

CHAR CHAT

Char Valley Parish Council Newsletter

Whitchurch Canonorum, Stanton St Gabriel, Wootton Fitzpaine

Issue 14

January 2007

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Subjects/reports discussed by the Parish Council May to December 2006

USEFUL WEB SITES:

Char Valley Parish Council:
charvalleypc.co.uk

Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils:
dorset-aptc.gov.uk

Elections Office:
electreg@westdors-et-dc.gov.uk

Parish Council Elections

3rd May 2007

Do You Love The Area You Live In?

Can You Spare An Hour A Week?

Do You Want To Have Your Say About Local Issues?

Do You Want To Influence How Your Money Is Spent?

... THEN YOUR PARISH COUNCIL NEEDS YOU TO STAND FOR ELECTION!



Local elections will be held on Thursday, 3rd May 2007. All our existing Parish Councillors will stand down, but while some will seek re-election, there are some who have decided not to stand again, providing the opportunity to bring new people on to the Council. We have the opportunity to achieve the ideal mix of newcomers and experienced councillors.

If you feel you have what it takes to be a councillor and can spare an hour a week, then we would like to hear from you. And if you don't want to stand for election - then please suggest the idea to someone you think would make a great councillor - and don't forget to USE YOUR VOTE!

Nomination packs are available from the West Dorset District Council Elections Office, Stratton House, 58-60 High West Street, Dorchester DT1 1UZ, Tel 01305 252206 or email: electreg@westdorset-dc.gov.uk.

These are to be returned to the Elections Office by **noon on Wednesday 4th April.**

Why Do We Need Parish Councillors?

Your elected local councillors are consulted on nearly everything that happens in your area and so take an active part in deciding what services will and will not be provided for you.

Councillors live side by side with you in your community; they represent the most local level of government, are easily contactable and are answerable to the community in an obvious way every time they leave their front doors. The money they use to implement their decisions comes mainly from your **council tax** so you need to be sure that you have voted for the right people to look after your community.

It is an unfortunate fact that Parish Council elections are often uncontested because there are too few candidates standing. Local democracy is best served when an election is held that gives local people the choice, from many candidates, of who should represent them on the Parish Council. It is therefore vital for interested people to come forward to stand for election.

What Do Parish Councillors Do?

The duties and pleasures of being a Parish councillor are many and varied; however, it is the ordinary day-to-day contact with local people in their own community that is the most important part of being a councillor. Parish Councillors are the collective voice of the community they represent.

From making representations on planning applications to the state of footpaths, Parish councillors have a wide range of ever-increasing responsibilities and duties. They make decisions that affect our everyday lives. We list here just some of the responsibilities and powers that Parish councillors have.

- **Preservation of the quality of the countryside.** Parish councillors are careful to ensure that the qualities of the countryside are not threatened by development.
- **Examining and commenting on planning applications.** The Parish council is notified of any planning application affecting its area and makes comments that the planning authority takes into account. For example, the wish to use farm buildings for diversified enterprises or the extension of existing dwellings are matters that councillors have to deal with.
- **Informing public bodies or organisations of the views of people in the local community.**
- This information is hard to capture other than through Parish councils. Char Valley Parish Council commissioned a Community Survey in 2002 and produced an Action Plan in 2003 so Councillors can better reflect the views and aspirations of their electorate.
- **Representing their Parish council at other local government meetings or on local bodies/organisations.** Councillors act as ambassadors for their community, keeping everyone aware of local needs and concerns and reporting back to their council on District, County and regional changes.
- **Ceremonial Duties.** Sometimes councillors are asked to attend civic functions as part of their duty to the community. For instance, a Char Valley Parish Councillor attends the St George's Day parade in Lyme Regis.
- **Power to make bylaws**
- **Power to repair and maintain public footpaths and bridleways**
- **Power to prosecute and defend any legal proceedings in the interests of the inhabitants.**
- **Power to take part in any public local inquiry**
- **Transport.** Power to spend money on community transport schemes. Power to provide and maintain bus shelters
- **Crime Prevention.** Powers to spend money on various crime prevention measures
- **General Powers.** In any situation not covered by one of its specified powers, a council may spend a limited amount of money on *any purpose*, which in its opinion is of direct benefit to its area or to the inhabitants.

There are many more...

Critical to carrying out the responsibilities of a Councillor is **attending meetings**. A councillor agrees to attend all meetings (where reasonably possible) to which he or she is summoned. There are ten Parish Council meetings each year and there may be a need for councillors to sit on sub-committees to deal with, for example, Planning or Finance. Councillors are there to consider the information gathered and make a group decision on all matters. *No individual councillor is responsible for any single decision.*

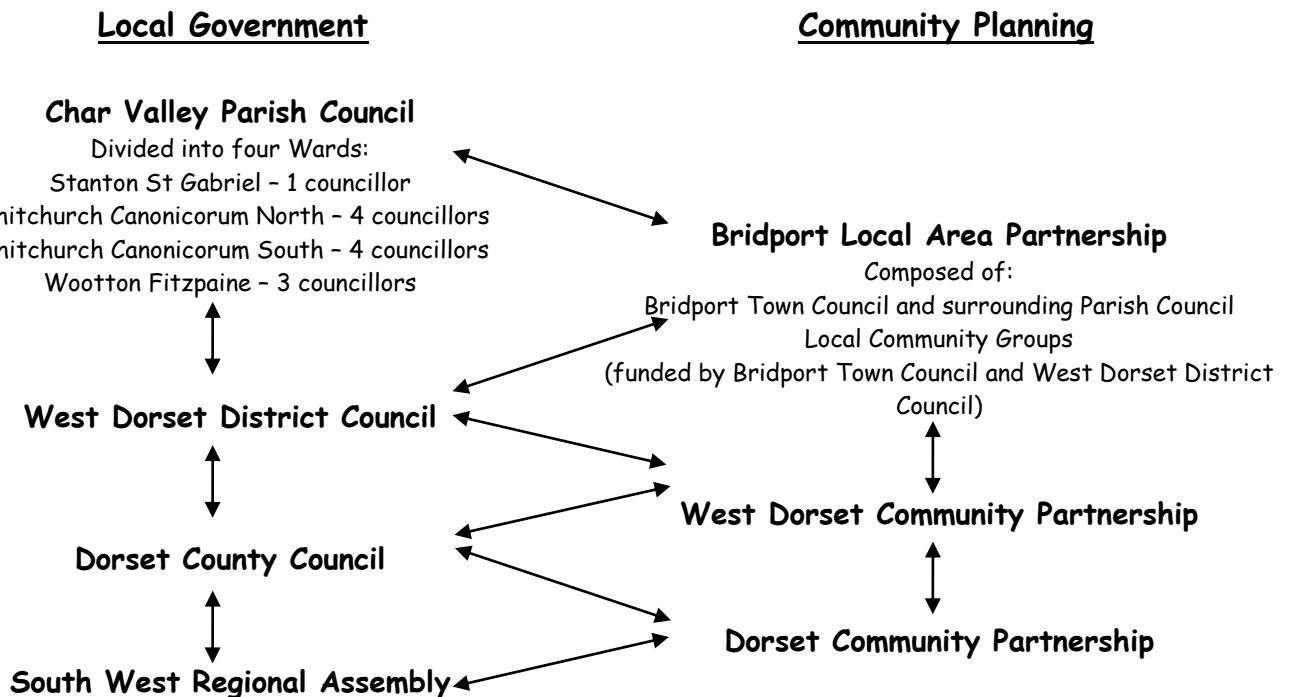
What help can Parish Councillors call on?

As a new councillor, you will not be alone in undertaking your duties. Far from it. You will be able to call on the help and advice of: -

- The Clerk to the Parish Council
- Your fellow councillors and officers
- Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (*DAPTC*)
- Bridport Local Area Partnership Community Planning Officer
- Your District and County Councillors
- The Char Valley Community Survey and The Char Valley Village Communities Action Plans

Training and support: Training is available to any Parish council. Legislation allows councils to pay for training and DAPTC run several courses each year for councillors. DAPTC will be able to provide details of professional training programmes designed specifically for councillors.

How Does The Parish Council Fit Into The Wider Democratic Structure?



The Char Valley Parish Council fits within the purview of the West Dorset District Council and represents the concerns and aspirations of the local community. It is not a voluntary organisation, a charity nor (a common misunderstanding) anything to do with the Church. It is the most non-bureaucratic kind of local authority in existence, although it is strictly audited each year.

Parish Councils were created by law and exercise those powers and functions that have been conferred on them by Statute. The range of powers available continues to change and proposals announced in the White Paper 2006 set out plans to reinvigorate local politics by giving more power to councils and communities.

Local Power for Country Towns and Villages. The Government has set itself five key tasks for enabling parish and town councils to take on an enhanced role and these may be summarised as follows:

- To enable local councils to achieve the highest standards and thus reach a new status within the framework of local government. This is being achieved by granting "Quality" status to all qualifying parish and town councils.
- To enable larger local councils to provide a wider range of services through enhanced **partnership** working with principal authorities.
- To help rural communities to develop Town, Village and Parish Plans that indicate how they would like their town or village to develop.
- To create stronger local partnership arrangements through more modern local government, including the requirement for principal authorities to develop **community strategies** that should cover a wide range of community needs and aspirations.

Community Planning, by contrast, is a fairly recent, and still developing initiative designed to work in tandem with Local Government. Char Valley Parish Council is an active member of the Bridport Local Area Partnership, which is a network of local people interested in developing their environment, championing local issues and bringing pressure to bear on decision makers. Its premise is that local people are invariably the best source of knowledge and wisdom about their surroundings. Better decision-making results if this knowledge and wisdom is harnessed.

How Do I Become A Parish Councillor? See over

How Do I Become A Parish Councillor?

If, having considered all of these aspects, you think you might like to stand for election, you may apply to the Clerk to the Parish Council, Charlotte Hughes, for an information pack.

In essence, provided you are

- 18 years of age, or will be by 3rd of May 2007;
- On the Electoral Register for the council area for which you wish to stand, or have worked in the area for the preceding 12 months;
- A citizen of the European Union;
- A local government elector of the parish; or a person who, during the whole of the twelve months before nomination as a candidate occupied land or other premises as owner or tenant in the parish, or has, during the same period, resided in that area or within three miles thereof, or has during the same period, had a principal or only place of work in that area,
- Able to attend ten evening meetings per year...

...then you are eligible to stand.

Nomination forms can be obtained from the West Dorset District Council Elections Office - address on the front page..

You will need a Proposer and a Secunder from within the Ward you wish to stand for and the forms must be completed and returned to the Elections Officer by **noon Wednesday 4th April 2007**.

Experiences Of A Councillor

Stanton St Gabriel - Councillor John Bridle

The parish of Stanton St Gabriel includes Golden Cap and extends west to near the beach café in Charmouth. Its northern boundary more or less follows the south side of the A35.

The task of the councillor for this parish is to represent local people's interests and make every effort to maintain the rural nature of the area. We have eighty residents in the electoral register; therefore dealing with Stanton St. Gabriel planning applications is no great chore. The councillor must check that any proposal is not an eyesore when seen from Langdon Woods or the coast. If it is a trifle unsightly, you ask for appropriate screening to be used.

The cliffs erode endlessly and the major job seems to be gently to persuade the people with money and labour to keep the way down to the beach at St Gabriel's open and fund land purchase to maintain a coastal path because Stanton beach gives pleasure to locals and holidaymakers alike.

Both my wife and I have thoroughly enjoyed being a councillor for Stanton. We have both grown old and neither of us will seek re-election. If you are conservation-minded and want to see this part of the Jurassic coast properly preserved, then perhaps you will be prepared to be the new watch-keeper by joining the CVPC.

Whitchurch Canonorum South - Councillor Vincent Diment

By election time 2007, I will have been a Parish Councillor for almost six years. In that time, I have gained a vast amount of new knowledge - and am still learning - and have also been able to use my own abilities and life experiences to the full.

Yes, the public expects! However, although we are usually not able to undertake the physical side of things, we can and do point you in the right direction, or pass on to the right authority all sorts of queries and complaints.

How about time? Well, the basic commitment is just ten meetings per year, but your involvement can be very much more than this, and of course depends on how much of your time you are able to offer. When I started out, I must admit that I had very little idea of the work on the council, and never thought that I would become as involved as I have.

And the pay? Absolutely nothing, but job satisfaction? Yes!

