

Char Chat News

For residents and our guests in

Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine, Morcombelake

Stanton St Gabriel, Fishpond, Ryall and Monkton Wyld

August 2023

Welcome to the Char Valley Parish Council newsletter

August 2023

Welcome to our local parish council newsletter for the Char Valley. As I am writing this two weeks before the 112th Annual Whitchurch Morcombelake and Ryall Flower and Dog Show, I have no idea what the weather will be like (seemingly, neither do the weather forecasters) so I hope the sun is shining and it's a dry day for everyone to enjoy the show.

The show is one of many events throughout our parishes that highlight our local communities and the character of this area— influenced by our location and the people living here. We are also affected by the decisions made by Dorset Council and, more distantly, by Central Government. Our two main industries here— farming and hospitality—are struggling with the effects of high inflation and economic uncertainty. We have included an article from our farmers which explains some of the challenges they face and why you might see more pressure for farmers to change from providing food for us to providing electricity or holiday homes and camp sites.

We also explain some of the planning issues that are affecting us and potentially undermining the protections that this area of outstanding natural beauty has benefitted from.

Do you know anyone who is particularly vulnerable if there are power cuts? If so, please make sure that they are recorded on the 'Priority Services Register'. This is run by the electricity companies to ensure that vulnerable customers get looked after if there's a power cut. The details are on the back page.

One of the great successes of our local residents has been the progress made to address pollution in our waterways. You will have seen the activities of our climate and ecological emergency working party and their interaction with other action groups around West Dorset to get the problems noticed, raise awareness locally, and to actually start to fix them. Many of you have helped with activities along the River Char and down at Charmouth. Their progress report is included.

The Editor

Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC) is a group council made up of the civil parish councils of Stanton St Gabriel, Whitchurch Canonorum (North and South), and Wootton Fitzpaine.

Because each separate council is small, we join up for meetings so we can take decisions together and achieve more.

The combined civil parish stretches from the Jurassic Coast to the Marshwood Vale, all falling within the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

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Opinions expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily represent the views of CVPC as a whole.

CVPC Meetings

CVPC meets monthly except in August and December. Being a group council, our meetings are normally held in each of our village halls in rotation—James Hargreaves Hall in Morcombelake (JH), Whitchurch Canonorum village hall (WC), and Wootton Fitzpaine village hall (WF). The meeting minutes and agenda are posted on parish notice boards and website. All our meetings are open to the public and we welcome public participation.

Our meetings are generally on Monday evenings and start at 7:30pm, with the following schedule for 2023:

Sep 11th (JH) Oct 9th (WC) Nov 27th (JH)

CVPC COUNCILLORS

www.charvalley.org

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Andrew Carey	01297 560057	E: acarey@charvalleypc.com
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CLERK

Tamsin Ely	07786 086038	E: charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk
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Footpath Officers:	Wootton Fitzpaine	Sarah Dewe	sarahdewe@mac.com	07973 920001
	Whitchurch	Christine Peat	christine_peat15@yahoo.co.uk	
	Stanton St Gabriel	Andrew Carey	acarey@charvalleypc.com	01297 260057

Tree Officer:	Emma O'Bryen	emma@obryen.co.uk
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Representing: DORSET COUNCIL: Councillor for Marshwood Vale ward

Simon Christopher	07798 833715	E: cllsimon.christopher@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
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There is a [vacancy for a parish councillor](#) to represent Whitchurch South. If you know of anyone who is interested, please contact our parish clerk, Tamsin, to discuss. This is a good opportunity for someone who is unsure as, at this time, the commitment is only for one year—until the 2024 local elections.

Change to Char Chat Newsletter format

In the last couple of Char Chat newsletters, we have asked for feedback from residents concerning the printed version of Char Chat newsletters. A few residents did respond and were happy to switch to digital only.

As no one requested the printed version, we will be publishing the newsletter on-line only. We will email the newsletter to those who have provided an email address, and post a copy on our website.

If any resident wishes to continue to receive either a full version in printed form, please contact your local parish councillor or our parish clerk.

PICNIC TABLE AT WOOTTON FITZPAINE

This is being made by Alex Brooks of Wootton with Paul White putting in the cement base. It will be installed in the playing field. The design will allow for a wheelchair user to sit at the table. The picnic table should be in place by the end of September.

Footpaths—your help is needed

Our footpaths are a wonderful asset and provide access to our great countryside for locals and visitors. Sadly, many of these are hard to find or hard to use because of poor signposting and poor upkeep of stiles and gates, or damage caused by ramblers. CVPC are looking for suggestions from you for addressing these issues—how should we improve access and protection for our local footpaths? How can we help landowners maintain access but protect their land, crops, and livestock? What would make these footpaths more useful and encourage their safe use by visitors and locals? Let us know... contact our clerk or our footpath officers.



Flood Warden

We have a flood warden for Ryall—Mark Southcott has volunteered ***BUT we still need wardens for our other areas!*** Whitchurch Hall Committee have agreed to storing about 15 sand bags in a shed at the car park. If you need a supply of your own for use in a flash flood, let us know.

Broadband solutions

Dorset Council (DC) are looking at their 'digital strategy' to improve broadband connectivity. This generally involves investing where the most people are—not here—but there are solutions if we're willing to push—and not just ugly masts as suggested by DC. If anyone's interested, please contact us.

A35 through Morcombelake

Two National Highways' (NH) officers walked through Morcombelake with CVPC to explain what NH are planning for our section. The planned changes to improve safety include village gateways, extending the 40mph limit to the west, and improving sight lines on the junctions. There is the possibility of having average-speed cameras through the village too, although a 30mph limit was thought unlikely. If you want a 30mph limit, or changes in junction layout to improve safety, we need to campaign, so let us know,.

Local Farming essentials

Farming is moving on as normal through the year's calendar and reliant on the weather which this year has been upside down again. Wet when you expect dry and dry when you expect wet. Crops were difficult to plant in the spring and germination of things like forage maize and spring barley was difficult with many very poor crops around and most will probably be late to harvest this year as the seeds were planted later than usual. They all had a dry June when germination was minimal. Some maize germinated in July which will make it very late to obtain the correct ripeness for harvesting.

Cereal crops have been difficult to harvest due to the wet weather every few days throughout July and August, so the 14-15% moisture content for storage has been difficult to achieve without expensive drying procedures. Many crops of winter wheat or barley have been cut at 20% moisture and been crimped with added preservative and stored in silage clamps covered in black plastic, with netting to keep the birds off and silage mats on top, to be fed to the cattle in the winter in a mixture with maize and grass silage in a TMR mixer wagon.

Prices for farm produce have gone down, about 20-25% for milk in the last few months so I hope the milk you buy in the supermarkets has also been reduced, I keep checking certain products and find that many have not been reduced at all. Milk prices are now all controlled by world prices for cheese, butter, cream and skimmed milk, so what happens in Australia also concerns farmers in the UK.

Beef and lamb prices have also fallen significantly in the last few months but these are more seasonal price reductions as they nearly always drop in the summer but should hopefully go up again in the autumn when shoppers tend to cook more meals at home during the darker nights and children are back to school. The worry is that Australian and Brazilian beef are hitting the supermarket shelves at lower regulations. We still have Red Tractor Inspections yearly and TB testing 6 monthly to contend with. Wool prices are never good considering what it costs to shear a sheep,

which exceeds the income from the wool.

Nevertheless, it is a health issue for the sheep to lose their heavy woolly coats against fly strike.

Government schemes like SFI and ELMS and Country Stewardship are a minefield of rules and regulations, now that the BPS Scheme is being phased out and will soon disappear altogether. You need a degree to be able to understand the online manuals, one is 156 pages, not sure who has the time or patience to read and understand that one. More and more farmers have to employ land agents to manoeuvre around the paperwork as it is all online and our broadband is nowhere fast enough to go from one page to maps and back again. Like everything else in farming the prices of information, labour, feed costs, machinery repairs and new machinery have skyrocketed since Brexit, Covid and the Ukrainian War. Of course, the borrowed money has gone up for farmers like everyone else on mortgages. Tractors are a prime example and salesmen talking over hundred thousand pounds for a tractor these days, so most are either hired or bought on finance deals. There is no free finance now as an incentive to purchase a special model or colour.

Climate Change has made us all aware of the different crops we must grow, wild bird seed mixes, low inputs on certain fields, herbal lays, maize management schemes and the list goes on, making field management very complex. There are virtually hundreds of different options in all the different schemes now to plough through and try to understand, especially for the older farmers.

Let's hope the younger generation are up for the job as, whether we like it or not, if farmers all go down the route of turning their farms into regenerative, wild flower meadows, trees planted, solar panels on productive land, with no animal or crops to be seen, we will not be able to import enough food to feed our ever growing nation. The rest of the world is also facing devastating floods, fires and unusual weather patterns which will diminish the amount of food they can grow too. Remember the shortage of tomatoes and peppers last winter and spring !!!!!!!

Monkton Wyld Dog Show

The recently held dog show in aid of the coping stone project at St Andrews Church Monkton Wyld and Project Food, Axminster was a happy, family orientated event.

Despite the appalling weather on the previous day, which required 12 sturdy souls from the hamlet of Monkton Wyld to hold down one small marquee, the sun kindly appeared on the Sunday morning and approximately £1,360 was raised.

There were three judging rings including classes for best sporting dogs, best condition, veteran, puppy etc, the usual novelty classes, a fun children's ring and two



displays from the Blackdown Dog Agility Society. Wyld Morris dancers also gave two displays - such

energy - they made most of us resolve to do more exercise.

We must thank all our many varied and numerous sponsors who gave raffle prizes and money to help put the event on. Without their encouragement to press ahead with organising this, our first dog show, we may have faltered. The main sponsors were Coombefield Veterinary from Axminster and Felicities Farm shop. The latter presented the championship prizes. Our judges travelled from Chard, Oxford, Cerne Abbas and Chardstock and we thank them all for their freely given time.

Finally, we must thank all our local friends who did sterling work behind the scenes, everyone who supported us on the day, especially the visitors on holiday, to make this a friendly, cheerful and enjoyable day. (Photos courtesy of Maria Sage, MMS Photography)



Planning Working Party Update

Before outlining what the Planning Working Party (PWP for short) has been looking at in the last 12 months, I would like to highlight the departure of its Chair, Clare Mahaddie earlier in the year. Clare brought a lifetimes' experience of planning matters to the role and will be hard to replace.

The PWP takes a strategic view of planning matters and also responds to county wide issues and consultations, either from central Government or Dorset Council. Issues that have given us particular cause for concern and where we have been involved in dialogues with council officers are:

Tourism infrastructure: accommodation continues to grow and even proliferate. This includes the many forms of camping and caravanning sites and also the provision of Airbnb type accommodation. This is obviously an important industry for this area, but it does have impacts on local people, including problems on our narrow roads and issues around waste. We are trying to persuade Dorset Council to take a

balanced view on this which has perhaps not always been the case. Also, the conversion of housing into holiday lets has a big impact on the availability and price of housing for locals. We have responded to a government consultation on this matter.

'Permitted development': this is a category of development that does not require planning permission. It includes what are, nominally, temporary campsites and also certain types of farm-related development. Again, we are concerned about this in relation to camping. (See above)

Enforcement: we are not convinced that the Council's ability and willingness to take action when people ignore planning law is robust enough. Whilst some people resent being told what to do on their own land, it is matter of simple fairness that, when most people obey the rules, others should not get an advantage by ignoring them. That tends to guide our view on this. We have put pressure on the council to do better on this. ...ctd

Planning Working Party ctd...

The PWP does not make recommendations on individual planning applications within our jurisdiction. Applications are assessed by a group of three parish councillors, led by one with good knowledge of the

particular area and then discussed at a full CVPC meeting in public. The final CVPC recommendation is the result of a vote by all members of CVPC. PWP ensures that the processes are in place to enable this to happen quickly to meet DC deadlines

River Char Community Project

This month we have updates from the two community projects (one in Charmouth and ours higher up the river) working to clean up our river. More good news:

1) South West Water has now confirmed that it will pay for the full 4-day operation to clean up the tiny plastic beads which are littering the river mouth and foreshore at Charmouth. This will now take place at Spring Tides in early 2024.

(Pictured below is one of the clean-up machines used by the Nurdle Organisation)

2) Our River Char Community Project is an active member of the CROWD (Clean Rivers of West Dorset) group, which also includes our MP. In May this year CROWD submitted a list of 13 detailed requests to Wessex Water. These called for the company to support or fund a range of local initiatives and we are now discussing details with Wessex Water. We should have detailed news shortly. (One request was for the company to pinpoint the sources of pollution in its rivers and another was for it to fund catchment advisors in the CROWD area to support farmers to move towards more regenerative practices, and

thereby lessen the impacts on the water environment.)

3) In July and August CROWD members met with senior representatives of the Environment Agency to discuss their work in testing our rivers and bathing waters.

Here, we are in discussion with the Agency about ways to ensure that children and families are safe when using the pools at the mouth of the River Char and of the River Winniford at Seatown (previously, high levels of dangerous bacteria like E. coli have been recorded in both places).

4) In late July, members of the River Char Community Project worked with Ian Rees of Dorset AONB to clear Himalayan Balsam from a stretch of the River Char at Gassons Lane outside Whitchurch Canonicorum. Himalayan Balsam is an invasive species which causes a lot of trouble along the banks of the river, where it overwhelms native species in Spring and Summer, then dies back to leave the river banks bare in winter and vulnerable to erosion.



Author: Andrew Carey

A Local Man

George Smith, the oldest man in Whitchurch, was born in Bridport Hospital on 12th July 1932 to Fred and Lilian, who had a dairy farm at Cockwell, Whitchurch.



His sister Elizabeth was born in 1929. He attended Whitchurch school until he was thirteen. Here he made friends with evacuees who mainly came from Southampton. School milk was delivered every day by pony and trap from Pitt Farm, run by the Barnes' family. He spent his last year at Symondsburry (being the local Senior School at the time). The school bus was an old ambulance.

He left school altogether at 14, and then started working for his father at Crooch Farm, where the family had moved to in 1934. They had one horse called



Violet, and used contractors for the heavy work. By the time he was 16 years old, the Smiths had their first tractor which George quickly

learnt to drive.

His mother died from kidney disease when George was 10 years old, which meant that George had to help with milking before and after school.

During WW2 they grew 20 acres of corn and half an acre of potatoes, both to help with the War Effort. This was as well as milking cows twice a day.

George was an active member of Whitchurch Young Farmers' Club and used to attend lots of social events and dances in the Old Reading Room (which was situated near the new houses in the Pound Field, next to Wakeleys).

George married Peggy Marsh in 1954 at Whitchurch and they had two sons: Lesley born 1955 and Geoffrey born in 1960. This marriage ended in divorce in the mid 1960s.



In 1969 George married Nanette Smith in Peterborough whilst George was still farming at Crooch, Whitchurch. They had two daughters: Katherine born 1971 and Anita in 1973.



George and Nanette retired from farming in 1997 and went to live in Charmouth, later moving to where they live at present: Broadlands, on Bluntshay Farm, Whitchurch in 2006.

George kept himself busy during his retirement, when back in West Dorset, by restoring 3 tractors which he took to various tractor rallies. He was also involved



with the 1980 Whitchurch celebrations (for 900 yrs since the first vicar) when he dressed as a monk. The family celebrated George's 70th birthday party at Salwayash Hall.

When asked how Whitchurch had changed in his lifetime he remembered that there was another pub called the New Inn at Whitchurch Cross run by the Murleys. He can also remember two shops, one being at the Five Bells and the other at Bonhayes run by Mr Diment. In addition to this, there was a shoe makers at Cross Cottage run by Mr Fudge, a Mr Pitman who was a carpenter and church sexton, and a blacksmiths opposite the Five Bells.

George's family can trace his Smith roots at least back to the middle of the 1700s, who all lived in the Whitchurch area. His grandfather Albert, born 1868, spend some time in his youth working in the Channel Islands, as many young men did from West Dorset. He later took over the Five Bells pub and ran that as a thriving business for many years. During this time, he put his children into local farms to give them a good start in life: Fred farmed Crooch, Hilda who married William Larcombe farmed Cockwell, Mabel who married Bertram Trevett farmed Wakeleys, and Albert farmed Cutty Stubbs. Crooch and Cockwell are still being farmed today by Smith descendants.

Power Cuts and the ‘Priority Services Register ‘

As you all know, we do suffer from occasional power cuts in our local area. They are probably more frequent here than in urban areas because of the complexity of the infrastructure needed to get power to so many locations. What you may not know is who is responsible for what in relation to your power. The company that you have a contract with and whom you pay, do not have responsibility for the infrastructure needed to get it to your house (you may wonder what they do do, but that is another matter!) That is the responsibility of National Grid plc (it used to be Western Power but were recently taken over by National Grid plc). So, when your lights stop working, that is the company you need to contact. The number to call (and it may be worth having this somewhere to hand) is either 105 or 0800 6783 105.

Many of you doubtless know all this already. What is perhaps less well known is that National Grid also keep a ‘Priority Services Register ‘. This is for people who may be old, infirm, seriously unwell, have hearing or

sight problems or, most important of all, have medical equipment in the home that requires electricity. Once you are on the register, they can offer a dedicated phone number to call for updates, advice on what to do and how long the power cut will last, and support from charity partners such as the Red Cross, if an intervention is required. We do need to manage your expectations! They are not promising to get your power up and running before anybody else’s. But the support and advice could be very useful and reassuring.

The simplest way to register is go on to the National Grid plc UK website, click on ‘Customers and Community’ and then click on ‘Priority Services’:

<https://www.nationalgrid.co.uk/customers-and-community/priority-services>

There is a simple form to fill in. If you do not feel confident doing this, or do not have access to a computer, you may wish to enlist the help of friends or neighbours to help you. Be reassured, once you are registered, you do not need a computer to engage with this service. There will be a dedicated phone line to help you. Good Luck!

Ride + Stride: Saturday 9 September

Once again, The Friends of St Candida are joining in the annual Ride + Stride campaign to raise funds for the Dorset Historic Churches Trust (DHCT).

Half the money we raise will go to the DHCT and the other half will help to maintain our church in Whitchurch Canonorum.

Sam Milburn and Adam Peat will organise the Stride with a plan to visit some local churches on foot. We will picnic en-route and end up at Whitchurch for tea and cake in the church. It will be a shorter walk than in previous years — about eight miles rather than ten. Dogs are welcome, but you may need to help them over a stile or two.



The tractor rally will again be led and organised by Robin Symonds. We all meet for tea at the end.

We are not organising our own bike ride this year, but the Chideock team have said that Whitchurch riders are very welcome to ride with them.

We ask for a minimum £10 contribution to take part in the activities, and this includes the tea.

Here’s how you can help:

1. You could join our striding group, or arrange to cycle with the Chideock group, by enlisting with Adam



(adam.e.peat@gmail.com Tel: 01297 489676).

2. You could join the tractor team by enlisting with Robin Symonds (Tel: 01297 489743).

In any event, you could sponsor us — and we hope you will, as it’s such a good cause. The easiest way to make a donation is through our Just Giving page:

<https://www.justgiving.com/page/whitchurch-ride-stride-2023>

The DHCT does a wonderful job in helping to preserve our lovely Dorset churches, and by supporting Ride + Stride you can help our own church here in Whitchurch and other historic churches across the county.