or if you are reading this and are not a member, please renew or join by going to <https://yarevalleysociety.org.uk/about/join-us/>

The Covid situation permitting, our next Newsletter will be giving details of an AGM for 2022. Please be in touch at yarevalleysociety@gmail.com if you would like to support us by joining the committee.