

Valley Conservation Society



doing nothing is not an option

Members' newsletter No 171

We are a non-political organisation

November 2020

Last newsletter before lockdown



It seems hardly any time at all since we were celebrating the lifting of the last lockdown and delighting in the resumption of VCS work parties and other normal activities. Yet here we are again facing the prospective of another month-long lockdown starting on Thursday.

This Tuesday's work party (Nov 3) will be the last until the curfew is lifted, although individual members will continue to visit our land in the Lower Loose Valley to ensure essential maintenance and safety. If you notice anything amiss during this time, please call our chairman Bryn Cornwell on 01622 746514.

Our land at the ponds, Crisbrook Meadow and Hayle Park Nature Reserve will remain open to the public and you are more than welcome to take your daily exercise – which is still permitted – there. The last lockdown had some positive benefits in that many more people visited the Valley for the first time and soon came to appreciate its beauty and tranquillity.

Of course the most important thing is for members to take care of themselves and stay safe. Remember Hands, Face and Space!

The last time, volunteer support groups were quickly set up in both Tovil and Loose to help people do essential shopping and to collect prescriptions.

This latest shutdown has taken us a bit by surprise and we have no details to give you of those yet, but no doubt they will be up and running soon.

In the meantime, there is an official support service run by Kent County Council that will arrange essential shopping and medicine collections etc for anyone in the county who is in need. The Kent Together helpline is open 24hrs a day. You can get help by visiting www.kent.gov.uk/kenttogether or calling [03000 41 92 92](tel:03000419292).



The collapsed wall in Crisbrook Meadow

October was a tough month

The Society suffered a major setback at the start of the month when a section of the ragstone wall in Crisbrook Meadow – which had been so lovingly restored by the work party in 2017 – collapsed.

The falling stones also crushed a public bench that had been donated by one of our members in memory of her father.

The collapse followed days of heavy rain, but we had already noticed that the ground around the bench was getting flooded and it later transpired that there is a spring in the steep bank below Mount Ararat behind the wall.

The area was quickly roped off and the fallen stones tidied up and we have since called in a structural engineer to advise on how to rebuild the wall without the same thing happening again further down the line.

When the wall was built originally it rested on large stone blocks set in the ground as a foundation. This time, we have been advised to dig a trench and lay concrete foundations. This work has already been done and we are grateful to GP Concrete from Badgers Mount who supplied us with the ready-mixed concrete at a large discount.



The cement arrives

The bench has also been repaired by members and relocated to a different part of the meadow, away from the flooded area.

The wall will be re-built with support buttresses and with weep-holes to allow the water to pass through and with the wall raked at an inward angle to give it extra strength.

We will be using traditional lime mortar (which is expensive). Unfortunately because this cannot be laid while there is a risk of frost – plus now the Covid shut-down – this work is not likely to be carried out until the New Year.

The job will be a costly one, large quantities of lime mortar, builder's sand and sharp sand will be required. However, on that score there is some good news – see below.



The bench has been restored and re-located

Local Giving

Towards the end of October – and at very short notice – we heard that our application to be included in Local Giving’s Coronavirus Match-Funding Campaign had been successful. There was no time to distribute a newsletter as the appeal only ran for a short while, but we contacted all our members who are on email and asked if they would consider donating. Every gift was match-funded by Local Giving and there was also the opportunity to boost the sum still further by claiming Gift Aid.

The result was fantastic and as we go to print the appeal has already raised more than £3,000. **Thank you all so much!**

Siltexing postponed

One of the annual chores most enjoyed by the work party is the application of Siltex in the ponds. It gives everyone the chance to muck about on the ponds in the Valley Conservation boat.

Siltex is a living microbe material that when scattered in the water consumes the silt and helps to keep the water clean and breathable for the fish and other wildlife.

The Siltex application is done in mid-November and for the past couple of weeks, the work party has been clearing away overhanging undergrowth from the pond edges in order to give themselves a clear run with the Siltex.

Sadly, the lockdown has put the kybosh on this for the time being.



“There is nothing –
absolutely nothing –
half so much worth doing
as simply messing about
in boats.”

*So says Ratty to Mole in
'The Wind in the Willows'*

Happier times



Local meat available

When out walking, you will have heard the bleating of sheep in the valley. The animals belong to a young farming couple, Chris Woodhead and Zoe Colville, who are based at Pypmes Court Farm off Busbridge Road, Loose.

They have 700 ewes, 30 cattle and - unusually - 50 Boer and Anglo-Nubian goats, all being bred for their meat. (They also have a number of pygmy goats that they keep as pets.) They have recently started selling their meat directly to the public – in what Miss Colville described as farm-to-fork marketing.

She said: "A lot of people are interested in the goats because it's actually quite difficult to buy goat meat in the shops. When you can, it mostly comes from Spain. "We offer high welfare standards and full traceability."

So if you really want to buy local and cut back on food miles, why not give them a call on **07540 490561**?

You can see what they have to offer at www.thelittlefarmfridge.co.uk



Goat for Sunday lunch anyone?

The couple will deliver using a refrigerated van to local postcodes. What better way to avoid the Covid queues at the supermarket?