

Community MATTERS

DECEMBER 2023



The Newt is committed to having a positive effect on the local community, whether that be through providing access to our amenities at a reduced rate, working with local groups and residents to support charitable initiatives, hosting schools and young people, or taking care to be environmentally friendly and sustainable. We are continuing to grow and we'd like to maximise this positive impact by being proactive, working and consulting with local communities. Over the next year we will be working hard to open new channels for discussion, feedback and action. This newsletter will be published quarterly and circulated to parish councils, local resident groups and individuals - please use link at the bottom to sign up. The newsletter will always cover key updates on our community activity and action, development works and environmental impact. The first action we are taking to enhance relations between The Newt and our neighbours is to hire a full time Community Liaison and a Village Steward; you can read more on both these roles below.

I look forward to seeing you in the garden, best wishes for Christmas and a joyful New Year.

Edward Workman
CEO

NEWT *in the* COMMUNITY

Community Liaison

Following recent consultation with village representatives about what The Newt could do to support local community initiatives and groups, we have taken the decision to create a dedicated resource for building on existing relationships, through the hire of a full-time community liaison. We have been advertising the role over the past few weeks and have received over 70 applicants. We hope to have someone in post early in the New Year. The community liaison will work proactively with local village groups and representatives to ensure The Newt is having a positive impact within the local area. We look forward to introducing the successful applicant in due course.

Village Steward

In addition to the community liaison, we have also advertised for a Village Steward. This practical role will be engaged at the borders of The Newt estate, where our land touches local villages and towns.

The successful applicant will be focussed on maintaining the appearance of estate owned assets, being a visible and responsible custodian, and assisting communities with practical problems and upkeep of public amenities.

DATE for your DIARY

CHRISTMAS MARKET WEEKEND 9AM-8PM ON 9
DECEMBER, AND 9AM-4.30PM ON 10 DECEMBER



School Visits

In 2023 we have welcomed 48 schools and over 2,000 children from five counties to the Roman Villa. 26 of these schools have been from the immediate South Somerset area. Moving into the new year, we have 20 schools already booked and a further 60 that have expressed interest in visiting. Nicky Everett is our educational lead, and she says "we provide a high quality educational experience to young children. The tuition, tours, activities, and resources are delivered at no charge to the schools, by an experienced education professional. Roman history is part of the national curriculum, and we are pleased to share this amazing resource with children of all ages."

*"Outstanding in all areas.
The experience was excellent and
we will most definitely be back!"*

FEEDBACK FROM CASTLE CARY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Castle Cary in bloom

For the last three years we have been supporting Castle Cary town council with an annual donation of £7,000, to create hanging baskets and green areas throughout the town and planters at the railway station. This year the council entered the RHS Britain in Bloom competition and was awarded a Gold medal, with special praise going to the Eat Cary garden, which won the Gordon Ford Trophy and 'It's Your Neighbourhood' Award. We will be supporting the council to compete again in 2024, fingers crossed for another medal!

Wincanton FC

In 2022 we donated £9,000 to Wincanton FC for the construction of a new pitch at their home ground. This work was completed in 2023 and in October 2023 a Newt team, made up of staff, were amongst the first to run out on the pitch in a friendly game against Wincanton. The home team were in great form and took the win.

Yarlington Carol Concert

On Monday 11 December Wells Cathedral School Choir will be singing at the Church of St. Mary in Yarlington. The Newt has been helping Reverend Tristram Rae Smith and the Parish Council organise, and we have supported this event so that is free for all residents. It should be a real seasonal treat.

MON 11 DEC, 6PM AT CHURCH OF SAINT MARY

PROPERTY & PROJECTS



The Creamery

Our careful, brick-by-brick renovation of the Creamery building at Castle Cary Station is finally nearing completion. This former milk factory dating from the early C20th, with its splendid 60ft tall chimney, will be home to our own new dairy, making hand-crafted white cheeses and yoghurts. There is still lots to finish off but we look forward to opening the dairy, together with a restaurant and shop in the spring.

The new station car park constructed by GWR has brought a major improvement for rail users. The Newt has constructed the stairs and accessible ramp, within our site,

that has made this new parking possible. However, we have been informed by GWR that the new car park will again be closed from mid-January for 10 weeks, whilst their work to fully complete the approach road is carried out.

A New Lease of Life

Two charming historic workers cottages adjacent to the Creamery building on Station Approach have been carefully repaired and modestly refurbished over the past year to provide great new staff accommodation. These small cottages with 2 and 3 bedrooms will make perfect homes for members of our team.

Estate Kitchen

At Avalon Farm the superstructure of the new Estate Kitchen building is now well formed and work continues apace indoors to install the fitout. This state-of-the-art new facility will enable our chefs to work with estate-grown produce to create high quality meals, baked goods and other food products for sale in the farm shop as well as online.

Over this winter our team will be planting thousands of new trees and hedging plants as part of the landscaping design around the Butchery and Estate Kitchen buildings.

Community Flooding Response

The Newt's development team is working actively alongside neighbours, local action groups and government agencies to investigate ways to help make our landscape and properties more resilient to surface water flooding.

Our farmland falls into several catchment areas and so recently we met with experts from the Environment Agency and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group to learn more about practical steps we can take to help slow the flow of surface water across the wider landscape, which in turn helps to prevent flooding of watercourses downstream. Over the coming weeks we will be identifying where we can employ Natural Flood Management principles across the Estate to best effect and putting together proposals to share with local stakeholders.

GREEN NEWT

Entomology and Biodiversity

Thomas Oliver joined The Newt in December as our full-time resident entomologist. Tom has a MSc from Royal Holloway and has recently completed a PhD at Bangor University. He has a particular interest in Bumblebees, but his role at The Newt will allow him to look at a huge number of different species, that are flourishing in the gardens. One of his first tasks will be to undertake a biodiversity audit, learning from Fergus Garret at Great Dixter, we hope to understand what we have before taking steps to improve. Tom will involve staff and members in this project and we will publish all the results and learnings.

Head Gardeners Conference

In October we hosted over 50 head gardeners from across the country for our annual conference. Attendees included gardeners from the RHS, National Trust, English Heritage and our partner gardens. The conference provides a platform for these industry professionals to come together and discuss themes and actions that can have far reaching influence and outcomes - hundreds of thousands of acres of land is in the custodianship of these individuals. This year we focused on sustainability, with interesting debate on rewilding, use of phosphates in gardens,

biodiversity, heritage gardens and urban green space. As an offshoot from the conference The Newt, RHS and National Trust have pledged to found a new gardener exchange programme to further increase opportunities for learning and sharing best practice.



SPEAKERS AT THE HEAD GARDENERS CONFERENCE

Regenerative farming

Cameron Knee, our Farm Manager practices regenerative farming techniques, here are a few pointers from Cam on what that means: "Our Estate beef is reared using regenerative agricultural techniques which we believe best suit our herd, farm, and the wider environment. Animal welfare is our priority, with calves weaned at 7-8 months, heifers served with a bull based on weight rather than age and selective breeding across the herd with bulls paired with cows to best suit their condition and size, to ensure ease of calving. Beef is reared on a 95% grass diet, with finishing cattle supplemented by barley and beans grown

on the Estate. Fattening stock is not pushed hard, as we prefer to finish cattle between 24-28 months to ensure the best quality fat cap on our meat. All grass, hay and arable crops are grown using no artificial fertilisers or chemicals on growing crops, with our straw bedding for the cattle coming from these same crops. Cattle muck is spread regularly with herbal leys and cover crops are integrated in rotation alongside extensive cross sowing of clover into our grass leys to prioritise soil health and organic matter. Our ever-growing sheep flock follow the cattle in grazing rotations to maximise grazing efficiency as well as being a key tool in improving and helping to tiller our new grass leys. Our lamb is 100% grass fed and finished. Maintaining the soil and biodiversity on the farm is not good enough for us, we as regenerative farmers aim to leave the farm, soil and environment in a better place than when we started and hopefully encourage and inspire other farmers and growers to do similar."



CAMERON KNEE, FARM MANAGER