

DEDHAM VALE AONB AND STOUR VALLEY

FORUM

FRIDAY 16TH JUNE 2017

SHRUBS FARM, LAMARSH

by kind invitation of Robert and Sara Erith

Report prepared by Cathy Shelbourne
Sea Shell Communications



ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM *Speakers from left to right: Simon Amstutz, Tracey Brinkley, Councillor Nigel Chapman, Howard Davies, Lord Gardiner, Robert Erith and Professor Jules Pretty*



Key issues in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley over the last twelve months

ROBERT ERITH TD DL
Chairman of the Dedham
Vale AONB and Stour
Valley Partnership

Robert and his wife Sara welcomed everyone to Shrubs Farm, commenting on a wonderful turn-out, looking forward to an interesting and educative day, and drawing attention to the volunteers who did a brilliant job.

The key issues over the last year were:

- The launch of the Management Plan, a framework for keeping the Valley as it should be
- The review of the boundaries of the AONB. Consultant Alison Farmer had been appointed to assess the AONB's special qualities, and the case for its extension. Everyone, from councils to MPs, local communities and individuals, had all been very supportive - and as Robert hoped that the extension would happen within his lifetime, it needed to take place soon!
- The possibility of a Dark Skies park within the AONB [or just outside, as subsequent commentators indicated]

Robert Erith was born and brought up on a farm at Ardleigh on the edge of the Vale and has lived in Lamarsh for over 50 years. The Erith family have lived in the area for over 400 years. He has an arable farm with Higher Level Stewardship and has restored hedgerows, ponds and other features as well as having amassed a collection of rare and unusual trees, many of them oaks.

Robert has been Chairman of the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Partnership for eight years and is also President of the Dedham Vale Society and a Committee member of the Colne Stour Countryside Association. He was High Sheriff of Essex 1997-98 and is a Deputy Lieutenant for the County. He is also a Vice President of the Essex Community Foundation, of which he was a founder-trustee.



Priorities in the AONB and Stour Valley for the coming 12 months

COUNCILLOR NIGEL
CHAPMAN, Chairman,
Dedham Vale AONB and
Stour Valley Joint Advisory
Committee (JAC)

Nigel added his welcome, and thanks to Robert for the use of the barn at Shrubs Farm.

The priorities for the coming year are:

- The inevitable look over the shoulder at the new government's approach to protected landscapes, and to Brexit
- A sideways check to see what local authorities are doing in their Local Plans; Colchester's Draft Plan was recently approved for public consultation and Nigel has ensured that recognition of the quality of the Night Sky in the Vale has been included. Braintree and Tendring Districts are at similar stages of their Local Plans. "We must recognise that the population of the area will continue to increase dramatically, and some of those people will want to enjoy, exercise and

relax in the AONB and the wider Valley. We must be ready to welcome and to cope with them."

- The new annual business plan, operating jointly with Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, with seven priority areas: Conservation and Enhancement, Planning, Enjoyment of the area, Advocacy, Working together, Finance, and Team Development
- A Project Officer has been appointed to develop projects not funded from the core supporters Defra and local authorities
- A bid has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Partnership Scheme for a £2m project around the Stour and Orwell rivers (including part of the Dedham Vale AONB), delivering benefits to the landscape and the wildlife
- A more modest bid, Wild in the Stour Valley, is being submitted to the HLF,

Nigel was born in Colchester and has, therefore, known the Dedham Vale all his life. His earliest memory is of visiting distant relatives, who grew watercress in a Stour tributary! He was first elected to Colchester Borough Council in 1982 - representing a rural ward from 1998. He became the council's representative on the River Colne Countryside Project and then on the AONB Project in 2002, becoming chairman of the Joint Advisory Committee in 2009. His other great interest is housing and, in particular, social housing; frequently echoing the words of the 19th century social reformer, Octavia Hill, who wrote, 'the need of quiet, the need of air and, I believe, the sight of sky and things growing, seem human needs, common to all.' He is keen to support and encourage a thriving landscape, where natural assets are conserved and enhanced and where people, communities and businesses can prosper.

delivering access, wildlife and landscape projects. Other funding opportunities are being pursued

- The very successful River Stour Enhancement Project continues, supported by the Environment Agency and Essex & Suffolk Water, and by generous landowners - and by parish councils and amenity societies this year too

- Continuing to raise the profile, especially through the twice-yearly newspaper "snapped up voraciously as soon as it is published!" and the support of John Grant in the *East Anglian Daily Times*, and the *Essex County*

Standard. Simon Amstutz's monthly e-newsletter goes far and wide, and word of mouth continues to spread information quietly and diligently

- The value of tourism, a major investor in the wealth creation of the whole community, is over £90m per annum. Two particular projects will be making their mark: the Stour Valley Tourism Action Group and the River Stour Festival in 2018

Nigel expressed his thanks to and pride in the dedicated staff team working hard for both AONBs, especially

Simon for his leadership skills. He also thanked David Wood for his co-operation and support as chairman of Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, and the volunteers and others who put in over 1,000 days of work through the Project. "I am confident that our excellent volunteers will continue to confound us all with their contributions to wildlife conservation, access, survey work etc."

Ambitious plans are in place to support the priorities for

the coming year. "We want to maintain a thriving, living landscape where natural assets are conserved and enhanced and where people, businesses and communities can prosper. We are all part of the Stour Valley and we must work together for its future."

"We must recognise that the population of the area will continue to increase dramatically, and some of those people will want to enjoy, exercise and relax in the AONB and the wider Valley. We must be ready to welcome and to cope with them."
- Councillor Nigel Chapman



SIMON AMSTUTZ
AONB Manager

Simon has worked in countryside management in the private, charitable and public sector for around 25 years after graduating from the University of Leeds before completing a Post Graduate Diploma in Countryside Management. He started his career working on private estates in the South of England before joining the National Trust in Buckinghamshire.

Much of the last 15 years has seen Simon working in the nationally protected landscapes of the Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coast & Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Simon has a particular interest in landscapes and the many facets that make them so valuable to society.

The work of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project over the last 12 months and plans for the next 12 months

Simon's presentation focussed on:

- Wildlife and landscape, particularly control of invasive species such as giant hogweed, by volunteers as well as through the use of digger machinery

- Planning applications and issues, mainly dealt with by Paula Booth, AONB Officer. Current ones include land adjacent to All Saints, Great Horkesley; re-development at Brantham; Konings, Hill Farm, Boxford; Thrift Farm Barns, Great Horkesley; and up to 95 houses at Finchingfield Road just outside Steeple Bumpstead

- Natural Beauty and Special Qualities Document - next month Simon will be giving a presentation to the National Association of AONBs outlining what natural beauty is, based on this pioneering work done in the AONB

- Position statements, which can be seen on the AONB website and in the newspaper

- Enjoying the area, with the aid of publications such as *A visitor's guide to Constable Country*; *Walking in Constable Country*; and *Walking in Dedham*; and taking part in the Suffolk Walking Festival

- Access: helping to improve access for everyone

- Working together:
 - the wonderful volunteers under the leadership of Emma Black and Neil Lister, and previously, Neil Catchpole;
 - the National Association for AONBs family who work together all year round, but especially during Outstanding Landscapes Week, when the Twitter campaign and #OutstandingHour achieved trending status
 - the graduate trainees and student placements, which have very successfully provided experience to Danny Thorrington, Sam Weir, Ben Rigby, Lauren Goring and Alona Ochert
 - the landowners, farmers, stakeholders who own or manage the land, and

come together for forums, conferences, workshops etc

- The next 12 months: Simon's personal view took in the impact of Brexit and the general election on how Outstanding Landscapes are farmed and supported environmentally. The *Wild in the Stour Valley* bid will be realised by the end of the summer; the outcome of the Stour and Orwell LPS bid will be known in the Autumn.

Domestic tourism may well increase with the emphasis on experiences. Outstanding Landscapes can offer the great outdoors, although excessive activity such as the recent 24 hour walk isn't recommended! [Simon's feet are still recovering].

As volunteering opportunities increase, the offer to the individual is becoming more competitive.



TRACEY BRINKLEY
Tourism Development
Officer, Babergh and Mid
Suffolk District Councils

Much of Tracey's career has been with local authorities, in Housing Management, Sheltered Housing, Affordable Housing Development and the Communities Team but she has also worked for a housing association, and with the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project.

Tracey joined the Economic Development team in October 2015, in the newly created Tourism Development post. Her role is to implement the Visitor Destination Plan prepared by specialist tourism consultancy AECOM and develop Tourism Action Groups around different geographical locations. She also supports new or existing tourism attractions and establishes links and relationships with other key organisations.

The Stour Valley Offer: tourism and a river festival

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Visitor Destination Plan 2015 concluded that Tourism Action Groups (TAGs) should be created for different Tourism Character Areas (TCA) - of which the Stour Valley is one!

Within each TCA, clusters of tourism and leisure businesses will be actively engaging visitors in inspiring and authentic experiences linked to some of the most attractive countryside, villages and market towns in England. The foundation for the experiences will be the wealth of attractions, sightseeing opportunities, and activities, with gentle adventure, family outdoor fun, and exploration and discovery through trails being integral to the overall offer. This will be augmented by quality-driven niche experiences that are directly linked to the key characteristics of the area, such as cooking in the Suffolk countryside, wool weaving and dyeing, painting the Suffolk countryside, and wood craft.

Main towns and villages will be recognised as hubs and gateways for the TCAs, with each having the ability to support visitors through a network of facilities and amenities (ie accommodation, attractions, catering, retail) that offer a friendly, welcoming, and authentic service.

In order to survive, TAGs are business-led although they can involve Town and Parish Councils and related Community Groups. They are based around geographical areas not local authority boundaries - such as the Waveney Valley, Shotley Peninsula, Heart of Suffolk, south Babergh, and the Stour Valley.

They can develop new and existing products and initiatives to boost the visitor economy and will focus on increasing visitor overnight stays, out of season. Around Constable Country and the Dedham Vale, the aim is to draw interest further into the Stour Valley, away from the honeypots. The TAGs work with the Suffolk Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) - Suffolk Coast, All about Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, and Waveney Valley - as well as with Visit Suffolk.

What's happening with the Stour Valley Tourism Action Group? Since its establishment in December 2016 there have been Network Meetings around the area covered, at the National Trust in Flatford, Munnings Museum in Dedham, Dedham Vale Vineyard, Assington Mill, Kentwell Hall; and next one in July is at Milsoms in Dedham.

There has been lots of support from the AONB team, and plenty of interest from local businesses to work collaboratively for mutual benefit. The Stour Valley TAG has chosen to develop artistic themes, and a sub group is working on a group tour offer. Further developments include the adoption of a formal constitution at next meeting, to open a bank account and put in a funding bid to commission the Creative Coop to help formulate an identity and brand to strengthen marketability of the area. By auditing what the area has, trails can be created, using mapping and digital technology as well as printed leaflets.

The TAG is also supporting Ruth Philo and Stuart

Bowditch's film of the river Stour, and River Stour Festival in 2018. In Sudbury, they are helping to develop the silk weaving heritage and Silk Festival in 2018; and the Gainsborough House with HLF funded bid called *Reviving an Artist's Birthplace: A National Centre for Gainsborough*. It is also assisting the Wool Towns Association develop a Wool Town theme.

By way of an example of a successful and co-ordinated campaign by a TAG, Tracey outlined the Arthur Ransome anniversary celebrations. As well as organising the hugely popular Pin Mill Jamboree, the Shotley Peninsula TAG commissioned permanent information boards, set up a walking trail and Parade of Sail, hosted the *Shanties on the Shore* initiative involving local schools, and have created a geo cache.

What lessons have been learnt?

1. It is vital to identify business champions and leaders; without them, it's a struggle
2. Utilise the areas' strengths/assets (review and agree what these are!)
3. Identify gaps - and fill them!
4. Agree on a small number of achievable goals - don't reinvent the wheel
5. Networking events are useful - identify partners, and allow businesses to engage with each other
6. Plan and look ahead for future years - particularly for anniversaries
7. Co-ordination and communication are essential, particularly if organising events
8. The local authority are there to support; they cannot do it alone, everyone has to do their bit



HOWARD DAVIES
Chief Executive, National Association for AONBs

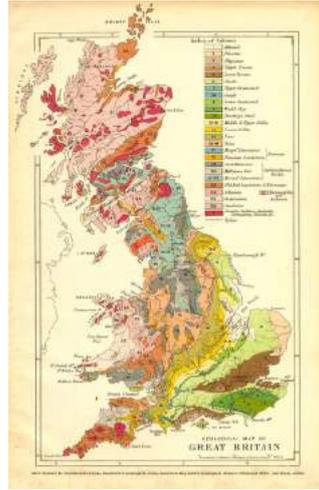
Howard is passionate about the natural environment. His career started in farming, before moving into the private sector working in research and development. After a period of extensive travel, he came back to the UK to work for various practical conservation-focused organisations in the third and public sector, before moving on to work within the Countryside Council for Wales' Protected Landscapes team. He is Honorary Vice President of the North Wales Wildlife Trust, and an appointed Board Member of Natural Resources Wales. Before his current post he was Director of Wildlife Trusts Wales.

Howard has a degree in Natural Sciences with Biology, a passionate interest in the relationship between people and place and actively promotes collaboration and consensus building. He is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Howard has been actively engaged in his local community for over twenty years and volunteers with many organisations, charities and businesses. His home is the Ceiriog Valley, North Wales.

"Landscape affects us emotionally. We can dress it up in policy, but it is an emotional thing."

AONBs: a benefit to society



Back to basics. Howard took his audience on a journey through the geology of the British Isles. The land mass is tilted, with frequent fault lines, and consequently the geology changes every 20-30 miles unlike in Europe. We are very lucky that the UK has such a rich and varied geological base underlying what we see today. The geology has an impact on the topography, soil drainage, habitat and land use - as was illustrated dramatically with photos from AONBs in the High Weald, Stour Valley and Pennines.

The built environment is also affected, through the use of building materials local to

the place, resulting in stone cottages in the Cotswolds, and timber framed houses in the High Weald.

Land management, choice of crops, enterprise and business all results from the geology. This gives us insight into why the landscapes of the UK are so rich and varied, and how they are linked into our identities. It was in the 1950s that the government programme of designation began. There are now 46 AONBs covering 8,000 square miles, managed by groups with 700 elected members - and covering 15% of England. By way of contrast, the Wildlife Trusts manage 5,000 square miles. The designation of National Parks continues. It is not just for the benefit of the locality; it is in the nation's interest to safeguard these areas. These living places form part of the working structure - see the infographic.

So what are the benefits? While the cost to the country of maintaining the Dedham Vale AONB is about half a pence per person per year, the impact on the health and well-being to the visitors is enormous. The Management Plan for

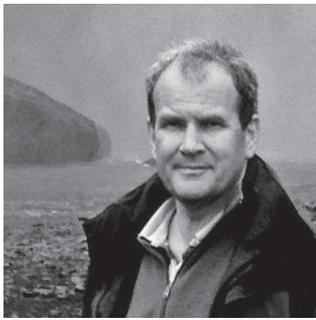
each AONB, underpinned by legislation, is a place-based plan driven by democratic processes; in other words, good thinking driven by local need.

And AONBs can guarantee magical and personal experiences, such as a barn owl hunting in front of Howard's parked van, swifts returning to his home in North Wales.

The challenge ahead is associated with the global economy; while worldwide communications are easier, there is such a rapid re-distribution of opportunities and resources. One local example is water extraction; Howard had a copy of *The Field* from March 1960 in which the writer was concerned about the enormous extraction of water from the river Stour, previously a fast-flowing salmon river.

In the AONBs, natural features meet human endeavour. The nation is aware of their importance, but it is down to local action to sustain them. Our role, whether emotional, academic or scientific, in caring for these places is absolutely vital.





JULES PRETTY
OBE, FRSB, FRSA

Jules Pretty is Professor of Environment & Society and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Essex. His sole-authored books include *The East Country* (2017), *The Edge of Extinction* (2014), *This Luminous Coast* (2011, 2014), *The Earth Only Endures* (2007), *Agri-Culture* (2002) and *Regenerating Agriculture* (1995). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology and the Royal Society of Arts, former Deputy-Chair of the government's Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, and has served on advisory committees for the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Royal Society.

He was presenter of the 1999 BBC Radio 4 series *Ploughing Eden*, a contributor and writer for the 2001 BBC TV Correspondent programme *The Magic Bean*, and a panellist in 2007 for Radio 4's *The Moral Maze*.

He received a 1997 award from the Indian Ecological Society, was appointed A D White Professor-at-Large by Cornell University from 2001, and is Chief & Founding Editor of the *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*. He received an OBE in 2006 for services to sustainable agriculture, an honorary degree from Ohio State University in 2009, and the British Science Association Presidential Medal (Agriculture and Food) in 2015.

This Luminous Coast was winner of New Angle Prize for Literature in 2013.

The links between the environment and good health

For the last 15 years, Jules Pretty has been involved with a research group at the University of Essex looking at all types of activity, from very active to purely contemplative, and the benefits of nature. How nature produces mental and physical health benefits is what he calls 'green exercise.'

"It works for all people, young and old, rich and poor, all cultural groups, in all green environments whether urban park of nature reserve, whether wild or farmed, small or large. We have shown that a five-minute dose of nature brings immediate well-being."

Nature provides a health service. But this message isn't working for everyone. Lifestyle health problems cost the UK £150 billion every year for treatment. Mental ill-health, obesity, loneliness... a question for all of us is: how do we use the natural environment to address health and social problems? Individuals are locked into current behaviours and lifestyles and it's very difficult to change them.

He suggests that immersive attention delivers a mental health benefit. So for example immersing yourself in a lovely landscape, being with friends, participating in a craft activity, can help close down the mental chatter that causes ill-health and stress.

Who hasn't taken a photo of a lovely sunset? Why do we like them? It's not so much the colour as our behavioural response - we stop, we settle, we feel calmer.

Why do we like going to the beach? Is it because when we are there we do nothing,

and watch other people doing nothing? Likewise, we know that when we visit an AONB, we will undertake some behaviour or activity with a positive mental attitude.

In the Japanese longevity hotspots of Nagano and Okinawa, there are a record number of happy centenarians. Their culture encourages healthy and tasty foods, regular physical activity outdoors, social connections and continued cognitive engagement.

What can AONBs do to engage people for life? There are a number of limiting factors. The design of our lived-in environment

"We have shown that a five-minute dose of Nature brings immediate well-being."

is such that in London, with its focus on public transport rather than private cars, residents walk 292 miles per year, whereas rural Britons walk just 122 miles. Obesity afflicts 35% of adults in the United States, but in the Manhattan district of New York, where there are pavements and public transport, people walk more and only 15% are obese.

Institutional inertia can be seen in hospitals - but not in hospices. Hospices are beautifully designed; they have 'green views'. Care homes too could be better designed. So many institutional environments are not designed for health and well-being; although in the past, parks were.

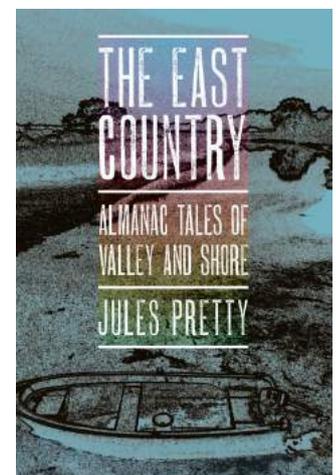
People need access to green spaces, and in fact AONBs are home to over a million people and more than 66% of the population in England live within half an hour of an AONB. But do they visit?

Jules cited the example of a group of Asian women living in Bradford who had been held back by cultural barriers from visiting their local countryside. When they did go, one commented that it was just like Gujarat. Geologically it wasn't, but in terms of space and wind and sun, it was.

The biggest challenge was to get children aged 6-11 into the AONBs. This was the time that memories were made, discoveries about the world, connections formed.

AONBs can help people to engage and deliver the health benefits by involving other social groups such as the WI, churches, care homes. "Immersive attention is the key concept. Being outside, in nature, is the best health service for the nation."

Professor Pretty's latest book, *The East Country*, will be published on 15th September 2017





LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity

Lord Gardiner was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity on 14th June 2017. Lord Gardiner served as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from 17th July 2016 to June 2017.

He is a Conservative member of the House of Lords. Lord Gardiner was Director of Political Affairs at the Countryside Alliance between 1995 and 2004 and Deputy Chief Executive between 2004 and 2010. He is a partner in a family farm, and lives in Suffolk.

Parliamentary responsibilities include rural ambassador and rural affairs, including broadband and mobile; biosecurity strategy, including endemic and exotic plant and animal disease, invasive alien species and Kew Gardens; animal health and welfare; commercial projects; landscape, including litter and national parks; climate change adaptation; National Pollinator Strategy; all Defra parliamentary business in the House of Lords.

The view from the Government

“So many people have no concept of the glories in their midst,” began Lord Gardiner, countryman, farmer, Suffolk resident and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State. “Even children in rural schools have no concept.” Opportunities for engagement need to be addressed, and a start can be made in local communities and especially with the next generation.

“I certainly feel an emotional commitment,” he continued, referring to earlier comments, and moving on to the natural masterpieces in Constable and Gainsborough country and the need to cherish the Stour Valley. “The landscape is not only beautiful but integral to tourism, food production, the economy and physical and mental health.”

He expressed a commitment too to the national parks and AONBs. “I will be doing my utmost to secure a bright future for these places.” Such areas encapsulate part of the national identity. Lord Gardiner is keen to explore positive opportunities, especially partnerships, and involvement of volunteers, a key and distinct element of national life. Within Defra

there was a desire to work together and ensure that volunteering continues.

He was pleased that the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project were helping young people to shape the future of the environment, through the graduate scheme and student placements. Sam Weir, Graduate Volunteer, was singled out for honourable mention. “We have a need to ensure that the next generation have opportunities in the environment and management sector.”

Everyone at the Forum would share in the ambition to increase visitor numbers and improve the local economy. “This is not a recreational playground for visitors, it’s where we work.” As an example of partnership, he mentioned a scheme at his family farm in Kimble to facilitate rural housing. “Small distinctive sensitive developments help communities thrive.” Despite challenging economic times, we all share a determination to maintain longstanding protections. Councils, businesses, communities, charities, Natural England, AONBs, all make enormous efforts to make everything work.

The landscape matters very much to many people; his largest postbag was over power lines. There is a recognition in government of its responsibility for natural places. Leaving the environment in a better state than the one we inherited is inherent in landowners.

Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is absolutely clear and steadfast about the environment. In the ‘great repeal bill’ the government will be bringing back protective legislation, and ensuring the designation of important landscapes through domestic legislation. These places are special because of our farming system; 70% of our land mass is farmed. He will be working with landowners, farmers, managers and other custodians.

Whatever one’s opinion of Brexit, the government will be putting its energies into designing policies for our natural environment. “The British countryside is our most precious natural asset. The success of our stewardship will be judged by those who succeed us. I will champion those places as Defra’s rural ambassador.”

**“The whole thrust of the 25 year plan is to enhance the environment. Food, farming and the environment is entwined. To reduce consumption we have to be wise custodians of useage. The great thing is partnership; the state can’t wave a magic wand.”
- Lord Gardiner**

Site visit to Foxearth Meadows



Foxearth Meadows, alongside the river Stour, is the only nature reserve in Britain managed primarily for dragonflies and damselflies. It's owned and run by A Rocha UK, a Christian charity whose aim is to mobilise Christians, churches and communities to care for the environment.

Since acquiring the site in 2013 volunteers have worked with Reserve Manager Mark Prina to manage the reed beds, remove invasive plants and open up ponds that had become stagnant or overgrown.

The result is a "forgotten corner of England," says Mark, who led the site visit. "It's home to harvest mice, eight species of bunting,

spotted kestrel, red admirals as well as dragonflies. We ensure that all habitats are here for dragonflies; it's an ongoing experiment to prove that management makes a difference."

Participants enjoyed spotting dragonflies and damselflies, as well as the series of ponds in the bends of the river before it flowed under a redundant railway bridge.

"I was pleased to be able to refer to some of the points made by the speakers in the morning," recalled Mark. "We had fun enjoying the nature but it was good to have the opportunity to explain the aims of A Rocha UK, how this reserve will help to enable these aims

Foxearth Meadows Reserve Manager Mark Prina led the site visit around the nature reserve adjoining the river Stour; above left, sniffing the wild mint; above right, one of the ponds; right, rampant vegetation; left, reaching the boundary.

and how they fit in with what we had heard earlier in the day."

For more information see www.arocha.org.uk/foxearth

Soundbites

"I was fascinated and inspired to hear how the AONB plays a local part in the national (even international) challenges of wildlife declines, social division in respect of wealth and opportunity and environmental stresses. I did not expect to be presented with such a far-reaching and fundamental assessment of the grave situation facing us all. Therefore I found Howard Davies speech utterly inspirational!"
- Mark Prina, Reserves Manager, Foxearth Meadows

"Being quite new to the area it was very beneficial and enlightening to see and hear some of the background to the AONBs. Having studied A level geography, the geology of the UK shouldn't be a surprise - but Howard's excellent linking with landscapes was a real lightbulb moment!"
- Verity Hales, Property Operations Manager, National Trust

"Good to see results developing from so many projects, and how the TAGs were helping businesses to work with councils and understand each other better."
- Councillor Alaric Pugh, St Edmundsbury Council

"We made lots of useful contacts, and will definitely be following up the Dark Skies idea as Little Ropers is open all year round."
- Ellie Mead, Little Ropers Woodland Camping

"It was pleasing to see the AONB taking a wider view, especially on the benefits of the environment to people's health. As a resident who lives so close to the Stour Valley, and with a countryside management background, I was pleased to see so much effective partnership working going on."
- Luke Bennett, East Suffolk Partnership

Site visit to Dedham Vale vineyard



The tour to Dedham Vale Vineyard gave the group of Forum delegates a real insight into the workings of a small business, both of their produce and the vineyard as a visitor opportunity.



About 15 delegates attended the vineyard tour, and our expert guides were Tom and Ben Bunting, father and son team. Ben (father) was incredibly knowledgeable about the provenance of wine and has a long history of knowing what grows well in the valley soils and what grape varieties produces the best end result.

Tom has been introducing new methods to the vineyard, such as a weeding machine that doesn't damage trunks which means you don't have to use herbicides. It was interesting to hear that the tap root of a vine can reach about 20 feet, making vines capable of resisting dry and even drought conditions.

They have 40 acres of vines, and produce wine from here plus from their vineyard on Mersea Island. They also produce cider and manage a local walnut orchard.

We learnt that it's a long-term investment, as not only do vines take a long time to grow and it can take years to get the grape to the best quality, but also the wine itself can take several years to go through the production line. The group enjoyed tasting three of the wines which were all delicious.

Their sparkling wine is currently available from the East of England Co-op and Waitrose and they are having discussions with other supermarkets.

The vineyard shop and tasting centre are close to the AONB at Boxted.

www.dedhamvalevineyard.com



WORD OF THE DAY: Emotional

as in Simon Amstutz feeling emotional about the huge contribution made by volunteers;
Howard Davies commenting that landscape affects everyone in an emotional way;
Lord Gardiner feeling an emotional commitment to the countryside

We should not feel afraid to express our emotions in response to the AONB

Q and A sessions



Q: Charles Clover: the Dedham Vale is the closest place to London of any potential site for a Dark Sky park. This is a great opportunity for tourism, as astronomers and others will be looking for somewhere to eat, drink and stay, particularly out of season. The areas within the proposed extension of the AONB are even darker.

A: Simon Amstutz (SA): Of eleven International Dark Sky Reserves in the world, the UK has four, all in national parks ie Brecon Beacons, Exmoor, Snowdonia and South Downs.

Q: Robert Erith: the local community are planning to buy the local pub, the Lamarsh Lion. What help can Babergh and Mid Suffolk give?

A: Tracey Brinkley: Lamarsh is actually in Essex! There are several examples in Babergh & Mid Suffolk of local communities buying the village pub, although it can be difficult to get funding, and community shares are often the answer. Visitors to the area enjoy the novelty of a pub run by locals.

Q: Neil Winship: Should meeters and greeters be accorded the authority of wardens so that they can deal with misbehaving visitors?

SA: Yes and no! The AONB are always keen to develop opportunities for wardens and rangers eg the Countryside Rangers at Flatford; however, the local authorities are best placed to manage behaviours.

Q: Councillor James Finch: congratulations to the AONB! In the ten years he has been involved with them, they have moved forward considerably in their thinking, and have moved on and involved businesses in all sorts of ways eg encouraging them to extend the season to encompass Night Skies. He also thanked the farmers who provide the landscape on a daily basis.

Q: Ruth Philo: Wondered what the progress was of *Wild in the Stour Valley*, and gave an update on her film; the walks are free. She is putting leaflets in surgeries to encourage the not so well to join them.

SA: The *Wild in the Stour Valley* bid has been a long time in formation. This £100k project will fund half a member of staff, and raise awareness of landscape features as well as involve volunteers in small projects working for wildlife.

Q: Peter Stephens: It is proper that the NAAONB endeavours to set the agenda for the realignment of farming subsidies during Brexit; does Defra have the capacity to manage complex and delicate negotiations?

A: Howard Davies: the landscape is the product of generations

of farmers; the CAP has some good things but is not perfect and there are ways to improve. It will be a difficult situation; the government will be negotiating a trade agreement with the WTO and small farmers will not survive tariffs on their products. The NAAONB is working with the National Parks to produce an offer; there are various views across the AONBs. Defra are welcoming feedback.

A: Lord Gardiner: the Defra team are crafting the domestic arrangements. In the meetings on exit arrangements the officials are of very high value, and clear about the need to work effectively. Defra want to hear and engage with farmers and landowners widely to ensure the vibrancy of farming businesses. In the 25 year plan it is important to have proper consultation with people.

Q: Charles Clover: every reading we've done this year of the dark skies is darker than areas already designated, and they are also darker than in the AONB dark sky area. Can Lord Gardiner give assurances that Natural England will not be prevaricating for another 25 years on designation of a dark sky area locally? Colchester is increasing in size rapidly. Is the government responding with the right degree of urgency?

A: Lord Gardiner: processes have to be undertaken; Natural England has a responsibility for these lovely places and is aware of aspirations around the country to expand. They have to be outstanding not just lovely.

Q: Nella Probert: Loneliness is very prevalent in the countryside; how can lonely people in towns be matched with those in the countryside?

A: Jules Pretty: the first step is identifying the problem; another challenge is having the resources. Maybe we can use existing institutions to engage with the problem eg encourage schoolchildren into care homes.

Q: Neil Winship: the overuse of cars is leading to dependence and addiction. How can we address our traffic problems?

A: Jules Pretty: have more cyclists! We need to effect cultural change and promote alternatives such as cycling.

Q: Unidentified questioner: once we've left Europe what is the situation for things like the water frameworks?

A: Lord Gardiner: the whole thrust of the 25 year plan is to enhance the environment. Food, farming and the environment is entwined. To reduce consumption we have to be wise custodians of usage. The great thing is partnership; the state can't wave a magic wand.

