

# Community MATTERS

MARCH 2024



## Dear Neighbours,

It is often with some relief that we can say Spring has arrived. The return of bird song and eruption of colour serve as welcome reminders of how the natural world provides a constant source of beauty, creativity and sanctuary. I am personally encouraged by the longer days to explore the area on foot and take stock of the seasonal changes.

On our boundaries and where footpaths weave across the countryside, we appreciate our responsibility in ensuring those routes are maintained and walks are accessible. As custodians of the land it is our aim to preserve right of ways and do our best in protecting the vista. Out and about, you may meet our new Village Steward, Rob, who is walking the footpaths and taking on those crucial maintenance jobs.

Back on the estate, Spring means buds on the trees, flowering bulbs and the excitement of lambing season. The warmth of the sun will kickstart insect activity and our entomologist, Tom, will be on hand to paint a picture of our rich biodiversity. Spring remains the most obvious display of new life and seasonal change which keeps life diverse and ultimately, moving forward.

And so it is within our organisation. Alongside Rob we have now welcomed our Community Liaison, Zoe, and together they will become focal points for community involvement. This is a chance for renewed focus on what it means to be a business in the local area and all the opportunities, to collaborate and thrive, that represents. I hope this edition of the newsletter reassures you of our commitment as neighbours and serves as inspiration for positive change in the area we live and work.

Wishing you all the best,  
Ed

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## NEWT *in the* COMMUNITY

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### Community Liaison

We are pleased to introduce Zoe Young as our Community Liaison Officer who joined The Newt in February. Zoe lives locally and until her new appointment worked on Castle Cary High street for Save the Children.

Prior to that she served in the Army; a Commissioned Officer in the Royal Logistic Corps, Zoe has vast experience in problem solving and liaison work.

*"I am thrilled to be appointed in this unique role working alongside members of the community to make positive contributions locally. It's been great to learn more about the local area and the incredible work that goes on. My role is a resource to be utilised; I am here to listen, improve communication and work proactively to engage on issues. I look forward to meeting more of you in the near future."*



ROBERT ASKEW AND ZOE YOUNG

### Village Steward

Our other new post has been filled by Robert Askew, a seasoned estate custodian whose passion for upkeep and maintenance is equally matched by his talents as an illustrator.

Rob is looking forward to becoming a recognisable face and someone to approach as Village Steward. Already he has been involved in numerous ongoing projects around our communities. Be sure to stop and speak when you see him.

### Castle Cary Cricket Club

We are thrilled to continue our support of Castle Cary's Cricket Club with sponsorship of £9,000 towards whites, kit and pitch covers.

We can all be inspired by the team's tremendous performance last season with the 1st & 2nd teams winning their leagues, the Somerset Premier League and 5th Division respectively. Moreover, the club won Somerset Cricket League Club of Year. We wish them all the best for 2024 especially as they look to restart their Youth section.

We're hoping to learn a little in the process for our fledgling team- in due course we may even become worthy opponents!

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## DATES *for the* DIARY

EASTER WEEKEND: 29, 30, 31 MARCH & 1 APRIL

GARDEN DAY WEEKEND: 4 MAY - 6 MAY

CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW: 21 MAY - 25 MAY

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## Gather and Grow

Our most recent Gather and Grow event was hosted by energetic brothers Giacomo and Matteo Grasso, two brothers, who have recently bought a 50 acre farm just outside of Castle Cary, Higher Farm. Joined by Basil and Dave, Farm Manager and Head Grower respectively, the team at Higher Farm shared their mission

of regenerating our food system. Higher Farm is an agroecological farm whose vision is to be local, accessible and natural. With plans for an eatery, accommodation and an app to connect consumer directly to the producer there is certainly a lot to be excited about.

Here at The Newt, we look forward to celebrating their success.

*“Gather and Grow is a series of events throughout the year meant to challenge our employees thinking and inspire them with local initiatives, educational opportunities and broader ‘out of the box’ thinking. Fortunately we’ve also been able to offer tickets out within the community and have been encouraged by the interest.”*

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## GREEN NEWT

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### Biodiversity Audit

Tom, our entomologist, is in preparation to uncover the six-legged secrets that The Newt in Somerset has been hiding. He aims to conduct an invertebrate audit across three locations on the estate: The Kitchen Garden, The Parabola, and the wildflower meadow. His goal is to discover the insect species present in these areas and subsequently use this information to inform conservation and management projects at The Newt, ensuring continued biodiversity.

During this process, he hopes to engage with the local community and wildlife groups, involving them wherever possible to educate about the importance of invertebrates and how they can aid in addressing the biodiversity crisis.

In other exciting news Tom has discovered some rather obscure stem-mining flies that until recently were thought to be extinct. Inspired by research by the Agromyzidae Recording Scheme, Tom focused his search at Avalon Farm and as result is the first person to record the presence of the Hawthorn Stem Mining Fly (*Phytobia carbonaria*) and the second to record the Blackthorn Stem Mining Fly (*phytobia cerasiferae*) in Somerset.

### Farm

The weather has felt against us in recent weeks. The particularly wet weather conditions have been especially bad on our local farmers at an already

demanding time. Our farm manager Cameron found a moment to give us an update:

*“It has been a busy February on the farm as lambing is in full swing with our pedigree Dorset Down ewes and our commercial flock. Our pedigree British White cattle have also started their spring calving, with a beautiful set of twins marking the start of the next 8 weeks of calving. We have also seen the addition of our charismatic water buffalo to our farming operations. These unique and friendly buffalo are milked every day to provide our new Creamery with rich buffalo milk to produce our new buffalo cheeses, yogurts, and gelato.”*

CAMERON KNEE, FARM MANAGER

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## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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### A359 Bridge

The new bridge over the A359 by Avalon Farm has been successfully installed, with the second phase concrete pour planned for either the 5th or 15th April. The bridge, of similar design to the popular Viper bridge at the Story of Gardening, will help reduce farm traffic on our local roads and will also provide a safe route to connect the Macmillan Way as it will be made a permissive bridleway. We know the danger for walkers trying to traverse that busy road and hope that the bridge will increase the accessibility of such a significant route.



### Community Flooding Response

We’ve been grateful for the continued support of our neighbours for sharing information and collaborating over flood prevention measures. Zoe

our Community Liaison, will be in attendance at local resilience planning meetings going forward. She will also be meeting with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group to understand whether our planned mitigations meet their recommendations.

### The Creamery

The final finishes are being put on the Creamery renovation with a handover to our operational team expected mid-April, closely followed by our first milk delivery. It has been a successful recruitment drive with a number of local applicants and some well-deserved internal promotions too. Details of opening dates are coming soon!