

The Char Valley Village Communities

Action Plans 2003

for the parishes of Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine and Stanton St Gabriel

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Acknowledgements

Parish Plans were announced in the 2000 Rural White Paper and are an integral part of the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages initiative. The aim is to identify the actions needed to help a community to develop. By leading their communities through the Parish Plan process, local councils can encourage a livelier role for the residents of their area and become more effective in their dealings with other strands of Government.

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Introduction

The Char Valley Group Parish Council comprises the parishes of Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine and Stanton St Gabriel. The area is all within the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is completely rural in character. The parishes contain scattered farm settlements, the small villages of Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine and Morcombelake and the hamlets of Fishpond, Ryall and Monkton Wyld. There are also settlements at Stonebarrow Lane and at Fern Hill on the outskirts of Charmouth but within our parish boundaries.

The A35 trunk road bisects the parishes from East to West. Stanton St Gabriel parish, between the A35 and the sea, is nearly all owned and managed by the National Trust as are the hilltop forts which look down on the landscape of small fields, deep streams and woods of the Marshwood Vale and the Wootton valleys. The whole of Stanton St Gabriel parish and the southern parts of the other parishes are

within the Dorset Heritage Coast.

In 2002 Char Valley Parish Council undertook a Community Survey (Village Appraisal) and from this one can see that the majority of residents care passionately about their environment and their communities. Most residents would like things to stay generally as they are, but they also expressed a strong desire to live in mixed communities both of ages and people.

Our residents do not look to one local centre but to Bridport, Axminster and other local towns. Nearly half the residents of working age work within our parish area. Others are based in the parish but supply trades and services over a wider area; only 12% travel to Bridport for work. Of those in work, a large proportion is employed in the caring services, catering for the needs of an elderly population.

We have examined many different issues, some of which affect the whole of our parish group and others that are pertinent to an individual settlement. However, the nature of our rural communities, their needs and aspirations, and what makes them cohesive and self-sufficient is the starting point for our Action Plans.

Our Villages and Village Life

with personal views by residents

The Marshwood Vale nestles inland from Charmouth, surrounded by the hills of Pilsdon, Lewesdon, Lambert's Castle and Coney's Castle. The heart of the Vale was a royal hunting ground under the control of Marshwood Castle (of which little remains) from the 12th century. Past royal and ecclesiastical connections to the area are indicated by such farm names as Higher and Lower Park, formerly royal deer parks, and the Abbots Wootton farms were at one time owned by the Abbott of Abbotsbury.

The patchwork landscape slowly evolved as more land was taken into cultivation. Dairying had been established on the higher slopes in Anglo-Saxon times and much later many acres were used for flax cultivation with the associated ponds for retting (soaking the flax to soften the fibres), the flax being used by the rope making trade in Bridport. A hundred and sixty years ago most of the land formed part of large estates. Nowadays most farms are owner occupied.

Today the clay soil has been drained and supports productive grassland that continues the dairying tradition, with the inclusion of sheep and occasional cornfields. Farming expanded during the latter part of the last century and with incomes and land prices rising, small farms were bought and absorbed into larger units. Farming has continued to evolve and diversify as the farming community weathers the changes brought about by international agreements, milk prices, changes in consumer demand, and livestock regulations.

Few hay meadows with native wildflowers remain. Now they are mainly to be found along roadside verges. These are protected by an agreement between Dorset Wildlife Trust and the County Council. Many of the hedgerows were established during medieval times and form an important part of the visual landscape as well as providing shelter for stock and wildlife areas. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme has recognised their importance as a feature of the area, and helped with the preservation of some of them with on-farm agreements.

The focus of the Vale is the Church of St Wite at Whitchurch Canonicorum, founded by Alfred the Great in 890 AD. Ancient tracks brought pilgrims through the Vale to the saint's shrine. One of the best ways to enjoy the peace and beauty of the Vale is to walk on one of the many footpaths and bridleways that make their way through the Vale. Two winding lanes lead from Whitchurch Canonicorum through the Vale linking farms along the route, reaching Marshwood Village, Bettiscombe, Pilsdon and Broadoak.

The Char River, which drains the Vale, rises inland to the north and enters the Vale between Pilsdon and Laverstock. The river valley provides a wildlife corridor and has recently attracted otters to return, indicating an improved environment. The tidal influences extend inland considerably and can change the river character quickly after a rainstorm, from a meandering stream to flood condition, which can make the roads through the Vale impassable for a while.

As the Vale moves into the future, it is hoped that the essential character of the area and its inhabitants will remain unchanged.

Whitchurch Canonicorum Village

The setting of the village is on rising ground above the River Char with houses strung out along the street. The variety of house styles from different decades adds to the character of the village and this has also attracted a variety of people who have chosen to make the village their home. The village is well defined in each direction. The beautiful church is in the centre of the village which is a conservation area, with the aim of protecting not only the buildings but also the distinctive spaces between the houses which open up to the adjoining farmland. This is a village of trees and flowery gardens with views from the highest points, over the Church to the Vale.

The Five Bells Public House is at the upper end of the village opposite the turning to Shave Cross; the Village Hall, which started life in 1840 as The National School is in the centre. In front of the Church gates is a war memorial and in the wall on the other side of the road is the Village Well House. Whitchurch Canonicorum boasts many listed buildings of varying periods as well as the historic church.

A personal view of the changing life of Whitchurch Canonicorum.

The character of the village is changing, and this is being speeded up by the fact that there is no affordable housing for young people born and brought up here, who are now working and ready to leave home. They have either to continue living with their parents or to move away. Most of those working here, the majority of whom are local families, are self-employed. There are few young children in Whitchurch because of the lack of housing; but there are still a number of older teenagers. Without affordable housing for the next generation, the population is inevitably ageing, and there will come a time when nobody local will be able to provide work, care or services for an elderly population and the sense of community will die.

Of the houses in the village many are now second homes, particularly those ancient cottages around the church. Many people have come to live here because the idea of a small community appealed to them and many have become fully involved in village life.

The lack of a sewerage system causes problems in our small streams. When it was thought that we were to have one, some years ago, there were many people who could not afford the proposed charges to bring the pipes from the road to the back of the house (most septic tanks are at the backs of properties, so drains go out that way). The cost was going to be very high – up to several thousand pounds even then, which is out of the reach of most people here.

The only public transport through the village is the Wednesday bus, which gives about two hours in

Bridport. There is now a good service along the A35 (although it does not always dovetail with the Axminster trains). The whole transport system needs to be integrated.

Village life has changed in the last twenty-five years, mainly for the reasons already outlined, but there is still quite a bit going on. The playgroup is lively and well supported. It brings in children from a wide area. The Five Bells Pub serves food, runs outdoor discos or karaoke occasionally, pub quizzes and occasional sales. The licensees try hard to make it a social centre. The Hall is at present being refurbished, but it is not used and supported by local residents as it used to be. There are regular short-mat bowls, monthly whist drive, various events to raise money for the hall, jumble sales, farmhouse breakfast (well supported), dances and social gatherings.

The Gymkhana is popular and a truly local event. The Flower Show is supported by most people and a big event. The Purcell concerts in the Church and Hall with performances by musicians from all over the world are organised by the retired head of the Purcell Music School. The standard is superb and the concerts are well attended. The Fete and Flower Festival has, until this year, been in the centre of the village around the church and rectory and has attracted help from a wide group of Whitchurch people. The event is moving to a farm this year, as the barns will provide cover. The Flower Festival continues in the church.

Whitchurch is situated in a most beautiful area and is the envy of many people, but unless affordable housing for working people is provided, it could easily become a neglected backwater, instead of the vibrant and beautiful local community it should be.

Morcombelake and Ryall

Morcombelake and Ryall are two hamlets that are joined together and wrapped around the lower slopes of Hardown Hill, sliding into St Gabriel's Valley to the south and into the Char Valley to the north and west.

Being set mainly on high ground many of the dwellings have the benefit of fine views, and from the top of Hardown Hill, panoramic views of the Char Valley and over the Marshwood Vale to Lambert's Castle in the west. Sweeping round northerly there is Pilsdon Pen, the highest hill in Dorset and on to the east, fine views over Chideock and the countryside around Bridport. Finally, we have the southerly vistas, with the hills of Golden Cap (the highest point on the south coast), Chardown and Stonebarrow and the sea at St Gabriel's, Charmouth and Lyme Regis.

The A35 trunk road cuts through Morcombelake and so provides the area with a good bus service to Exeter, Axminster, Lyme Regis, Bridport, Dorchester, Weymouth and all places between.

Morcombelake is the home of Moores Dorset Biscuits that are known all over the country. Large numbers of visitors are attracted to both the bakery and the retail shop. There is a small church (CofE) within Morcombelake which is shared by the United Reformed Church, having their services on alternate Sundays. Although Morcombelake and Ryall are quite rural when you get away from the A35, the coast is only a mile and a half away, as the crow flies, and roughly three miles by road will get you to Charmouth beach. Again, away from the A35 there are plenty of footpaths for walkers, and if you are quiet and patient, plenty of bird and animal life to watch and enjoy.

Living in Morcombelake

I have lived in Morcombelake for nearly seven years. While that is not nearly long enough for me to be regarded by older villagers as anything other than a newcomer, it is enough time for transient initial impressions to have disappeared.

It should not surprise anyone that the A35 dominates how I feel about Morcombelake. The road has advantages and, of course, disadvantages. But for the A35, it is likely that we would not have a regular bus service, a shop, a garage, or the Ship Inn. Perhaps even Moores biscuits would not be here either. We also do not have to drive along miles of difficult country lanes whenever we want to travel to or from our village. Those are all important advantages. The main disadvantage is the noise from traffic, of course. A simple re-surfacing such as was carried out at Raymond's Hill would greatly reduce the noise from the road surface and it may be that will happen shortly.

I greatly enjoy Morcombelake's easy pedestrian access to the Golden Cap estate. It is wonderful to wander that area and I never tire of it. The combination of hills, farms, and coastline is perfection.

Morcombelake lies mainly on the sides of Hardown Hill and its slope influences many aspects of our lives. The incline affects such fundamental activities as walking, gardening and even outside house painting, for example. These are made more difficult but at the same time more interesting than living on the flat. The necessary deliveries of fuel oil and the emptying of septic tanks are in general more difficult in Morcombelake than elsewhere.

Most houses in Morcombelake lie on the south side of Hardown Hill, which means that we enjoy sunny gardens in summer but that we often suffer severe weather conditions in winter. There is a great feeling of 'openness' about living in Morcombelake. Being close to the sea would seem to pose the threat of salt corrosion, but I am surprised not to have observed any sign of that.

I find the great variety of style of houses in Morcombelake quite attractive. Most houses have been designed individually. There is also an 'eco' house under construction in the village, which is a particularly interesting development. This house will have Scandinavian standards of insulation and will be heated geothermally. There are hardly any 'second home' dwellings in Morcombelake.

The summer influx of tourists to the West Country has only a small effect on life in Morcombelake. There is a big increase in traffic density, of course, for a couple of months but little of it stops here except to visit Moores or eat in The Ship. Those houses offering B&B naturally do very well in the summer. Guests' inevitable question on arrival is "Anywhere nearby where we can eat?" The answer

tends to be 'The Ship' so the B&B business also benefits our only pub.

There is a strong and enjoyable community spirit in Morcombelake and it is growing. Most village group activities are centred on the James Hargreaves village hall although some are organised by the Hardown Society. Those responsible for organising these events always take into account the fact that many people in Morcombelake are getting on in years and perhaps do not or cannot drive a car. That fact, coupled with the limited parking available in Morcombelake, influences the type of activity provided. Hence the village enjoys 'pop-ins', scrabble evenings, art groups, gardening club, lectures, quiz nights and coach outings, for example. All of these activities require little use of cars; most villagers simply walk to the hall.

Newcomers to a community such as Morcombelake tend to be relatively young, have energy and (sometimes) money. It does not follow that such people will always be welcomed but in my opinion there is an excellent relationship between newcomers to the village and longer term residents. In some ways this is the most enjoyable aspect of life in Morcombelake. I am told it was not always so. Why the present generation of villagers, old and new, get along so well together is hard to explain. Perhaps it is down to the fact that many of us newcomers joined in community activities as soon as we were able and changed village life in a way that older residents find agreeable. Long may that continue.

Another viewpoint on living in Morcombelake.

The roar of the A35 road dominates Morcombelake like some prehistoric monster that comes to life at about six in the morning and calms down at about six in the evening, but with plenty of noisy action into the night. This road, from my point of view makes Morcombelake a convenient place to live, as it gives good accessibility to town and coast. But there is much more.

I suspect that like me, most residents create their own little oasis where the sights, sounds and smells of nature can be enjoyed. I like to wake early and listen to the dawn chorus in the spring, hear the cock birds waking at Fulvens when the wind is in the west, hear the collared doves coo cooing outside, a sheep bleating, a dog barking and in the depths of winter the sound of silence after a fall of snow.

Sit in the garden, listen to the humming and buzzing of busy bees and other insects. On a summer's day, see the colourful butterflies flitting amongst the flowers and sunning themselves on the stems, and so much more.

Take an evening stroll along the lanes and enjoy the scent of the honeysuckle in the overgrown hedges, hear the church bells from Whitchurch on practice night when the wind is from the northwest. The smell of newly mown grass, or freshly cut hay, looking to see the first swallow of spring and now, in mid August on Morcombe Green they arrive in their hundreds lining up on the wires, swirling and twittering as they prepare to depart. Collectively this is just one reason for living in Morcombelake, a village of sounds, sights and smells.

Moore's Dorset Biscuit Factory

Moore's Dorset Biscuits began with the making of Dorset Knobs about one hundred and thirty years ago at Stoke Mill in the Marshwood Vale. In the small bakery Dorset Knobs were baked in the faggot-heated oven for local farm workers after the bread had been made. They were, incidentally, a favourite food of Thomas Hardy who, we are told, had them in the evening with Blue Vinny cheese.

In about 1880 the second son started his own bakery in Morcombelake. This business began as a general bakery then, in the nineteen-twenties, Dorset Knob production was increased until shortly after the Second World War, they had become the main function of the firm, bread and cake production having ceased altogether.

The business, now carried on by the fourth generation, is today mainly concerned with the production of sweet biscuits. For economic reasons, Dorset Knobs are made only during the period January - March, still in the traditional way. Each biscuit is individually moulded by hand and has three separate bakings lasting a total of four hours, the whole process taking eight to ten hours.

More recently a wider range of sweet biscuits was started. The business is expanding and production now runs at a maximum rate of about eighty thousand biscuits a day. They are on sale in shops throughout the South West, the Midlands and the South East of England and worldwide.

Stanton St Gabriel Parish

Stanton St Gabriel Parish is bounded by the sea and the World Heritage Site and lies in the Heritage Coast between Seatown and Charmouth. The jewel in the crown of the parish is Golden Cap. This highest point on the south coast can only be reached on foot. The parish also includes the two other impressive hills of Stonebarrow and Chardown that are easy to access by a narrow twisting lane leading up from Charmouth to the National Trust car park at the top of Stonebarrow. The whole of the parish is south of the A35 main road.

In recent years about one acre of the nine hundred and fifty acres covered by the parish has been lost to the undercliff and the sea each year. This constant stirring of the geological structure is the main reason why the coastal edge of the parish has provided so many and such sensational fossil specimens. A further consequence of this instability is that it is difficult to get down to the beach. The only direct access is a rather slippery path and then down some precarious steps cut in the cliff from the now deserted village of Stanton St Gabriel immediately at the western end of Golden Cap. The deserted village and its ruined 13th century church stir the imagination. In 1650 there were twenty households. The village was abandoned at the end of the 17th century.

Most of Stanton St Gabriel was acquired by the National Trust under Operation Neptune in the 1960s and is managed so that many visitors can enjoy the unspoiled views from the hilltops and the quiet charm of the secluded farmland, woods and coastal path. The estate has many SSSIs and to ensure

fauna and flora it is farmed in an environmentally friendly way.

The residents of Stanton St Gabriel who do not farm, live either within a few hundred yards of the main road and look out on a landscape that has altered little since medieval times, or along the narrow twisting lane leading up from Charmouth to Stonebarrow and look out over Lyme Bay or the Marshwood Vale.

Wootton Fitzpaine Parish

Wootton Fitzpaine is the most westerly of our parishes and runs up to the Devon boundary. The A35 cuts through the southern edge of the parish and then forms the parish boundary as far as the Devon border. There are two church parishes, Wootton Fitzpaine and Monkton Wyld, with two small village centres and many scattered farms.

Several small streams form the landscape, with the valleys divided by high ridges, which provide spectacular views to the sea and to the Marshwood Vale inland. The streams meet below Wootton village to run down to join the river Char. The small irregular fields with hedgerow trees and strips of woodland along the streams give an impression of a largely wooded landscape while Charmouth Forest on Wootton Hill provides a different environment with a large area of mixed conifer and deciduous plantations. The whole parish was owned and managed by the various Lords of the Manor from before 1066 until 1970, but is now split into individual holdings.

The deep, winding lanes have flowery banks and there are protected ancient meadows. The parish has a network of rights-of-way, which includes The Wessex Ridgeway, The Liberty Trail and the Monarch's Way. There are no shops, post offices or public houses in the parish and only one bus service a week.

Wootton Fitzpaine village is divided into two parts. The main village centre with the village hall has fifty houses closely placed. About half a mile to the east of the main village, are a further eleven houses and the Church within the Manor grounds.

The manor house is a lovely Queen Anne building in red brick. The original manor open fields to the south have lost their strip cultivation marks but the enormous hedgebanks which were once the boundaries of a medieval deer park can still be seen. To get to the Church you walk through the Manor gates by the East Lodge. At the entrance to the new Manor Farm is a small stone village pound big enough for one or two skinny animals, and below the farm on the stream is an old sheepwash.

The Village Hall is a much-loved "Arts and Crafts" listed building and has beside it a licensed Social Club and a skittle alley. The village war memorial is a clock on the hall, with a bell on the roof, which rings the hour. Behind the hall there are a children's playground, a small playing field and a large car park.

A personal view of the community in Wootton Fitzpaine

I have lived and worked in Wootton Fitzpaine for more than twenty years but my family has been here for over a century, and four generations still live within two miles of each other. What do I love about living here? It is of course set in the most beautiful countryside. This is a man-made parkland of meadows and woods with great oaks standing in the hedgerows, with rushing streams and an interesting network of walks.

However, for me it is home because of the village community. Not everyone gets on all the time it is true, but it is overall a friendly, supportive village. We have seventeen Housing Association houses, nearly one third of the total dwellings, which means that there are local people of all ages, as well as others who have retired to live here. Young couples can bring up their children near grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts. Children use the playground and the playing field and their noisy play means that the village is alive.

The Housing Association houses have also been a bonus as they cannot become second homes or holiday accommodation. The (six) village houses that are empty for part of the winter months, leave a hole in the village, and their owners (with honourable exceptions) do not generally find time for village activities. The converted farm buildings and whole farm complexes converted for holiday use do not disconnect village life, as they are generally isolated from other houses and nobody has to live next door to an empty property.

The Village Hall is well used. There are regular bookings for the Parent and Toddler Group, the Wootton Friendship Club, The Charmouth Girl Guides, and others. There are also several Arts Reach productions each year which are well attended. The Wootton local history group has held several very successful exhibitions and there is a Harvest Supper in some years, with food from local farms. The Social Club next door to the Hall has a skittle alley and teams play regular matches. The Club has a bar and a family room, and has an important role in the social life of Wootton. The Club Management Committee organises informal football matches on the playing field and other social evenings attended by many local families. An enormous Jubilee party was organised by villagers in the Hall and on the Playing Field. Everybody turned out. It was a good example of the enjoyment that home made entertainment provides, with circus skills, barbecues, Barry's band and Sue and Graham's wonderful hot air balloon.

Wootton has a Best Kept Village Committee, which sees that the public spaces of the village are kept free of litter, clean and tidy and in good repair. They also combine with the PCC for an annual churchyard and cemetery tidy, and help with the Wildlife Conservation in Churchyards Scheme. In the Millennium, the children of the village planted trees and wild daffodil bulbs, and more tree planting is planned for the future. The village has twice won Best Kept Small Village.

The Church is in the upper village within the grounds of Wootton Manor. The congregation is not large and there are worries over the future for the upkeep of the Church. The PCC holds a Flower Festival every other year, with cream teas on the Manor lawns, which is much appreciated.

One of the best ways to appreciate the community is to walk down the village street. People out gardening stop for a chat, friends passing in cars wave, parents waiting for the school bus are laughing and talking. When people are ill or things are difficult, Wootton can be a caring place to live, as neighbourliness is alive and well.

Monkton Wyld Village

Monkton Wyld has fewer than ten houses near the splendid Victorian church, but the area has about the same number of farm settlements and more isolated houses. In the Churchyard wall there is an original Victorian letterbox and a war memorial stands in front of the lychgate.

The countryside within the parish is particularly unspoilt with steep wooded hillsides. The hillside farms have ancient oaks and much flower-filled unimproved meadow, but on the top of the western ridge are flatter fields running along the Devon boundary with improved grassland. Many of the farms still have traditional stone buildings. Hidden in the bank at the entrance to Greenlands Farm is a deep stone sawpit, awaiting restoration.

At Monkton Wyld Farm there is a large touring caravan site approached by a good road from the A35. The owners have planted an enormous number of trees in recent years so the site is well screened and takes some of the tourist pressure off the immediate coastal strip.

Living in Monkton Wyld

Living in the heart of Monkton Wyld you would presume that it would be quite 'happening' with plenty going on, but it is the opposite. The Church is used by a very small congregation on every second Sunday in the month. The lane that runs through the village does not actually go anywhere else so it has not become a 'rat run' or short cut; therefore the traffic that there is tends to be local or delivery. One only sees one's neighbours when they pass by in their cars on the way to somewhere; this is because the houses are spaced well apart and there is no real neighbourly feel.

Owning a car is essential because there are no services at all and whether it is for pub, post office, petrol or food the car must be used (there should be a Government grant for people who live in places like Monkton Wyld!). Delivery traffic is fairly frequent and usually lost! Because we live in the heart of the village ours is the property where drivers stop to ask the way (usually because they have the postal address of Bridport and have been there first). It would be so nice if there was a 'YOU ARE HERE' map in the Church car park for those days when we are not in.

Generally the village is a noise free zone and a haven for wildlife. Traffic can be heard from the main A35 depending on the wind direction and every now and again Monkton Wyld Court will be holding a course – drumming is a good one – or self expression – get out that aggression – learn to scream – any of these create unusual noise.

The local community is added to considerably and on a fairly regular basis by those staying at the Court. These people can be seen strolling aimlessly up and down the lane – aimlessly because there is nowhere to walk to. Buddhist monks are a frequent sight, wearing sandals and dressed in orange robes.

Fishpond Village

Today around fifty people live in Fishpond, in a scattered variety of some thirty-nine dwellings all having mains electricity, some supplied with mains water, but no mains drainage. At the head of the valley overlooking the sea at Charmouth are the Iron Age forts of Lambert's Castle on the northern edge and Coney's Castle further to the east. The whole area is within the AONB and borders upon the World Heritage Coast of Dorset at Charmouth four miles away. There are magnificent views from the many hillside vantage points; rambling and riding horses and cycles are popular.

Both the A35 and A30 roads are easily accessed through narrow winding lanes and the nearest station at Axminster is about three miles to the west.

Many of the dwellings are currently occupied by semi-retired people, who seek a country life in tranquil surroundings. Older residents are of very long standing and have always lived in the immediate neighbourhood. There is no shop, but the small Chapel of Ease serves as a meeting place, and regular services are held on Sundays. One pupil attends the Woodroffe School in Lyme Regis; the residents are mainly sixty-five or over however, and six of the houses are only occasionally occupied for holidays. Two properties are currently for sale. The National Trust owns both Lambert's Castle and Coney's Castle with the usual protective regulations and restrictions in place. A number of hedgerows are also protected by law throughout the area.

Much of the land is grazing, being too steep, wet and stony to plough, and the area boasts innumerable springs, while shifting greensand soil prevents development. Forestry has been part of the landscape of Wootton Hill for many years and Charmouth Forest currently has many visitors, all enjoying the flora and fauna. Although recently felled in places, replanting with broadleaved trees has already renewed much of this woodland.

A single line of electricity pylons passes between Lambert's Castle Hill and Coney's Castle and this is the only sign of the march of progress in this green and peaceful valley.

Future and On-going Village Projects

Marshwood Vale Heritage Exhibition in Whitchurch Canonicorum Church.

Whitchurch Canonicorum Parochial Church Council has proposed a project to create a "Heritage Exhibition" in the south aisle of the Church. The aim is to provide information about the historic church, the history of the area, other nearby churches, details of the wildlife and the farming, information about the local community and advertising for local accommodation, attractions, farm shops, pubs, open days and walks.

The PCC has set up a community group to look into the feasibility of the project, and the funding available. The Church has toilet facilities inside and a large car park. The PCC has long wanted to have a "Brown Tourist Sign" on the A35 to the ancient Church and the Shrine of St Wita, and this will be investigated.

An Archive Room for the Wootton 2000 Group.

The Wootton 2000 Group has held several exhibitions about the history of their parish in the village hall. The work done by the membership for these exhibitions together with a large amount of additional research has been used to write a book which is due to be published in late 2003 or early 2004. A large number of exhibition display boards and other archive material, photographs and artefacts now urgently need a dry secure home. We need a room with lots of storage space, in which people can examine the records, do research work and add to the collections. Until the book is published (which is being done by the members of the Group themselves), we have not gone any further into the feasibility of finding a room or building to convert.

The Restoration of the Greenlands Sawpit.

Outside the gate to Greenlands Farm at Monkton Wyld, there is a deep stone sawpit dug into the bank. The project aims to re-point and repair the stone walls, build a new replica superstructure for rolling trunks onto the pit and provide an information board with illustrations of the stages of timber production in the horse drawn age. The site is on the Monarch's Way Trail, and several footpaths and bridleways lead from the site to other parts of Monkton Wyld, Wootton Fitzpaine, and Charmouth Forest. The project is at the stage of assessing the costs and the local skills required. When this is completed a Heritage Grant will be applied for through the Wootton 2000 Group.

Wootton Fitzpaine - Dorset Wildlife Trust Living Churchyards Scheme.

The Wootton Fitzpaine Parochial Church Council with the Wootton Fitzpaine Best Kept Village Group has joined the Living Churchyards Scheme. The Churchyard and the separate Cemetery are included. The aim is to provide a haven for wild flowers, birds, butterflies and mammals within a carefully managed environment which keeps a balance between the need to keep access to the graves while enjoying the benefits of wild flowers and grasses. The regular grass and hedge cutting is contracted out, but there is an annual pruning, clearing and painting session before Easter by the group. Provision of a board with photographs and a species list in the Church, and a bench in the churchyard on the north side of the Church have been proposed.

Some other Community Groups:

Char Valley Heritage and History Group
Wootton 2000 Group (Wootton Fitzpaine history)
The Hardown Society
Morcombelake Scrabble Group
Morcombelake Art Group
Wootton Friendship Club
Wootton Social Club (& skittles teams)
Whitchurch, Morcombelake and Ryall W.I.
Ancient Hedgerows Survey Group
Short Mat Bowls
Table tennis
Pony Club
Scouts
Guides & Brownies

Action Plans

For Issues Affecting All Three Parishes

1. Provision of Social Housing

- 1.1. Our survey indicated a strong desire for a mixed community. This requires all age ranges and working opportunities to be present. This is a low-wage area with exceptionally high house prices, so if we are to retain a working community some **social housing** (rented or shared equity) will be necessary in our villages. From comments made to the survey it can be seen that concern was expressed that if this is not permitted, properties will eventually be owned and occupied only by retired people, those with second-homes, or people coming in from outside the area, and the original village families will suffer.
- 1.2. For this to succeed, **Local Plan policies have to reflect that our settlements, although loose-knit in character, actually are living, working communities that wish to prosper.** The lack of more than basic local facilities does not unduly hamper those who choose to live in rural communities, most of whom are looking for quality of life or family and countryside connections rather than town facilities.
- 1.3. We are anxious to see that youngsters working locally should not be forced out of the communities in which several generations of their families have lived. If social housing is provided only in Bridport, then people will have to commute to the Char Valley area for work. It is quite wrong that those with jobs in rural areas should in effect be told that they are too poor to live in the countryside, especially if they see a tourist use promoted over their own needs.
- 1.4. At present nearly 50% of our residents of working age, work within our grouped parish area and a significant proportion of that work involves servicing the needs of the elderly, the retired, and of tourism within the Vale (Care in the Community, gardening, cleaning, building and other service trades). By contrast only 12% work in Bridport. We strongly support the ideals of fostering community life expressed in the Dorset Structure Plan.
- 1.5. We support the basic principles of **agricultural ties**. But many farms are being amalgamated or enlarged and this has led to a change in local employment to reflect the farm diversification presently encouraged. Many local people now work not only in agriculture but also in local support services and in tourism. We would like to propose a change in designation from "agricultural ties" to "local employment ties". This would reflect the reduction in the number of those employed in agriculture while retaining a local housing stock with suitable restrictions.
- 1.6. The use of **tied cottages as holiday accommodation** increases farm incomes but reduces houses available for those working on the farms. We would like to see restrictions to the letting of houses with an agricultural tie for tourism, where employees on the same farm are in need of local housing.
- 1.7. Our survey results have shown that residents would prefer to see the adaptation of **redundant buildings for social housing** for local people and not just to holiday units. This could only be where there is a proven need, suitable access can be made, and all the restrictions implemented necessary to prevent conversions coming back onto the open market. Residents see this as preferable to building new social housing units in the AONB.
- 1.8. In Wootton Fitzpaine there are eleven Pass Housing Association and six Hastoe Housing Association houses. The residents are all local people which has provided a close knit village with many young families and a wide mix of ages. The Pass Housing Association houses are all rented. Of the Hastoe houses, four are to rent and two are shared equity.
- 1.9. In Morcombelake there are several Housing Association houses and six bungalows for the elderly. There is only one Housing Association house left in Whitchurch Canonicorum and our survey, together with local information indicates that within five years more social housing will be needed in this village.
- 1.10. There was strong support in our survey for a policy that the existing social housing units in Morcombelake should be offered to people who work in this area or who have lived here or have family here, **before** those who have no such connection.

ACTION PLAN AIMS:

To see that village communities retain a balance of ages, and of different types of property. To see that those who work in the Vale can be housed here if they wish, and to retain family and community cohesion. New social housing should not be detrimental to the AONB or to the Whitchurch Canonicorum conservation area, and could be created from existing houses or converted buildings, as well as new build.

Actions on provision of social housing:

- Put forward the above Parish views to the **Local Plan Review** and to West Dorset District Council Housing Department and to District Councillors. (2002/2003)
- Set up a **Housing Working Group** (2003) with a brief to:

- i) Talk to the Housing Enablers about Social Housing
- ii) Examine the Housing Needs in more detail, particularly in Whitchurch Canonicorum
- iii) Consider setting up parish housing needs registers to complement the WDDC register
- iv) Find houses to buy, suitable buildings for conversion, or sites suitable for building within the larger village communities

Information for local residents:

Looking for housing? WDDC and local Housing Associations operate a **Joint Housing Register**, so anyone who needs housing should get their name on the list, as applications will only be looked at from those who are registered. You can send for an application form to The West Dorset Housing Partnership, 22 High East Street, Dorchester Dorset DT1 1EZ, Telephone 01305 756045, email housing@westdorset-dc.gov.uk. Advice surgeries are at present held in Mountfield, Rax Lane, Bridport on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, or at 22 High East Street, Dorchester, Monday to Thursday 8.30 am to 5 pm.

2. Planning and employment issues

- 2.1. Planning policies relating to **extensions to existing properties** should be carefully looked at; some extensions have been as big again as the original property. The size of the houses in the area is getting steadily larger, but even the smallest cottage is now outside the price range of local young people. If every small dwelling is bought with a view to enlargement, the housing stock will become available only for those from outside this area with larger incomes than can be earned here. Extensions should be sympathetic to the surroundings and the original property and **follow the guidelines set out by the Local Plan Review**.
- 2.2. There have been a large number of **conversions of redundant buildings to holiday accommodation** in the last few years. We feel that saturation point for this type of conversion has now been reached. Visitors to the area are out and about in their cars far more when on holiday than local residents would be, and this causes problems in our narrow lanes. There is also pressure on **drainage systems** with a noticeable rise in watercourse pollution in the summer months. The move to holiday letting throughout the year is not a problem except that the pressure on the environment is now spread over a longer period.
- 2.3. Income from Tourism is an important sector of the economy in our parishes. A large number of businesses including farms and smallholdings have a tourist enterprise as part of their income and the relatively large number of service trades in building and gardening are supporting the maintenance of holiday accommodation.
- 2.4. Another important sector is **Care for the Elderly**. Many people choose to retire to this lovely area, but need help with gardens and housekeeping. There are also nursing homes, residential homes and Care in the Community services.
- 2.5. Both the above sectors require a number of fit young people to work in them and at present there is an increasing shortage of carers due to the fact that young people are priced out of the housing market. People working in these sectors cannot afford to buy a house and there are few to rent, as it is more profitable to let to holidaymakers. Any further development of **Tourism, Care for the Elderly and other services** in our area, as well as local agricultural work will need the **provision of social housing in our parishes**.
- 2.6. There are difficulties for elderly property owners who live in high Council Tax banded homes in paying for the maintenance of their houses when faced with high Council Tax increases and reduced personal incomes on small pensions.
- 2.7. Residents are concerned to see that any further **development of tourism** is sensibly planned and would prefer the natural environment as a tourist attraction, which brings implications for maintenance of rights of way and also for the education of visitors on the Countryside Code and farming practices.
- 2.8. Our Community Survey shows that many existing businesses are considering expansion or diversification plans. Given the need for diverse local employment, we would not like to see policy restrictions that could inhibit opportunities for community development. However, given the AONB status, **new businesses or workshops** should be in existing buildings wherever possible and it is recognised that many existing small businesses or self employed people do need storage or small workshop facilities.
- 2.9. **Caravan sites** are usually easier to screen on high level ground than on the slopes or valley bottoms where one can look down from above. The survey shows that local people think that more effective screening needs to be implemented. The Local Plan policy to allow no further expansion or provision of sites within the Heritage Coast is endorsed, but the majority of residents do not want to see any more permanent caravan sites in our area at all. However we do feel that existing caravan sites should be allowed some latitude for expansion if they produce a sensible five-year plan for reorganising the site incorporating a full landscaping scheme which will substantially improve the visual amenity of the site.
- 2.10. Large new **agricultural buildings** pose an even greater problem within the AONB, and yet

farm incomes are fragile and the economies of scale are constantly promoted. Better enforcement of landscaping conditions is needed and planning applications should be accompanied by a reassessment of the whole farmyard drainage scheme whenever an enlargement is proposed. "Foul drainage to existing system" is not good enough in an area where many streams are polluted and the existing systems overloaded. **All existing "rights to discharge" must be re-examined.**

- 2.11. It is essential to keep our last **Village Shops and Post Offices**. Over 200 people rely on the services of The Post Office Stores at Morcombelake; Charmouth Post Office and shops are also vital to our area. A way needs to be found to keep these facilities, which will be more difficult with the move to pay pensions directly to banks. In an area with minimal public transport and a large retired population, many people rely on receiving their allowances in cash at the Post Office.

Action plan aims:

To see that planning rules as laid down in the Local Plan are adhered to and that our beautiful area and the quality of life of its inhabitants and countryside is maintained.

To see that a wide range of appropriate small businesses are fostered alongside the agriculture and tourist industries in order to provide a variety of employment for our existing communities.

Actions on planning within the AONB

- Put forward the Parish views to the **Local Plan Review** and to West Dorset District Council Planning Department and to District Councillors. (2002/2003)
- To see that the best use is made of any redundant buildings suitable for conversion, with due regard to our lovely countryside and the needs for social housing for those who work in the area.
- Set up a working party to explore the feasibility of other solutions where shops have disappeared, such as delivery or mobile shopping services, or outlets attached to pubs or village halls. (2003)
- Liaise with the AONB Management Plan Team on all the above points.

Information for residents:

The planning rules within the AONB or a Conservation Area differ from those in other areas. Always ring the Planning Office to ask for advice before making alterations to any buildings, whether you think they are covered by "permitted development" or not. When wanting to add on to your house or make any change of use, a Planning Officer will always be willing to visit you, examine the proposal and give advice before you commit to an application.

A list of current and recent planning applications from within our parishes can be viewed on the Char Valley Parish Council website at www.charvalleypc.co.uk. West Dorset District Council website www.westdorset-dc.gov.uk has all area planning applications and the decisions of the Planning Officers or Planning Committees.

3. **Countryside and Environment**

- 3.1. We would like to see investigation into **better drainage systems** within our parishes, as we have no main drainage apart from the settlements on the outskirts of Charmouth. On our impervious clay soils, soakaways from existing systems do not work well. In the summer months the pressure of additional visitors combined with low flow in many of our watercourses, leads to incidents of pollution. Aerobic systems that rely on moving parts and an electricity supply have not proved to be completely reliable. If main drainage is not feasible, could a secondary filtration plant or reed bed system picking up the existing soakaways be provided for settlements in our area? There is support for a main drainage system to protect our streams **as long as development does not follow in its wake**, and the cost to individual homeowners is not prohibitive.
- 3.2. Great concern was expressed over the siting and proliferation of all types of **mobile phone masts**. We would like to see policy decisions on the minimum distance that masts can be sited from dwellings, schools or other buildings in constant use, to protect the inhabitants from the possible harmful effects of microwaves (about which too little is yet known to guarantee safety). We would like to see an exclusion zone of 500m.
- 3.3. We have a real problem with **noxious weeds** such as Giant Hogweed and **invasive weeds** such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. There does not seem to be any systematic control of these plants, so an information and control plan needs to be sorted out with Dorset County Council, West Dorset County Council, local landowners, The Dorset Wildlife Trust and The Dorset Countryside Ranger Service. This is particularly important in the case of Giant Hogweed, which is spreading over some of our most frequently used footpaths. It can cause a serious allergic reaction if the sap comes into contact with bare skin, exposed to sunlight.
- 3.4. Many residents have expressed an interest in working on surveys of our wildlife, wild flowers, hedgerows, historic monuments and heritage assets. These could be pleasurable outdoor activities involving all ages to learn more about our local environment.

Action plan aims

To see that the streams are kept free of pollution from existing and new drainage systems, to protect our

environment from the spread of noxious and invasive weeds, and fight to protect the area from hazardous emissions from mobile phone masts.

Actions on countryside and the environment

- Talk to West Dorset District Council, The National Trust, local landowners and the Dorset Wildlife Trust about a management plan and public information on noxious and invasive weeds. (Parish Council 2003/2004)
- Initiate talks about the possibility of local people monitoring watercourses and finding a better solution to our foul drainage problems.
- Set up ancient/important hedgerow and wildlife groups in each parish. (2003)
- Set up footpath groups in each parish. (2003)
- Liaise with the AONB Management Plan Team and the Dorset Countryside Rangers.

4. Rights of Way

- 4.1. There is a footpath officer for each of our three parishes (see below) to whom any problems or information about blocked paths should be reported. Landowners or farmers who have complaints or need to report broken stiles or footbridges should also contact one of the Rights of Way Officers or the Parish Council Clerk.
- 4.2. There are two Bridlepath Officers for our area to whom any problems should be reported. They work through the Three Counties Bridlepath Group. (See below).
- 4.3. Several people said they would like to "Adopt a Path". This is done through the County Council, but should also be a partnership between the adopter and the landowner. This way, everybody will know what is going on and a sensible management plan of maintenance and waymarking our network of footpaths can be arranged.
- 4.4. There are increasing problems for farmers with gates left open, wire cut, and dogs left unleashed in fields with farm animals. Any new gates, stiles or footbridges provided by Dorset County Council Rights of Way Department or Dorset Countryside Ranger Service should be discussed with farmers to see whether they are suitable.

Action plan aims:

To see that all rights of way are open and waymarked and to find new bridlepaths to allow horse riders to keep off the lanes.

Action on rights of way:

- To liaise with farmers and landowners about any problems they may have.
- To register all those who wish to join the "Adopt a Path" scheme.
- To create village/parish groups to help the footpath officers and farmers.
- Village groups to prioritise paths for upgrading and maintenance e.g. major "Trails" first, followed by most used paths.
- To talk to DCC about a safe crossing scheme for horse riders over the A35
- To talk to DCC and landowners/farmers about creating some new bridlepaths to provide safe circular routes so that riders can use paths rather than our narrow lanes.

INFORMATION FOR RESIDENTS:

Parish Council Bridlepaths Mr John Bridle (Eastern area) 01297 489711
Miss Barbara Briscoe (Western Area) 01297 678203
Parish Council Footpaths Mr & Mrs Don Newman (Whitchurch Parish) 01297 489781
Mrs E Fortescue (Wootton Fitzpaine Parish) 01297 560800
Mr John Bridle (Stanton St Gabriel Parish) 01297 489711
Three Counties Bridlepath Group Miranda Dicks 01297 561199
Dorset Countryside Ranger Service Demelza Hyde for the Wessex Ridgeway 01305 268731
Bob Ashington for the Char Valley Trail 01305 262912
National Trust Charmouth Office 01297 561900
Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre 01297 560772

5. Public Transport

- 5.1. The information provided by the Community Survey showed that there would not be sufficient demand at present for a more extensive public transport scheme **within** these rural parishes, as very few people who live here are without a car. The once-a-week **village bus to Bridport** is much appreciated and should be supported. The **Axe Valley Ring-and-Ride** scheme is available to anyone elderly or disabled within our parishes.
- 5.2. A good deal of vehicle movement in the Vale both for social activities and for work is **between** the villages and hamlets of our parishes for which it would be impossible to provide a cost-effective, public transport service due to the scattered and isolated nature of our settlements. Nearly 50% of those of working age, work within our parishes, not outside.
- 5.3. Sixteen households were identified as being without a car. Eight people aged over 75 were without a car. Some of these residents use A35 public transport. Several people use local taxi services. There is also a taxi service for wheelchairs, Evans Private Car Hire, in Uplyme. Friends and neighbours give lifts. A **taxi voucher scheme** should be considered. There are at present about 120 people aged over 75 living in our parishes: of these, between 20 and 30 are over 85. Some who are still driving may wish to give up if taxi vouchers were offered, and some of the very elderly find a bus too difficult to negotiate. The likely small take up for vouchers should mean that this is more cost effective and flexible for **those who really need it**, than providing a new public transport system for the Vale. In rural settlements, where both partners in a household are working, they will frequently require two cars.
- 5.4. **Young people** in our villages have to rely on taxis, parents and friends for their social life and activities outside the Vale. The Parish Council needs to investigate whether children and their parents would like a dedicated bus to a leisure centre once a week. Chideock Parish Council supported by Dorset Community Action is investigating the provision of a **Leisure Bus** to take people who are not on a bus route to the Bridport Leisure Centre on a Friday evening. The leisure centre would provide supervision of youngsters for swimming and other sports activities for about two hours. Char Valley Parish Council support this initiative and hope that it will provide an answer for some of our youngsters.
- 5.5. The No. 31 buses on the A35 are much appreciated by those who use them, but a later bus back from Bridport on Saturday night is needed for people who go to concerts, plays etc at the Bridport Arts Centre or other venues. School buses will continue to have to be provided for children within our rural areas, as the lanes are not safe for walking to school unattended. (Milk tankers and large HGVs in the single-track lanes). A **car park in Morcombelake** is needed for those who live in the rural areas who wish to transfer to public transport for longer journeys. **Shelters** on at least one bus stop in each direction are needed in Morcombelake.
- 5.6. **Shopping practicalities:** Somerfield is at present the only supermarket in Bridport to provide a home delivery service to rural parishes and it is within easy reach of the bus station. Many people still use a taxi to get the shopping home. For others, doing a weekly shop for a family, it will still be necessary to provide car parking in Bridport or Axminster, as there will be too many bags to carry home from a bus to an isolated rural dwelling. Encouraging more home-delivery services from local shops and towns might reduce slightly the number of cars driving into the towns and it would be a useful service for those in isolated dwellings.
- 5.7. Char Valley Parish Council has a Transport Officer who sits on the A35 Communities Initiative Committee and attends the Western Area Transport Group meetings.

Action plan aims:

To see that a sufficient standard of public transport is maintained for the needs of our area. To provide a village car park in Morcombelake. To join with Chideock in supporting provision of a Leisure Bus. To support a taxi voucher scheme. To support and advertise the Bridport Area Scooter Scheme (BASE)

Actions on public transport

- Support the continuation of the No 31 bus, hourly service on the A35, but in addition ask for a later service from Bridport through to Axminster on Saturday nights.

- Support the X53 service Exeter to Weymouth.
- Support the 76 service through the villages to Bridport on Wednesday market day.
- Support the provision of a taxi voucher scheme for those who have no car (if they are not already in an existing scheme) and who are over 75 or registered disabled of any age.
- Negotiate with the Highways Agency and Dorset County Council over the acquisition of a suitable site for car parking for bus transfer in Morcombelake.
- Look into the provision of a bus shelter on each side of the A35 in Morcombelake, and to decide on the most suitable stops for this.
- Work with Bridport Area Partnership to provide Market Town support to the rural parishes for shopping, delivery and local transport services.
- Advertise the Bridport Area Scooter Scheme (BASE).

Information for residents:

BASE Bridport Area Scooter Scheme aims to provide access to employment, education and training opportunities relevant to the lives and aspirations of young people. The Scheme provides mopeds to rurally isolated individuals aged 16-25 in Bridport and the surrounding parishes. The primary use of the scooter must be to access employment, education or training with secondary uses permitting access to leisure facilities and other essential amenities. Want to know more? Telephone Hannah 07909 935 951 or speak to your Youth Worker, Connexions Advisor or the Job Centre Plus Team.

A taxi service with a car adapted to carry wheelchairs (no transfer to a seat required) is available from Evans Private Car Hire 01297 442136 (Uplyme).

6. Road Conditions, Restrictions and Controls

On the A35 Trunk Road and in our Lanes

problem solving on the A35:

- 6.1. **A 30mph limit** through the centre of Morcombelake and an extension of the present 40 mph limit westwards to beyond "Fulvens bends".
- 6.2. **A 50mph limit** from the end of the westbound 40 mph limit on Chideock Hill to the beginning of the speed limit through Morcombelake. See A35 Communities Initiative October 1999 paragraph 4.2.9
- 6.3. **A pedestrian crossing or island** in Morcombelake between Moores Biscuit Factory and the Morcombelake Post Office Stores. Morcombelake has a predominately elderly, retired population and the A35 carries an enormous volume of holiday traffic. It is very dangerous for pedestrians crossing the road to the Post Office and the Church.
- 6.4. It is at present dangerous to turn left into Tizard's Knapp by the Ship Inn travelling eastwards from Charmouth. The 40mph restriction is shortly before the turning, which is on a bend, and the turning itself is sharp and into a narrow lane. Traffic roars up behind cars that have had to slow down to make the turning. We would like a widening of the corner, to allow for this turn to be made safely. Also to extend the 40mph limit further westwards.
- 6.5. **Safe crossing points for horse riders.** The Three Counties Bridlepath Group are doing a West Country survey into safe crossing places for horses on major roads. We need crossing points at Morcombelake to give access to bridlepaths on the National Trust Golden Cap Estate, further west beyond the Charmouth bypass at Penn and at Raymond's Hill. Our bridlepaths are used by local riders and by tourist visitors to our AONB so we need to make sure that it is possible to use them.
- 6.6. **Road signs** indicating the nature of the lanes should be provided where they leave the A35 and the B3165. Either a sign indicating narrowest width, or "Single track roads with passing places". We do not wish to disadvantage our farmers who rely on **bulk deliveries**, but in the long term, some solution to the chaos that enormous delivery lorries cause within our lanes will have to be found. If there could be a national scheme to prevent very large HGVs using C, D or unclassified roads, and instead deliver loads to transfer stations on local industrial sites, then farmers in one area would not be at a disadvantage to another.
- 6.7. When the A35 is closed **for any reason**, between Bridport and Axminster, a **well planned diversion scheme** co-ordinating Dorset, Devon and Somerset Police forces needs to be implemented without delay. The diversion scheme used during road repairs by Connect in the autumn of 2002 worked well, but when there is an accident the action is inadequate. We need to have a permanent strategic plan in place, which all the Police forces **know about and adhere to**. The reason for this is that there is no alternative route for the A35 traffic between Axminster and Bridport.

Action plan aims:

To see that the A35 becomes a safer road for drivers, pedestrians and riders.

Actions on the A35:

- To lobby for the re-routing of long distance HGVs to a more suitable road.
- To lobby for all of the above wish list points.
- To investigate the possibility of sensory signs, camera boxes and road markings to reduce traffic

speed

- To retain a place for our Transport Representative on the A35 Communities Initiative Committee and on WATAG.

Problems in the Lanes:

- 6.8. The single most important factor for the residents of, and visitors to our rural area is to provide for the **proper maintenance of the existing road infrastructure**. This is not being done at present, and there appears to be poor co-ordination of the different responsibilities of County and District Councils.
- 6.9. Ditches, drains and road gullies are not cleared.
- 6.10. The edges of lanes have, in many places, grown out one or two feet into the road so that even if the drain grids are cleared, the water on the road does not flow into them.
- 6.11. When the drain covers are removed and the silt sucked out, it still leaves some pipes between the drain holes blocked.
- 6.12. Water flowing down the centre of the roads is ripping up the surface.
- 6.13. Flooding is becoming an increasing headache during the winter months. The roads in and out of Whitchurch Canonorum are particularly bad.
- 6.14. The roads are not **swept** frequently so that they are covered in slippery leaves and mud during the autumn and winter.
- 6.15. **Potholes** are damaging cars and making the roads particularly dangerous for use by motorbikes and cycles (and yet we have cycle route signs on many of our lanes).
- 6.16. Our local tourism industry is now providing year-round accommodation. People will not come to the West Dorset countryside if the lanes are a mess and they have to negotiate floods, banks of silt and stones over the lanes.
- 6.17. A good deal of vehicle movement in the Vale is not just outwards to Bridport and Axminster, but also between the villages and hamlets within the Vale. Please note that nearly 50% of those of working age work within the Vale. We need to be able to get around our area throughout the year.
- 6.18. **MORE MONEY needs to be set aside for maintaining our lanes.**
- 6.19. We would like to see a **20mph speed limit** through Whitchurch Canonorum and Wootton Fitzpaine.
- 6.20. We would also like **“Children crossing” or “Children at play” signs** either side of Whitchurch Canonorum Village Hall and Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall where there are village playgrounds.
- 6.21. **Footpaths and bridlepaths** in the Vale need to be maintained and well waymarked. Many visitors come to walk and ride in our AONB so it is an essential tourist facility as well as necessary for those who live here. It would good to have a speedy solution to the reinstatement of the South Coast Path further inland from where it has fallen into the sea, but we acknowledge the difficulties of this with continuing coastal erosion.
- 6.22. We have well marked **cycle routes** throughout our parishes. The lanes are not suitable for a large development of these, but at the present scale of use they are fine. The A35 is unsuitable for cyclists or pedestrians and alternative routes or footpaths should be well signed.
- 6.23. Our **verges/banks** are cut twice a year. The timing of the first cut is crucial because we have so many spring flowers. The Parish Council would prefer to see that the verges are not cut before the 1st June. The “Blue Post” verges are meant to be cut “later”, but in fact are usually left until the autumn as the cutting subcontractor does not return for a mid season cut. This has not helped to preserve our rarer flowers, as they are now overgrown by vigorous summer plants and dead vegetation. The whole issue of how to find a sensible programme needs to be looked at again.

Action plan aims:

To see that the rural lanes are maintained to a level where they are passable at all times of year.

Actions on roads and lanes in rural areas

- To address all the above points and to press Dorset County Council and West Dorset District Council to put together a plan for better co-ordination on the delivery of a maintenance, cleaning and verge cutting programme for our lanes.
- To talk to Dorset Wildlife Trust and The AONB Management Plan Team about the “Blue Post” verges.
- To look into the “Quiet Lanes” project to see whether it would be suitable for any of our villages.

Information for residents:

Freephone telephone number for potholes or drain clearance **0800 232323**

Mud or slurry dropped on the road during farming operations should be cleaned up by the farmer responsible. Please be tolerant and accept that some mess is inevitable in a farming area, but if this becomes a continuous problem, which creates a hazard to road users, then the Police should be

informed.

The responsibility for cutting hedges along the lanes rests with the landowner/farmer/householder, as does the trimming of low overhanging tree branches.

7. Community Policing

- 7.1. In our Community Survey 2002, the residents expressed dissatisfaction with our Community Policing. The Police personnel were not criticised as much as the system under which they operate. This is a low crime area, for which we are thankful; however, when a crime is committed, particularly when property is broken into, then the response from the Police should be much quicker and more concerned.
- 7.2. We have a predominately elderly population, and the fear of crime can unduly restrict people's lives. There are several instances where elderly people living alone are frightened to go out, leaving their houses unattended. Statistically, looking at the whole area, this fear may seem unjustified, but once someone has been burgled, then for that individual, the fear is completely justified. We feel there are several matters that need looking into, for the policing of our area.
- 7.3. A more **rapid response** when crimes or urgent suspicious circumstances are reported to the police. The response times and attitude to the crime were repeatedly criticised by residents in our Survey.
- 7.4. When there is a spate of thefts in an area, we are often told that these are drugs related. But the thieves have to sell their loot on somewhere, and when several mowing machines are stolen from different sheds in one night, or several thousand pounds worth of tack is stolen from a stable, it must mean that a well-developed criminal chain is in operation. These are not, in that context, small local crimes of limited significance, but part of a much wider problem.
- 7.5. We need **more police on duty from Lyme Regis** to cover our area at any one time. Could they be backed up by **village based special constables or wardens**, who could keep an eye on what is going on in their parish and provide local information to the Police? It would be a great step forward to have officers who actually knew the lanes, tracks, farms and people of the area intimately.
- 7.6. We do now have two **Community Police Officers** who work from Bridport Police Station and deal with antisocial behaviour and other problems in our local communities.
- 7.7. Residents are not always sure that telephone calls about nuisance or suspicious circumstances are logged, or taken seriously. Those who contact the Police can ask for the **log number for their call** and this makes following up the enquiry easier for both sides. It would also be useful to know where the person answering the phone is based – Lyme Regis, Bridport, or further afield, where there is less knowledge of our local area.
- 7.8. Our area is in the **Exeter and East Devon telephone directory**. There is a full-page advertisement for the Devon and Cornwall Police, but none for the Dorset Police. We need information on all the contact numbers for our Police Service, which should be in large type, in our directory.
- 7.9. We have **Home Watch Schemes** in Morcombelake, Whitchurch Canonorum and Wootton Fitzpaine. These are one way in which the Police are able to liaise with the local community. It is important that the Home Watch Schemes also communicate with each other to make sure that everybody knows what is going on.

Action plan aims:

To see that the residents of our area feel safe, and also confident that the Police Service will come quickly in an emergency. We also need good information in the telephone book on who to ring, on what number in different circumstances.

Actions on Community Policing

- To ask for these points to be looked into by the Dorset Police and Dorset County Council Police Committee.
- To have a joint meeting between the various Home Watch Committees to look into any other ideas to help the Police and the residents within our area.

Information for residents

For non-emergency calls: **Lyme Regis Police Station 01297 442603**. Calls will be automatically transferred when the Station is closed.

Dorset Police main contact number **01305 251212**.

The **Community Police Officers** can be contacted through **Bridport Police Station 01308 422266**.

The **Dorset Police Community Support Unit** (Mobile Police Station) calls at Charmouth, Lower Sea Lane, and Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall once a month. The days and times are posted on the adjacent notice boards (at present the third Friday in the month). You can sit in the van to discuss any Police matter and there is advice and information on security.

The Dorset Police website is at **www.dorset.police.uk**.

Local Home Watch Schemes

Whitchurch Canonorum	Mrs T. Hawkins	01297 489914
Morcombelake	Mrs S. Chambers	01297 489349

8. **Childcare and Schooling**

- 8.1. Access to day care or child minders for under school age children is always more difficult in a rural area. **Tick Tocks Day Nursery** now operates in Charmouth which is a great step forward, but it already has a waiting list. In our small communities most parents who want, or need to work, manage to do at least a part time job by juggling the childcare between them on different shifts, or by sharing the childcare with other members of their families. The network of grannies is a vital element of the economy and is one of the reasons why many of our young families prefer to be living within the communities in which they were themselves brought up.
- 8.2. A **Parent and Toddler Group** meets on Friday mornings at Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall. This is for pre-playgroup children and their parents who meet for a social morning and to learn to help their children with play and games. This group not only provides a happy play experience but also helps with any feelings of isolation that young parents may feel in a rural area.
- 8.3. A flourishing **Playgroup** meets in the Village Hall at Whitchurch Canonicorum three mornings a week. The Playgroup serves the entire area including Charmouth. There is also **Monkton Wyld Kindergarten** at Monkton Wyld Court on two mornings a week. Both these pre-school groups accept Ofsted vouchers for free places to 3 - 4 year olds.
- 8.4. The children from our parishes nearly all go to either **Marshwood CE VA Primary School** or to **Charmouth County Primary School**. We are fortunate in having two excellent but different primary schools for parents to choose between. Children mostly go on to **The Woodroffe School** in Lyme Regis, with a few going to **Colyton Grammar School** in Devon and some to the **Sir John Colfox School** in Bridport. Children with learning difficulties go to **Mountjoy School** in Bridport or other specialist centres within Dorset. In our Community Survey, the majority of parents were happy with the schooling that their children received.
- 8.5. Many children now stay on at Woodroffe after sixteen, but some go to **Weymouth College** (by bus) or **Exeter College** (by train from Axminster) or other training. We are particularly interested in the new Scooter Scheme (BASE) in Bridport which could ease the transition into work or college for those who do not yet have transport of their own. It can be difficult to access public transport on the A35 if you live in the Marshwood Vale.

Action plan aims:

To support our local early learning and childcare facilities in any way that we can, to ensure the continuing provision of the best possible start for the children of our area.

Actions on childcare and schooling:

- Provide support and help for grant funding when necessary.

Information for residents:

Contact numbers: Tick Tocks Day Nursery, Charmouth 01297 560088.
 Whitchurch Playgroup, Claire Blatchford 01297 678426.
 Monkton Wyld Kindergarten, Kate on 01297 560342.
 Dorset County Council Children's Information Service (for list of registered childminders and nurseries etc.) 01305 228418
 Bridport Area Scooter Scheme (BASE) 07909 935 951

9. **The Char Valley Churches**

- 9.1. The Char Valley Churches in the five parishes of Whitchurch Canonicorum, Stanton St Gabriel, Monkton Wyld, Fishpond, and Wootton Fitzpaine are used in many ways as well as for worship, and are an important part of their rural communities. In places such as Fishpond for example, the church is the only community building, there being no hall, pub, or shop.
- 9.2. Although there are a relatively small number of regular church-goers in each community, the churches are used extensively by their communities for funerals, weddings or as social meeting places and much is being done to encourage their use as such.
- 9.3. At Whitchurch, the money was finally raised with generous bequests, to build an adjoining toilet, and an area of the North Aisle has been fitted out as a kitchen/meeting place. The addition of these facilities means that it is now possible to use the church for many other activities such as concerts or drama. When thinking of using the churches for the benefit of the wider local community, it is worth looking at Marshwood Church which, in co-operation with the adjacent church primary school and County Education Committee, has converted the church for use part time, as a school hall and gym. The community can now use it for church services and also as a hall for coffee mornings, concerts and other events.
- 9.4. Morcombelake Church is used not only by the Church of England congregation but also by the URC Church under a church-sharing agreement. The main problem there is the lack of parking on the busy and dangerous A35. At fund-raising events, people take their lives in their hands when they park in the lay-by opposite and have to cross the road.

- 9.5. One of the major problems faced by these churches in small rural areas is the problem of upkeep. The amount of money which is needed for repairs and improvements is often very large, so that small, relatively poor communities consisting mainly of small farmers, retired people living on small pensions and the self-employed, cannot find the money required on top of the share quota levied by the Diocese. The quota goes to pay the salaries and pensions of clergy, which are themselves very low. On the continent, historic church buildings such as Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine and Monkton Wyld are funded by the government. Unless there is more help here, then these churches will fall into disrepair.
- 9.6. Heritage buildings (unsupported by government money) may not be closed or converted for other community purposes but have to be kept open at the expense of the parish. All our churches are listed buildings: Whitchurch is Grade 1, Wootton Fitzpaine and Monkton Wyld Grade 2*, Stanton St Gabriel and Fishpond Grade 2. As with all listed buildings full VAT has to be paid on repairs and maintenance but not on alterations. An exemption from VAT on repairs would enormously help our historic buildings.
- 9.7. We also need help with tourism such as "brown signs" on the A35. Whitchurch has the only church in the country, apart from Westminster Abbey, to be said to have the bones of its own saint, St Wita. It has been a place of pilgrimage and of healing for a thousand years, and still is. Many people come here every year from all over the world to pray for healing at the Shrine of St Wita, as well as to look at the beautiful building. It is tourism which could prevent the churches going bankrupt. Whitchurch has plans to increase tourism, by providing a Heritage Exhibition in the church. This will not only point out interesting features of the building, but display aspects of local and natural history (particularly relevant now with the Jurassic Coast status). We hope this will have a "pyramid effect", pointing the way to other churches and places of interest, which in turn might take visitors on to the next stage of the "trail".
- 9.8. This is probably the way forward for rural communities if they are to retain all their churches, but public funds will also be needed.

Action plan aims:

To help our Parochial Church Councils to maintain their churches in the way that is most suitable for each parish.

Actions on churches:

- Parish Council to continue to provide financial help for the grass cutting of the burial grounds.
- Look into ways in which the Parish Council can help with tourism.

Information for residents:

The Parish Council pays for half the cost of grass cutting in each of our five burial grounds and also in the closed URC churchyard at Morcombelake. Every resident of whatever faith or none has the right to be buried in their parish burial ground. At Morcombelake the closed churchyard is a quiet amenity space for the community.

Golden Cap Benefice Team Rector	The Rev Robin Fairbrother	01297 489223
Golden Cap Benefice Team Administrator	Miss S. Herman	01297 489658
Whitchurch Canonorum PCC	Secretary Miss S. Herman	01297 489658
Wootton Fitzpaine PCC	Secretary Mrs S. Snook	01297 560587
Stanton St Gabriel PCC	Secretary Mrs A. Waldie	01297 489686
Monkton Wyld PCC	Secretary Mrs M. Chapman	01297 560428
Fishpond PCC	Secretary Mrs J. Taft	01297 678314
Sunday School	Mrs Margaret Fairbrother	01297 489223
Mothers Union	Mrs J Gillespie	01297 678235

Our three Village Halls

- 1.1. Our village halls are a vital asset in the social life of our parishes. We have three halls (at Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine and Morcombelake) to serve distinct but very small communities. Each serves about 350 residents, some of whom never use a hall. All three halls are old buildings, all are high maintenance and one is a listed building.
- 1.2. The halls are not run by the Parish Council, but are all owned and managed by individual Charitable Trusts. The Management Committees of these Trusts have a duty not only to look after the fabric of their Halls, but to see that the facilities (particularly access and toilets for the disabled, kitchen arrangements and security) are all kept up to the exacting standards required for an entertainment licence. This is not an easy task.
- 1.3. We do feel that the Parish Council should provide financial help in the form of grants. However, it must be said that the chief onus for supporting the halls financially should rest, as in the past, with the local residents and the Management Committees, who have worked extraordinarily hard to raise funds for their projects.
- 1.4. In the past and in the foreseeable future, the Parish Council has, and will continue to provide 5% of the cost of approved projects, which enables a Hall Committee to apply for grant aid. This 5% has been paid directly by the residents of all three parishes through the Parish element of your Council Tax, whichever hall is involved. A Hall Committee has to raise half of the cost of any project and the county and district councils can grant aid *up to* 55%, depending on the size and the cost of the project .
- 1.5. West Dorset District Council is now proposing an optional scheme whereby it will make loans. The Parish Council has in place Standing Orders which state that it will not take out, or guarantee loans, which would add to the Council Tax burden, while the existing grant system is in place.

Action plan aims:

To see that the residents of our parishes have a well maintained, well organised space for social gatherings, entertainment and education.

Actions on village hall funding

- Organise a standard procedure for an application to the Parish Council for funding. The Parish Council needs to have sufficient detail, in writing and through discussion, for the Finance Committee and then the full Parish Council to make a decision.
- To see that a Councillor continues to be appointed as a representative to each Village Hall Committee.

INFORMATION FOR RESIDENTS:

Advice and funding information for Village Halls from Lois Rose at Dorset Community Action (direct line) 01305 216416.

A Summary

Our landscape and the rhythm of life in the Char Valley have evolved from a farming heritage. The tradition of nurturing crops and livestock, planting in the spring and gathering-in as the days shorten is deeply ingrained within us. For generations, the fellowship of shared country activities, whether harvesting crops, haymaking, hunting or hedge-laying, provided the theme and alignment to the seasons that exist in the country.

This does not indicate a static existence. Farming styles are changing, with new and varied enterprises appearing, the traditional ones expanding or contracting according to the economic pressure of the times. There are Countryside Stewardship farmers, smallholders, horticultural enterprises for organic vegetables, rare breed farmers and more traditional large scale farming, on land that used to be divided into smaller units. As farming families adjust their continued care and stewardship of the landscape, the importance of their role is indicated by the concern all our residents have shown, whether from farming backgrounds or not, in the protection of our countryside.

The residents in our village communities are also changing. Many people now living here came from outside the area, to work or to retire. The new residents work hard for their communities and bring a new energy to village activities and social life. The large number of retired people, together with the lack of affordable housing for youngsters, means that the average age has risen in most villages, though in Wootton Fitzpaine, with several Housing Association houses, a more balanced age range exists. All our residents love this area and their village communities but there are some difficulties that need to be addressed.

The first and most important issue is **housing**. As has been stated several times in this document, the provision of social housing is essential, so that working people can live in our villages, to keep the tourist and farming industries alive and well and support our elderly population. We are aware of the planning constraints of the AONB, but this is a man-made landscape, and the people who still work to maintain it should be allowed to live here too. **We strongly recommend that the Local Plan be altered** to allow us to find a suitable site in a village setting for a modest number of homes which will never come onto the open market.

We have had an enormous expansion in the **tourist industry** in the last few years, which has provided many jobs both directly and indirectly. The downside of this expansion has been the increased pressure on our environment from many more holiday units, and from increased traffic in our lanes. The residents also feel strongly that they are not getting value for money on their **Council Tax**. Most holiday units and businesses pay business rates, which do not go directly to our Local Authorities. Are we getting back enough money for West Dorset, to compensate for the expansion of this industry? Visitors are now encouraged to come throughout the year, not just during the summer months. Those who create policies that allow for the expansion of tourism must in return provide **the services to protect our environment**. **Our lanes** have also suffered from **lack of maintenance**, which has led to more frequent flooding. Dorset County Council and West Dorset District Council should put together a plan for better co-ordination on the delivery of a maintenance, cleaning and verge cutting programme for our lanes. The residents have the will to keep their village communities going themselves. The future of the countryside and of our communities is uncertain at a time of rapid change, but we still farm the land, make a living through an enormous variety of different jobs, we are largely self employed and self sufficient and this is still a wonderful place to live and work.