

Working Together for a Better Community

# NEROCHE VILLAGES

## Newsletter

For the parishes of Staple Fitzpaine, Bickenhall, Curland  
and Orchard Portman with Thurlbear

Issue 51 - Spring 2024



*Photo by Karen Morgan*

Welcome to the Neroche Villages' Newsletter, a quarterly publication delivered free to every household in Neroche Parish, helping the community to stay connected and up-to-date on local issues.

## Road Safety – 30mph limit approved for Staple Fitzpaine

Following over a year of working with Somerset Highways, the Parish Council has been successful in reaching agreement to have a reduction to 30 mph (from current 40 mph) speed limit in Staple Fitzpaine. Implementation of the new limit, together with two village gateways to highlight the entrances to the village on Staple Road, will be happening from April onwards (precise dates to be confirmed). The Parish Council has also been successful in its request for the beginning of the speed zone to be placed higher up the hill in the location of the current village name sign, so that cars slow down at the beginning of the steep descent (from Taunton direction).



Close engagement with the Highways team was needed, as they needed to push the process through. It wasn't a quick thing to do because there is a sequential process to be followed. This included getting speed data that needed to prove that 30 mph was a feasible limit, on the basis that a speed limit will not work if it is set too low compared to the average speed of vehicles. Fortunately, the results taken on one day showed an average of 34.2 mph, and hence a 30 mph limit was viewed as achievable. Then it was necessary to get Police consent for a change in speed limit placement, as we wanted to set the new limit at the top of the hill, as the current placement of the limit is after vehicles have gained speed from their descent. Finally, there was a need for advertisement locally in the press to allow for objections: none were received, nor were there any objections lodged against the Traffic Regulation Order published by Somerset Council. New speed roundels for 30 mph will be installed, with 30mph painted on the road for extra emphasis, and will also be incorporated into the village gateway set up at the entrance to the village at the Manor side and at the entrance on the hill from Taunton direction. The purpose of gateways is to bring greater awareness to the passing drivers that they are entering a village and must slow down.

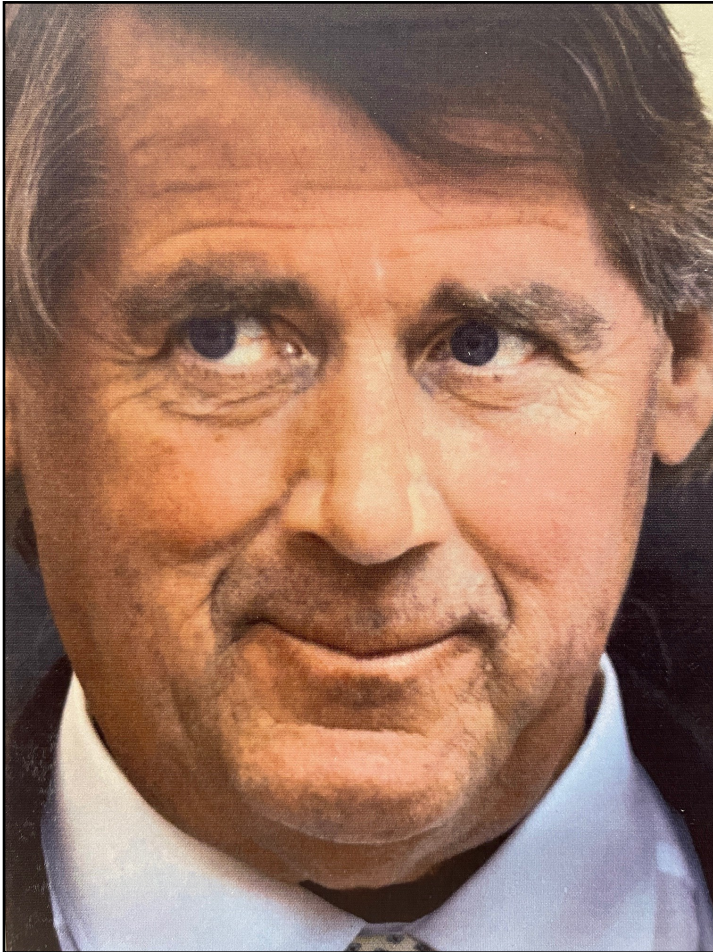
If you wish to know more about speed limits, and traffic calming, please look at: [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/speed-limits/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/speed-limits/)

The Parish Council continues to look at other ongoing road safety issues, turning its attention to problems with fast vehicles using the road up and down from Neroche woods.

## In Memory of Chris Dunn

St Peter's Church and the wider community lost a much-treasured friend in December with the passing of Chris Dunn. Chris was a keen and long-term supporter of the church. Giving generously of his time and resources he served for many years on the PCC. He and Heather, with great good humour, organised and hosted the church fete in the perfect setting of their grounds, along with numerous other occasions.

His memorial service, held at St Peter's, spilled out of the church into the erected marquees with video feed of the service. Generous to the last Chris had specified that the considerable collection should be donated to St Peter's.



## Helping to Save Nature at Mount Fancy Farm

Very shortly Spring will be on us, and nature will start to stir from its winter slumbers. In the normal way of things, the early spring flowers will emerge and then the caterpillars that feed on them, followed by the bird nestlings being fed caterpillars by their parents. Climate change is already having a disruptive impact on these normal sequences of events. Over the last few years, by my reckoning, we have had mild wet winters where fungi and moulds can devastate over-wintering butterfly forms. Then with Spring's warm and dry days coming much later, the flowers come too late, the caterpillars which have emerged already are unable to survive, and so the nestlings suffer from lack of food.

Not all years are the same, maybe this year will be different. Wildlife can be adaptable and find new ways of responding and succeeding in these changing climate patterns. Although not all, some have very specific needs and cannot easily step sideways to adopt new habits. This is where butterflies come in, they are easily seen and respond fast to changes. Since the 1990s they have been annually counted once a week (during their main season) providing solid evidence of how they, therefore nature in general, is responding to how we manage the land and what impact climate change is having.

The data going back over decades is clear, all butterfly numbers are declining. Some, the more generalists, are coping and finding new ways to adapt. You will still see in your garden so many of these common butterflies, just perhaps not in the usual expected numbers. They too have their boom-and-bust years. However, the overall trend is down. The specialists are the ones suffering - with perhaps their limited flight, or short egg-laying days, or very specific plant requirements or synergy with forms, such as ants, they are really



*Marbled White*



*Small Skipper*



*Gatekeeper*

struggling. We are recording severe drops in their numbers. Some of them are close to extinction in the few remaining places where once they were common. This is why the weekly transects, counting the numbers, are so important, to keep providing that data. Data that shows clearly, year by year, what is going on.

We are so fortunate to be living in this wonderful Blackdown Hills National Landscape. Close by there are two transect sites, Wych Lodge (Smokey Bottom access) and the Mount Fancy Reserve. The two fixed routes are roughly a two hour walk, depending on how much there is to record! The benefit is that they are walked on the best day of that week for the butterflies. That means warm, dry, calm and preferably sunny, roughly between 11:00 and 16:00. The downside can be that the weather and even the forecast is changeable, even on the chosen day. Each transect is reliant on just a couple of recorders, and they too, just like you, have other commitments or need that holiday. What we desperately need is someone willing, at short notice, to walk around with the recorder, noting down what is seen. Very quickly you too will begin to see and identify, those sometimes maddening difficult to pin down, species. You have two choices, Wych Lodge, dry, stiles and gates, shared with docile Longhorns and sometimes tangled undergrowth, and always rough ground. Managed by Anna – contact: [annabcwarden@gmail.com](mailto:annabcwarden@gmail.com). Or MtFancy, often wet, sometimes soft going, with a wide range of habitats but always rough ground with a few climbs, shared with ponies. Managed by Meg – contact: [mechteldvanheck@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mechteldvanheck@yahoo.co.uk)



*Reserve View*



*Longhorns*

The other aspect of helping to save nature is our practical conservation work. Left to itself the reserve would quickly revert to scrubland dominated by willow, birch and bramble. The over-winter work of cutting back the scrub is nearly over. Then will be begin our summer battle

trying to reduce the vigour of the bracken. If we can keep on top of the bracken, then what Natural England recently described one of our habitat areas as a 'stunningly good' example of neutral grassland, might be even more evident around the reserve. It takes a lot of physical work.

Referred to as the Green Gym, for good reason, the **Fancy Volunteers**, meet up every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday to do their bit. You too could be there helping to keep this wonderful reserve in the best possible condition, so the wildlife has the best opportunity to flourish. The work is simple, easy, just using the supplied hand tools, raking up the bracken, or cutting the bracken with a scythe, (easy to learn) or using loppers to get rid of bramble. We meet at 9:30 through to 15:00, and the beauty of volunteering is that you just do what you can for as long as you want, no pressure then. Best of all you get to spend the day in a glorious location, getting to know the reserve, its wide array of wildlife, whilst in good company, learning more about some of the intricate life cycles of its inhabitants. Do give it a try, see <https://fancyvolunteers.weebly.com/> and keep your eye on it, as where we meet depends on which part of the reserve we work.



**Save the date**

Staple Fitzpaine Church Fete and Family

- Dog Show. Sat 15th June 2024 2-5pm

*We are looking for help beforehand and on the day.  
Wanted quality vintage items (not books) and  
pre-loved clothes please.*

Contact : [rebecca@indinet.net](mailto:rebecca@indinet.net)

made with PosterMyWall.com

# EASTER FAMILY BINGO

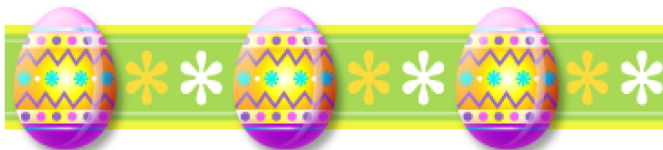


**Chocolates    Easter Eggs    Prizes Galore!**

**Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March**

**6.30 pm FOR EYES DOWN 7pm  
Neroche Hall, Bickenhall**

**RAFFLE / BAR**



Bring your own nibbles  
Booking advisable at [pmphelps47@gmail.com](mailto:pmphelps47@gmail.com)

All proceeds in aid of Neroche Hall

## The Neroche Wassail

**By Rebecca George**

We held our first Wassail this year at Winterwell at the suggestion of Joanna Porter, our Rector. It was what I called a 'fusion' event, combining elements of Christian and Pagan traditions.

Traditionally, Wassailing refers to drinking and singing to wake up the apple trees and scare away evil spirits to ensure a good harvest. Wassailing dates back to Anglo Saxon times, and usually takes place on 12<sup>th</sup> night, January 6. It involves blessing the orchards, singing, dancing, making a lot of noise, and drinking. Wassail is an Old English word which means 'be well'. This is a traditional Wassailing song:



Here we come a-wassailing  
Among the leaves so green;  
Here we come a-wand'ring  
So fair to be seen.  
Love and joy come to you,  
And to you your wassail too;  
And God bless you and send you a Happy New Year  
And God send you a Happy  
New Year.

*(With thanks to Wikipedia and 'Down Somerset Way', a local's guide to Somerset and an excellent website).*

We had a Wassailing king and queen (Jon Barrett and Rosie Giblett), very good sports, gorgeously dressed and very authentic, who led a procession into the orchard. We sang and had some music. The queen put some toast soaked in special 'Wassail' from the special 'Wassail Cup' into one of the apple trees. There was a bible reading, Joanna



blessed the orchard, and we processed back to the fire singing 'The Holly and the Ivy' – another traditional Wassailing song. The St Peter's Singers sang 'Jesus Christ the Apple Tree', which seemed very appropriate. Guns were fired and we all got down to eating and drinking and enjoying the fire.

About 50 people attended, including a number of children. We were extremely lucky with the weather as after weeks of rain it wasn't too cold, and the sky was clear.

It was our first Wassail and we have learnt some lessons for next time. We will be encouraging people to be a lot more rowdy – bring pots and pans and any percussion instruments to make a lot of noise, hit the trees, pour cider on the roots, and generally be loud. The procession will be longer, winding its way through more of the orchard. I hope we will have dancing, and more people playing instruments.

It was a really good fun event. People were generous bringing along food to share, and Mark made an excellent fire pit which people sat around late into the evening. Wassailing is a great way to light up those dark days after Christmas and is something to look forward to.



# St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine

## TEDDY TOWER JUMPING Saturday, April 6th



Is your Teddy Bear (or another soft toy) brave enough to jump? Do they have a head for heights? If they do, why not join us at St Peter's Church and see your loved bear parachute from our 80-foot-high tower.

All teddy bears taking part will receive a certificate for their bravery. Additionally, there will be a prize for:-

- Best turned-out teddy (even if they have not passed a medical to jump)
- The aerobear that flies the furthest, landing safely in the allocated landing zone

For this event you will need to help your teddies make a suitable parachute at home, or you can make one at our cafe/workshop from 10.00am until the first jump time at 12.30pm.

All jumps will be organised by Head of Flight Control (Mark), the Bell Tower Captain (Paul) and the launch team. All teddies and supporters must follow their instructions. A Teddy Aid Post will be available along with a Teddy Doctor, and if required they will check if your bear is fit to jump.

In the event of inclement weather and after discussions with the Met Office, the jumps may be postponed until Sunday, 7th April at 12.30pm.

There is no fee for entry. If your teddy is planning on participating, please register by e-mailing [jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com](mailto:jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com). You will receive a leaflet on the Teddy Tower Jumping rules and parachute design tips.

The cafe will be open all through the event serving scrumptious biscuits and cakes.

If you would like more information about your Teddy Bear competing in these daring tower descents, contact one of the following.

Jacqueline - [jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com](mailto:jacqueline.kolkowski@btinternet.com)  
Mark Porter - [mark@indinet.net](mailto:mark@indinet.net)  
Nicky Baxter - [ncbaxter@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ncbaxter@hotmail.co.uk)

## Community Christmas Lunch

Over 70 guests attended the Christmas Lunch on December 7<sup>th</sup> at Neroche Hall, which is organised by members and friends of St Peter's Church.

The hall was beautifully decorated, and the tables were set out with Christmas crackers, wine and lovely chocolates. After an introductory glass of sherry, the guests took their seats, looking forward to the feast which was to follow. A full traditional Christmas lunch of turkey, stuffing, roast potatoes and copious amounts of veg were served to the guests, many of whom had already pulled their crackers and were wearing their hats! Our one challenge was eeking out the gravy to such a large gathering.

The highlight of any lunch, the puddings, were then taken around on the trolleys, with many guests enjoying at least two, if not three, portions of the desserts, which were absolutely scrumptious as always. A veritable smorgasbord of cream, custard, chocolate and fruit! This was followed up with teas and coffees, and a few carols, a wonderful lunch was had by all.

A huge thank you to all the organisers, cooks and helpers for their invaluable contribution to this community event.



*Decorated Hall*



*Full House*



## **Neroche Spring Quiz**

**Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024**  
**Neroche Hall**

Doors open 7pm for start at 7.30pm

Entry £4.00 per person  
Max 6 in a team

BYO / Raffle

Book your table via  
[r.davies507@btinternet.com](mailto:r.davies507@btinternet.com)  
01823 480286 from 1<sup>st</sup> March

# Neroche Environment Group: Citizen Scientists Opportunities

*By Jane Hole*

## Water Quality Monitoring in Neroche

Would you like to get involved as a Citizen Scientist in monitoring the quality of the parish's streams and springs? Most of the water from our local springs and streams flows into the Rivers Tone and Parrett. The Westcountry Rivers Trust will train, equip and support local people who would like to get active in monitoring the water quality within the parish. For more information come to the Annual Parish Meeting at Neroche Hall on April 16<sup>th</sup> or contact [Jane.hole@outlook.com](mailto:Jane.hole@outlook.com)

## Upcoming Green Dates in 2024

- Now to 31st March **Frog Spawn Count:** Somerset Wildlife Trust see SWT for more info on citizen science activities
- 8 - 16<sup>th</sup> June **The Great Big Green Week:** national celebration of community action on tackling climate change [greatbiggreenweek.com](http://greatbiggreenweek.com)
- July/August **Big Butterfly Count:** watch for dates [bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org](http://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org)
- 6-12 July **Net Zero Week:** get online access to this national event, speakers, debates, case studies [netzeroweek.com](http://netzeroweek.com)
- **Open Meadows/Gardens:** Neroche Environment Group - visit local parishioners wildlife meadows and gardens. Dates to be announced.



### SCHOOL DATES

- |                   |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Term 4:</b>    | <b>19 February to 28 March 2024</b> |
| <b>Holiday 4:</b> | <b>29 March to 14 April 2024</b>    |
| <b>Term 5:</b>    | <b>15 April to 24 May 2024</b>      |
| <b>Holiday 5:</b> | <b>25th May to 2nd June 2024</b>    |

# Annual Parish Meeting

**Tuesday April 16th**  
**7.15 for 7.30 start**

*Community review*

*A358*

Find out more about the local issues that  
**affect you**

Discover what your Parish Council has been  
doing and what plans they have for the

**future** *Taylor Wimpey*

*Broadband*

An opportunity for you to have your voice

**heard**

## **Free wine and nibbles**

*SCC struggling*

**Time to come together**

**A Stronger Parish, A More Resilient Community**



## **Blackdown Hills National Landscape**

### **A New Name for the Blackdown Hills**

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has a new name – Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

Along with all other designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales we are now a [National Landscape](#). The new name reflects the national importance of the landscapes and the vital contribution we are making to protect the nation from the threats of climate change, nature depletion and the wellbeing crisis. The name change will also help us to create greater understanding and awareness for the work that we do. Becoming Blackdown Hills National Landscape reflects a step change in our work to protect and regenerate our landscape, with a focus on nature, climate, heritage, culture, and people. The care of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is entrusted to local authorities, organisations, community groups and the people who live and work within them. We help bring these people together, working collaboratively to conserve and enhance these special landscapes.

### **National Landscapes across England and Wales**

The change to National Landscapes is a significant milestone for the UK, and the next step in fully realising the National Landscapes' vision to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people's health and wellbeing.

National Landscapes teams have been at the forefront of delivering natural solutions to the main challenges facing the nation for many years. The new brand underscores our commitment to redoubling

our efforts and engaging with a wider audience. In 2019, we collectively set ourselves the most ambitious targets for nature in the sector and we continue to work to meet them.

By 2030, it is our aim that, within National Landscape boundaries: at least 200,000 hectares of the most valuable natural areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest or SSSIs), which equates to 1¼ times the size of London, will be in favourable condition; 100,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of SSSIs will be created or restored, which is roughly nine times the size of Manchester; and 36,000 hectares of woodland, which is a little smaller than the Isle of Wight, will have been planted or allowed to regenerate. National Landscapes Partnerships will also focus on habitat restoration to ensure the protection of some of our most endangered species and increase their work to help more people to enjoy time spent in beautiful places.

Here are some examples of the work we have been doing recently:

### [Somerset Nature Connections](#)

With the [Somerset Nature Connections](#) project, we are working with Somerset Wildlife Trust and two of the other National Landscapes in Somerset (Quantock Hills and Mendip Hills) to help individuals and groups in Somerset connect with nature to benefit their physical and mental health.

### [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#)

Through the [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#) programme, farmers and land managers are being supported to carry out projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and cultural heritage, or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. In the Blackdown Hills, we have already awarded funding to 57 projects totalling £343k up to March 2023, with a further £315k in the pipeline to fund projects.

### [Nature Recovery Plan](#)

National Landscapes across the country have signed up to the Colchester Declaration – an ambitious plan to recover nature in and beyond protected landscapes, build climate resilience and enhance engagement with people. To fulfil our contribution to the



Colchester Declaration and address the biodiversity crisis we have worked with landowners, conservation organisations, neighbouring National Landscapes, community interest groups and other stakeholders to produce a [Nature Recovery Plan](#) for the Blackdown Hills. An online survey has recently been launched to help shape the Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Go to our website [www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk](http://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk) to find out more and complete the survey.



### Connecting the Culm

Through our multi-million pound [Connecting the Culm](#) partnership project, we have been working with communities and businesses to help them become more resilient to climate change, especially flooding and drought, whilst providing benefits for biodiversity, carbon storage and water quality.

### Community Action Groups (CAG) Somerset

A new network – Community Action Groups (CAG) Somerset - has been set up to provide free support to local community groups who focus on reuse, repair, waste reduction, sharing, surplus food or composting. This builds on the existing CAG Devon networks and means that groups throughout the Blackdown Hills can now access CAG's support with repair cafes, community fridges, swapping and sharing events and more.



Members of the CAG network have access to free training, support with basic governance, help with funding, and opportunities for skill sharing and peer-to-peer learning.

## Volunteer to be an Independent Visitor or Advocate for children in Somerset



Would you like to make a positive difference in 2024?

There's a famous quote from Rev Sydney Smith "It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can."

From as little as a couple of hours a fortnight and less than a week's quality training, you could be making purposeful contact with a young person and make a positive difference for them through outings, conversations, activities and more...

Route1 have two volunteering opportunities: Independent Visitor and Advocate.

Independent Visitors are volunteers who befriend and spend time with a child or young person who is in the care of the Local Authority. We will match your interests and skill set with a young person who will best suit your support. You and the young person have the freedom to decide what you do, how you do it, to build a meaningful friendship.

One young person with an Independent Visitor said: "Things I get from my IV relationship... is space from the world, where I can have an open and honest conversation with, at first a stranger, that becomes a friend. I would be happy to say it is a really good experience!"

An Advocate is an independent person who can offer one-to-one support to children and young people to have their voice heard when meetings are taking place concerning their wellbeing. It's the role of the Advocate to speak up for the young person, make them aware of their rights, listen to them and represent their views, wishes and feelings.



The Chair of a Child Protection Conference said "I am always amazed by the calibre of the volunteers and how generous they are with their time." Why not join our bank of Advocates?

Your volunteering can be arranged to suit your availability. Your life experience will be highly valued, and you will be trained and supported in developing key skills.

To find out more, contact us:

Telephone: 01749 822801

Email: [route1businesssupportadmin@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:route1businesssupportadmin@somerset.gov.uk)

Website: [www.route1advocacy.co.uk](http://www.route1advocacy.co.uk) or scan the QR code



Route1 Advocacy  
& Independent  
Visitors



@route1advocacy



route1advocacy



## Nom Nom Pizza at Neroche Hall

Every other Monday (26<sup>th</sup> February onwards)

5pm – 8pm

Delicious wood fired pizzas – full menu at  
[www.nomnompizza.co.uk](http://www.nomnompizza.co.uk)

Phone or text the hotline between 10am and 4pm  
to pre-order (07950 254427)

## News from St Peter's Church

*By Mark Porter, Churchwarden*

St Peter's celebrated a joyous Christmas season. The church had been stunningly dressed by the Flower Guild and with the church lit with candles, Rosie Giblett's solo for the first verse of 'O Little Town' was a spine-tingling introduction to the service and the celebration of the nativity. Attendance was at pre-Covid levels, and the congregation sang with gusto. St Peter's singers, now up to 24 in number (although always happy to take more), contributed hugely to the power of the service.

For the first time since Covid, and the sad loss of Julie Pope, we went carolling around the villages of Curland, Staple Fitzpaine and Bickenhall. The thirty strong choir of carollers were met with great generosity by their hosts. Both in terms of the fare on offer, and donations to the chosen charity, Open Door. A great event to be re-awakened, although many lamented the passing of Alison Brown's horse box.

Our well attended Midnight Communion gave a joyous welcome to the birth of Christ, with many of the congregation joining from the now traditional singing of Christmas songs in The Greyhound.



## St Peter's Church Flower Guild

*By Jacqueline Kolkowski*

We once again decorated the Church with Karen Morgan's spectacular display of poppies for our Remembrance service, although this year Karen and the team enhanced the display by making over 100 more poppies that were displayed on stakes along the path to the Church.



In December, the Flower Guild ran our annual 'Decorate our Christmas Tree' craft morning. The theme for this year's event revolved around teddy bears as the reclusive Tower Ted has decided to come out of hiding from the church's bell tower to join in with events within the parish during 2024. The children (along with the grown-ups!) decorated teddy bear biscuits to eat, and wooden bears to hang on the tree. They decorated bunting with bears jewels and glittery stars that also decorated the tree. The pew ends were a triumph with greenery ribbons, red bears and sparkly bells. Their handiwork looked wonderful along with the other displays produced by the Flower Guild.



Of course, the morning would not be the same without scrumptious cakes, music and singing provided by the choir/band. Thanks to all the musicians and especially St Peter's Flower Guild for running this event and making the church look so lovely throughout the year.

Finally, Tower Ted was still being very shy and hid himself in the church, so the hunt was on to find him during the morning! When you come to St Peter's keep a look out as you might just get a glimpse of him!!! And you will see him when he competes (if he is not too shy) in the **TEDDY TOWER JUMPING CONTEST** from the church tower on Saturday, April 6th.

Easter will soon be with us - as many of you know, we always add lilies into our displays. If you would like to make a donation towards a lily in memory of someone, please contact myself or Alison Brown. The names of all those remembered will be displayed on a board within the church.



*Arabella*



## Pop-Up Café

St Peter's Church, Staple Fitzpaine  
Every Friday, 10am to 12pm

Come along for a cuppa with biscuits and delicious home-made cakes.

Meet old friends and make new ones

**2024 Fixtures**

<b>Fixture</b>	<b>First Race</b>	<b>Last Race</b>
Thursday 29th February	2.05pm	5.00pm
Monday 11th March	2.10pm	5.10pm
Tuesday 26th March	2.20pm	5.20pm
Thursday 11th April	1.25pm	4.55pm
Wednesday 24th April	5.15pm	8.10pm

**THURSDAY 11TH APRIL**

**First Race 1:25pm**

**Buy Now @**

**[tauntonracecourse.co.uk](http://tauntonracecourse.co.uk)**

**THE ROARSOME FAMILY  
RACEDAY**

**ALL U18s FREE!  
FREE Bus!  
FREE Parking!**

**T-REX  
EGG  
HUNT**

**DINO  
FACE  
PAINTING**

**SAVE at  
least £5  
online!!**



## **News from Neroche Hall**

***By Karen Learoyd, Chair***

The winter months are traditionally quiet at the Hall in regard to bookings, although we have been delighted to host a wedding party, and a few birthday parties (young and old), as well as our very loyal regular hirers. We have been very pleased, so far, with the performance of the new heaters, which are typically set on timers by the caretaker, ensuring that the hall is warm at the start of the hiring period. Even those more relaxed exercise classes, like Tai Chi, and Yoga, have commented on how warm it is – music to our ears!

In terms of ‘looking after’ our lovely building, we have plans to repaint the kitchen, and hopefully, install a vent to help with the steam/mould issues we experience when the dishwasher is in heavy use. The committee regularly discuss the ‘list’ to ensure we focus on what’s important to improve/maintain it as an attractive venue. We have also decided to regularly change the access code to the outside key safe – with the increasing number of hires, it’s very important to maintain security. To that end, we have just changed the locks to the main door, so if you have an old key at the back of your drawer, please either return it to me, or feel free to dispose of it.

Regular checks of the emergency lighting, smoke alarms, electric and fire safety equipment are taking place and recorded, as per regulations, and we will shortly be arranging asbestos and Legionella reviews for the same reason – legislation covering community buildings can be quite extensive these days. Work continues looking at possible grants for AV equipment, and in conjunction with the Parish Council, we are looking at ways of improving the acoustics, especially for public meetings.

By the time the newsletter is distributed, there will have been a Murder Mystery Play, organised by St Peter’s Church, which we hope will be a fabulous night for those who have been lucky enough to get tickets. We are once again running an Easter



Family Bingo, with our next quiz planned for Friday, 19th April. Other possible events include a Brunch / Breakfast and a Food/ Drink Fair later in the summer. As always, if there is anything you would like to see at the Hall, please do let me know.

We would love to welcome more people to the committee, especially if you are relatively new to the area. It's a great way to get to know people and to find out what's happening – it's how I started when we moved here 6 years ago, and I can thoroughly recommend it. We would particularly be keen on someone who may be interested in being our Treasurer, or at least taking on some of the book-keeping. Jacq Wanstall, our current Treasurer, has now taken on a more full-time role at Nuffield Hospital, and doesn't have enough bandwidth to continue with all the excellent work she has been doing for us over the last couple of years – please help us if you can. Email me at [karen.wensley@gmail.com](mailto:karen.wensley@gmail.com) for more information.

Til next time.

## **Neroche Thursday Lunch Club**

**Neroche Hall  
12.30pm for 1pm**



**March 7th, April 4th, May 9th - £8 per head**

Come along to Neroche Hall and enjoy a superb home-cooked lunch in wonderful company (transport and special diets can be arranged). Meet old friends and make new acquaintances - ideal for both long term residents and those who have recently arrived in the community. A wonderful way to spend a weekday lunchtime.

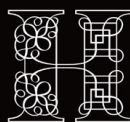
**Advance booking is essential by the Monday prior to the lunch to book for catering purposes. Contact Alison Brown 01823 480441 or [aabrown.battens@gmail.com](mailto:aabrown.battens@gmail.com)**

# BIG VIEWS OF TINY CREATURES



EXHIBITION BY DAVID SPEARS  
15<sup>TH</sup> MARCH - 14<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

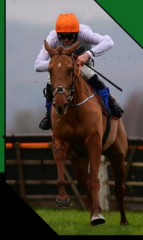
FIND OUT MORE AT [HESTERCOMBE.COM/WHATS-ON](https://www.hestercombe.com/whats-on)



THURSDAY 29TH FEBRUARY - THE LEAP YEAR MEETING

FIRST RACE 2.00PM

SAVE AT LEAST £5 OFF GATE PRICE, BUYING ONLINE, IN ADVANCE



FREE:  
BUS,  
PARKING,  
U18'S

WWW.TAUNTONRACECOURSE.CO.UK



*Photos © Karen Morgan*

## Do you Run a Local Business?

You could help the running of your Neroche Newsletter  
by advertising with us.

For a small fee, you can advertise in the quarterly Newsletter, and  
have your business included on the Neroche Villages website.

If you are interested please drop us an email to chat about  
it: [nerochenewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:nerochenewsletter@gmail.com)

## News from RSPCA West Hatch

### The Swan Story

At the end of January, our RSPCA Water Rescue Team were joined by Swan Support and the Maritime Volunteer Service in an incredible joint effort to rescue eight oiled swans from a contaminated estuary in Southampton.

After being transported to our centre, they were assessed by our vet to determine their condition and their care. The oil was removed immediately from their feet and legs to prevent their skin from breaking down and becoming infected. Once stabilised, the birds were washed by our highly skilled wildlife assistants, who are trained in oiled bird washing.

Washing a contaminated bird must only be undertaken by professionals. As feathers are so important to a bird, it is imperative that they are not damaged during the washing process. The photos shown here are prior to and during the washing process.

Luckily for these swans they only required one wash to remove the contaminant, as some birds may need several. Once they had dried, they returned to an aviary where we could check their



waterproofing. Thankfully, their feathers had cleaned up beautifully and with confirmation that the estuary had been cleared of all contaminants, we were able to release them back to the wild.

Please note these were exceptional circumstances where we were able to admit the swans to our centre and keep them isolated to adhere to bird flu restrictions. We still cannot admit most waterfowl and seabirds to our centre. However, if you find a bird in need of help, please still call our centre so we can advise.

## **Wildlife Centre**

Total animals admitted in the wildlife centre during 2023 were 1338.

The most common species we admitted were:

- Wood pigeons.
- Hedgehogs.
- Grey seals.
- Rabbits.
- Red foxes.

## **Domestic Animal Centre**

In 2023 we found homes for 67 dogs, 120 cats, 28 rabbits, 21 birds, 8 farm animals, 2 fish, 9 guinea pigs, and 8 small mammals. All our animals come to us via Inspectors, either as a result of cruelty, neglect or as sick strays (cats and small animals), meaning that they mostly require lengthy veterinary and / or behavioural rehab before they are able to be rehomed.

We found foster homes for 43 dogs, 30 cats, 3 rabbits and 5 other small animals, which totalled 81 animals in foster homes throughout the year. This is not only wonderful for the animals, it also frees up staff and resources to help even more animals in need.

Our vet team carried out 182 neuters, 140 other operations, implanted 122 microchips, and administered 372 vaccinations, so all in all a busy and successful year!

If you would like to help the animals in our care, there are many ways you can help. One way would be to purchase something from one of our Amazon wish lists:

Wildlife: [amzn.to/2WQbN9l](https://amzn.to/2WQbN9l)  
Kennels: [amzn.to/2wnWBSH](https://amzn.to/2wnWBSH)  
Cattery: [amzn.to/2VJdseQ](https://amzn.to/2VJdseQ)  
Small Animals: [amzn.to/2YVlhS1](https://amzn.to/2YVlhS1)

For other ways to help, please call the centre and we can advise about fundraising, donations, becoming a Friend of West Hatch or volunteering - 0300 123 0721 (wildlife centre) or 0300 123 0747 (animal centre).

## Want to join a Badminton Group?

Friday afternoons – 4pm  
Neroche Hall

A social, friendly, ladies group – we play for fun, and a little exercise!

Contact Diana at [dianadavies32@icloud.com](mailto:dianadavies32@icloud.com) for more information

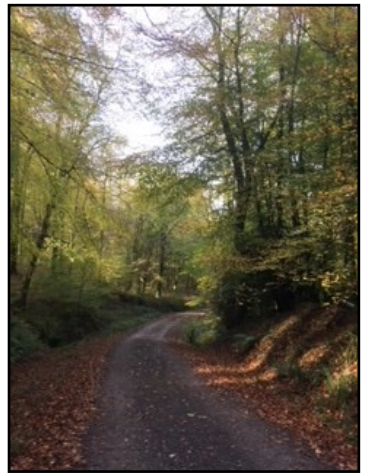


## Public Rights of Way

*By Sue Hayman*

You may or may not be aware that PRow have featured in every Parish Council Meeting for the last two years and probably in one way or another in many previous meetings.

The Community Review upheld the importance of our local rights of way, be they footpaths, bridleways or droves and some were keen to be part of a PRow group to walk, report issues and maintain them. The review revealed that many do not know how to report an issue with a path; I didn't when I started on this journey, so you are not alone. All PRow are recorded on what is called a **Definitive Map**, each County has their own. If a path is recorded on the Definitive Map, it affords legal protections and as such County Councils have a statutory duty to maintain and keep those paths open and accessible to users. Landowners have a DUTY to keep pathways clear and can be prosecuted if they do not, and ultimately the Highways Department is responsible.



*A Good PRow*

If you find a defect while out walking or riding on our public rights of way, you can report it at <https://roam.somerset.gov.uk/roam/Map> or scan the QR code below on your mobile phone and this will guide you to the definitive map. On the page you will find a + marked button where you may input the required information, pictures can be included although need to be attached with the initial information and cannot be added later. It's amazing to see how many paths we have in our area although also so very disappointing to see how many have issues.

The information from the Community Review has encouraged the Parish Council to investigate the possibility of taking some of these responsibilities in house. We are currently liaising with the PRow department to find out how this may look and work for the future. The PRow department welcome this proactive approach especially as Somerset County is in a difficult financial situation at present. Despite Councils saying they have few resources it is their Statutory Duty to act on complaints raised. Each complaint is prioritised with 'danger to life'

the most urgent; fortunately, we have none of those although that does mean that our complaints which are mainly medium to low in priority all fall further down the line, so are less likely to be resolved in a timely manner.

Ceri Rapsey, who coordinates the PRow Volunteer Groups, has sent a list of active issues in our parish to Mark Palmer, the Chairman of the Parish Council, for consideration. This list has been prioritised into different categories. All need investigation, some need clearing, others need repair to footpath furniture. Some issues: like crops planted across the footpath, will have been resolved with harvesting. We can all help by carrying a pair of secateurs in our pockets when we walk or ride and Mark Palmer, having completed training as an authorised vegetation clearance volunteer, can use a county brush-cutter to maintain paths. The setting up of Local Council Networks also supports taking on more responsibilities in the hope that things may progress faster than they do at the moment. Liaising with the County Council is quite a slow and sometimes frustrating process, we hope by taking on some of the responsibilities we may improve access in a shorter time frame.

We do need you as parishioners to support us practically in this venture. It will involve reporting issues to the Parish Council as well as on the Definitive Map as you come across them. This is most important to help the Parish build a picture of our assets and prioritise particular paths for improvement. Perhaps those who have more time to spare will consider joining a working party, sharing expertise and skills. We need all hands to the pumps to make this a success, so please consider joining us to keep our many paths open and accessible. Please contact either [sue.hayman@nerochevillages.org.uk](mailto:sue.hayman@nerochevillages.org.uk) or [Emily.york@nerochevillages.co.uk](mailto:Emily.york@nerochevillages.co.uk)





## News from Your MP

*Rebecca Pow*

### **KING CHARLES III**

Let me start by sending heartfelt good wishes on behalf of people across our constituency to His Majesty King Charles III for a full and speedy recovery. At the time of writing, Buckingham Palace have recently issued a statement of his illness. Sadly, so many of us have experiences of this ghastly disease which highlights more than ever how important it is to tackle cancer at every level.

### **BLACKDOWN HILLS PARISH NETWORK**

I had a constructive meeting with the Blackdown Hills Parish Network recently at Neroche Hall, with useful discussions on a range of issues relating to the rural nature of this area. I was pleased to hear how well projects are going, working with many of our farmers located in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape using funding from our popular Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund. The aim of this fund is to get money into our precious protected landscapes to improve access, connect people with nature and generate some economic benefit for farmers and their communities. Many would like this fund extended and I have raised this with the DEFRA department in my capacity as Environment Minister.



Some transport issues were raised at the meeting, and I will be following up with the Roads Minister, Guy Opperman, on concerns about the increasing number of large lorries inappropriately directed through our country lanes by their sat nav systems. And, with public transport provision continuing to be difficult in rural areas like the Blackdowns I will also be discussing a proposal for a rural version of 'Uber' with the Roads Minister. We need to explore all options. Whilst I have his attention, I shall also stress the need for a bypass for Henlade, which we must keep on the table.

I have also requested a meeting with the Science and Innovation Department to get some answers about when connectivity issues will finally be addressed for those who still have an inadequate service across some parts of the Blackdowns. Whilst connectivity services have improved dramatically across England, for those who have not benefited, this is of little consolation.

## **COST OF LIVING**

I am acutely aware that for many of my constituents, the most serious issue that continues to face them right now is the cost of living, which is putting real pressure on household budgets, so it is welcome news that the cut in employee National Insurance announced at the start of this year is now starting to take effect. This equates to a tax cut of £450 for the average worker earning £35,000. In practice, this means a typical police officer will receive an annual gain of over £600; a typical junior doctor will pay over £750 less in NI and a hard-working family with two earners on the average income will be £900 better off a year. The Government will also cut National Insurance for the Self Employed, delivering a total average saving of £340 a year which will come into force later this year. All welcome. Government is also boosting the Local Housing Allowance which will mean that 1.6m private renters on Universal Credit or Housing Benefit are £800 better off each year. Also, this month many qualifying families across Taunton Deane are amongst the eight million families nationally receiving their third tranche of cost of living payments to help with the challenges of everyday living, bringing their total support to £900. It's part of a wider £2bn support package for vulnerable households.

It has to be remembered that these kinds of measures are only possible thanks to difficult long-term decisions being made by Government to get inflation falling, (I am pleased to say it has more than halved,) and to strengthen the economy.

## **NHS DENTAL PROVISION**

I have devoted much time to finding solutions to the unacceptable dearth of dentists locally – one of the top issues constituents have contacted me



about. Recently I had a full and frank meeting with new Dental Minister, Dame Andrea Leadsom, making no bones about the hardship being caused. So it is with some relief that at the time of writing the Dental Recovery Plan has been launched. I am pleased to see it includes some of the initiatives I proposed including mobile dentists and priority for those who have not accessed a dentist for over two years. Cash incentives will also be offered to encourage dentists to move to regions like ours. I will continue to work with Government to ensure these services are delivered locally, especially for children in need. Further details of the Dental Recovery Plan can be found on my website.

### **POST OFFICE SCANDAL**

Understandably, I have received a lot of correspondence from constituents since the turn of the year concerning the Post Office scandal. It is one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in our nation's history and ITV must be commended for their coverage of this issue bringing the scandal into sharp focus. I, like many across the constituency am appalled by the treatment of the sub-postmasters who were accused of theft based on flawed evidence from the Horizon IT system. The Government is determined to make compensation claims as soon as possible, and certainly by the current deadline of August this year. It has come to light that there is potentially a second IT system called 'Capture' that was also causing problems before the Horizon system was introduced and I have met the Minister handling the post office scandal, Kevin Hollinrake, to raise some serious allegations I have received from affected parties. I understand that the Government are in active discussions about widening the scope of the current inquiry. Clearly, if there is any indication of additional miscarriages of justice this needs to be properly investigated through the appropriate channels.

### **SUCCESSFUL FUNDING BIDS FOR OUR AREA**

In Taunton, the YMCA on Liseux Way has been awarded over £2m from the Culture Media and Sport Youth Investment Fund for a rebuild incorporating a training kitchen, new sports facilities and meeting spaces. The YMCA already provides a great service for over 1000 young people every year and this will mean at least 250 more can benefit from the skills and opportunities the centre offers. Whilst on young people, many constituents who have been in touch regarding the dangers of smoking, will welcome the recent Government ban on disposable vapes. The number of children using vapes has tripled in

the last three years and there is strong evidence to suggest that cheap and easy-to-use disposable vapes are partly to blame so this should be a useful step in terms of better health outcomes. (This will also cut down on litter).

### **New law on stolen pet**

It is clear that we are a constituency of great pet lovers! Many of you have shared stories of your pets and I must say that since my husband died and my children have left home, my two fine cats, Rafa and Mr Tips, have taken on an even greater role in my life. Sadly, some of you have also shared heart rending stories of having



pets stolen, with an increase during Covid. So, the recent legislation on Pet Abduction is really welcome. This introduces 5-year prison sentences for stealing a pet, improved monitoring and better data gathering to better determine and track just how widespread this cruel offence is.

This latest piece of animal welfare legislation adds to the Government's excellent record on animal welfare. In fact, we are the highest ranked G7 nation according to the World Animal Protection's Index.

Amongst legislation we have introduced since 2010, we have: increased maximum sentences for animal cruelty; made microchipping compulsory for cats and dogs and banned third-party puppy and kitten sales. For farm animals we have: banned traditional battery cages; introduced CCTV in slaughterhouses and supported farmers to adopt high welfare practices. For wild animals we have introduced one of the toughest bans on elephant ivory sales in the world as well as extending this to other species. It's a pretty impressive list and this is only some of it.

Anyway, do take care of your precious pets. And as ever please get in touch if I can be of any help.

## Is your Business using the Neroche Villages Website?

One of the main reasons for developing the Neroche Villages website was to promote our local business. It does this in two ways, both designed to help them become better known and more easily found by those needing their services.

All businesses operating within Neroche Parish are entitled to a **free entry on the Business pages of the website**. They are listed in one or more of seven categories: Accommodation, Arts and Crafts, Building and Gardening, Equine, Farm and Agriculture, Food and Drink, Leisure, and Services. No business is too large or small to appear and there are many involving one person. Each free entry lists the name of the business, type of activity, contact details, address and telephone number/s. Many pay £10 per annum to have an email address and/or website added to the entry.

The **Advertisers page** allows a business to provide more details of its activities for an annual charge of £30. We can help you create your advertisement.

Please have a look at the website at [www.nerochevillages.org.uk](http://www.nerochevillages.org.uk). Use the Contact page to get back with your details or to correct any entry. We are keen to have all businesses listed on the website, and with more than a basic Business page entry. All additional fees are used to fund the activities of the Neroche Communication Action Group.

## ARE YOU NEW TO THE AREA?

**Here are the different ways you can find out what's happening in Neroche from the Communication Action Group:-**

**Neroche Newsletter** is delivered free to every household each quarter – full of upcoming events, articles on recent events, and updates from local Groups and leaders. Contact us at [nerochenewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:nerochenewsletter@gmail.com)

**Neroche Villages Website** - the place for information from the Parish Council including planning applications, meeting minutes etc. You will also find information on local groups and clubs, events, News, local businesses, and details of the Blackdown Hills and Neroche Woodlanders.

[www.nerochevillages.org.uk](http://www.nerochevillages.org.uk)

**Neroche Email communication** – distributed every 3 to 4 weeks, bringing you information about local events, information from the Parish Council, and details of what's happening in our neighbouring villages. To sign up for the Email communication, just send your details to [nerochemail@gmail.com](mailto:nerochemail@gmail.com).

**Welcome to Neroche**

# YogaNess

Yoga

My name is Vanessa Bourne, I live in Bickenhall and I am a Hatha Yoga Teacher, specialising in Subtle Yoga, a slow, mindful yoga, designed to suit everyone. This type of Yoga is specifically designed to reduce the effects of stress on the body, using subtle, nuanced and deliberate movement to optimise the nervous system, combating overwhelm and creating ease in the mind and body.

### Classes currently available:

At Neroche Village Hall – Tuesdays Mat Class  
10.30am-11.30am

At West Hatch Village Hall:  
Mondays 11-12pm – Chair Class  
Tuesdays – 7-8pm – Mat Class

Please contact me for class dates if you are interested or have any questions on suitability for you - all abilities catered for - I have equipment to borrow if needed.

[ness@yoganessyoga.co.uk](mailto:ness@yoganessyoga.co.uk)  
[www.yoganessyoga.co.uk](http://www.yoganessyoga.co.uk)

## The Greyhound Inn

Country pub with rooms

Open daily

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# BURROW



**Septic Tank Owners  
register your interest  
in a fully-funded upgrade**

Due to the Phosphate pollution in your local river catchment we are operating a septic tank replacement scheme using private funding.

We install wastewater treatment plants that remove almost all pollutants, with funding secured from planning applicants who need to create a positive impact on the environment.

**Register on our website today.**



[burrow-environmental.com](http://burrow-environmental.com) 01935 507 508

# Events for your calendar

(Venue is Neroche Hall unless stated)

## March

Thursday, 7th - Community Lunch  
Tuesday, 12th - Parish Council Meeting  
Wednesday, 13th - WI Meeting  
Wednesday, 20th - Quiz at The Greyhound  
Friday, 22nd - Easter Family Bingo

## April

Thursday, 4th - Community Lunch  
Tuesday, 9th - Parish Council Meeting  
Wednesday, 10th - WI Meeting  
Tuesday, 16th - Annual Parish Meeting  
Wednesday, 17th - Quiz at The Greyhound  
Friday, 19th - Spring Quiz at Neroche Hall

## May

Thursday, 2nd - Local Elections  
Wednesday, 8th - WI Meeting  
Thursday, 9th - Community Lunch  
Tuesday, 14th - Parish Council Meeting  
Wednesday, 15th - Quiz at The Greyhound

For latest updates visit [www.nerochevillages.org.uk/events-calendar](http://www.nerochevillages.org.uk/events-calendar)

# Local Communication and Information

## **Websites:**

### **Neroche Villages** [www.nerochevillages.org.uk](http://www.nerochevillages.org.uk)

Community website run by the Neroche Communication Action Group. It has an up-to-date calendar of events; a news section; information about residents' action groups, including broadband, traffic; a business section and advertisements.

The website features a comprehensive list of clubs and organisations, including details of those in neighbouring parishes. It is also the website of Neroche Parish Council and lists its activities, agenda, minutes and reports.

### **Neroche Hall** [www.nerochehall.org.uk](http://www.nerochehall.org.uk)

The website lists the coming events, facilities and availability for hire of our village hall, and has an online booking form.

### **Church of England Seven Sowers Benefice** [www.sevensowers.org.uk](http://www.sevensowers.org.uk)

Has a calendar of events and church service times for Staple Fitzpaine and Orchard Portman churches, as well as other churches in the benefice.

## **Email Information:**

The Neroche Communication Action Group runs an Email Alert System for sending information to those wishing to receive it. **Please note the email address for the Email Communication:** [nerocheemail@gmail.com](mailto:nerocheemail@gmail.com)

## **The Parish Magazine:**

Full information on benefice matters, a great source of news, coming events and general information, and details of many local businesses and services. For new subscriptions phone Alison Brown on 01823 480441.

### ***Many thanks for taking the time to read this Newsletter.***

*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Neroche Communication Action Group. Publication of an advertisement in, or with, the newsletter does not imply the Action Group's approval of the goods or services.*

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