

Char Valley Parish Council

Covering Report on the Char Valley Residents Survey 2016

J West, Parish Clerk, December 2016

1. Introduction

This short report is written by the Clerk to highlight what he personally believes to be some of the key issues and opportunities arising from the residents survey 2016. The Council will obviously wish to also draw their own conclusions and explore issues raised further with the local community.

2. Overview

The Char Valley has a relatively stable population who appear generally very content with the area, as evidenced by over 95% of respondents saying that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the area they live in. There is a feeling of caution around anything that would cause a negative impact or overload infrastructure, e.g. significant built development, more traffic or lack of proper application and enforcement of planning regulations. The Council should not lose sight of this overall positive context.

3. Housing

When asked for their view about housing growth, 77% of those who expressed an opinion supported the current local plan policy, which limits any new housing in the Char Valley area to replacement buildings, sub-division, rural (agricultural) workers housing and affordable housing schemes on "exception sites". This commanding majority suggests that creating policies through a Neighbourhood Development Plan to allocate land enable more "open market" housing would be unlikely to have the support of the local community.

The view on social/affordable housing is more balanced, although less than 50% currently favour new provision. It should be noted that current local plan policy enables affordable housing "exception schemes" if certain criteria are met.

In relation to second homes the survey found that 46% of respondents were not concerned, had no opinion or didn't know when asked about them. This suggests that second home ownership as an issue may not be a priority for the Council.

4. Transport

In relation to local roads 44% of those expressing a view said that maintenance was inadequate or poor. Maintenance of verges and drains was rated inadequate or poor by 54% and attracted a number of individual comments supporting this view. Verge cutting is still a DCC responsibility although there will always been some confusion about where the verge ends and the hedge, which is a private responsibility, begins. Concern about drain clearance needs further exploration, e.g. are there particular problem areas, is the current approach effective, should the council spend more and be more pro-active ? The Council may at some point need to take on responsibility for filling potholes and other minor maintenance, which could be significant expense.

Responses suggest a wide level of dissatisfaction with road safety. Individual comments particularly highlight concerns about the need for an additional pedestrian crossing and reduction of the current speed limit in Morcombelake, speeding in villages and lanes is also an issue. The pedestrian crossing and speed reviews by Highways England need following up to clarify the current position. Speed limits in

villages could be reviewed and requests made to DCC lower these if considered appropriate, speeding in lanes is less easy to address, though blanket speed limits or warning signs could also be considered.

The lack of parking in Morcombelake appears a continuing issue, but the suggestion of a car park specifically for bus users was not popular.

5. Employment

Scope for action on employment issues is limited. However some interesting ideas emerged. These include :

Farming

- Provide a directory of local suppliers of food and drink and where to buy direct from farmer/producer
- Support a local farmers market in village halls
- Open exhibition explaining the work of the farming industry in the area may benefit building support & relationships within the community

On tourism

- Publish a walking map with local places of interest marked & local suppliers of food etc.

Employment generally

- Actively work to keep business rentals at reasonable levels and thus encourage more marginal users.
- Support planning applications from local people to create workshops/space
- Ensure good maintenance of roads and possibly more official passing places

6. Energy

There was strong support for domestic solar PV and panels mounted on agricultural buildings and 54% of respondents felt it important or very important that the Council should promote renewable energy. There was also very strong support for initiatives to promote energy efficiency with 65% seeing it as important or very important. While the council should not try and set itself up as an expert there may be opportunities to facilitate information on each on these areas by linking up with experts and providers, e.g. an energy open day in village halls. A Dorset County Council, Energy Officer, Kate Hall has informally expressed an interest in the survey outcomes. Constraints with regard to conservation areas and listed properties need to be taken into account, but also challenged where appropriate.

7. Communications and utilities

While some areas are now experiencing good quality broadband and this may improve in the Whitchurch area, a significant number of residents are clearly not satisfied with the current service. As things stand there will still be residents who will be reliant on satellite services to achieve satisfactory broadband. This needs to be explored further to understand the scale of the problem and to ensure local residents are at very least being treated compatibly with those in similar rural situations.

8. Leisure and recreation

Local facilities appear to be valued and keeping them active will be important as is demonstrating continuing support for facilities outside the area such as Bridport Leisure Centre.