

Dedham Vale Society

Registered Charity No. 246007

President's Comments to the AGM, 28th September 2015

Yesterday, the flagpole flying the cross of St George at St Mary's church, Langham was finally dedicated by the Rector at a brief ceremony in glorious sunshine following Harvest Festival. It was well attended by the Dedham Vale Society as well as by local Councillors with the Churchwardens, PCC members and other churchgoers from Langham.

It marked the final chapter in the saga of the memorial to our former Chairman, Wilf Tolhurst. Sarah Carr has written modestly about what was involved in bringing this to fruition in the latest issue of the Newsletter but in truth the full tale would reveal how incredibly hard she worked in the face of endless obstacles to secure this result. We owe her a very big Thank You and much praise for her tenacity and resolve.

Thanks also to everyone who subscribed to make this possible and especially to Essex Community Foundation, of which Wilf and I were founder Trustees, for their generous donation of £1000.

I should also like to thank Ann Tolhurst, our honorary Vice-President for so kindly providing wine and refreshments after the ceremony. I think Wilf would have approved and certainly would have been very proud of his grandchildren for looking after us all so well.

In an organisation which so often has to say NO, it is a pleasant change to make a positive contribution to the landscape which can be enjoyed for many years to come.

Other enjoyable events were the fascinating lecture and film about John & Christine Nash by our Patron, Ronnie Blythe last December and also the delightful party in the stunningly beautiful garden of Bill & Liz Durlacher in Langham last June. A very big *Thank You* from us all to everyone who helped organise and produce these events.

Continuing on the positive theme, members may have seen in last Saturday's *East Anglian Daily Times* an excellent series of articles about our local AONBs by the paper's Environment correspondent, John Grant. In this he has been much helped by Cathy Smith, one of the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley project's staff under Simon Amstutz who has won wide praise for publicising the Project's work.

The article followed up a recent conference at the Suffolk Food Hall and two new publications, one by the National Association of AONBs and National Parks entitled *So Much More Than the View* and the other, *The Economic Impact of Tourism*. These documents show the enormous contribution to the economy made by protected landscapes and the massive value of tourism which is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the UK economy.

People are passionate about AONBs and National Parks and care deeply about their future. They contribute more than £20 billion a year to the nation's economy and attract a total of 260 million visitors annually.

In the Dedham Vale, which is one of the smallest of the 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, a study by *Destination Research*, a tourism research and intelligence agency, has found that in 2014 the total tourism value was £53.2m and supported 1,162 jobs. It was the destination for 820,500 visits of which 718,500 were day trips and 102,000 were people staying at least one night.

All this in an area with a population of less than 10,000. Now that so much work can be done from home using the internet, We can expect the economy in our beautiful countryside to continue to grow strongly without much further building.

The Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project's work is all part of this positive agenda but it does not mean that the Dedham Vale Society no longer has a role to play. The Project is a publicly funded body. Its Partnership can discuss issues of the day and decide to support or oppose certain courses of action, such as extending the AONB boundaries, but it cannot campaign or dig out threats like we can.

Our Society can and does take a view on all development proposed within and near the AONB boundaries. As Bill Bryson, the author and former CPRE president says in his latest book: “Ordinary people must fight for the traditions, sights and landscapes they love and taking the countryside for granted is now almost certainly its greatest threat.”

There are indeed many threats and we remain resolute in bringing them to public notice and opposing them.

To do this we have a group of hard working officers and committee. I thank them all and hope that we may continue to recruit more and especially younger members to ensure the Society continues its invaluable work.

Robert Erith TD DL

28th September 2015