

Shrubs Farm, Lamarsh, Bures, Essex CO8 5EA

Tel: (01787) 227520 Fax: (01787) 227197

e-mail: saraerith@btopenworld.com and bob@shrubsfarm.co.uk

website: www.shrubsfarm.co.uk

President's Comments to the AGM, 8th October 2012

This is the tenth report I have given to the AGM as your President. I have re-read those I have saved on my computer and they do tend to be similar in many respects so it may be instructive to take a decade-long view this year.

Looking on the positive side, our membership has increased from 736 to 892. This is despite the inevitable loss of older members and those who move out of the area. I am pleased to report that there are very few resignations.

We must hope that the end of life membership will not hamper our drive for more members – the 1000 target remains elusive, but not out of sight. I have made my grandchildren members once they reach the age of ten – five so far- and can have an understanding of what the Society does and I urge members to follow suit. Membership is still very cheap and there is increasing value with a most informative website, a splendid annual party, a thoughtful annual lecture and of course this AGM open to all. The only disappointment on the website is that there have been no letters or other feedback from members so far. Please use this facility because it will certainly influence the committee in its deliberations.

We need younger members and there are a lot of newcomers to the Vale who support our aims but do not know how to get involved. Perhaps we should seek to work through schools like Littlegarth and we should certainly involve the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Project whose work is such a benefit to the whole valley and whose managers Simon Amstutz and Katherine Blake have done so much to enhance its reputation.

Another encouraging development is how membership of the Committee has evolved. Of the 18 officers and committee members of a decade ago, only eight stalwarts remain. The numbers in total have been cut to 16 and of these, two, Rosemary Turner representing CPREssex and Charles Aldous, Chairman of the Colne Stour Countryside Association, are co-opted.

The average age has reduced and the newer members are making a lively and most valuable impact. I think the Society is in good hands and I thank all, old and new, wholeheartedly for all they do. Nobody gets paid any fees or expenses and this wonderful voluntary work is an example of the *Big Society* at its best.

I should like to pay tribute to Mike Parker who has recently retired as Treasurer after 18 years in this post. It is a key job which has to be undertaken with scrupulous attention to detail and he has done it well. I welcome Adam Sedgwick, who has done much other valuable work for the Society and has replaced him.

As for the issues, the never-ending saga of aircraft noise continues and there have been many complaints, particularly of noise on summer evenings. We have been sent a draft document about flight path alternatives from NATS with a range of options to consider, none of which are wholly satisfactory. Further consultation is likely soon both with us and with local authorities.

Tom Hill and I are seeking a further meeting with NATS, hopefully in November to review the document in the hope of finding an acceptable way forward.

We are also aware of some potential and disturbing developments nationally of which there has been much media coverage.

The House of Commons Transport Select Committee Aviation Strategy Enquiry, which was convened on 13th September and calls for written evidence by 19th October, has no East Anglian MPs and there is a real danger that the impacts of Stansted will be underplayed both by the committee and those who give evidence to it. We must ensure that this committee understands the impact aircraft noise has on areas under flight paths many miles from an airport. We also need details of the questions the Select Committee are considering and will seek to make representations and encourage others such as the Dedham Vale Project and Suffolk County Council to do so as well.

There has been a resurgence of speculation, by the Mayor of London amongst others, that capacity at Stansted should be increased – four runways have been mentioned. Tim Yeo MP has assured me that he is strongly opposed to any expansion of Stansted but many of his colleagues may think it is an easy option. We must be prepared to resist such demands.

In the longer term we should also endeavour to influence the Howard Davies' Government commissioned Review of Aviation Capacity in the South East due in 2015.

Much of our work is in responding to consultations, enquiries and planning applications. Often the documents involved are lengthy and complex. Our responses need to address the issues directly and if they are carefully researched and well argued, they can carry weight with the recipients. Working with partner organisations and local authorities has become increasingly important as has been the case with the pylons and will be with our efforts to extend the AONB.

On the latter, we have been warned not to expect local authority funding as further spending cuts are inevitable. We need to study the new criteria for AONB designation and in due course submit evidence that the landscape quality has improved markedly since 1992 when the area was last considered. This will be a very long term project.

My grateful thanks for your support and your attendance tonight. I am sure that, like me, you are looking forward to what the principal landowner and farmer in the Vale, John Rix, has to say. I congratulate him on winning the 2012 Essex Agricultural Society's County Farms Competition for farms over 700 acres. This is a considerable recognition of good farming and conservation practise which is so vital to the Dedham Vale.