

The Dedham Vale Society

President's Comments to the AGM, 26th September 2016

In last month's Journal, I said that the new Minister responsible for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty was Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal. However, after several weeks of prevarication, responsibilities for the various DEFRA Ministers have been re-allocated and we now know that the person who will be in charge of all landscape issues is Lord Gardiner of Kimble. John Gardiner is a farmer with a home in Suffolk who was made a peer in 2010. I had a long conversation with him at the Suffolk Show last June when he was a more junior minister. We discussed the problems of extending AONBs, amongst many other topics. I am inviting him to visit the Dedham Vale next year and hopefully he will be a speaker at the annual Project Forum which will be held at Shrubs Farm Barn next June, probably Friday, 17th.

The money which the Society has paid the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Project along with contributions from other amenity societies and parish councils has been put to good use. It has helped to pay for two studies produced last July by the highly-regarded Landscape Consultants, Alison Farmer Associates.

The first is entitled ***Dedham Vale AONB Natural Beauty and Special Qualities and Perceived and Anticipated Risks***. It has reviewed, gathered and presented evidence on the natural beauty and special qualities of the existing AONB in order clearly to articulate why it is one of Britain's nationally valued landscapes. The study also looks at vulnerability and perceived risks. It concludes that Dedham Vale is unique within the family of AONBs – a special “one-off” AONB. It will be particularly valuable to planning officers as a checklist of the special qualities and will inform their advice to developers and will assist in determining planning applications.

The second report is called ***Special Qualities of the Dedham Vale AONB Evaluation of the Area Between Bures and Sudbury***

This study reviews the history of the area and undertakes a detailed evaluation based on *Natural England* Guidance. It recommends that a large part of the area meets the *Natural England* guidelines but that the area of the main river valley north of Lamarsh has become degraded and will not meet the criteria.

Question marks remain over whether Bures village, Lamarsh and surrounding valley landscapes affected by incongruous features and Twinstead should be included and these areas require particular scrutiny.

Both these documents are available on-line from the Project and are worth careful study.

Last Friday week I had a meeting, along with others which was arranged by Simon Amstutz to brief local MPs on the purpose, problems and economic value of Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONBs.

Of the six invitees only Bernard Jenkin and James Cartlidge turned up. However, the meeting was unexpectedly useful. Both MPs expressed strong support for AONBs and concern at the fact that only two people in the whole country are employed in assessing boundary variations in National Parks and AONBs, and they have other duties as well. We have finally learned officially that Dedham Vale is one of six AONBs requesting boundary variations. We don't know what order they will be considered in, but the Alison Farmer report gives us a strong position as a result of work already done.

The Society has had much to do in opposing unsuitable planning applications with more to come. Examples are Bures Hamlet, 105 houses, and at East Bergholt, Langham, Horkesley and elsewhere.

We are fortunate in having a dedicated team to make our views and objections known. I thank them all and a special mention and thanks to our new Hon Secretary Kate Warburton for so ably picking up the reins from Sarah Carr.

Finally, we have lost one of our most loyal and longstanding supporters in Catherine Whitworth-Jones of Boxted Mill. She is someone I have known for 65 years and she will be sorely missed. We send our sincere condolences to her daughters Arabella and Lucinda and all their families.

Robert Erith TD DL

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