

Valley Conservation Society



doing nothing is not an option

Members' newsletter No 189

We are a non-political organisation

November 2024

Calendar time



Our brand new 2025 calendar is now available.

It features 12 lovely month-appropriate photographs of the Loose Valley taken by our members. It's a bargain at £6 and makes the ideal Christmas present.

Calendars can be collected from the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill on Tuesdays when the work party is in action.

At other times, call our chairman, Bryn Cornwell, on 01622 746514.

This year's calendar marks the silver jubilee of the Society's foundation, back in the year 2000.



Damage to railings

Since our last newsletter, we have had to deal with some damage to the iron railings bordering Reeds Pond in Cave Hill.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service had engaged Tree Surgeons of Kent to fell a diseased Ash on their land on the other side of the road.

Unfortunately, Tree Surgeons of Kent allowed two large boughs to fall across the road onto our fence. The firm admitted responsibility, but getting them to put the matter right seemed to take a lot of effort.

In the end, our work party took over the job in return for a “donation.”



Work Party

The Tuesday work party continues to meet every week from 10am at the Conservation Cabin.

Recently they have been tidying up around the islands in the ponds ready for our annual delivery of Siltex, due on November 5.

Each November, the Society spreads a ton of Siltex across the ponds. The highly porous form of calcium carbonate is environmentally friendly and harmless to plants and animals, but helps to break down the silt accumulation in the bottom of the pond.

The work party welcomes new volunteers. Stay for an hour or all day. All equipment provided. Just bring stout shoes and your lunch!

Fishing

This is the reason why we don't allow fishing in our ponds.

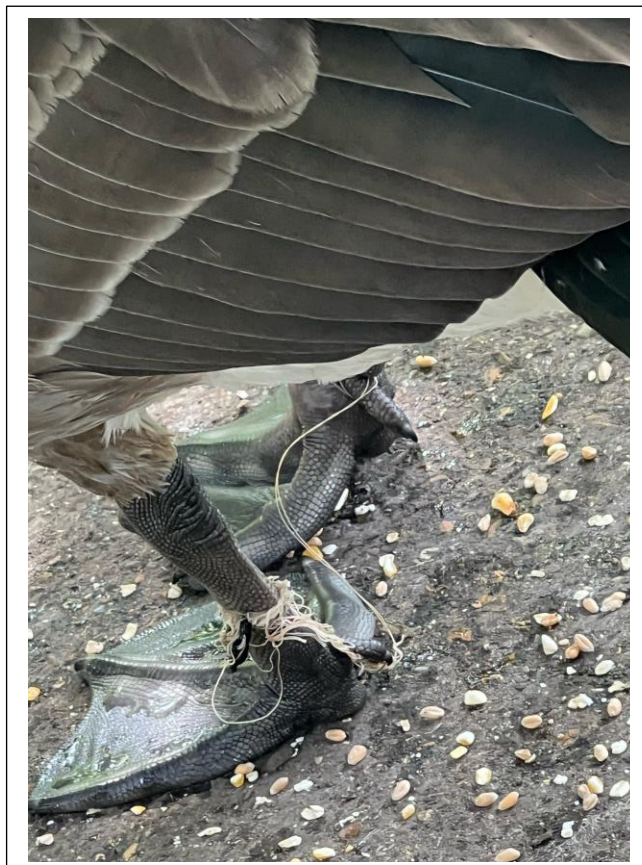
The cast-off line causes the wildlife serious problems.

We've relayed photographs of fishermen to Kent Police, who have already spoken to one offender and say they will take action on the others once they have been identified.

If you see fishermen in our ponds and are able to take a photograph of them or of their vehicle, please send it directly to the wildlife crimes officer, Martin Chivers, on martin.chivers@kent.pnn.police.uk

Give details of time and location.

Copy us in please, on a128smith@btinternet.com



Planning

After a period of relative quiet, it's all kicking off again planning-wise.

Local members, will not have failed to notice that work has begun in earnest on what is known locally as "**the Burke's site**" on Farleigh Hill (although Pat Burke no longer owns the land.)

It is necessitating the occasional use of lane restrictions and temporary traffic lights.

The development by Countryside Partnerships and L&G Affordable Homes will result in 272 extra homes.

Next door to it is the Walnut Tree Meadows Nature Reserve, which is where the new access road will be forged across the meadow to reach the planned **Abbeygate Farm** development.

After MBC allocated this site for 250 homes in its recently adopted Local Plan Review, it is only a matter of time before a formal application is posted. We will keep you informed.

Cricket Field appeal

My son, when he was going through his video games period, once explained to me that: “You can’t kill a Zombie, you can only re-kill it.”

That’s about how I feel about developers. No matter how many times you shoot them down, they spring back into life.

Having had their planning application for nine homes on the “cricket field” at Hayle Place comprehensively rejected by MBC on a number of grounds in February, the developers have lodged an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate.

Cricket has not been played there for over 30 years and the land has long since returned to nature.

The developers claim the land is “brownfield.”

Planning permission was granted in 1979 for a wooden hut for use as a changing room, but it was on a temporary basis, only with the condition that the hut be removed by 1984.

The development site is close to several listed buildings, is in the Conservation Area, and will spill its traffic onto the junction at the top of Teasaucer Hill – already dangerous enough.

The Society has written to the planning inspector supporting the council’s refusal.

If you want to do the same, you can go online at <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk>
The appeal reference number is APP/u2235/w/24/3350221

But in fact, you only use the 3350221 part when searching for the right appeal.



The “cricket ground”

Smith's Field

Adjacent to the Cricket Field and just behind the bungalows in Richmond Way is Smith's Field. Chailey Homes was granted permission to build 62 homes on the site back in December 2019, but never got around to it – chiefly because it couldn't reach an agreement with Taylor Wimpey who own the land that Chailey would need to form the entrance.

The planning permission should have expired in December 2021.

Just four days before that deadline, Chailey Homes had contractors lay kerbing at the entrance, extending for 35 metres – despite not actually owning that land.

The road surface was not addressed and no further work was carried out.

Since then, Chailey Homes has sold the plot to a new developer, Tonbridge-based Aile Homes. Rather than submit a fresh application – which would require it to comply with new planning policies such as Biodiversity Net Gain that have come into force since 2021, Aile has submitted an application to Maidstone council for a “certificate of lawfulness.”

It claims that Chailey had made a “material start” on the development by laying 35m of kerb. The Society disputes that. We wait to see what MBC will decide.

You can tell MBC what you think by going online at the borough's planning applications page and searching for 24/503536/LDCEX | Lawful Development Certificate (Existing) Land At Postley Road Maidstone Kent ME15 6RH



Aile Homes contends this single stretch of kerbing constitutes a “material start” on a development of 62 homes

Seaquer

This is pronounced “Seeker.”

It is the name of a new nature app developed by Maidstone software designer Ben Darlington.

It enables users of the app to take a photo of anything interesting they see on their country walks.

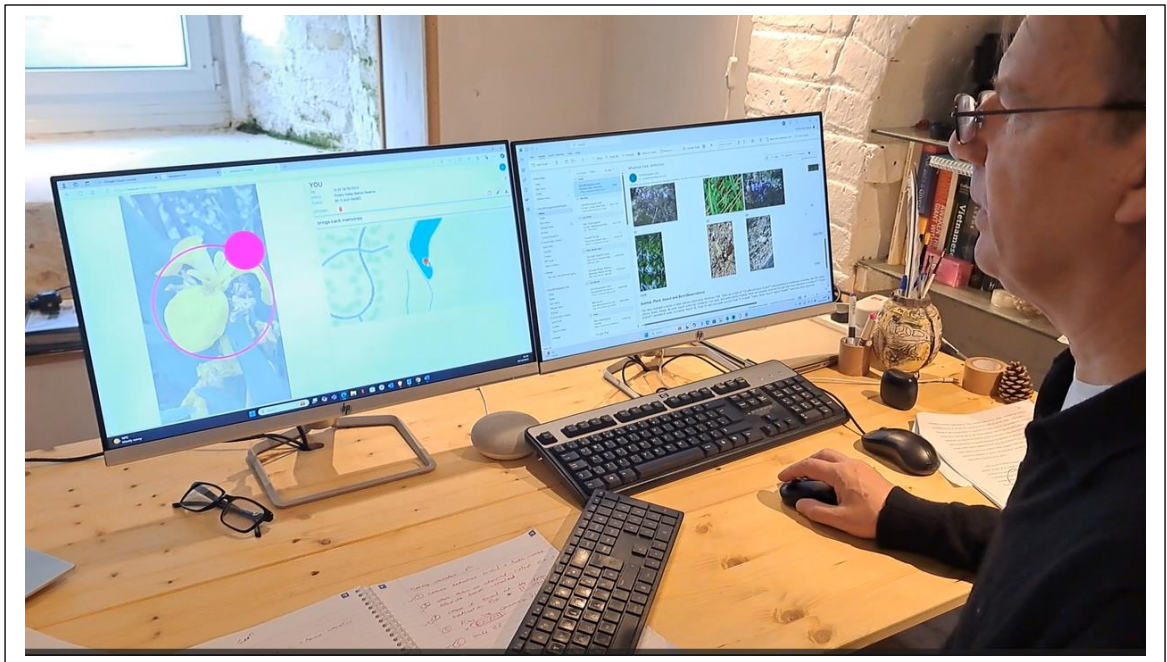
The app will tell you what plant, animal or insect you are looking at, and even what birdsong you are listening to.

You can then “Vibe” (Mr Darlington’s word for Post) your photo to a shared map with other users so that they can see what you have found and where.

Mr Darlington hopes that the posts by members of the public will provide useful information to managers of open spaces such as VCS or the Hayle Park Nature Reserve Trust.

The app is still being refined, and he would love a few people to start “vibing” and give him some feedback. Mr Darlington believes the real value of the app is in getting people to pay more attention to nature when they are out walking.

You can find out more at www.seaquer.com



Mr Darlington at work on his Seaquer app

Jacquie Day

It was with great sadness that the Society learned at the start of October of the death of Jacquie Day. She had been a founding member of the North Loose Residents’ Association and had done so much for the area. She will be greatly missed.