

Newsletter. May 2018

Dear Everyone

Neighbourhood Plan notes for this month

Wildlife in and around the village

March saw the publication of several depressing reports on the state of wildlife here and in the rest of Europe. They made sad reading with the loss of around 40% of our animals over just a few decades. One report highlighted, particularly, the steep decline of the water vole (Ratty, in *Wind in the Willows*).

The Neighbourhood Plan will have policies that will offer some protection to our most important wildlife areas and also how to build housing estates that incorporate wildlife corridors and promote wildlife-friendly house design.

We made habitat protection the topic of the Farmer's Market stall in April. The main aim was to try and show that we have important habitats in and around the village. We have two streams running through the village, Hurst Brook and Mill Brook (which goes under the road just south of the Church). Both are very clean waterways supporting many species now rare and endangered. Some work done for the Neighbourhood Plan reports, along these watercourses in the village, some 80 species of flower, 36 trees, 20 butterfly and 60 birds, many 'of conservation concern'. Both streams have otter and water vole

If you walk our footpaths we would like to hear of other habitats around the village that you feel are important. Here is some information when you walk Martock's footpaths (and some things for children to do)

- Maps of all our footpaths are [online here](#) The work of our footpath man, Richard Deubert (report footpath problems to him).
- [Here is how recognise footprints in the mud](#) (water vole strangely not shown but its star-shaped, very like the wood mouse, a bit bigger and next to water).
- [Here are the Red and Amber lists of birds](#) that are declining in numbers,

Hills to Levels Scheme

Following the serious flooding of 2013-14 the government made some funding available for flood alleviation programmes in Somerset. This gave rise to the 'Hills to Levels' scheme of the Somerset Rivers Authority and the Farmers Wildlife Action Group (FWAG), a series of measures to slow the flow of water down onto the Levels. Last month, the scheme won a prestigious national award, [the UK Rivers Prize](#).

Our flood warden, Gordon Swindells, working with local farmers, played a key role in the Scheme developing a series of many carefully designed small dams and ponds in our river catchment area. One feature are small leaky wooden dams which don't interfere with normal tributary flow but, at times of high rainfall hold back a surprising lot of water to even out the flow downstream through the village. Another feature is a

series of larger ponds with manually controlled sluices were also made which hold back a good volume of water until it is safe to release it.

So we have had no floods this winter, not even when the snow all melted at once. And when one of the ponds was safely lowered recently after the snowmelt, the muddy edge was quickly covered with water vole tracks. Win win.

We want to try and integrate drainage systems from new housing developments into this scheme; this part of the Neighbourhood Plan is being designed by Gordon.

More on Hills to Levels - from Gordon -, on the Neighbourhood Plan, and much else besides, at the **Annual Parish Meeting next Thursday, 17th May, 6.30pm**, Parish Hall (With refreshments, I'm assured).

The Orchard Way extension planning decision.

The extension to Orchard Way next to the Rec was finally passed this month. Earlier it had been rejected by SSDC and then rejected again at appeal by the Planning Inspectorate because the developer's ecologist had somehow failed to notice an exceptionally large badger sett that was a dominant and obvious ecological feature of the site. The revised plan incorporated an enforced eviction of the badgers to a brand new pre-dug home nearby and also a 4 foot wide 'badger corridor' around the western edge of the site to allow them access to their breakfast on the Rec and in everyone's gardens

I suggested that maybe the corridor could, instead, be about 10 feet wide under the row of fine mature conserved oak trees on land that could not therefore be built on anyway. It would make a nice footpath for humans as well as badgers, a natural extension of Lovers Lane as far as the new estate. Brick wall. Badger paths are protected by law, human paths not.

The neighbourhood plan development strategy

Martock must grow by about 10-12 new houses per year (National and South Somerset policy). We have been pretty well on track for the last decade and we need about 80-100 more before 2028. We could leave it to the market and to South Somerset to decide where to build these. But if we do they will probably not be where we would like them, they would probably not be what the village needs, and we may not have much control over the numbers.

We will therefore be calling for possible housing sites in the June Leveller. Owners of land, small or large tracts, are encouraged to submit possible housing sites to us (via the Parish Office). The land must be next to (or inside) the village boundary. We hope we will then have more than will be needed and this will allow a choice to be made, based on transparent and objective criteria, of where the houses should be built, how many, and what kind.

More on this important action at the Farmers' Market tomorrow.

Hope to see you there

Andrew