

CHAR CHAT

Char Valley Parish Council Newsletter

Whitchurch Canonorum, Stanton St Gabriel, Wootton Fitzpaine

Issue 6

December 2004

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A35 update

The Parish Council is still pressing for a pedestrian crossing over the A35 in Morcombelake and for flashing Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) along the road through the village within the 40 mph limit. Our MP Oliver Letwin, is helping with this campaign.

Parish Council Budget for 2005/2006

The Parish Council has voted for a budget of £10,860 for 2005/2006. This is a reduction from the current year. Full details of the budget will be in the next issue of Char Chat.

Affordable Housing - an update

Initial results of the Whitchurch Canonorum Housing Needs Survey, in which 75% of respondents supported the provision of affordable housing for local needs, clearly show the evidence of need in the area:

- 10 whole households reported a housing need, 4 were forming new households and a further 4 wished to return to the area. Of these 18, two wished to be housed in the nearest market town, leaving a potential need for **16 affordable homes**.
- The main test of affordable housing need is income in relation to local accommodation costs. Housing Association guidelines define an affordable rent as 25% of disposable income. Thus local rents for 3-bedroomed homes (around £600 per month) would become affordable on incomes of around £40,000 per annum!

The Parish Council has shown that the community has sufficient amenities to be judged as 'sustainable' and so it is anticipated that the planners will now support a scheme. Everything is now dependent on finding a site acceptable to planners and the community.

We need to find a site in Whitchurch Canonorum parish where a Housing Association can provide a minimum of four houses. This could be a suitable piece of field or garden, an extension on an existing house, or redundant buildings suitable for conversion. The site needs to be within easy reach of amenities and some form of public transport such as the weekly bus. A Housing Association would be able to help with this investigation and would negotiate the value, carry out scheme feasibility studies and submit planning applications. Any scheme proposal would be presented to the community prior to planning.

We are now calling all landowners to see whether anyone has a suitable site. We are situated in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and have no "development boundaries" within which building would normally be allowed, so sites will be examined very carefully by West Dorset Planning Officers. Land may be gifted, long term leased, or sold at a value above agricultural but significantly below development value. If a suitable site is found, then it will come under the legislation for "exception sites for affordable housing". Anyone with a site they wish to be considered should contact Mrs Charlotte Hughes, Clerk to Char Valley Parish Council, 42 Fishweir Fields, Bradpole, Bridport DT6 3HF or Mr Andy Lloyd, contact details below. All communications will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Report from Andy Lloyd, Rural Housing Enabler:

Dorset Community Action, c/o West Dorset District Council, Stratton House, High East Street, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1UZ

Tel. 01305 252447 a.lloyd@westdorset-dc.gov.uk or andy.lloyd@dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk

Making sure no one is missed:

The survey has done the job of establishing that there are a number of households in the parish with a clear need for affordable housing. However, some of the people who are eligible for affordable homes did not return their contact details. This will make it difficult to keep people informed of progress and difficult to make sure that everyone who is eligible receives an offer should a scheme materialise. Can I now make a plea to anyone who described themselves as in housing need, but thinks they may not have supplied contact information, to get in touch with me so that I can try to put their contact details together with their application form.

Also, although the survey is done, it is not too late. Other households or individuals in need may still be considered. If you write, phone or email me, I will to make sure you are included.

Planning Applications

West Dorset District Council now need to have a response from parish councils within 21 days. Three councillors will look at the site of an application and the plans. If it is a minor matter with no objections from either councillors or neighbours, it will be returned immediately. If there are any objections or concerns, or if it is a larger application, it will be sent through to a meeting for all councillors to discuss. Thus it will be necessary on occasion for the Char Valley Parish Council to have a Planning Meeting between scheduled monthly meetings. The notice for these will be displayed on parish notice boards. All applications appear on the Char Valley web site:
www.charvalleyipc.co.uk

Local Police Community Support Officers

We have two uniformed Community Support Officers working from Bridport Police Station. They will help with any worries about security or anti social behaviour in our parishes. You may well have seen them patrolling our lanes and car parks of local beauty spots in their well-marked car. The fact that they are out and about will help to deter crime. Ester Osborne and Mark Jones can be contacted through Bridport Police Station on **01308 422266**

Siting Of Tetra Telecommunication Masts

Introduction.

The siting of telecommunication masts in our area is a highly sensitive issue. People living close to such masts often have concerns not only about visual effects but also about risks to their health and well-being. Local attention has been focused mainly on TETRA masts, of which there are already some 120 in Dorset; it is certain that there will be many more in the near future.

What is TETRA?

TETRA stands for *Terrestrial Trunked Radio*. It is the system that has been adopted nationwide as the basis for *Airwave*, the new communication system for the emergency and public safety services. TETRA is the result of a public-private partnership involving the Home Office, BT, mmO2 (a subsidiary of BT) and the US telecommunications company Motorola.

Why is TETRA needed?

The Home Office states that '*Current police radio systems are obsolete and incompatible with each other. New digital technology will allow for more complete coverage of the country, clearer signals and extra features such as encryption, and data as well as voice communication.*'

Why choose TETRA technology and when will all police forces be using the new system?

The Home Office states that '*Before Airwave was commissioned, independent experts reviewed all available technologies. Only TETRA was found to meet the requirements of the police service....The system is being rolled out force by force. Currently it is available to forty forces. Once a force reaches its Ready For Service (RFS) date, and Airwave is available to it, the force will typically need a further six to twelve months to become fully operational. Most forces in England and Wales will reach RFS by the end of 2004, and will therefore be fully operational by the end of 2005. All forces in England Wales and Scotland will reach RFS by the end of April 2005, and will be fully operational by the end of May 2006.*'

SAFETY OF THE TETRA SYSTEM

There is a large mass of published information relating to the safety of telecommunication systems. The type of information available varies widely, from anecdotal evidence to formal large-scale studies. We give here some useful sources of information and summaries and/or extracts from their content.

- **The Ecologist, October 2004.** 'TETRA - A Popular Revolt'. This article describes the effects alleged to be due to the installation of TETRA masts in Llanidloes in Wales, Dursley in Gloucestershire, Littlehampton in Sussex and Drumcarrow in Fife. The article also refers to the work of Dr Gerald Hyland, the Police Federation and the initial experience of TETRA with police forces in Lancashire and Leicestershire.
- **The Stewart Report** (May 2000, INTERNET: www.iegmp.org.uk/report/text.htm). This is a government-authorised report by an independent expert group chaired by Sir William Stewart. It is an important work because it is often referred to by both government sources and those opposed to government policy with regard to TETRA and other systems. Among its conclusions are
 1. *The balance of evidence to date suggests that exposures to RF radiation below NRPB and ICNIRP guidelines do not cause adverse health effects to the general population.*
 2. *There is now scientific evidence, however, which suggests that there may be biological effects occurring at exposures below these guidelines*
 3. *We recommend that a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phone technologies be adopted until much more detailed and scientifically robust information on any health effects becomes available.*
 4. *We conclude that the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines. However, there can be indirect adverse effects on their well-being in some cases.*
- **Mobile phone masts: government response to committee report.**
(www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_planning/documents)
This document is the government's response to the recommendations in the Stewart Report (see above). It contains the following statements: -
 1. *The Government has agreed that, as a precautionary measure, exposure from base stations should meet the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposures The mobile phone operators have undertaken to provide, as part of planning applications for base stations, a certificate of compliance with ICNIRP. The audit of emissions from masts currently being carried out by the Radiocommunications Agency has shown, so far, that whilst typical maximum exposures are variable, they are generally tiny fractions of the public exposure guideline levels.*
 2. *It is our view that, if a proposed development meets the ICNIRP guidelines (as recommended by Stewart on a precautionary basis), it should not be necessary for a planning authority, in processing an application, to consider the health effects further. Most existing base stations already meet those guidelines and we expect all new base stations to do so."*

STAMP. STAMP stands for 'Stonebarrow Against Mast Proximity' and refers to the organisation of Stonebarrow Lane residents who are opposed to the siting of telecommunication masts near residential areas. STAMP's website (www.stamp.clara.co.uk) is a source of much useful information. It includes the description of a meeting, chaired by Oliver Letwin MP, with residents of Stonebarrow Lane, representatives of all local councils (Parish, District, County), two representatives from mmO2, Ali Cameron and Rob Murray (Chideock Parish Vice Chair) of 'Dorset Against More Masts' (DAMM). DAMM and STAMP had a meeting with mmO2 on Wednesday 17th to discuss alternative sites and while nothing specific has been agreed, indications are that a new site will be confirmed in a month or so.



- **Home Office programme of work on TETRA health issues** This document discusses the health issues associated with the TETRA system. (www.policereform.gov.uk/implementation/tetra/tetra10.html).
- **Caroline Lucas** (www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk) is the Green Party MEP representing the South-East of England. Her web site provides a number of ways of finding out about her work on TETRA masts. It contains links to campaign groups that she has worked with and how she has worked at the European level on this issue.

THE NATIONAL TRUST. Siting of Telecommunications Apparatus.

The National Trust is a major landowner in our region. Given the possibility of more TETRA masts in this area, the Trust's attitude to them could be important. The Trust has issued a policy statement on the siting of telecommunications apparatus on its properties, which was agreed by the Trust's Council in January 2000: -

"There is a presumption against the erection on Trust land of telecommunications apparatus which is visually intrusive but the Trust recognises that there are rare instances where there is no significant visual intrusion or where the least environmentally damaging location may be on Trust property. In such situations the design and siting details must be of a high standard."

It may be of interest to note that the masts sited near Langdon Wood, in Stonebarrow Lane and on Hardown Hill are *not* on Trust property.

Quality Town and Parish Councils

This is a scheme set up by central government open to all parish and town councils in England.

Quality Parish Councils are expected to:

- be representative of and actively involve all parts of their community
- be effectively and properly managed, with members and officers upholding a high standard of conduct
- work closely with voluntary and community sector groups, and articulate the community's needs and wishes through effective communications, which might include the production of parish plans or other similar documents

and

- work in partnership with other local authorities and agencies and, depending on their size, be able to deliver local services which give the best deal for the local community

Char Valley Parish Council is now working towards the accreditation process. We already meet nearly all the "tests" involved. Working towards higher standards has involved looking hard at every aspect of the way our Parish Council is run. Whether or not we achieve Quality Status in 2005, this is a useful exercise, as clearly we wish to represent the residents of our parishes in the most efficient way possible. When Quality Status has been awarded it will be possible for Parish or Town Councils to enter into Charter agreements with other Local Authorities on the best way to deliver local services.

The tests are as follows: Electoral Mandate (i.e. elected, not co-opted Councillors), a qualified Clerk, regular Council meetings, communication through newsletter, web site and minutes, production of an Annual Report, accountability through unqualified accounts and adoption of the Code of Conduct.

Maintenance of our lanes

Our County Councillor, Geoffrey Brierley, kindly arranges for an officer from Dorset County Council to visit our parishes and meet with parish councillors every year in the autumn. We drive around our parishes with them and inspect the state of the lanes. We point out the places where flooding occurs and also discuss the maintenance of drains, ditches, gullies and the state of the road surface. Under a new system, Dorset County Council now provide work teams to come and do all the maintenance, parish by parish so that potholes and drainage problems can be sorted out more quickly. The Parish Council finds this system is working well and that our lanes are being maintained to a better standard now. We would like to remind all residents that the number to report any potholes or problems directly to DCC is **0800 232323**. Any other long-standing problems can be directed to our Clerk or a local councillor.

Roadside hedges, trees and shrubs

Please could all householders and landowners make sure that hedges, shrubs or trees are not growing out over pavements, paths or roads. It is your responsibility to keep them cut back. Thank you.

Invasive Weed Control

We are fortunate to live in an area of outstanding natural beauty, with a diversity of flora and fauna within the distinctive character of the wildlife habitats we all appreciate. Many species have been introduced either deliberately or accidentally since Roman times and some have added to the character of the countryside. However, in recent times, there has been an unprecedented increase in new species being brought into the country (many associated with water) and some introductions give cause for concern. When non-native species become invasive they can transform ecosystems, causing a variety of problems including seriously threatening native and endangered species. Problems caused by introduced plants include blockage of drainage channels, ousting of native vegetation, deoxygenation causing fish mortality, limiting of safe access to water and, in some cases, the posing of serious health risks to the public and to livestock.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides the primary controls on the release of non-native species into the wild in Britain. The two flowering plants currently listed for which it is an offence to "plant or otherwise grow in the wild" are Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. Japanese knotweed in particular has nearly doubled its distribution in the past 20 years.

In addition, the Weeds Act 1959, which is directed at clearing weeds that threaten agricultural production, provides for the control of five specified weeds: parrot's feather, Himalayan balsam, Australian swamp stonecrop, ragwort and floating pennywort.

We have a number of the listed species within the Parish including giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam, floating pennywort, ragwort and Japanese knotweed. The Hardown Society has asked West Dorset County Council to treat the increasingly large patches of invasive Japanese Knotweed on the lanes around Hardown Hill. They will spray in May and June 2005. This is a problem in many spots around our parishes. It is up to the landowner to deal with the problem of invasive weeds (Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, ragwort, giant hogweed) on private land, but the County Council will tackle patches on road verges. Any landowners needing further information can contact the following private company, which specialises in dealing with Japanese knotweed: Japanese Knotweed Solutions, Hamilton House, 205 Bury New Road Whitefield, Manchester M45 6GE tel: 0161 796 7200, web site www.jksl.com

Invasive weed plant material is considered a 'controlled waste' and its correct mechanical disposal (hoeing, pulling, cutting etc) is vital. Japanese knotweed will, for instance, survive composting and should only be buried or burnt in accordance with advice.

Parish Council Notice Boards

For your information the Char Valley notice boards are at:
Whitchurch Canonorum: Village Hall
Morcombelake: Post Office
Morcombelake: James Hargreaves Community Hall
Ryall: corner above
Stonebarrow Lane: bottom of lane
Wootton Fitzpaine: Village Hall
Wootton Fitzpaine: Knapp corner
Monkton Wyld: War Memorial by the church
Fishpond: Lower Road

Meetings of Char Valley Parish Council

Councillors have decided to hold the Parish Council meetings at 7 p.m. in the winter months:

- 11 January, Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall 7.00 pm
- 14 February, James Hargreaves Community Hall 7.00 pm
(to be confirmed)
- 14 March, Whitchurch Canonorum Village Hall 7.00 pm
- 11 April, James Hargreaves Community Hall 7.30 pm

Agendas are displayed on Notice Boards and on the web site at least 3 days before each meeting.

The Environment Agency has produced a booklet providing guidance on the control of invasive weeds in or near fresh water which may be obtained either by telephoning 0845 9333111 or via email on enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk. The booklet includes a fact file on each of the plants listed: giant hogweed; Japanese knotweed; parrot's feather; Himalayan balsam; Australian swamp stonecrop; floating pennywort, and gives details of methods of control and disposal to be adopted, including chemical and non-chemical control methods.

