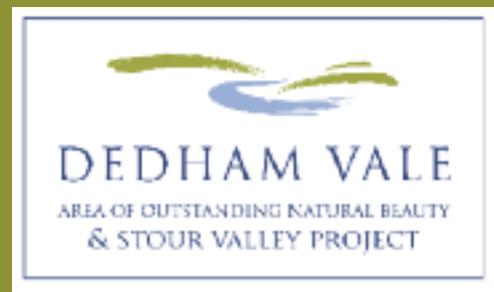


DEDHAM VALE & STOUR VALLEY NEWS



News and Visitor Information for the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley **Free** Autumn/Winter 2017/18



Playing Pooh Stricks at Daw's Hall Nature Reserve

Educating the next generation is a key to a life long interest in nature and conservation

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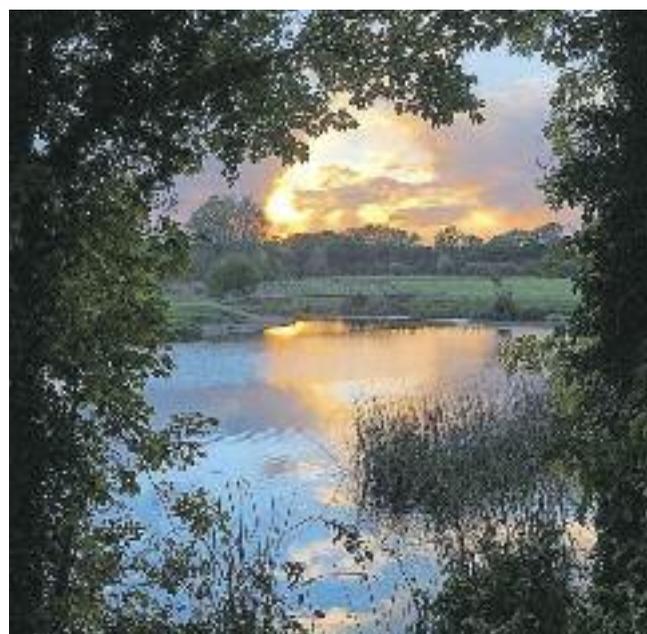
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hugely to the AONB

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Messages from the Chairmen



Robert Erith TD DL

Chairman, Dedham Vale
AONB and Stour Valley
Partnership

On 16 June the Partnership hosted a group of distinguished speakers at its annual Forum in Lamarsh, the centre of the Project area. A record number of over 100 attendees heard Howard Davies (Chief Executive of the National Association of AONBs), Professor Jules Pretty (Pro-Vice Chancellor of Essex University, a leading environmentalist) and Lord Gardiner (Defra Minister responsible for AONBs and National Parks), talk about the great benefits to health and happiness of our outstanding landscapes. It was a thoroughly worthwhile occasion with valuable content on the great importance of our protected landscapes especially to our largely urban population. See further information on page 5.

Lord Gardiner toured the AONB, including the proposed extension area, remarking on its high quality and the care with which it is maintained. He also spoke at the National Association of AONBs conference in July, where I presented him with a copy of the discussion document produced by Nick Collinson and Simon Amstutz which charts the way in which AONB boundary reviews can be speeded up. As a result, the Minister discussed this with Natural England and we understand that the process is under review. There are at present just 13 suggested designation projects of which two are new National Parks (based on existing AONBs), five are new AONBs and six are AONB boundary variations, of which the Dedham Vale extension is one. At the present rate of progress this work would take 50 years to complete, an unacceptable situation. We have the support of all MPs in the area and all local authorities so I am encouraged to believe change is on the way.

Other new initiatives include a proposal to erect "Entering Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" signs on main roads at the entrances to our AONB, see page 8. This is part of a wider campaign to raise the profile of these beautiful and diverse landscapes. There are also early discussions about the replacement of Countryside Stewardship and other payments to farmers following Brexit. The importance of a healthy and well maintained countryside especially in protected areas should receive a high priority.

Cllr Nigel Chapman

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

Although tourism isn't a responsibility of the AONB Project, I and my colleagues have been endeavouring, for some years, to encourage a business group to come together to work across the whole valley. I am, therefore, delighted to welcome the formation of a Stour Valley Tourism Action Group. There is more about what they are up to on page 15 of this newspaper, and we eagerly look forward to working with them in the coming months.

Also featured in this edition is news about next year's exciting inaugural River Stour Festival. I am pleased to be personally involved in what I think will be a tremendous celebration of the river, its landscape, its culture and its people!

I am often asked why are such things important to the Valley? I believe that we must recognise that the population of north east Essex and south Suffolk will continue to increase over the next few years and many of these people will want to enjoy, exercise and relax in and around the AONB and wider valley. I want us to be ready to properly welcome them all. I am a firm believer in a 'Natural Health Service' and happily echo 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: I am encouraged by the number of young families that I have met recently who, having moved to the area, have discovered the Stour Valley and enthuse to me about all the area has to offer. We must continue to inspire them.

Finally, a brief mention that the Draft Stage of Colchester's Local Plan has recently been agreed and the next stage is to seek the approval of the Secretary of State. I believe that we have strengthened policies that relate to the AONB and I am particularly pleased that it clearly refers to the desire to recognise the quality of the night sky in the Vale, which has recently been recognised as being of a standard good enough to qualify for an award from the International Dark Sky Association.

Please enjoy all our wonderful valley offers over the winter months and take a look at that sky in the evenings!

River Stour 500 Trees

The AONB Project had a fantastic winter planting over 500 riverside trees on the rivers Stour, Brett and Box. The response from landowners for trees was very encouraging and we simply couldn't meet demand! Plans are already in place to plant a further 2,000 trees and shrubs winter 2017/18. A BIG thank you to the 104 tremendous volunteers that helped to plant the trees, including 50 primary school children from Wells Halls Primary, Hintlesham and Chattisham Primary and Bildeston Primary.

The project was made possible due to a grant of £3,500 awarded by Essex and Suffolk Water Branch Out Fund. Trees were planted at an incredible 23 sites across the AONB and Project Area. Surveys carried out in 2015 by the formidable team of Dedham Vale volunteers highlighted the riparian areas that were suffering from inadequate tree shading.



Team of Environment Agency staff helped to plant trees at Shelley Hall on the River Brett

These areas were targeted and varied broadleaved native trees and shrub species were planted.

A lack of shade is detrimental to fish and other riverine species, particularly in the summer months when river temperatures rise to levels that are stressful for them.

Trees are vital for rivers in many other ways including providing food for fish in the river. Fish such as Dace and Trout are reliant upon insects that fall into the river from overhanging trees. Trees also help to input woody debris that helps to create important refuges for fish and invertebrates.

Alex Moore da Luz

Dark Skies in Dedham Vale

The Dedham Vale Society is campaigning to protect the night skies, and as Mike Barrett, our Polstead-based astronomer, reports below, things are looking very promising indeed. Every single reading taken with our sky meters is well within the limits required for designation by the International Dark Skies Association.

Another part of this campaign is to check on 'obtrusive lighting'. Quite small developments or external LEDs being fitted in our villages, even a single floodlight, can have an impact on upon a dark place if inappropriately fitted.

Charles Clover

Dark Sky Survey Results

The darkness of the night sky is measured using a Sky Quality Meter (SQM) during periods of



Mike Barrett surveying the Dark Sky at Polstead

astronomical darkness with no moon in the sky. The SQM readings are on a logarithmic scale meaning that a reading of 20 is twice as dark as 19, and 21 is 4 times as dark. The readings need to be taken across the AONB at approximately 1km intervals, and the grid will determine the status of our night skies.

The Dedham Vale is eligible for Dark Sky Accreditation as a Dark Sky Reserve. There are three tiers or this, Gold, Silver and Bronze, with Gold being the least affected by light pollution and Bronze being the most. Gold status is awarded for SQM readings greater than 21.75, Silver between 21.74 and 21.00, and Bronze between 20.99 to 20.00.

The initial results of the survey carried out in spring 2017 found that Dedham Vale was within the range of Bronze status all over and Silver in the western area. Not surprisingly the sections to the east of the AONB fared worst with Cox's Hill near Manningtree recording a SQM of 20.11 (still well within the banding for Bronze) whilst the western edge between Nayland and Bures returned readings of more than 21 in the Silver category. The best reading to date was taken on the Green at Polstead at 21.34.

Further readings will be carried out this autumn/winter, including in the periphery of the AONB and in the proposed AONB extension area, with multiple readings taken at the same site.

Once we have confirmed eligibility we need to do a survey of all the street lights within the boundaries and persuade the various councils and other bodies to have a controlled lighting policy ensuring that future development does not alter the balance of light and that any light that is required is suitably shielded and targeted for the required purpose.

Mike Barrett



A walk and talk at Flatford for the River Runs Through Us

Filming the River Stour

The River Runs Through Us is an exciting new walk/swim/film project taking place in the Stour Valley with sound artist Stuart Bowditch and painter Ruth Philo, who are working with the people and communities along the river.

Ignoring the notion of the river as a boundary in this age where increasingly borders and divisions are drawn, the artists are discovering a connectedness and primitive co-dependency that exists between people and water.

We have been hosting a series of walks, talks and a swim through the valley over the summer

of 2017 with local experts on the river's connections with ecology, literature, wildlife, writers and artists. We are also making a short film that will be shown along the river in the summer of 2018 as part of the new River Stour Festival.

We welcome contributions from anyone who would like to get involved. Do you live or work by the river? Do you have something to contribute? Then please get in touch with us: therriverrunsthroughus@gmail.com or www.therriverrunsthroughus.uk

Stuart Bowditch and Ruth Philo



Ruth Philo filming the river

A New Festival for the Stour Valley in 2018

The River Stour Festival will celebrate the river, its culture, surrounding landscape and people. It is unusual in that instead of running for a particular week it will take place throughout the year at different points along the river, rather like a caravanserai, with something happening somewhere in the Stour Valley each month. Several local people and organisations have committed to the project: the Dedham Vale AONB, River Stour Trust, National Trust, Essex and Suffolk Wildlife Trusts and the Field Studies Council Flatford Mill, to name a few.

The festival came about through the walks and film project The River Runs Through Us (see above). Whilst working on this I had the idea for a festival and found many people in the valley were keen to help develop this idea. Together we formed a steering group and have planned a schedule for 2018 that includes walks, a wild river swim, boat trips, exhibitions, music, poetry, painting, photography and wild writing.

The festival will open in January 2018 with a screening of Ronald Blythe's Akenfield at the Quay Theatre, Sudbury. There will be a focus weekend when the film will launch at the Boat House Gallery, Flatford on 30 June, accompanied by a lecture in East Bergholt by Jules Pretty. The festival will provide impetus to the arts, nature, health, environment and to businesses in the Stour Valley and beyond. The ambition is to connect both local people and visitors with the rich landscape on our doorstep.

A steering group has been formed of stakeholders and interested parties, council and charity representatives, businesses and individuals - more are welcome! The festival can be contacted at admin@riverstourfestival.com or www.riverstourfestival.com and the brochures will be out in the valley in December.

Ruth Philo



The River Runs Through Us and the River Stour Festival have both benefited from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund. If you or your community has a project or idea that aims to conserve and enhance wildlife or support the environment of the Dedham Vale, please contact us to find out about the grants that may be able to help you.

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Team Efforts Clear Non-Native Plants

The AONB team and Stour Valley Volunteers have been at war with the troublesome Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam again this year, and clearing Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS) remains a top priority.



Giant Hogweed

Great progress has been made in the Giant Hogweed Control Program in 2017 with 57 sites on the Rivers Stour, Brett and Glem having received control work. 14 new sites have been identified and it is hoped that the spraying, digging and cutting at all sites will have helped to reduce the abundance of Giant Hogweed and halted its spread.

Some formerly heavily infested sites such as the fields immediately upstream and downstream of Shelley Bridge are significantly better this year as a result of our previous concerted manual control efforts. Control work is already being planned for next year and the focus will be on 'early' eradication of Giant Hogweed which will start in late February to tackle emerging plants.

Giant Hogweed is a very dangerous plant due to its sap that exudes from the stem and underside of the leaves. If the sap comes into contact with skin it can cause severe blistering following exposure to sunlight. Worryingly, the plant is now classified as 'common' across much of the UK. If you spot any Giant Hogweed in the Stour Valley please report your sightings on the Suffolk Biological Information Service recording website: www.suffolkbis.org.uk/inns. See the handy guide (left) for how to identify it.

Himalayan Balsam

The Stour Valley Volunteers were once again heroic in their battle against the dreaded Himalayan Balsam. Volunteers helped to pull up Balsam at six sites across the Stour Valley: Bures, Nayland, Althamstone, Shelley, Higham and Boxford. Himalayan Balsam is the largest annual plant in Britain, growing up to 2.5m tall. It spreads very quickly due to its ability to fire seeds from its seed pods up to 8m away. Many seeds drop into rivers, streams

and ditches which contributes to their rapid colonisation of new sites. Himalayan Balsam is causing problems throughout the UK and in the Stour Valley because it out competes native plants, altering the ecological balance and character of wetland sites.

Japanese Knotweed

Back in the nineteenth century, when Victorian engineers were designing the latest in transport technology, Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* sounded like a very clever idea. A plant that typically colonised volcanoes in Japan was imported to Britain to help hide, or possibly even stabilise, railway embankments. Since then its spread has caused much damage: it can crack tarmac, block drains, undermine foundations and invade homes. Five years ago, the Environment Agency commissioned a new app to track Japanese knotweed, using the crowd-sourcing principle, to get more people aware of the problems, and show what to look for www.plantracker.org.uk/map/knotweed.

Alex Moore da Luz

If you are interested in finding out about the non-native species in the Stour Valley please download (free) a copy of the Managing Invasive Non-Native Plants leaflet or request a copy from the AONB office www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/publications/wildlife-and-landscape



Giant Hogweed growing alongside the River Brett at Layham Mill



Stour Valley Volunteers removing Himalayan Balsam in Bures



Japanese knotweed ©GBNNS

Bures Community Clears Non-Native Species



Himalayan balsam flower ©GBNNS

An morning work party to clear non-native invasive plant species (NNIS) on the River Box was organised by residents of the parish of Bures. They have helped with previous removals under the guidance of Alex Moore da Luz, River Stour Project Officer.

After obtaining landowner permission, four local people and I pulled out Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* along the river and the adjoining willow plantation. Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* plants were also identified and the information passed onto the landowner, who has been removing this NNIS when spotted.

Himalayan Balsam is also known as Policeman's Helmet or Indian Balsam and is native to the West and central Himalayas. It is found mostly on river banks and in damp woodland, but can also grow in other damp habitats. Introduced as a garden plant in the early 19th century and first recorded in the wild in 1855, it is now widespread in the UK. Its seeds are spread by an explosive dispersal mechanism; and the seeds are

small and easily carried by wind or water.

Himalayan Balsam is a problem because it out-competes native species in ecologically sensitive areas, particularly on river banks. Where it grows in dense stands along river banks it can impede flow at times of high rainfall, increasing the likelihood of flooding. Die back of extensive stands over winter can leave river banks bare and exposed to erosion. Himalayan balsam is

listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England and Wales. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.

To find out more about Non-Native Invasive Species, visit the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNS).

Andrew Ward, Environment Agency



Residents of Bures helping to remove non-native Himalayan Balsam from the banks of the River Box

Dedham Vale Forum 2017

With a theme of "Outstanding Landscapes: Good for the environment, health and economy" the June Forum attracted a large turn out and an excellent line up of speakers.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity with Defra, said: "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... 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."

Howard Davies, Chief Executive of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONBs), talked first about the underlying geology of the UK, and continued: "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... The nation is aware of their importance, but it is down to local action to sustain them. Our role in caring for these places is absolutely vital."

Professor Jules Pretty, Professor of Environment and Society, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Essex, spoke about links between the environment and good health. "It works for all people, young and old, rich and poor, all cultural groups, in all green environments whether urban park or nature reserve, whether wild or farmed, small or large. We have shown that a five minute dose of nature brings immediate well-being... [and] nature is the best health service for the nation."

The full report on the Forum can be seen at www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/about-us/annual-forum-conference.

Simon Amstutz



Lord Gardiner speaking at the Forum



Lord Gardiner is shown the area, including the dragon at Wormingford



Professor Jules Pretty (left) and Howard Davies



Forum speakers l-r: Simon Amstutz, Tracey Brinkley, Nigel Chapman, Howard Davies, Lord Gardiner, Robert Erith, Jules Pretty

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Youth Ranger Expands his Experience

For the last few years I have been volunteering as a Dedham Vale Youth Ranger. There we help different groups such as the RSPB, the National Trust and similar organisations repair fences, secure riverbanks, clean ponds, cut back plants near paths, or undertake other measures to keep public areas safe, clean and accessible.

Naturally I thought of the AONB for my work experience, as I wondered what the role of an environmental officer would be like. I was lucky to be accepted and have recently completed my work experience with the joint Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

During the week, I took part in a variety of tasks and even though most of them were not new to me, I learned a tremendous amount. On my first day, I worked with two other volunteer groups helping clear an overgrown path. On my second day, we cleared nettles and other overgrown vegetation/greenery from a group of black poplar clones – black poplar trees are one of the most endangered national trees in Britain, and cuttings are grown into saplings for further planting to secure the survival of this species. I also helped monitor trees from the Scattered Orchard Project for two days. These are small trees which had been planted in communities in the last year. We were there to check them and make sure that they were still healthy or to note down any damage or illness.

I had a great week with the AONBs and would recommend the experience and that everyone visits the areas.

Alexander Churcher, Kesgrave High School



Work experience student, Alexander Churcher, pulling up Himalayan Balsam

Volunteering Contributes Huge Benefits to AONBs

Our wonderful volunteers contributed 1,975 days to the two AONBs in the recent April to March year! This is equivalent to almost ten full time members of staff and goes to show how much the AONBs benefit from the work of volunteers.

Volunteer activities included in the survey and supervised by AONB team members, are carried out across a range of areas including: practical conservation; walking route surveys; Beachwatch; river restoration; footpath work; Coast & Estuary and River Wardening; Rangers; and as Work Placements. And this doesn't include all the other volunteer activity carried out by local community and conservation groups in each area.

Volunteering has obvious benefits for local biodiversity, and we also know from talking to our volunteers that they benefit from being in the healthy outdoors, from camaraderie and working as part of a team, being a bit fitter and less anxious, and they get a great sense of achievement!

Volunteers giving time for conservation make a real difference to the Essex/Suffolk AONBs. Everyone quickly finds inspiration to care about our outstanding landscapes when they share their time with nature.

The AONBs offers a range of opportunities for volunteers to work in the AONB to help protect its landscape, wildlife and heritage and provide the means for people to enjoy the area. No matter what your age, background, interests and abilities there are volunteering roles to suit everyone. If you fancy helping we'd love to hear from you.

People and wildlife thrive in the AONBs, and you also feel healthier from getting a regular dose of 'nature'!

Thank you to all our existing and past volunteers, who have put so much effort into making the AONBs a better place! Making a positive difference to the AONB whilst learning more about it and helping others to understand, protect and therefore enjoy it even more is one of the key benefits of the support we enjoy from our volunteers.

Volunteering in Vale & Valley

New Sites and Construction Projects for Volunteers

One of the attractions of being a Stour Valley Volunteer is that you get to work at new sites along the Stour Valley and get to see the landscape from a different perspective. You also undertake a variety of tasks, which during the early part of the summer tend to involve habitat creation or construction.

One new site, Foxearth Meadows Nature Reserve, run by A Rocha UK (see page 13), is a beautiful secluded site by the River Stour near Glemsford, and a haven for wildlife, in particular dragonflies. The volunteers removed old fencing and created a new pond /scrape which despite the heat and hail was a fantastic team effort!

Another new project was at the newly restored pond at Valley Farm, Flatford, where Flatford Mill Field Studies Council asked volunteers to build a wheelchair path to the pond, and over three days 30 volunteers came to help. It was a great task for the volunteers as there was lots of preparation and construction: measuring up, removing vegetation, digging out the path, securing edges with wooden planks and backfilling with

hoggin. The shovelling and barrowing of hoggin to the path was exhausting in the hot summer sun but was well worth the effort when you saw the result.

The volunteers also enjoyed the various construction tasks in the new garden area of the RSPB Flatford Wildlife Garden, where they installed a new water irrigation system and filled gabions to support a new bank which

over time will be covered in plants which will attract pollinators.

Exciting New Volunteer Opportunities

In 2018 we are planning two new projects. One will involve surveying wildflowers at County Wildlife Sites in the Stour Valley, and the other

one will involve the creation of a Dedham Vale and Stour Valley footpath maintenance group to help Public Rights of Way officers maintain the footpaths in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley. Both are looking for new volunteers so please contact me emma.black@suffolk.gov.uk.

Emma Black



Volunteers creating wheelchair path at Valley Farm, Flatford



Volunteers digging a new pond at Foxearth Meadows Nature Reserve

Traditional Orchards Get a Boost from Orchards East



Great Cornard school planting

The English landscape has been described as the richest historical record we possess. Orchards are an integral part of this landscape, but have been relatively poorly researched; they are important for landscape and biodiversity as well as being a rich resource for local communities.

Orchards East, is an exciting new three year Heritage Lottery Fund project working across the eastern region. The project, based at the University of East Anglia, builds on the work of partner organisation, Suffolk Traditional Orchards Group, to survey existing orchards and improve our understanding of traditional orchard management and history. The project will recruit and train members of the community to take part in surveys, and other volunteers will receive training in traditional orchard management, helping to halt the decline of these vital skills.

Orchards East welcomes any information readers may have about old orchards in the AONBs or the wider region, and are also looking for volunteers who can help to track down and survey old orchards and undertake some research in local archives. Anyone with an interest in fruit, orchards and the historic landscape is welcome to join us! Please contact rachel.savage@uea.ac.uk.

Rachel Savage

Pilot Project into Portable CCTV for Barn Owl Nest Box Monitoring

The Suffolk barn owl population has grown to over 450 pairs, and Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (SCBOP) relies on volunteers to monitor population changes. Hitherto, heavy ladders are carried across often muddy fields and there is always the risk of someone falling from a ladder.

Combining my experience as a volunteer monitor with my background as a Technology Consultant, I suggested important changes to our methodology.

My idea was to develop tiny video cameras (GoPro) on long telescopic poles that would broadcast live footage showing the contents of the box to the monitors safely at ground level. The cameras also take photos that allow identification of species using the nest box and age of any



chicks present, while causing a lot less disturbance to them.

We have made several modifications. For example, around 80% of the nest boxes contain an internal shelf that can hide our view of the owls, or

Jackdaw nests, which have thick twigs, can snag the camera, so the camera arm has been re-designed.

Enquiries with technical experts in the bird world revealed that this pilot is new for barn owl monitoring. The two local AONBs are funding this development and, after months of voluntary work, we have reached the prototype stage. Field trials have revealed what further R&D is required, but we are close to rolling out Portable CCTVs for volunteers in the AONB areas.

Positive feedback from monitors using the prototype include: "It's brilliant!", and "Will definitely save time for those ringing chicks and box-cleaners, due to the many empty nest boxes".

Adrian Silvertown

LEADER Rural Business Grants

Do you have an idea for a project that helps improve the local economy on the Heritage Coast or Wool Towns areas?

The LEADER programme is currently offering capital grants for rural businesses (micro – small) and organisations to support business growth and increases in productivity. Funding can be used to support projects linked to; increasing farm productivity, farm diversification, boosting tourism, developing food and drink enterprises, providing rural services, increasing forestry productivity and providing culture & heritage activities. LEADER grants are typically for 40% of eligible capital costs and range from £2,500 to £100,000.

Projects should aim to deliver at least one of the following outputs: job creation; increased turnover; introduction of new processes or techniques; improved services or additional visitor numbers. Search 'LEADER' on www.suffolk.gov.uk or email fundingenquiries@suffolk.gov.uk.



Edible Museum

One entrepreneur recently supported is Sarah Hardy who creates high quality chocolate sculptures based on the insects and fossils you would see in a museum. She started her Edible Museum food business in Sible Hedingham, north Essex and used her grant to develop her workshop.

Jim Brown

AONB Boundary Signs: pride in our outstanding places

Both Suffolk Coast & Heaths and Dedham Vale AONBs have wanted to mark their boundaries for many years. You often see markers for National Parks, where a major road enters the designated landscape, to let a visitor know they're entering a special area. They help to foster a sense of identity and pride that encourages people to look after the landscape and perhaps to find out more about it.

AONBs are less understood than National Parks, so for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty signage would help raise the profile of the designation itself and of the organisation that helps to make its status come to life. It also would give the local tourism economy a boost, adding to the brand identity of their unique "product".

Road signs are governed by Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions issued by the Department for Transport, and the 2016 version is positively encouraging for signing AONBs, and it is also now clear that the local Highways Authority (Suffolk and Essex County Councils in our case) is empowered to authorise them. To the civil servant who wrote page 255; thank you!

We don't plan on lots of signs, just a handful on the more significant roads into the AONBs, and both safety and cost may be limitations. But, fingers crossed, we seem to be making progress at last.

Bill Jenman

Ancient Oaks in the English Landscape, by Aljos Farjon

It is always a pleasure to come across an excellent book written about trees, and 'Ancient Oaks in the English Landscape' is one of those, and all about English Oaks, both *Quercus robur* and *petraea*.

Well researched, highly informative and including great pictures, charts and maps, it is skilfully written by Aljos Farjon, with contributions on biodiversity from Martyn Ainsworth, Keith Alexander and Pat Wolseley, all of whom have greatly added their expertise to this book.

Farjon is a wonderful writer; dare I say it, like Charles Darwin and Oliver Rackham. He starts off by making it clear how significant ancient trees are within the English landscape along with their importance for culture and biodiversity. This book will sit with my 'special' books on trees and will become a constant reference book in the future.

Reviewed by Gary Battell FRGS



AONB Engagement With The Planning System

There is a large amount of planning casework for the AONB to consider across the seven district and borough and two County Council planning authorities that are wholly or partly in Suffolk Coast & Heaths and Dedham Vale AONBs.

So how does the AONB engage in the planning system?

We prioritise which applications to respond to based on their location, the type of proposal and the potential they have to result in a significant negative impact to the natural beauty and environmental quality of the designated landscape. It's not necessarily the size of the development that is significant to the AONB, but about how a development sits within the landscape.

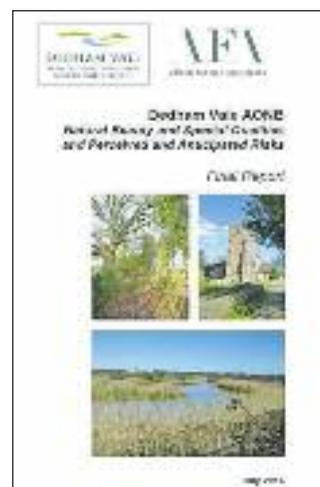
We carefully consider the proposal in the wider context of the landscape, using our landscape character assessment evidence and local knowledge to help us. We take a pragmatic approach to our consultation responses, recognising that the AONB designation is not about preventing development but about informing good decision making and ensuring that the purpose of the designation – to conserve and enhance natural beauty – is properly taken into account.

But what is 'natural beauty' and how can we conserve and enhance it through the planning system?

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so they say, and much of what we do in relation to planning is about anticipating what impact a development might have on our *experience* of a landscape as well as the impact on the physical structure of the landscape, such as the loss of a hedgerow or the introduction of a large industrial building.

A 'Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the Dedham Vale AONB' report was published in 2016, an interesting read for those of you who have a love of landscape and want to delve deeper into the meaning of landscape and sense of place in the Dedham Vale. An equivalent report exists for the Suffolk Coast & Heaths and both can be found on our websites. These reports articulate what we mean by 'natural beauty'.

Ideally proposals should demonstrate how they contribute to the purposes of the AONB and be clear about whether they are likely to have any negative impacts. If something



common aim is for us to provide a voice for the AONBs to encourage quality proposals which take account of their setting in these nationally designated landscapes.

Paula Booth



Local Planning Support

Suffolk County Council's plans and priorities for 2017-21 are inclusive growth, health, care and wellbeing, and efficient and effective public services. Including Suffolk's Nature Strategy and historic environment as part of the Inclusive Growth section is an important indication of the value that is put of our landscapes, www.suffolk.gov.uk.

Suffolk Biodiversity Information Services (SBIS) circulates a quarterly update to provide accessible information about biodiversity issues in relation to planning www.suffolkbis.org.uk/biodiversity/statutoryobligations/plannerspage. A similar Essex county service can be seen at www.essexbiodiversity.org.uk/planning-and-development.

Protecting Landscape & Heritage

Founded in 1929, the Suffolk Preservation Society is the county's leading heritage charity. We are a proud and active member of the AONB partnership and because of our Suffolk-wide remit, our campaigns encompass both the Dedham Vale and the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONBs.



Little Hall, Lavenham, SPS office

We work to protect the landscape and heritage of Suffolk through the planning system in a way that acknowledges that whilst we are not against all development or expansion within the AONBs, we do recognise the special qualities of the areas and the importance that this has to Suffolk's economy and its residents' quality of life. We therefore campaign for top quality designs and development that is both necessary and in appropriate places.

In recent months, in Suffolk Coasts & Heaths AONB, we have supported residents objecting to new housing at St Felix School, Reydon, campaigned against a wholly inappropriate development built at Felixstowe Ferry, and have recently worked with many local groups in responding to the severe environmental impacts of the Sizewell C proposals. In the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley we have made detailed representations on the proposed expansion of the Konings Fruit Farm juice business and called for sensitive design and materials for the proposed Abellio rail servicing shed at Cattawade by the Stour river.

Fiona Cairns

is clearly going to have a significant landscape impact, we need to understand from the applicant how this can be mitigated. If they can't, there is of course the question of whether it is compliant with the national and local policies in place to conserve the AONBs. On the other hand, many developments offers opportunities for some landscape enhancement, and we welcome early liaison with applicants over proposals where there may be opportunities for AONB enhancement.

We respond to around 100 planning applications a year, and look through many more. These can range from anything from change of use of a meadow, to a garden, to a 100m long train depot building, and of course to a nuclear power station! It's certainly varied in terms of scale and type, but the

Unnatural Ugliness vs. Natural Beauty

'*Emotional*' was the Word of the Day at the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Forum, while '*inspirational*' features whenever landscapes and natural beauty are discussed.

Babergh and Suffolk Coastal District Councils are consulting on Development Planning for the next twenty years. Their 'Issues and Options' documents for this note a vital role of AONBs, but focus on ever-continuing requirements for new homes, jobs and infrastructure, with key words being *growth* and *sustainable*.

Growth here is not about flora & fauna but economic performance as judged by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Elected councillors face great challenges due to our ageing population, migration from urban to rural life, limited land availability, austerity with national liberties permitting second homes. It has been said however that GDP measures everything except what makes life worth living!

Sustainable is often taken to describe a development, business or policy that can continue indefinitely, but its originators defined it as: '*Development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*'.

Our two Councils' consultation papers and questions are understandably objective and factual, and we are all invited to comment to Babergh & Suffolk Coastal, whose on-line consultations close on 10 Nov and 30 October respectively.

www.babergh.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/new-joint-local-plan
www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/local-plans/suffolk-coastal-local-plan

Neil Winship

Thoughts On 60 Miles Of The Stour Valley Path



Group at end of walk, Flatford

I recently spent 28 hours nonstop at my place of work, the nationally designated landscape, the Dedham Vale, and the equally wonderful but not designated wider Stour Valley. For many this might be a chore but I had organised a 60 mile walk along the Stour Valley Path from Newmarket to Flatford, as part of the 2017 Suffolk Walking Festival.

Although the valley is the focus of my work like many I spend much of my working life in an office or meeting rooms. Being in the valley for that length of time, along with 16 other people, gives time for reflection, and I find the natural rhythm of walking a great time for thinking and absorbing thoughts and ideas.

The landscape of the AONB and Project Area, with its gentle valley slopes and steeper tributary valleys, often with woodland, can at times feel timeless. This feeling is compounded when getting to the valley bottom and walking through the green and luxuriant grazing marshes with the river meandering through amid riverside trees.

Agriculture, and public policy around agriculture, has greatly shaped the valley we see today and we should be grateful for many of the practices that ensure the landscape retains an outstanding quality.

The features are not restricted to the farmed landscape. Human activity has shaped the area in other ways too. Not least the isolated farmsteads, hamlets and halls that appear to the careful observer. Larger settlements in the Vale are often superb quality and are sometimes taken for granted by those that live and work in the area. When family and friends visit us and get the chance to enjoy the area they never fail to comment on the outstanding quality of the built environment, be that timber framed houses, flint built churches or riverside mills.

What is sometimes not seen so readily is the historic element.

In my work, I sometimes have the privilege to see the area through the eyes of historians and archaeologists. The insight, understanding and knowledge of these experts brings to life a landscape filled with Motte and Bailey castles, great halls, ring ditches, registered parks and historic navigation features.

For some it is not the landscape or the historical features but the wildlife that is the draw. Whether that is experienced from country sports, wildlife watching or just casual interactions the feeling is strong. The walk in June was as much for the long days as for the knowledge that it can be a good time for wildlife watching. We were not disappointed and enjoyed views of deer and red kites, with the subtler experience of butterflies, woodland birds and bats.

The Mega Challenge Walk needed a support team providing food and drink at regular intervals and I must express our appreciation

for a rather thankless task to what became an increasingly weary bunch. Thanks also to the number of businesses such as pubs and other eating establishments who also supported our walk. We bumped into many people on the way, interested to hear what we were doing and with stories of their own about their plans for the day.

Those conversations and warmth of welcome reminded me that as with many aspects of life it is people that contribute to enhancing experiences, and the welcome and support we received certainly enhanced ours.

Walking nonstop for 28 hours covering 60 miles is not an easy undertaking. Was it worth it? When I looked round at the tired faces as we were welcomed in to Flatford by the National Trust it was obvious to me that it was. Some of those experiences will stay with us for life.

The Dedham Vale and Stour Valley is truly an outstanding landscape. The subtle changes to the landscape as we travelled east, the changing light as the day moved on and the sense of place evoked by the different influences on our senses, made us realise what an outstanding place this is. However, we should not be complacent. We need to constantly ensure and challenge decision makers to ensure the natural beauty and special qualities of the area are conserved and enhanced, not just for us but for future generations.

Simon Amstutz



The Stour Valley Path Guide details the route and highlights of the long distance path, in ten sections. It is free to download, or the full guide with folder is available from the AONB for £5 plus P&P.

Walking for Health

Only a third of adults in the UK are active enough, but it doesn't have to be this way. Walking for Health is England's largest network of health walk schemes, helping all kinds of people to lead a more active lifestyle.

Our walks are led by friendly, knowledgeable people, specially trained for the job. Along with fellow walkers, walk leaders provide all the advice and encouragement a new walker needs to build fitness and confidence at a pace that's right for them. In just a short time, a small amount of regular exercise can significantly improve a person's health, well-being and confidence.

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5. Walking tones up legs, bums and tums
6. Walking boosts vitamin D
7. Walking gives you energy
8. Walking makes you happy

Finally, walking is good for making friendships

Locally, we offer a wide range of walks across the whole of Suffolk, in partnership with OneLife Suffolk, see www.walkingforhealth.org.uk or www.onelifesuffolk.co.uk for all dates.

Various levels of walks are available, from Level 1 – less than 30 minutes on flat surfaces through to longer walks of up to 90 minutes at Level 5 walking faster on uneven ground with stiles. We work closely with the Ramblers Associations so those who want to go on longer walks may transfer smoothly to a local group.

We recently added a walk around Flatford to our walk options. It is a circular walk starting and finishing at the National Trust Café at Flatford Mill, taking in countryside views as depicted by John Constable. From what our walkers tell us, there's plenty of laughter to be heard on our walks.

Debbie Maynard and Sue Calver



Walkers join a Health Walk to improve their energy and confidence

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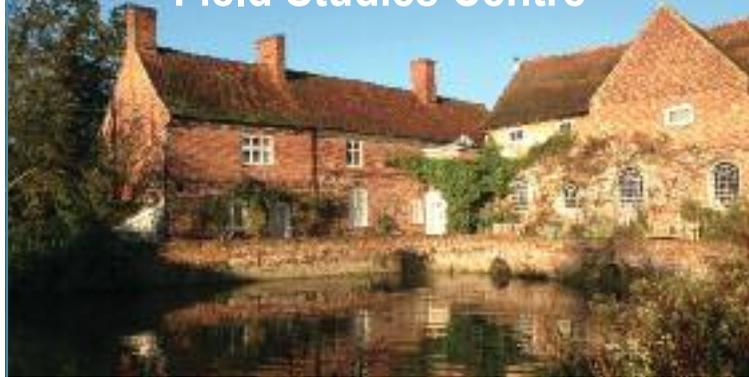
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Bulrush Harvesting, the Coracle Way!

For twenty years I have frequently cycled over the River Brett bridge at Shelley and marvelled at the lush bulrush beds that grow there. As a thatcher and willow weaver it is normal for me to take an interest in the natural materials of the landscape and soon I was thinking, why is this rich material not being harvested?

Bulrushes, *Scirpus lacustris L.*, have been cut from rivers 'forever' to be platted into mats, baskets and even a range of hats, bags and foot wear. Well it took me twenty years to do something about it and so after liaising with the AONB Stour Valley Project, landowners and the Environment Agency, I gained permission to begin a regime of harvesting bulrushes from the River Brett at Shelley.

Here the river is full of rush and bur reed from bank to bank, so appropriate harvesting helps to open the water course, assisting the flow, adding light and reducing biological oxygen demand. All beneficial for enhancing the diversity of the river flora and fauna.

An August harvest avoids disturbing nesting birds, and leaving a band of vegetation at least a meter wide against the bank ensures that water voles have plenty to eat and good cover. By September, rushes are structurally weak and soft, bending into the water and beginning to degrade into a slimy rotten mat which breaks up and disappears downstream leaving little trace of their earlier effulgence. Harvesting in this shallow stretch is all about getting in the river and hand cutting with a grass hook.

The rushes are soft, they bend and tangle together making their harvest a very particular craft, but once I found my technique this was most enjoyable and addictive. One starts to discern patches of better quality or greater ease of cutting. The wildlife is all around me to be intimately sensed. I used a home-made coracle as a floating platform to help me organise the rushes into bundles tied with a twist of rushes. I could then float the bundles five at time to the bank.

This year I cut a total of seventy five bundles, about one fifth of the potential crop, while I learn the skills needed to do the job well. I wish I had weighed the fresh rushes to know just how much water I then dried from them. After standing them in sheds and green houses or just along a hedge in the sun, the total dry weight was just 67.5 kg.

This was an experimental season and I can see that the drying is going to be the tough part of this job, but next year I could cut a larger swathe and start to supply rushes to a local craft industry. For now, I have about twenty bundles available to home craft workers.

This natural harvest, sensitively taken, is all part of the sustainable management of our landscape, productively enhancing habitats.

Richard King



Harvesting bulrush

Improvements for RSPB Flatford Wildlife Garden

Thanks to cash grants from Essex & Suffolk Water (£10,700) and the Dedham Vale AONB (£2,550), a 7,500 litre underground water tank has been installed at the Wildlife Garden, which harvests the rainwater from the roof of the barn. Some of the water collected will be used to solve the age-old problem of watering the gardens' plants. The average rainfall for the area is only about 550mm per year, so the additional water available should be a great help. A new garden area over the tank is under development and will be landscaped to match the rest of the wildlife garden adjacent.

There have been further welcome changes at the Barn, including a much improved membership pod and resource centre, resplendent with a UK map showing all the RSPB's main reserves, plus great additions to the Kid's Corner (activities, log stools and AstroTurf).



Stour Valley Volunteers installing new water irrigation system at RSPB Flatford Wildlife Garden

The garden also has a new family trail which seems to be much appreciated. The newly installed fantastic carved wooden figures (made from sweet chestnut from Stour Woods) are proving to be a great talking point and enable us to explain their local origins and how our woods are being sustainably managed. They have been created for us by David Good, a local wood sculptor.

Alison Damant, Flatford Wildlife Garden Volunteer



White Admiral butterfly

Chalk Grassland Uncovered at Sudbury

Chalk grassland is one of Britain's scarcest habitats. Among Sudbury's chalk quarries however, a tiny remnant was uncovered when scrub was cleared on the old William Armes site (behind Sainsburys). Sulphur Clover, Small Scabious, Cowslip, Restharrow, Red Bartsia and Ploughman's Spikenard are some of the chalk grassland wildflowers, that have since made a phoenix-like reappearance! Others, such as Meadow Vetchling and Meadow Barley, are plants of heavy clay.

Sudbury Area Wildlife Group also report that "July brought heartening information on our woodland butterflies", with sightings of White Admiral – eight were counted in Assington Thicks and another a mile away. Also spotted were two White-letter Hairstreaks at Great Cornard's Shawlands Wood. "This welcome, but increasingly rare sighting, shows the benefit of conserving areas of bramble and rough woodland round the edges of town".

If you would like to find out more about the conservation efforts of individuals and organisations in and around Sudbury there is a monthly newsletter, contact nicknewmiller56@gmail.com.

Nick Miller

All in the Making at Wormingford

The neglected pond at Wormingford Community Education Centre (WCEC) had become very overgrown, with reeds causing the water to become stagnant and a willow puncturing the existing membrane. All in the Making, a local community organisation, working with ART (Abberton Rural Training), decided to undertake its overhaul, with the help of an AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant.

We used Bentonite Clay to line the pond as this is more sustainable and should any leaks occur can be easily repaired by covering with more clay. This natural lining allows plants to become established quicker and enabled us to shape the pond with relevant zones to increase biodiversity. The zones include a deep water zone, shallow water, a pebbled area to allow birds to drink and an overflow into a marsh and boggy area. We built a dipping platform so that the local children could explore the pond area to learn about life cycles of frogs, dragonflies etc. This was made from reclaimed wood from the local country park.

Choosing the plants for the pond was an education for everyone, as we discussed what plants are needed where and for what purposes. Following advice, we re-established the reeds to provide shelter for insects and small creatures as well as climbing staffs for the emerging dragonflies. Lilies and other oxygenating plants were planted to provide shade. Wormingford residents have been involved and donated plants to go into and around the pond area.

The students enjoyed constructing the pond and the project helped them gain a better understanding of how a small change, such as renovation, can have such a large effect on the community and the wildlife. With locals thanking the students when they visited, confidence was boosted, and in front of their eyes the pond filled up and they watched how some birds sat on the pebbles or the swallows swooped down to drink, and dragonflies dipping their tails in to lay eggs.

Rob Mann



ART students clearing the old pond at Wormingford

Foxearth Meadows is Magical

Dusk was turning to dark as I bid farewell to members of Glemsford Photographic Club after their visit to Foxearth Meadows. I stayed awhile, and had a quite magical experience seeing, in ethereal torchlight, bats flying through a ghostly confetti of moths and flies; hearing their clicks on my bat detector through a cacophony of bush-cricket noise. I felt privileged to be a fleeting witness to a largely unseen world.

Whilst we may rarely encounter wildlife from such a perspective, we instinctively feel that it should be there. That if we looked we would find it. A Rocha UK manage Foxearth Meadows primarily for the conservation of dragonflies and damselflies, but believe that this small site can accommodate a far wider range

of wildlife riches. We aim to enhance depleted wildlife, educate and engage people to connect with nature, and enrich lives.

In May 2017 over 300 people attended the official opening where we communicated this vision. A bench was dedicated in memory of Keith Morris. This place is his legacy.

Foxearth Meadows was featured on BBC Countryfile, boosting our profile dramatically, and community links have grown through visits from local and national groups. We are currently excited about the inauguration of Friends of Foxearth Meadows and the development of educational links with schools and colleges.

A willing band of volunteers is growing, and upcoming tasks include: extending existing ponds, controlling invasive willow scrub, planting new hedges as corridors into the adjacent farmland, installing new gates and stiles and, most excitingly, working with Keith's original grazier to reintroduce selective grazing.

I shared a glimpse of the joy that I gain from working at this special place, to convey the message that nature matters and that we must make space for nature everywhere. My hope is that, through A Rocha UK's work, the need for re-connection with nature is established and that my experience on that sultry night will not be simply a private one.

Mark Prina



Mark Prina introduces group to Foxearth Meadows

Clare Castle Country Park



Clare motte

The Development Phase of our £200,000+ Heritage Lottery Fund project is now well under way. The plan is to submit a £1,500,000 Delivery Phase grant application in November 2017. This will enable us to renovate the old railway goods shed (currently the Clare Park Centre), de-silt the moat and ponds, repair the station platforms, carry out a programme of archaeology digs and make visits much more interesting by improving the 'interpretation'. There will also be a whole range of ongoing activities that are relevant to the Park and the history of Clare.

Since taking over the management of the Park in March 2015 the Trust has demonstrated that it can operate as a financially independent organisation. No subsidy has been sought, or needed, from Castle Town Council (who since 2015 have owned the freehold of the 35 acre Park); in fact the Trust has been able to create reserves of £25,000 in this period from the surpluses it has generated.

Around 60 volunteers regularly take part in some aspect of running the Park. This has enabled many of the previously neglected maintenance items to be dealt with. The picture shown here of the motte and keep is an example of one of the more obvious improvements; it was previously covered with unsightly scrub. Another major task was to clear the south bank of the moat. This has improved the general habitat and provided a much better view of the motte and keep from a new angle. The opening of a café in the old station booking hall ('Platform One') has proved to be very popular.

Geoffrey Bray

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Helping Families Access Nature

The recent initiative of producing a leaflet to promote Stour Valley Education Network (SVEN) member's activities has proved to be a great success. The numbers of families attending family nature walks and activities during 2017 has risen, which has meant more children have enjoyed access to nature on their doorstep. SVEN members have not only benefitted financially from increased visitors but have had even more interest in their organisation.

In 2018 the group will produce another flyer, update the popular Stour Valley Discovery Fact Sheets and support each other at their events in the Stour Valley, such as the Flatford Nature Days, a National Meadows Day and a family activity day which will take place in Sudbury in the May half term as part of the River Stour Festival.



SVEN Flatford Nature Day

Emma Black

"Come along inside... We'll see if tea and buns can make the world a better place" KENNETH GRAYSON

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Daws Hall Nature Reserve

We have been delighted with the success of our education and events programme at Daws Hall during 2017. We were particularly pleased with the number of people that joined us for our SVEN summer bat walk. We had a wonderful evening led by Essex Bat Group volunteer Sarah White. The group investigated life in the pond and brook, along with a twilight stroll of the reserve with bat detectors, picking up the feeding and communication calls of pipistrelles, soprano pips and even a Daubenton's bat flying over the River Stour at Pitmire Island!

Suffolk Home Educators Group make regular visits with a group of 10-15 children visiting the reserve once or

twice per month for science based learning of native trees, invertebrates, classification, nocturnal wildlife, prehistoric plants, river studies and much more. We are open for school visits all year round and cater for groups from EYFS to A-level. We highly recommend autumn and winter for geography visits to take environmental measurements in the Stour tributary, Losh House Brook.

During school holiday periods we run Wild & Crafty days for families: pond dipping, kite and raft building, fire-lighting and minibeast investigations, for great experiential learning. Children make journals of their day and receive a certificate to keep. Our next Wild & Crafty day is during half term on Wed 25 October for

Halloween adventures and check our website for further dates www.dawshallnature.co.uk.

We also have selected Open Days for everyone to visit the reserve and gardens, including a special Autumn Colours Open Day on Sun 22 October 2017, when people can experience the beauty of the 50 varieties of Acer trees, the stunning Stour Valley scenery and enjoy woodland activities by the campfire. There is a Festive Family Day on Sat 16 December, and in February our Snowdrop Celebration open days offer the opportunity to see thousands of beautiful snowdrops and other early spring bulbs.

Amy Sutcliffe, Environmental Education Officer

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Creating artwork on a Wild & Crafty Day at Daw's Hall Nature Reserve



Using the rope swing in the Daw's Hall Forest School area



Families canoeing on the Stour



Children toasting marshmallows



Family around BBQ

Growth Through Collaboration in the Stour Valley

Joined up visitor related businesses matched with collaborative product development and shared marketing are adding to the valley's tourism success story, creating valuable new visits, encouraging longer stays and shoulder season trade. The Stour Valley Tourism Action Group (SVTAG) is a one such initiative. Formed and led by Babergh District Council, the group has led to real life partnerships and new success stories.

As a direct result of the SVTAG, Outdoor Hire Centre Networks (OHCN) have partnered with Lower Dairy Farm, Dedham Vale Vineyard and Blue Owl to offer a family orientated 'Stour Valley Explorer Break'. This two nights/three day adventure encourages groups of families to stay in the valley and to combine experiences by centralising organisation into one simple trip (with some personalised options) and has proved a great success. See www.ohcn.co.uk.

This 'nearly wild' camping experience is for groups of families, from 20-60 participants. OHCN set up a base camp on Lower Dairy Farm's riverside meadow, with classic Bell Tents and Tipis alongside a camp dining room. A selection of canoes, tandem bikes and themed walking routes are provided for guests to use as they explore the river and wider valley.

Food and drink is all locally sourced and delivered to base camp, and guests are encouraged to order craft beers, cider and wine from the vineyard. The collaborative theme extends to optional activities throughout the break which include: Guided Vineyard Tours and 'visiting' workshops such as Circus or Craft skills, being popular with children.

We've had groups of parents from Hamilton Primary School in Colchester, Dads and their sons from a London based Insurance Broker, and even a group from our friends in the US Airforce.

Gordon Hardy



Assington Mill

Courses are on-going. See the website for more dates and other topics



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Your AONB

Contacting the Team

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 Dock Lane, Melton, Woodbridge IP12 1PE
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The AONB team:

Simon Amstutz - AONB Manager
 Alex Moore da Luz - River Stour Project Officer
 Alona Ochert - Voluntary Officer
 Bill Jenman - Projects Officer
 Cathy Smith - Communications, Funding and Development Officer
 Emma Black - Countryside Project Officer Dedham Vale
 Lucy Oldham - Partnership Officer
 Lynn Allen - Countryside Project Officer Suffolk Coast & Heaths
 Neil Lister - Countryside Project Officer Dedham Vale/
 Suffolk Coast & Heaths
 Paula Booth - AONB Officer
 Pete Cosgrove - Marine Pioneer Manager

Health Benefits of the Great Outdoors!

Make this your year to Explore the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley. You'll feel healthier and you'll open your eyes to our Outstanding Landscape!

The health benefits of being in the 'great outdoors' are now well documented. Professor Jules Pretty, Professor of Environment and Society, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Essex, shared his research into the benefits of nature at the 2017 Dedham Vale AONB Forum:

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

Nature improves your physical and mental health, and lowers anxiety and blood pressure. It improves vitality, mood and creativity, and could even induce pro-environmental behaviour and greater life satisfaction. Take at least once a day!

Exploring Constable Country and the Stour Valley

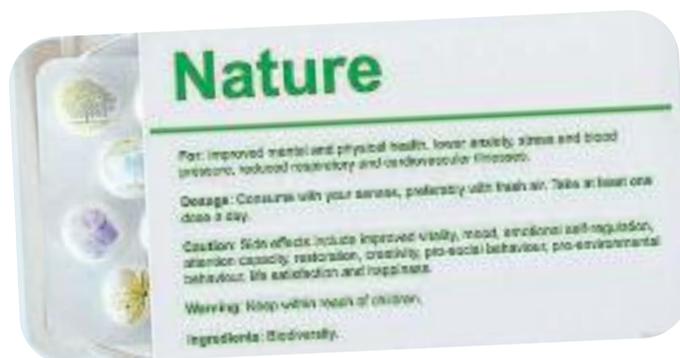
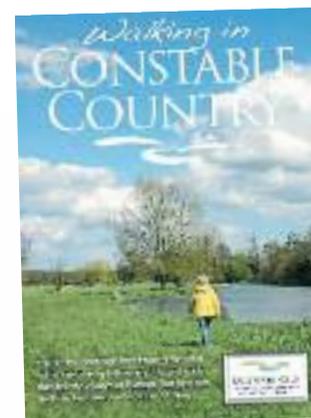


Four new walking guides join the 'family' of guides produced by the AONB team to encourage people to explore Constable Country and all along the Stour Valley! The area is fantastic at all times of year, and experiencing the changing seasons and discovering different landscapes and villages are more than enough reason to return again and again.

Explore Dedham, Flatford, East Bergholt, Stratford St. Mary and Langham with the 'Walking in Constable Country' guide - thanks to Discover Suffolk for supporting this guide! Or take a little more time to visit Dedham, Nayland and Stoke By Nayland with the other three!

Most of the AONB guides are free to download from the AONB website.

If cycling is your preferred outdoor experience, then we also have seven Cycling Through a Masterpiece guides exploring the full length of the Stour Valley, free to download. They range in distance from about 10 to 20 miles, with some short cuts for a more leisurely ride or can be joined together to take you further.



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