

# Valley Conservation Society



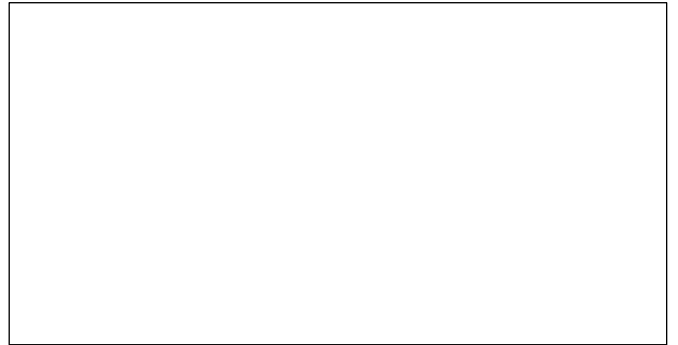
*doing nothing is not an option*

Members' newsletter No 186

We are a non-political organisation

March 2024

## Your invitation to our annual general meeting



The Society will hold its **annual general meeting** at the King George V Pavilion off Walnut Tree Lane, in Loose, on **Saturday, 6 April**.

There will be reports from the current officers on the progress of the Society over the past year, followed by a public open session.

This is your chance to raise any areas of concern, or to make helpful suggestions. It is also your chance to elect the new executive committee for the coming year.

Tea and coffee will be served.

Please make the effort to attend – we need to know that we are carrying out your wishes.

The meeting starts at **10am**, and must finish by 12.30pm.

Only paid-up members can vote, but membership will be available at the door – for the regular price of £2 per person per annum.

### **Tovil Annual Parish Meeting**

If you can't make our own AGM, we will also be presenting a report to the annual parish meeting in Tovil on **Monday, April 22**, starting at **6.30pm**.

You will also be able to hear reports from other charities and organisations operating in Tovil.

In a change of venue, the meeting this year will be at the Tovil Workingmen's Club in Hearne Court. Again free refreshments will be provided.

# Victory!

It is rare that we are able to report a total victory over a would-be developer – but this month we can.

In our December newsletter, we explained how an application had been made to build nine luxury homes on land known as “the cricket pitch” close to the Manor House at Hayle Place off Teasaucer Hill.

At that stage, the applicants had just withdrawn their first application – to correct some glaring errors – but since then, they submitted a new application for essentially the same thing.

The Society opposed the application and we are delighted to say that it has been refused by MBC. It didn't even reach the council's planning committee, but was thrown out by planning officers using their delegated powers. The comprehensive list of reasons for rejection included:

*The site was outside the limits to built development and was in land designated as countryside.*

*The only access was onto Cripple Street/Teasaucer Hill which were narrow, busy and without footpaths, making it an unsustainable location.*

*The development would represent a sprawl of urbanising development that would fail to enhance the distinctive character of the Loose Valley Landscape of Local Value.*

*It would detract from the setting of neighbouring listed buildings and of the undesignated heritage asset of the walled garden of Hayle Cottage, as well as harming the character of the Conservation Area.*

*The application had failed to provide an Arboricultural Impact Assessment on its effects on trees in the area, a number of which were subject to tree preservation orders.*

*The submission had failed to demonstrate it would result in any biodiversity net gain and it had failed to provide any affordable housing.*

Full details can be read on the Maidstone council planning website: look up application 23/505511.

## And a bonus

*In more good news we hear that the development site beyond the cricket field, known locally as Smith's Field, which already had planning permission for 62 homes (dating back to 2019) has also hit problems.*

*The original developer, Chailey Homes, tried to interest Taylor Wimpey (the builders of the Hayle Park Estate) in taking over from them, but we understand that after Taylor Wimpey's own engineers reported back, they declined. It seems that there is bedrock shortly below the surface, which would make developing the site less profitable than usual.*

*In addition, the original grant of planning permission has now expired, meaning that for the time being at least, the site remains safe.*

## And a final word on planning...

Members will recall that we have vigorously opposed the inclusion of Abbey Gate Farm in the current draft Maidstone Local Plan Review, where it is earmarked for 250 homes.

Our secretary, Alan Smith, and long-standing VCS member Eileen Lewis, both gave evidence to the Government Planning Inspector at his public inquiry into the Local Plan.

We were unable to convince the Inspector to drop the site allocation altogether, but we did gain some concessions over having the areas to become public open space more accurately designated and emphasis placed on the need to minimise harm to the Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve.

Last month, Alan and Eileen were given a briefing on the current thinking on the plans by two agents from DHA – the planning consultants representing the site's promoter – Alan Firmin Ltd.

There is no planning application for the site as yet, but DHA said it had now reconfigured the road which will run from Dean Street through the Walnut Tree Meadow Nature Reserve to access the site, so that now it lies much more to the east, running parallel with, and close to, the boundary with the adjacent Burke's site.

The Society is opposed to any road across the nature reserve, but the new position is better than that previously promoted, which would have gone right through the middle of the reserve.

DHA also promised that there would be no traffic – not even construction traffic – accessing the road from Stockett Lane; everything would enter from Dean Street.

DHA said there would be liaison with the community as the plan progressed over landscape mitigation measures and – at our insistence – also promised to discuss these specifically with the residents at Abbeygate Place, who will be most directly affected by the new estate.

## Some reminders

Don't forget we are now looking for photographs of the Loose Valley to include in our calendar for next year. We need to select 12 month-appropriate photos in total.

Landscape shots are best. Email them as j-pegs to the secretary at [a128smith@btinternet.com](mailto:a128smith@btinternet.com) giving details of when and where they were taken.

We have a handful of 2024 calendars still available. These collectors' items can be purchased for £2 each from Alan on the email above and can be delivered.

## Tuesday Work Party

The real work of the Society is done by the members of the Tuesday Work Party who meet each week at 10am at the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill. They would love to see more volunteers! Stay all day or just for an hour – it's up to you. Details from our chairman Bryn Cornwell on **01622 746514**.

# Elections

*While Radio 4 can't seem to stop obsessing about the as yet uncalled General Election, there are local elections coming up on May 2 that we know all about.*

*This year, there are going to be a number of confusing changes, so here is our guide.*

*Previously, the majority of our members have lived in one of two wards – either South Ward, which had three councillors, or Loose Ward, which had one.*

*But this year the borough council is undergoing a thorough shake-up, with the overall number of councillors reducing from 55 to 49.*

*Locally, that means that South Ward will shrink to just the parish of Tovil, and will return two councillors.*

*The rump of South Ward, the area known locally as North Loose, will now join in an expanded Loose and Linton Ward, that will take in Linton too, and will also become a two-member ward.*



*But that's not the end of the changes. There will also be parish council elections.*

*As the North Loose Residents Association is disbanding, Loose Parish Council is expanding to take on their area as well as Loose village.*

*In addition, some houses at the bottom end of Cripple Street, along with those in Saxon Way, are also being transferred from Tovil to Loose.*

*So your polling station may well be different from that you had previously and it will be important to check your polling card for details when it arrives.*

*Also don't forget we now have to take our passports or some other official form of photo ID to vote these days.*

*We will leave the politicians to promote themselves for the borough council elections, but a word on the parish councils.*

*Parish councils often find it difficult to fill their places, so if you believe you can make a contribution to local affairs, why not put your name forward?*

*The parish clerks will be able to supply you with details about how to stand.*

*For Tovil, contact Nicola Iddeson on [clerk@tovilparishcouncil.co.org](mailto:clerk@tovilparishcouncil.co.org)*

*For Loose, contact Kim Owen on [office@loose-pc.gov.uk](mailto:office@loose-pc.gov.uk)*

*Or call the borough council's electoral services department (they also run the parish council elections) on 01622 602007.*