

Char Chat News



For residents and our guests in

Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine, Morcombelake

Stanton St Gabriel, Fishpond, Ryall and Monkton Wyld

September 2019

Welcome to the Char Valley Parish Council newsletter

In case you're not sure...

Char Valley Parish Council is the first level of local government. This is old-fashioned democracy: anyone can attend any of our monthly council meetings and anyone can talk to any of the councillors. The council has nothing to do with the church (that's the parochial church council). You elected us on 2nd May this year.

The council's job is to represent our residents on all kinds of issues that affect the community... and to press for Dorset Council to take action on your behalf. So we monitor local roads, verges, footpaths and public transport, for example, and work to ensure they're well maintained. We review and comment on all planning applications. And we can support and co-ordinate any local initiatives in our parishes connected with housing, planning, the land and coming together as a community to work together and help one another.

There's a map of the parishes online at www.bit.ly/cvpc-map

Staying in touch

There'll be lots to talk about in the coming months – climate and environment emergency, housing, planning for the parish.

It will really help us save (your!) money and get news to you faster if we can communicate by email. For example, we would like to send future issues of this newsletter by email.

We will never give or release your email address to anyone else and we promise not to bombard you!

If you're happy for us to email you in future please go to www.bit.ly/CVPC-em and click on **Sign up to our email alerts**. You will receive a confirmation reply from us to double-check that you are happy.

If you're not a fan or user of email, we will continue to produce the printed version of this newsletter. And if you cannot access any of the links in this newsletter, please contact our Clerk (details on p.2) for a printed version.

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).

Newsletter: September 2019

CVPC Information:

- Meetings 2
- Contacts 2

Leading Articles:

- Climate and Environmental Emergency 3-4
- Roadside Verges and Hedges.... 5
- The Natural World 5
- *Rhododendron Ponticum* 6
- Bonfires 7
- Countryside Code..... 7

Council Updates:

- Bus Shelters..... 8
- White Gates 8
- A35 8
- Council liaison meetings 8
- Post Office and Letterboxes 8

Local Events..... 8

CVPC Meetings

CVPC meets monthly except in August and December. Being a group council, our meetings are 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). All our meetings are open to the public and we welcome participation. The meeting minutes and agenda are posted on parish notice boards. You are welcome to come along to any of these meetings.

Our meetings start at 7:30pm, with the following schedule:

9th Sept 2019 (JH)	14th Oct 2019 (WC)	18th Nov 2019 (WF)	13th Jan 2020 (JH)
10th Feb 2020 (WC)	9th Mar 2020 (WF)	13th Apr 2020 (JH)	11th May 2020 (WF)
8th June 2020 (WC)	20th Jul 2020 (JH)	14th Sept 2020 (WC)	12th Oct 2020 (WF)
16th Nov 2020 (JH)			

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Climate and Environmental Emergency

You have probably seen and heard a lot about climate change and the potential for real damage to ourselves and the world around us. Whether or not you believe there to be an emergency, we know that the climate is changing, and that the change has the potential to cause massive damage to our habitat and to endanger our own and children's future. Some of the predictions may sound far fetched or you may feel that nothing we can do will help, but even small actions by ourselves do make a difference.

This is why, on the 10th June, Char Valley Parish Council voted unanimously to support the motion that:

"This council acknowledges that there is a worldwide climate and environmental emergency."

Who are we to talk about climate and environmental emergency and why did we take that vote?

First of all, we are not climate scientists and we do not all agree on everything. But the council includes several farmers (from small-scale and organic to large-scale), the former leader of the WWF climate change adaptation team, a publisher of books on ecology and the environment... and others with a mixture of backgrounds in the local community. So we represent many views on the issues.

Second, the House of Commons, Dorset Council and over 600 other national and local government bodies worldwide have declared a climate or climate and environmental emergency. It's their view, and ours, that we are facing a real emergency. You may have heard David Attenborough talking about it, or the young campaigner Greta Thunberg. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said last year that "We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe".



Greta Thunberg. Photo: Anders Hellberg

Gathering facts and reliable projections

For some of you, all this may be obvious. Others may strongly disagree. And others may just feel that you don't know enough. If so, for anyone who wants to know more about the emergency we face, we have been putting together a collection of fairly sober and factual reports (from sources like the UN, the IPCC, The Guardian, The New York Times, WWF and the BBC) about the climate emergency, species extinction and environmental degradation. You can see the beginnings of it at www.bit.ly/CVPC-cer

Please contribute what you know

If you have any thoughts about this or any new sites/links/publications to suggest, please let us know, either via our website at www.bit.ly/CVPC-contact or direct to charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk

The next steps

1. We can all take action as individuals, in our own lives, at home and at work.
 2. We can work as a parish council to influence policy and decisions (often at Dorset Council level) in relation to carbon emissions, sustainability and the environment.
 3. We can encourage and support initiatives that involve as many people as possible in our parishes: families, farmers, businesses...
- There's more on all these steps on the next page.*

1. Taking action as individuals and families now — consumer choices

The first step for all of us in the face of the climate emergency is to reduce our carbon footprint. Large town and city councils can do a lot to reduce carbon emissions by managing their buildings better, insulating properties and improving public transport. In parishes like ours, we can all take some steps at home.

These could include some of the top 10 actions identified in a recent BBC report, such as:

- Switch to renewable energy sources (use a renewable electricity supplier; stop using coal, gas and oil).
- If you have a car or fly, significantly reduce your driving and flying.
- If you own shares or have a pension scheme other than a state pension, stop investing in businesses with high carbon emissions and banks that fund them.
- Eat less meat. If you eat meat, buy meat from local farms.
- Buy fewer consumer goods and shop locally.



For more information on what you can do, how to calculate your carbon footprint and further steps we can all take, see the information online at: www.bit.ly/CVPC-carbon

2. Taking action as a council

As a parish council we can try to use our (relatively small) influence, mainly at Dorset Council level.

- We've suggested locations for electric vehicle charging points in our parishes.
- We try to visit and comment on every planning application in our parishes and we will try to encourage plans and materials that will reduce carbon emissions and other adverse environmental impacts.
- We will lobby for new buildings to be more energy efficient.
- We hope to work with our MP to canvass for a return to a better feed in tariff.
- We could investigate issues like anaerobic digesters and waste incineration to produce power, develop a council policy and press for changes where we can.



3. Taking action as a community

The parish is the primary building block of community. It's where new habits can take root, where families can join up to make changes in lifestyle, where children can see that we're serious about the climate and environmental emergency and take part in efforts to do things differently.

If we're creative and committed, the parish is also where a transformation can begin, spreading to neighbouring parishes and more widely across the county. So what can we do as a community?

Options include: planting more trees; growing more food locally; car sharing; repairing and sharing tools; cutting down/out insecticides; increasing biodiversity via meadows/woodland/rivers in the parish.

For ideas like this to work, as many people as possible must support them. So we will be asking what you would be willing to support, collecting results and holding a public meeting in the autumn to discuss this further.



If you have other ideas or suggestions on any of this please let us know.

Roadside Verges and Hedges – an update

As you probably know, all the roads in our parish are classified as C or D class roads with the exception of the B 3165 on our Western boundary, and the A35, which is a national trunk road. The vegetation along the A35 is the responsibility of Highways England's contractor, Connect, while Dorset Council deals with all the other verges.

The B road gets two cuts a year in May/early June and in late August/September.

Dorset Council used to cut the C and D road verges twice a year; now, because of financial cuts, they only send out contractors once a year. This is currently programmed for late June/early July to allow the spring wildflowers to set seed first. Inevitably, in some years, the timing is not ideal, but it is felt to be a reasonable compromise. Where verges become overgrown and dangerous, Dorset Council can be asked to do an emergency cut.

Dorset Council is gradually introducing a new system of collecting up the cuttings but, so far, they have no machines to do this in our narrow rural lanes.

Verge-cutting extends 1.2 m from the edge of the tarmac, whether the bank is flat, sloping or vertical. Above that, the hedges are the responsibility of the landowner and must be kept cut back for safety reasons.

The general rule is that hedges should not be cut during the bird-nesting season from the end of February to the beginning of August, but road safety takes priority, so owners are expected to cut them at any time if they become overgrown.

You can report a problem online (at either of the addresses below) or ask a Parish Councillor to report it for you.

www.bit.ly/CVPC-problem ~ www.bit.ly/CVPC-hedge

The Natural World

We have all heard about the need to save endangered animals in far-flung places, but there are serious problems much closer to home. Change is gradual, and people may not notice the reduction in the variety and abundance of natural life around us for some time. If, though, you think back to your childhood you will probably realise how much has altered.

Older residents remember meadows full of cowslips, huge flights of swallows and plentiful frogspawn. Such sights are no longer part of daily life and we meet them only in nature reserves, if at all. Many younger people have never experienced such natural riches and therefore do not miss them.

Mackerel are much less plentiful along the coast (and in the fishmongers), and trees are suffering from new diseases. Recently we find that our windscreens are no longer plastered with insects when we drive through the countryside at night. This might be quite convenient, but without insects, what can the birds feed on?

The sheer abundance of natural life has declined severely in the last few decades and the decline is very noticeable, even in this beautiful corner of Dorset. Some of these changes are directly linked to climate change, others result from the extreme weather associated with it, or from the pollution which is one of its causes. They are also caused by our use of insecticides and by the loss of hedges, meadows, marshland and other habitats that flowers, birds, animals and insects need.

There have, of course, always been fluctuations in British weather, but over the last 20 years we can see very definite trends and if these continue at their present rate we will find ourselves living in an impoverished landscape which will, in turn, be more vulnerable to flooding, drought, erosion and further environmental degradation. Here, in Char Valley, we are not immune to these threats.



Rhododendron Ponticum

When this species of rhododendron is in flower it is hard to imagine the damage it does to our native flora and fauna. It is magnificent. Round here, it brings a welcome splash of colour to Hardown Hill and Charmouth Forest, its showy mauve flowers alive with bees. What's not to like? Well... quite a lot actually!



It is a thug, like Japanese knotweed, and features on the UK's list of invasive non-native species. Thousands of plants have been introduced into this country over the years. Some like knotweed and *Rhododendron ponticum*, have given rise to industries dedicated to their eradication and control. Who would have thought that plants introduced for their beauty and utility could be so troublesome? *Rhododendron ponticum* is a rogue and unchecked will muscle out nearly everything it meets.

Rhododendron ponticum is native to Asia, China, parts of the Mediterranean and Turkey, not Britain. First introduced in 1763, it became popular on country estates in the 19th century for its ornamental value and as cover for game birds. It is now one of the UK's most aggressive non-native species. It can also act as a host for Ramorum Dieback: the disease that causes sudden death in a variety of species including oak and larch. The need to eradicate it from vulnerable habitats is not disputed.

Thriving in mild, wet climatic conditions, on poor acidic soils, it will spread into neighbouring areas eliminating most native species. It propagates by seed and vegetatively, spreading horizontally over many meters creating a dense, evergreen cover of thick, interlaced branches which layer where they touch the ground. Growing up to 10 meters in height, a single plant can cover 100 square meters.

Each year one flower can produce up to seven thousand seeds, a large bush several million. Not all will germinate. Seedlings do not thrive where there is already continuous ground cover from native plants, but if native vegetation is disturbed and land bare they seize their chance. Mycorrhizal associations with the roots of rhododendron plants give them an advantage in nutrient poor soil allowing them to flourish. The tough leaves are unpalatable to herbivores and the buds exude a sticky substance which trap invertebrates. The flowers, appearing between May and June, attract many insects especially bumble bees. This, however, is to the detriment of native species in the vicinity which are not visited, not pollinated and so do not set seed. It is difficult to kill as herbicides do not translocate well through the plant, running off its waxy leaves, and physical control and removal is lengthy and expensive.

It is hard not to have a sneaky admiration for a plant that has so many ways to out-gun its rivals. But, make no mistake, once it has invaded an area few will survive and the loss of biodiversity that follows is dramatic and can take decades to reverse.

The problem has been acknowledged here in Dorset; the following response appears on Dorset Council's website:

The Natural Environment Team are now working with Dorset Highways, Dorset Environment Records Centre, Dorset Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency to ensure that all non-native invasive species are properly recorded and mapped, policies and protocols for control are put in place, advice is available and monitoring is carried out.

More information about the control of invasive non-native plants and our responsibilities can be found on the Government's website www.gov.uk

Bibliography: British Wildlife Volume 30 No. 5 June 2019

www.countrysideinfo.co.uk ~ www.nonnativespecies.org ~ www.forestresearch.gov.uk

BONFIRES

Every now and then the Parish Council receives complaints from people about other people's bonfires. The following advice and information has been taken from the 'Dorset For You' website:

If your neighbours are lighting bonfires which are causing you nuisance, in the first instance, approach your neighbours and politely tell them how the bonfire is affecting you. Often, people are unaware of the way smoke is blowing and, consequently, the effect it is having on you.

If after discussing the matter, the neighbour continues to light bonfires which you feel cause you nuisance, you can report the problem and we will investigate.

Alternatives to having a bonfire: there are other environmentally friendly ways to dispose of your garden refuse without having to burn it: [Composting](#) ~ [Garden waste collection](#) ~ [Household recycling centres in Dorset](#)

Having a bonfire: if you have considered the alternatives and a bonfire is still the best practical option for disposing of your garden waste, you should ensure you take the following precautions:

- Warn your neighbours – lighting a bonfire can cause nuisance to your neighbours especially if it is a nice sunny day with washing out and windows open
- Only burn dry material – this is likely to cause less smoke
- Never burn household rubbish, rubber tyres or anything containing plastic, foam or paint. These can cause harmful emissions
- Never use old engine oil, meths or petrol to light or encourage the fire
- Avoid lighting a fire in unsuitable weather conditions – smoke hangs in the air on damp days and in the evening. If it is windy smoke may be blown into neighbouring gardens and across roads
- Avoid burning at weekends and on bank holidays when people want to enjoy their gardens
- Never leave a fire unattended or leave it to smoulder.

The law on bonfires: bonfires are only illegal if they cause a nuisance to others and the person responsible fails to comply with the requirements of any abatement notice served by the council. It is commonly thought that there are byelaws banning bonfires or restricting the days or times when they are allowed – there aren't.

Environmental Protection Act 1990: This can be used to deal with people who act unreasonably and cause a statutory nuisance to neighbours. To be considered a statutory nuisance, a bonfire would usually have to be a persistent problem. If someone does cause a repeated nuisance this may lead to enforcement action, and ultimately legal proceedings could be taken and the person fined up to £5,000.

If we feel the bonfire is an isolated occurrence or insufficient evidence is gathered to substantiate service of a notice, and you are not happy with this, you may take legal action yourself under Section 82 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, you must be able to prove your case in court and may wish to employ a solicitor.

Burning waste from another site: it is an offence to bring waste from another site and burn it, for example tradesmen bringing waste home and burning it. Whether or not they are causing a statutory nuisance, they are committing an offence.

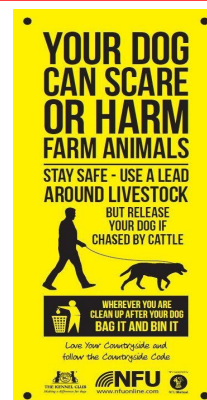
Burning waste on trade premises: if the bonfire takes place on trade or industrial premises then there is an additional power given by the [Clean Air Act 1993](#) where the bonfire is giving off dark or black smoke.

Going for a walk with the dog? Don't forget the lead and the poo bags!

Seems obvious? You'd be surprised. A volunteer coastguard recently that the owner of a dog, rescued after it had chased a sheep off the cliffs around Thorncombe Beacon, had come out without a lead. And, though it may be coincidental, there seems to be more dog mess on paths, tracks and bridleways during the holiday season than at other times of the year.

We don't want to nag but it would be helpful if owners of **camp and caravan sites, holiday cottages, as well as BnB and AirBnB hosts**, could help raise awareness amongst visitors who may not be used to walking with dogs in the countryside. Could we suggest a copy of the Countryside Code in your welcome packs or at reception?

Further information and copies of the code can be obtained / downloaded from:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code



CVPC Updates

- *Bus Shelters*

CVPC is working to provide a shelter for the eastbound bus stop opposite Moore's on the A35

- *White Gates*

The White Gates in Wootton Fitzpaine are being replaced and should be in place within a few weeks.

- *A35*

Highways England have commissioned studies into the community severance effects of the A35 through Chideock and through Morcombela. The Chideock report has resulted in a trial of reduced speed limit of 30mph replacing the 40mph westbound climb out of Chideock and a reduced speed of 50mph for the national speed limit section up to Morcombela, scheduled to have started in August. The report for Morcombela has just been released and CVPC will meet with Highways England and Connect in August.

- *Liaison Meetings*

CVPC regularly attend meetings of Bridport Local Area Partnerships, Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, and West Dorset Western Area Transport Action Group

- *Post Office and letterbox in Morcombela*

So far, there is no apparent prospect of getting a new Post Office in Morcombela. We will do all we can to get some form of Post Office service in the village.

We are also doing our best to ensure that there is a letterbox in a central location in Morcombela, even when the one at the old Post Office is closed. This is likely to be difficult, as Royal Mail policy would leave the box near the James Hargreaves hall as the only one in the village.



Local Parish Events—*please send our clerk details of events within our parish for our residents/guests*

SATURDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER

DORSET Ride and Stride to raise money for upkeep of Dorset's historic churches. The Ride will be a 6 hr cycle between churches across our local area and the Stride will be an eight mile walk with picnics along the way. There will also be a TRACTOR Ride locally. All activities will end up in Whitchurch at the FIVE BELLS for tea.

If you are interested in taking part, or raising a team, or contributing, please contact Michael at michaelwest@ryallfarm.com or phone 01297 489795.

Char Valley Parish Council welcomes feedback and suggestions on all aspects of our local life, including suggestions for articles and topics for inclusion in Char Chat.

Please contact the parish council through our Clerk:

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