

# Sturminster Marshall

PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE



THE VITAL VILLAGE PLAN 2004  
Sponsored by the Countryside Agency



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# Background

Under the “Vital Villages” scheme, communities are encouraged to develop Parish Plans as a means of identifying the best features of these communities and raising issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the quality of life within them.

The Countryside Agency provides up to 75% of the cost of preparing a Parish Plan, with the remainder being funded locally. Dorset Community Action administers the scheme for the county and the East Dorset Community Partnership provides local support. Although set up through the Parish Council and containing a number of its members, the Steering Committee overseeing the preparation of the Sturminster Marshall Parish Plan is independent of the Parish Council.

A key element of the Parish Plan is the formulation of an Action Plan, indicating where measures need to be taken, identifying who should be involved and assigning a time scale for achieving the objectives set. In order to produce a plan, it is necessary to find out how people view the local environmental and social status of the parish, then to determine what they see as the



most pressing issues needing attention.

This Parish Plan is the product of consultation, undertaken in a number of ways. We have consulted several different adult and youth groups, individually. We also organised a competition among pupils at the First School and invited comment at an open meeting in the Memorial Hall. On the basis of views expressed from these different sources, a set of questionnaires was designed and sent to all residents. We were very encouraged by the number that was returned. This report is based on responses and comments in the completed questionnaires and from other phases of the

consultation process.

The report is being sent to every household in the parish, to clerks of Parish Councils in adjacent villages, to East Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council, our Member of Parliament and The Countryside Agency. It is also going to other agencies involved in the provision of services and facilities in Sturminster Marshall Parish. It will be available for viewing on our website ([www.sturminstermarshallappraisal.org.uk](http://www.sturminstermarshallappraisal.org.uk)) for any other interested parties.

The report should help in planning the future direction of our community over the next ten years. The Action Plan is not a definitive document and will be subject to review and updating in the light of changed circumstances and new initiatives. As the Parish Council will be responsible for following through the actions identified in this report, any new ideas or suggestions should be addressed to its members or the Parish Clerk.

## Setting

Sturminster Marshall village lies on the right bank of the River Stour where it is joined by the Winterborne. The outlying settlements of Newton Peveril, Almer and Mapperton are in the Winterborne valley, whilst those of



Henbury, Henbury House Gardens and Stoney Down/ Crumpets extend to higher ground on the south side of the Stour valley. Most of these communities have close links with Sturminster Marshall, but those at Stoney Down and Crumpets tend to look more naturally towards Lytchett Matravers; Almer, although part of the administrative parish, is a separate ecclesiastical parish. Transport links have always been a major feature of the parish. White Mill Bridge, on the eastern boundary is a crossing point of the Stour. Two main roads intersect within the parish: the A31 is a primary trunk route running East-West, whilst the A350 connects the port of Poole with Bristol and the north-west. Formerly, the Somerset and Dorset railway line also ran through the village with a station at Bailey Gate.

The parish has seen many changes in the recent past. These have been a consequence of a decline in agricultural employment coupled with increased personal mobility. From a largely self-contained community with a wide range of mainly agriculture-related activities, the village passed through an industrial phase when



the Unigate milk factory was a major employer. It was essentially to provide homes for this work force that houses were built in Churchill Close. Based on responses to our questionnaire, 80% of those currently working are employed outside the parish. Over the past 25 years the village has grown considerably, with the construction of many more new houses, especially in the Parkelea and Railway Drive area, but with other, smaller, areas of development and infill building.

## History

People have lived in and around Sturminster Marshall since Mesolithic times, though the first written record is the Anglo-Saxon charter of 880AD. Archaeological excavations have been made on

Henbury Hill and there was a barrow at Stoney Down. A Roman road from Badbury Rings crossed the Stour at Shapwick and passed through Sturminster Marshall parish before continuing on through Winterborne Zelston.

The present parish church (St Mary's) in Sturminster Marshall was established in 1162, in the area where there is thought to have been a previous wooden Anglo-Saxon church. Of similar age is the parish church (also St Mary's) in Almer, whose name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon Aelmere - the eel lake.

"Sturminster" derived from the River Stour and the church (the minster church by the Stour). "Marshall" was added later and refers to William Marshall, who was born in 1146 and was one of the knights to witness the signing of Magna Carta. The land came to him through his marriage to a daughter of the Earl of Pembroke.

Before the Norman Conquest, the land was held by Archbishop Stigand, but afterwards was gifted to the Belmont family. Tithes from the parish went to the leper colony at Pont Audemar, Normandy until, at the end of the Hundred Years War, Henry IV gave the income to



Eton College, which he had founded. Domesday records show that the parish included Corfe Mullen, Lytchett Matravers and Hamworthy. The area was known as the Cogdean Hundred and had Sturminster Marshall as its administrative centre.

In 1101 permission was given to hold a fair and market in the village, and a maypole was erected.

White Mill Bridge was built around 1175 using stone similar to that in Sturminster Marshall parish church and Wimborne Minster. It was a very important river crossing and is recognised as the oldest bridge in Dorset.

The parish became a “Royal Peculiar” in 1457 which meant that it was not subject to the jurisdiction of the bishop. The local vicar was able to settle small legal disputes and prove wills. The seal of the Royal Peculiar was set into a pillar in the church, where it remains until this day, although the peculiar status was lost through an 1857 Act of Parliament.

The arrival of the Somerset and Dorset Railway in 1860 improved communications. It was the impetus for Mr. H. Tory to set up the milk factory, using the rail link as a means of exporting his



products. Under the ownership of United Dairies, it later became the largest cheese factory in Europe and employed more than 250 people. In 1950 the District council built 50 houses (mainly in Churchill Close) primarily to house staff at the milk factory. The railway closed in 1966, liquid milk production ceased in 1978 and cheese packing finished in 1989. The railway station and milk factory site is now occupied by Bailie Gate Industrial Estate. A water cress farm, established in 1910, also used the railway to send its crop to the north of England. The cress farm closed in the 1960s and later became a trout farm, then a site for gravel extraction.

A village school (The Old School) was built with funds from the Mackrell Charity. The current

First School was erected in 1910 and additional facilities have been added over the years. The former primary school at Almer is now a private dwelling. A War Memorial Hall was erected in 1967 and was replaced by the current, award-winning, hall in 1998.

The rural base that sustained the parish for several hundred years has been lost with the change and decline in local farming activity. Other industries have also grown, declined and been replaced by new ones. Flooded pits close to Moor Lane provide evidence of the former use of this area for excavation of sand and gravel; extraction continues to take place at Henbury. There is pressure to use sites of old workings, such as these, for landfill.

In recent years we have become much more of a dormitory village and the findings from our questionnaire reflect this. Changes will continue to occur and modern technology may bring a wider range of employment opportunities, modifying working patterns, and affecting the way Sturminster Marshall evolves and grows in the future.



# The Survey

On the following pages we report on the results of our consultations over the past year. We were very happy with the response received, which represented about one third of the households and population of the parish. This does indicate that the views expressed do have some validity and that they can be used as the basis of planning to meet the wishes of the inhabitants of Sturminster Marshall as a whole.

Where statistics based on questionnaires replies are given, these are quoted as either actual number of respondents giving that information (e.g. in the household forms) or as a percentage of the total number of forms returned. Not everybody answered all questions on a form. Lack of a response could have been for a number of reasons:

- a) people did not have strong views on the subject;
- b) they felt they had insufficient information (e.g. in the case of provision of facilities for under 7s or senior citizens); or
- c) that a reply to an earlier question made a subsequent response unnecessary (e.g. where people did not have a car, the question of off-road parking for a vehicle was



inappropriate).

A full set of summary statistics giving the numbers of people responding to each question and the proportions giving particular answers can be found on our website.

## Households & Individuals

Forms were returned from 306 households, of which 248 were located in Sturminster Marshall village. This does mean that the responses reflect, overwhelmingly, views held by people living in this part of the parish. However, we have tried to highlight particular issues raised by people in the other settlements, even though the total

number of respondents might have been small.

The great majority of houses (193) were detached, whilst 128 had four or more bedrooms; two had one bedroom and 51 had two bedrooms. This does suggest that there is an imbalance in provision with a relatively high proportion of large houses in the village. Owner-occupation was high, with 266 houses falling in this category; there were similar numbers of rented private (14) and rented housing association (17) households. Only two respondents said that the houses they occupied were not their main residences.

The 366 households between them held 744 individuals ranging from under-5s to over-80s. Most people thought that their houses were suitable for their needs, though 18 did not think so for various reasons: some wished for more accommodation or a larger garden, whilst a small number thought that their current houses were too large for their needs.

An indication of the dependence on private cars is shown by the fact that only 20 respondents said that there was no car in the household, whilst 190 households had two or more. In our survey, only 23 said that they



could not park all their cars off the road.

We received 549 completed adult questionnaires. These showed that 19% were under 40 years old, 49% were between 41 and 65, and 31% were over 65. The age structure of the population is, thus, skewed in favour of older age groups. This is reflected in the relatively high proportion (36%) of retired people: 53% said they were in full time employment and 4% were in full-time education. Among those working, 77% work outside the parish, though the majority (88%) are based in Dorset. At the opposite extreme, two people gave their place of employment as outside the UK.

We received 77 completed forms from the younger members of our community (under 16s).

## Amenities & Facilities

### EXISTING FACILITIES

The parish is served by a Post Office/general store and off-licence, three public houses (Black Horse Inn, Churchill Arms & The Red Lion Inn), a hairdressing salon and a reclaimed stock warehouse, all located within the main village. The Vines Close complex, on the



Wimborne Road, includes: a general store, a butchery, a bakery and café, and a florist. The World's End at Almer is the fourth public house in the parish. The Bailie Gate Industrial Estate, on the site of the former railway station and milk factory, has 46 occupied units, mainly by manufacturing or service businesses, but also including a café. Public buildings include: two parish churches (in Sturminster Marshall and Almer), a Methodist chapel, a village Memorial Hall and The Old Mackrell Charity School near the Sturminster Marshall church. The village has a first school, which has an excellent reputation. It has provision for 150 pupils and is almost at full capacity. Within Poole and Dorset a consultation process is beginning that could

lead to changes primary and secondary education: either strengthening of the pyramid system or a change from 3-tier to 2-tier system. The outcome could have implications for our school and the village as a whole. Life-long learning is provided by a number of specialist organisations and groups, whilst the Mackrell Trust holds a wider remit to provide for continued learning.

Open recreational spaces are: Churchill Close (with football and cricket pitches, a sun clock and a children's play area), Timber Green (with replica stocks), Maypole Green (with its maypole) and Trafalgar Green. Parts of Sturminster Marshall village, Mapperton and Almer have been designated as conservation areas. The Walnut Tree Field and Barton's Ground are also open for public recreation. Part of the old railway line is now a local nature reserve. The area is served by a network of footpaths and bridleways.

The parish is served by regular daily bus services to: Blandford, Bournemouth, Poole (including a late weekend bus from Poole), Shaftesbury and Wimborne. In addition, there are once-a-week market day services to Salisbury and Ringwood.



## USE OF AMENITIES AND FACILITIES

Most people in the parish use at least some of the amenities and facilities on offer, though there was a desire from many respondents for either upgrading of existing facilities or the introduction of new ones. However, 132 respondents did not make any comment. We do not know whether this is a reflection of satisfaction with the status quo or not.

The most popular open spaces were the Walnut Tree Field, the old railway line and Churchill Close. Only 11% used Barton's Ground: three people commented on the unkempt nature of this area and this could be one reason for a reluctance to use this open space. Otherwise there was a general view (63% of respondents) that the other open spaces were adequately maintained.

Only 19% of people said they used the Memorial Hall regularly, though 53% used it occasionally. Equivalent figures for The Old School were 9% and 31%, respectively.



## NEW FACILITIES

A quarter of respondents thought there was a need for additional recreational facilities, whilst 40% did not. Activities (indoor and outdoor) for children of all ages were requested and additional meetings of youth groups in the Memorial Hall were seen as a possible antidote to the boredom and anti-social behaviour of some groups of youngsters. Among particular facilities suggested, the most popular were a skate park (29 responses), tennis courts (28) and improvement/extension of the

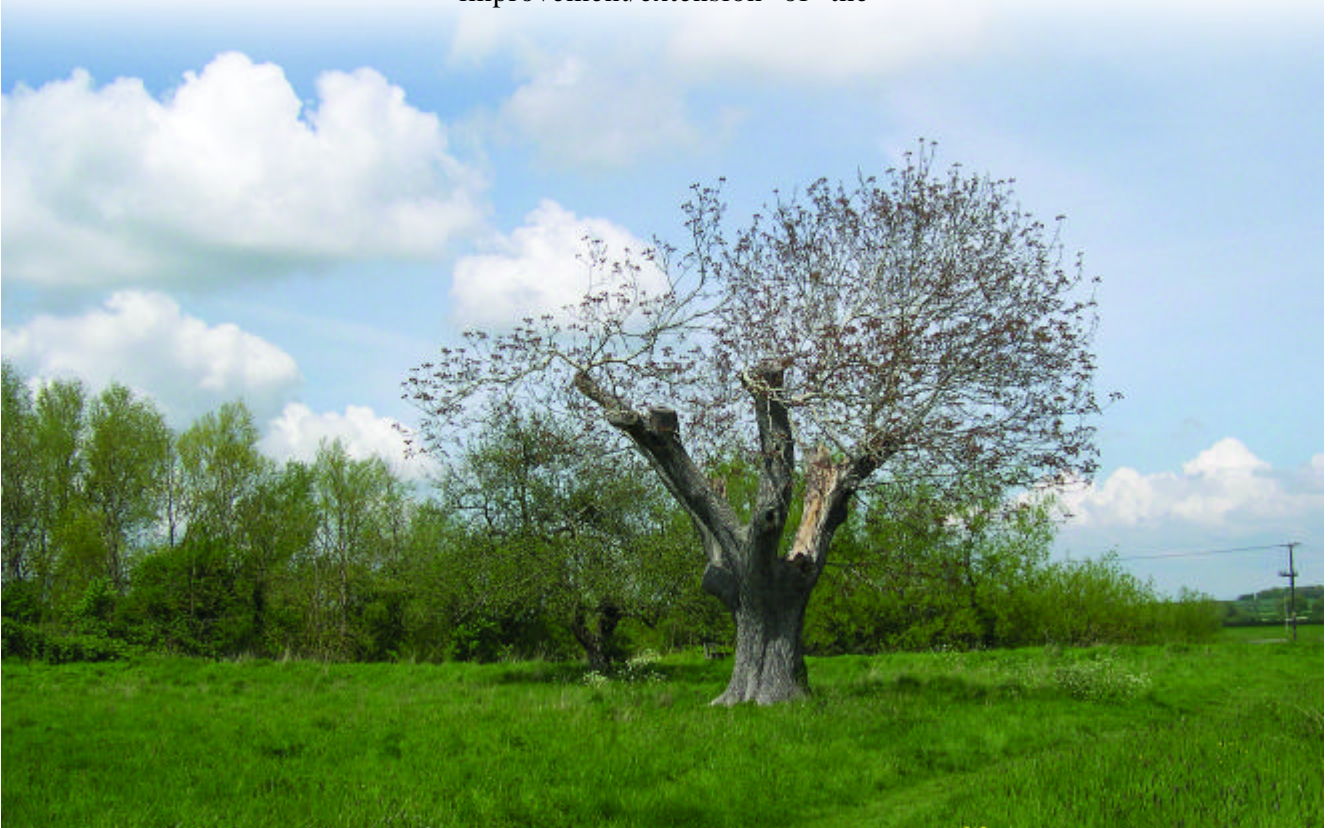
Play Park (10). Suggested areas where facilities could be sited included: Arch Ground (opposite the Post Office), Railway Drive, Churchill Close and Bailie Gate Industrial Estate (especially in relation to a skate park).

There was no great enthusiasm for the provision of allotments: 29% thought there was a need, whilst 44% did not see a need.

## LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The desire to continue learning and to pursue a diverse range of subjects was very positive. Languages attracted the most support (41 people); followed by different types of art (painting, drawing, art & craft, pottery) and the acquisition of I.T. skills (34% and 32% respectively). There was a feeling that costs of provision should be low.

Some of the subjects requested are already available within the parish, whilst others are available at evening classes outside the parish. Perhaps it is the desire to have classes available within walking distance that motivated people in their responses.





## USE OF BUSINESSES

People depending on, or regularly using, The Post Office Stores amounted to 71% of all respondents, whilst 21% regularly used or depended on the Vines Close complex. Replies indicated that regular use was also made of other businesses or services such as the public houses and/or their restaurants (108 people), Bailie Cross Garage (39), Bailie House Warehouse (20) and Zena's hairdresser (22).

A number of people indicated that they would welcome additional shopping facilities, either through expansion of the Post Office Stores with, perhaps, longer opening hours. Others suggested the building of one or more new shops, including a take-away.

At the time of the 1989 appraisal there were, in addition to the Post Office Stores and Vines Close, two other grocery stores, a newsagent/tobacconist and a petrol filling station. The loss of these facilities may indicate reduction in use, allied to the growth in number of readily accessible supermarkets, and the feasibility of additional retail outlets would need to be assessed using commercial criteria.



## HEALTH PROVISION

We have a doctor's surgery in the Memorial Hall and prescriptions can be delivered to the Post Office for local collection. There were nine requests for a daily surgery, to include baby and "well men/ women clinics." It was felt that the elderly might benefit by being able to have hearing tests locally or the services of, possibly mobile, NHS dentist (7 requests). Ten people felt there was a need for a chemist.

## BUS SHELTERS

Comments on use of the bus service are given in the Traffic and Transport chapter of this report. However, a need was seen for the provision of bus shelters at one or more of the stops in the village. Although the number commenting is a small proportion of the total number of people responding, it is significant as a proportion of those using the buses. Nearly half of bus users thought that shelters should be erected outside and opposite the Post Office.

## ELDERLY PEOPLE

Older people in the parish may have particular social and practical needs. To help cater for the social needs, there were requests for a luncheon club where hot meals could be provided. A senior citizens' club or drop-in centre was also suggested where participants could become involved in various activities, or simply call in for a cup of tea and a chat. Such a club could also double as an advice centre. Older people could also benefit from



advice on keeping up to date with developments in I.T. which might be especially beneficial in helping improve the quality of life for the housebound.

Practical suggestions to help older people included some form of volunteer support to help with visits to the doctor, hospital or assistance in shopping. Making pavements and footpaths suitable for wheelchair access was another suggestion.

## **PROGRESS**

All these suggestions for additional services and facilities are dependent upon the provision of a range of resources including: either commercial partners or volunteers prepared to give time, finding suitable locations, and financial support, through subscription or via local taxation. In planning actions based on suggestions for these additional amenities, the question of feasibility must be addressed first.



# **Housing & Development**

## **HOUSING**

Like a number of villages in the area, Sturminster Marshall has seen considerable growth over the past 25 years. In a village plan consultative document prepared in 1978, the village (excluding outlying settlements) consisted of 290 dwellings: our questionnaire, in 2004, was delivered to 526

households in the same area. Perhaps because of this growth, there is a desire to restrict further development (65% of those expressing a view thought there was no need for further housing development).

Among those who had lived in the village for less than 5 years only 24% saw a need for further housing whilst, among those who had lived here for more than 10 years, the figure was 37%. Few opportunities were seen for major development in Almer or Mapperton.

When asked how many houses should be permitted, if development were to take place, 50% of those who did respond thought that the upper limit should be 5 per year; most of those who had said there should be no development did not answer this question. A further 32% considered that no more than 10 should be built. This compares with an average of two per year in the 14 year period leading up to 1978 and is in line with the policy in the 1990 South East Dorset



Structure Plan, which proposed new housing, “which should not normally exceed 10 dwellings per year.” The East Dorset Local Plan, adopted in 2002 stated that “There are no specific proposals for further housing development in the village in the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan”.

If development were to go ahead, the greatest need would be for affordable housing. This could be either through the building of low cost properties to buy, the establishment of rent-to-buy or shared ownership schemes, or provision by a housing association. However, perceptions of the need are related to time spent in the village. Those who had lived in the village longest saw a greater need for more affordable housing and for warden-assisted accommodation.

Recent development has been, predominantly, high cost owner-occupier houses. These have been too expensive for most young people brought up and wishing to



remain in the village (and often with deep roots here). The result has been migration of many young couples to, for example, parts of Corfe Mullen and Poole, where property prices are lower.

Our questionnaire showed that people thought it important that any development that is approved should be sympathetic in style and scale with the older part of the village.

Perceptions of appropriate locations for any further development differed between

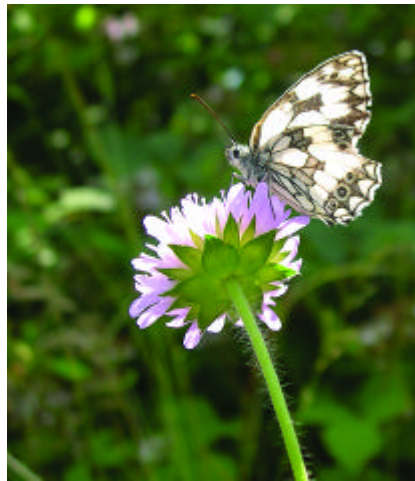
respondents, though there was a general objection to expansion into the Green Belt and to ribbon development. Options are somewhat limited: the River Stour provides a natural barrier on the northern side of the village, whilst its flood plain on the eastern side of the village is also a major constraint. There was general condemnation of the sale of plots of land on fields in this area, between the golf course and Church Farm (The “Gladwish Plots”) and an overwhelming desire to ensure that no planning consent is granted for development on these plots. Whilst there is a general appreciation of the limits to development in this area (on the flood plain and in the Green Belt), there is also a feeling that the sale of such plots was a dubious money-making scheme with little consideration for the needs of the village (or for the unsuspecting buyers).

A number of respondents (19) thought that infill only should be allowed, whilst 37 thought that the natural area for any development



would be Parke land between Railway Drive and Newton Road: a further 22 thought that Arch Ground (opposite the Post Office) would be appropriate for some form of development. This site has already been identified for possible public open space for sports pitches (East Dorset Local Plan 2002). There was limited support for housing in areas further from the village centre, e.g. on the west side of the A350. It may be that development in this area might be more appropriate following the building of a by-pass. Although proposals for such a bypass are contained in the Structure Plan, such a scheme is not likely to come to fruition within the lifetime envisaged for this plan.

The great majority of respondents (97%) thought that services needed to be upgraded before further development is approved, and 81% would like to see the burial of electricity and telephone cables. However, the necessity for burial was questioned by some respondents, mainly on the grounds of cost.



Whilst there was overwhelming support for retention of buildings built before 1900 (86% in favour), a number of respondents stressed the need to assess the architectural or structural quality of such buildings before sanctioning preservation.

#### **OTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The Bailie Gate Industrial Estate provides a link with the industrial past of the village and a source of employment (though most employees live outside the village). When asked if it should

be allowed to grow, the majority (63%) of respondents thought that expansion, at least beyond its existing boundaries, should not be allowed. Concerns included visual impact, noise and the growth of road traffic along Station Road. Full screening by trees was favoured by 89% of those expressing a view and 64% thought that construction of a new road from the Roundhouse roundabout would alleviate some of the traffic problems within the village (see also the Transport chapter of this report).

## **Environment**

### **LANDSCAPE**

Many people living in rural areas place a high value on their surroundings and those living in Sturminster Marshall are no different.

It was disappointing that, although 80% of people put a high value on the local landscape, very few provided additional information on how they thought it might be preserved for future generations.



## FEATURES FOR PRESERVATION

The overall consensus seems to be for the parish to be preserved as much in its present state as possible.

When asked to identify local features meriting preservation, the resulting responses covered a broad spectrum, from the greens to the old pill box adjacent to White Mill Bridge. The greatest response was for preservation of the open spaces: Walnut Tree Field, Maypole Green and Timber Green.

Respondents were also keen to retain all old buildings and structures within the village, though interpretation of “old” varied. Buildings mentioned individually included: the parish church, White Mill Bridge, the pack horse bridge over the Winterborne at Millmoor, and the school buildings, both old and more recent. People were adamant that all old, thatched buildings within the parish should be preserved: there should be no exceptions.

Churchill Close featured high



on the list and this may be purely for the value of the open space, but the impression given was that the whole close, including buildings, should be preserved.

## EYESORES

What may be regarded as an eyesore provided a wide range of responses: the state of the industrial estate was regarded as the biggest eyesore. Other candidates were the youth shelter in Churchill Close, the garages, also in Churchill Close, and the

unfinished wall at the end of Dullar Lane. Surprisingly, the old pill box at White Mill Bridge received the same number of votes for preservation as it did for removal as an eyesore.

## FOOTPATHS

Among those people completing the environment section of the questionnaire, 76% stated that they used the present footpath system, 61% thought they were adequately signposted and 51% that they were adequately maintained. The most negative comments on signs and maintenance came from those who said that they did not use the footpaths. Therefore, we might reasonably assume that, if the signage and maintenance were improved, more people would use them.

Most people did not want additional footpaths and only 28% said that they would like to see additional footpaths provided. The most common route suggested for any additional footpath was along the Stour, with a bridge from Walnut Tree Field to the opposite



bank. Until the latter part of the eighteenth century there was a footbridge (with three piers) across the river: a new one could connect existing footpaths on either bank. Other suggested routes were to Vines Close (a footpath does exist but improvements may be needed to meet the needs of users) and an extension to Corfe Mullen, and along the route of the old railway line to Blandford. This latter option would require enforcement of the right of the public to use and pass along a disputed section.

When asked if they would adopt a section of footpath, people showed a disappointingly low response, possibly because they were not aware of what this would entail and felt that it would be too onerous a task.

### TREES

53% of respondents thought more trees should be planted in the village, with the highest percentage requesting them as additional screening for the Bailie Gate Industrial Estate. Other popular sites were those throughout the village where dead elms could be replaced and general planting in hedgerows and along roadsides.



### FLOODING

Of those people responding, only 9% had been affected by flooding and the worst complaint was of effluent in the floodwater. Of those affected, most were happy with the repairs that had been carried out.

It was encouraging to see that 52% of the inhabitants responding to the questionnaire were willing to help in the event of flooding: this shows that the good neighbourly attitude has not yet died in our community.

### OTHER CONCERNS

By far the greatest of these was litter within the village. Most

people felt that this was because we did not have enough litter bins, and the ones we do have are not emptied frequently enough.

The second most common complaint was about dog fouling on footpaths and the fact that many dog owners have no compunction about allowing their dogs to foul the streets. This is a distressing concern and one which may also have health implications.

Other concerns raised in this section (e.g. tipping, parking etc.) are dealt with in other sections of this report.

## Traffic & Transport

Communication and transport links have been key aspects of the development of Sturminster Marshall. However, the rapid expansion in car ownership has brought problems as well as convenience to people living in the parish.

### PERSONAL TRANSPORT

Not surprisingly for a rural community, 90% of those responding to the survey said that they had access to a car and more than half regarded it as essential for work. At 28%, the number car



sharing was quite high.

Only 10% said they relied on, or regularly used, a bicycle. The 43% who occasionally use a bicycle probably includes a large number of recreational users. This figure could be higher, but there is a clear perception that the bicycle is not a safe form of transport given the speed and volume of traffic, and the general condition of our roads. There was considerable support for the expansion of the network of cycleways, in particular in re-opening the old railway line for this use, but it was clear that 29 people mistook “cycleways” for the cycle lanes on the side of metalled roads. The most popular destinations for cyclists were Corfe Mullen (96 people), Blandford (66) and Wimborne (57). However, as only 10% of respondents said they used a bicycle regularly, the value of opening such routes may be questionable unless it can be a spur to additional cycle use (see Youth chapter).

### **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Only 7% said that they relied on the bus services or used them regularly. There seemed to be little enthusiasm for public transport;



22% considered it adequate and 23% considered it inadequate. Perhaps the remaining 55% were not bothered because of the speed and convenience of the car. Despite this, many respondents acknowledged the need to improve public transport and saw it as valuable for individual groups, in particular the younger members of the village. The main reasons for dis-satisfaction were: cost, frequency, the need for more early and late buses and the need to serve more destinations. It is hard to see how the bus companies can improve the services without some form of subsidy. Without it they are caught in a downward spiral,

fewer passengers mean higher fares and reduced services, which lead in turn to even fewer passengers.

### **ROAD MAINTENANCE**

Road maintenance was a very emotive issue. 31% were unhappy with the state of the roads in the village, though very few specific points were made that can be taken forward in the Action Plan. There was enormous dissatisfaction over the state of the through routes, the A350 and, in particular, the A31. There were almost fifty comments specifically on the A31 which was variously described as “potholed”, “unsafe”, and “a disgrace”. Urgent action is needed to improve the condition of this road.

Although there was here was a general level of satisfaction (ranging from 53% to 67% of respondents) with the standard of maintenance of the verges, hedges, ditches and pavements, there was clearly also a significant number of people who were dissatisfied, though there were few specific comments to show where action needed to be taken. However, it was noted that Almer had no pavements. Pavements would also make for safer movement of pedestrians between Henbury



House Gardens and Vines Close, whilst re-siting the bus stop or provision of a footpath would obviate the need to walk in the roadway of the A31.

### TRAFFIC PROBLEMS

A total of 452 observations were made on areas of danger in the parish. Of these, 90 saw the area outside the school as the greatest cause for concern. The problems are obvious, parked cars, poor visibility, children and, to a lesser extent, speed. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that a number of the houses between the school and the Churchill Arms are among those with no off-road parking. With approximately 80% of the school children living in the main part of the village, many would argue that in fair weather few of our children need to be driven to school.

The other area in the village which causes great concern is outside the Post Office where the problem of parking must again be addressed. This area was highlighted as also having the greatest problem with parking on the pavement (47 people noted the fact). The problems associated with parking at Jubilee Cross (where Rushall Lane joins the A350) were also raised.



A total of 153 suggestions were made concerning parking restrictions. Of these, 41 specifically favoured parking restrictions around the school, while 118 thought there should be parking restrictions in Station Road and High Street. It is worth noting that 259 households said that they had off road parking and only 23 did not. Most of the problems with parking in this parish are of our own making and residents should be encouraged to make full use of their off road parking facilities.

A large number of people were concerned about safety on the

A350 and junctions with it, in particular Bailie Cross roads. Significant numbers also mentioned the area between the War Memorial and Back Lane, the bend at Church Farm and White Mill Bridge. The main worry with this bridge was the weight and width of the vehicles using it. The preservation of the bridge has long been a matter of concern. A width limit exists, but long or wide vehicles frequently cause damage. A total ban on all wide or heavy vehicles using the bridge is desirable as it would prevent such vehicles using the restricted roads of the village as a short cut (a concern frequently aired), but this would not be possible, as agricultural vehicles will still need to cross the bridge.

Most people (54%) felt that speed limits in the parish were satisfactory though 51 individuals expressed the opinion that drivers ignored the limits and that they were not satisfactorily enforced. Of the 36% who wanted tighter limits, most saw High Street as the area in greatest need. There were 57 replies emphatically opposing traffic calming. Of the 78 replies in favour of it, most, again, saw High Street as the area in greatest need, with special concern over the





stretch near the school. The area around the Post Office in Station Road also worried many.

Opinion was evenly balanced over the need to improve lighting in the village, with 40% wanting more light and 47% not wanting it. However the need to preserve darkness in the conservation area of the village was frequently mentioned.

### **ACCESS TO THE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE**

A total of 54% favoured direct access to the industrial estate from the A31. Of those against only two expressed concern over the green belt or the environment. This proposal should also be viewed in the light of the many comments expressing concern over the size of vehicles using White Mill Bridge and the hazards caused by vehicles negotiating the mini roundabout that currently provides access to the industrial estate.

## **Crime & Security**

Security and freedom from the fear of crime are important components of a high quality of life. Whilst crime in the parish of Sturminster



Marshall is not on the same scale as some urban and inner-city areas, it can still be a problem and give rise to concerns ranging from mild annoyance to severe distress.

### **EXPERIENCE OF CRIME**

More respondents in our questionnaire said that they had not witnessed or been affected by crime than said they had. However, significant numbers had experience of vandalism (40%), anti-social behaviour (35%) and illegal tipping (32%) during the past five years. The same topics were raised as causes for concern by those attending the open meeting and the young people consulted separately.

Young adults seemed to have had more experience of the effects of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The main areas where vandalism was noted were around the Memorial Hall (including the youth shelter) and in the vicinity of the roundabout at the Station Road/Railway Drive junction. Problems had also been experienced on the industrial estate, the golf course and in the school grounds.

Young people also had more experience of theft than the average (24%) for the parish as a whole. Petty theft was also reported as a problem at the Post Office.

Illegal tipping and littering was commented on more by older people. Fly-tipping seemed to be concentrated in a small number of locations, but litter was a more general problem throughout the village.

### **YOUTH AND CRIME**

From the responses received, it is obvious that young people are seen as the main offenders and measures to control anti-social aspects of their behaviour were seen as a way to reduce the amount of vandalism in particular. Measures suggested included:



provision of additional amenities and facilities for young people, stricter enforcement of penalties (including making parents of offenders pay for damage) and education to make youngsters, and their parents, more aware of their social responsibilities. At the same time, some respondents did stress that any problems were caused by only a minority so that condemnation of all young people was inappropriate. It is important to remember this because, among some residents, there seems to be a conviction that it is a crime to be young: any group of children (e.g. those waiting for the school bus in the morning) is seen as intimidating and a potential cause of trouble. This suggests a need for establishing links and trust between young and old.

#### **DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**

Drugs (in particular hard drugs) and alcohol are not seen as major problems in the village or in the outlying settlements: many respondents commented that they were unable to comment on the drugs situation as they had no direct knowledge. However, we must not become complacent. Among those who did comment, it was the younger age group who had a greater perception of drugs as an issue with 35% thinking there was a problem (see also comments in Youth chapter).

#### **ILLEGAL TIPPING**

Illegal tipping, both by individuals and by commercial concerns, is a widespread problem and there is a small number of locations in the parish especially prone to the tipping of rubbish or the abandonment of cars. There may be a case for trying to pursue a range of approaches to counter the problem, ranging from the use of surveillance techniques, and prosecution of offenders as severely as the law allows, to possible amnesties for businesses, allowing disposal at registered sites free of charge for a limited period.



#### **LITTER**

Littering requires a more local approach to make sure that people take a pride in their surroundings and are aware of the effects of their actions on others. A small group has undertaken an annual “tidying-up” in the past, but this pride in the parish needs to be extended more widely to include those responsible for the dropping of litter.

#### **DOG FOULING**

In the case of dog fouling, the additional health risks need to be stressed in an attempt to modify the behaviour of some dog owners. The main area of concern is the green in Churchill Close where young children play regularly, but concern was expressed about fouling in other open areas and along footpaths.



#### **POLICING**

There was general agreement that policing was inadequate and that the single greatest deterrent would be a more visible and obvious police presence. A number of people went further and suggested that a “village bobby” or a community policeman, with at least some knowledge of the parish and its main offenders, would be the most effective way of countering crime. Some asked for the re-instatement of a village police station: this is clearly an impractical suggestion under present circumstances. The majority of respondents expressing a view also considered that the existing council tax should cover the cost of providing extra policing and that they would be unwilling to pay any additional charges.

#### **CRIME PREVENTION**

Several people suggested that improved street lighting might act as a deterrent to crime, though there was little overall enthusiasm for the installation of CCTV. There was even less willingness to pay for such a facility. However, when asked where any CCTV cameras might most suitably be placed, there was an overwhelming vote in favour of the area of Churchill Close around the Memorial Hall, the children’s playground and the youth shelter. This is the main area within the village where vandalism is seen as a problem.

Most people (89%) had heard of “Homewatch” and 54% said they would be prepared to join: a number said that they were already members of the scheme. Whilst this awareness is welcome, again, we should not be complacent and should encourage even more active participation. Residents, whether members of Homewatch or not, need to maintain vigilance and to report all crimes. It is important that these reports are followed through, from simple logging (to ensure that statistics reflect the full extent of criminal

activity in the parish) to prosecution and sentencing (where appropriate).

## Youth

Young people are affected by most of the same issues as adults, though the ways in which they are affected may differ. Although not asked specifically to comment on transport matters, for example, a number of comments were made on transport. The fact that these were raised unprompted indicates that they should be given more weight than the actual numbers involved might suggest.

### GENERAL

Overall, comments about the parish were positive: 80% said they would like to stay. Most of the younger respondents said that they wished to remain here, though the older ones recognised that they might need to pursue education and careers beyond the boundaries of the parish. Particularly prominent among the positive comments were those referring to the amount of open space and quality of the natural environment, and the good community spirit. The perceptions of young people largely mirror those of the population as a whole; there is the same concern about litter, and the same desire to preserve the rural environment and limit development on green-field sites. In planning for the future and in expanding provision for young people, these matters must be taken into consideration.

### AMENITIES AND FACILITIES

At present the village has a play area for younger children and a swimming pool at the first school. There is a range of uniformed youth organisations and a Youth Club, in addition to which other clubs and organisations, such as the football club and the parish church, have sections devoted to young people. There is a youth



shelter on Churchill Close.

The existing facilities are well used by their targets; 90% of respondents of first school age used the play equipment in Churchill Close and 85% the swimming pool at the school. A high proportion of middle school children continue to use the play area and swimming pool. Membership of uniformed youth organisations is high in this age group. A relatively high proportion of all children (64%) use the Memorial Hall or the Old School, whilst 61% use Churchill Close.

However, the perception is that older children are less well served. Only seven out of 22 respondents of upper school age were members of either the Youth Club or of a uniformed youth organisation, and there is no dedicated facility



comparable to the play area for use by older youth, though there is the youth shelter. Less than 50% of respondents of upper school age used either the Memorial Hall or the Old School. However, only five respondents of upper school age made negative comments about the amenities of the village. Due to the wide range of interests of teenagers most are unavailable within the village, though they may be available in nearby towns. Accessing these, however, depends on transport, which is addressed below.

Although some suggested improvements in the amenities are clearly unrealistic, such as the provision of an ice rink, others mentioned by several respondents might be more realistic. Eleven respondents suggested that a skate park be provided. This has already been the subject of discussions, including an initiative by the Parish Council. The provision of a netball or tennis court (the same hard court could be marked out for either) was suggested by eleven respondents across the age range. Although this has not been the subject of public discussion, it may well be worthwhile gauging opinion to determine the real demand for such a facility and investigating possible locations for it.

Eight respondents, all of middle school age, mentioned an adventure-type playground. This age group is too old for the existing play facility but still requires some kind of playground.

The idea of a younger youth club was, once again, raised exclusively by children of middle school age, who are not served by the existing youth club provision. It is worth noting on this subject that one respondent said of the existing youth club that there was not enough for girls. Both these issues have been taken up informally with the youth leader. Whilst some effort is being made to provide more activities for girls, it seems that there is no funding available for

younger youth clubs and existing equipment would not be made available for this age group.

Comments were made by five correspondents on the poor shopping facilities within the main village. Upgrading the existing footpath, or its conversion to a cycleway, would make Vine's Close more accessible.

### **TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT**

Nine respondents mentioned speeding traffic as having a negative effect on the quality of life. One respondent of middle-school age specifically stated that they are unable to attend clubs and organisations within the village, or to use the green, as they are unable to cross the Blandford Road unaided. One respondent of first-school age expressed concern about the difficulty of crossing the road to the school between parked cars.

Whilst youth in no way contributes to the problems of speeding and parking, children may be disproportionately adversely affected by it. Because

of this, the calming of traffic may be seen as a youth issue as well as a traffic one.

One respondent of middle-school age stated that a negative aspect of living in the parish was his reliance upon his parents to be driven to events and activities outside the village. Many mentioned the relative remoteness of the village, and respondents of upper school age, whose friends at school are often from outside the parish, stated that it was difficult to meet them due to distance.

Public transport was mentioned by seven respondents, six of them of upper school age. The main problems identified were unavailability of buses and the prohibitive cost of fares, especially for those not yet earning a wage.

The lack of safe cycleways was identified as a disadvantage of living in the parish. Should the proposed trailway initiative come to fruition, then, provided a safe crossing for the A31 could be provided, the village could be connected to Corfe Mullen and beyond.

### **CRIME AND SECURITY**

Vandalism is seen as a problem with 47% of respondents claiming to have been affected directly. This is in line with the values obtained from the adult forms. Whilst vandalism is often seen as the work of the younger members of the population, young people are also its victims and they cite damage to their homes, the play area (noted especially by younger children) or the Memorial Hall.

Perhaps the greatest concern to emerge from the questionnaire is the impact of anti-social behaviour and intimidation on young people. Thirteen respondents stated that they felt intimidated by other young people. "I don't feel safe", said one eleven year old boy. Beyond a constant police presence it is hard to see whether any of this can be solved. However, two respondents specifically mentioned harassment of the Guide Association. Perhaps targeted patrols of known locations, and



at times when anti-social behaviour has been noted previously, might ease the problem.

Overall, 27% of respondents considered drugs to be a problem and 30% thought alcohol was a problem. However, the percentages were higher among those of upper school age, a group which is more likely to have direct knowledge of the situation. Of 17 respondents in this age group, five thought drugs were a problem and eight thought alcohol a problem.

### YOUTH AND COMMUNITY

It was one of the peculiarities of the youth questionnaire that it asked not only what could be done for youth, but what youth could do for others. The results were encouraging. Almost 60% would assist with tidying the village, and over 40% would assist with helping older people. In this respect it is worth noting that the issues which trouble youth most, namely intimidation by other people and by traffic, are also those which are of major

concern to older people.

Also popular was the idea that youth should have more of a say in village affairs. One suggestion was for a youth council, another that there should be an annual public meeting for youth. In such a forum concerns could be aired and expressed, and young people could meet the parish councillors and, perhaps, be encouraged in due course to play a similar part in the community.



# Action Plan

Abbreviations used in Action Plan: EDDC = East Dorset District Council (including Community Partnership); DCC = Dorset County Council

Issue	Action	Partners	Time scale
<b>Amenities and Facilities</b>			
Provision of additional recreational facilities	1. Assess needs more precisely	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC, Sports Council	Short
	2. Identify possible locations		Short
	3. Identify possible partners/funding sources		Short
	4. Establish facilities		Medium/Long
Life-long learning	1. Establish information system	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC	Short
	2. Assess additional needs		Short
	3. Identify locations		Short/Medium
	4. Seek tutors		Short/Medium
Extension of retail facilities	1. Consult existing traders	Parish Council, local businesses	Continuous
Additional clinic facilities	1. Assess need	Parish Council, EDDC, Primary Healthcare Trust	Continuous
	2. Consult providers		
Bus shelters	1. Identify locations	Parish Council, EDDC, Bus companies	Medium
	2. Assess costs		
Needs of elderly 1 - drop-in centre	1. Assess potential use of drop-in centre	Parish Council, EDDC, Over-60s, charities, potential volunteers	Short/Medium
	2. Identify possible locations		Short/Medium
	3. Investigate sources of support		Short/Medium
Needs of elderly 2 - volunteer support	1. Assess need for volunteer scheme	Parish Council, Over-60s, charities, potential volunteers	Short/Medium
	2. Seek volunteers		Medium
<b>Housing &amp; Development</b>			
Potential for future development	Identify and rank potential development sites within village and potential time scale for availability	Land owners, Parish Council, EDDC	Short

Provision of affordable housing	1. Identify potential sites for such development	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC, Rural Housing Trust, appropriate charities	Short
	2. Assess need for affordable housing, by category (Housing Association, shared equity etc.)		Short
	3. Consult appropriate organizations on procedures and options, especially for local people		Short
	4. Review social housing scoring system		Short
	5. Bring forward definitive plans for affordable housing		Medium
Provision of warden-assisted housing	1. Assess potential need	Parish Council, EDDC	Short
	2. Identify possible locations		Short
	3. Identify possible providers		Medium
	4. Bring forward definitive plans		Medium
Village character	1. Ensure new development is appropriate in scale and type	Parish Council, EDDC, external expertise, utility companies	Ongoing
	2. Review protection status of older buildings		Short
	3. Feasibility study for cable burial		Medium
	4. Review service provision and needs for upgrading		Short
Industrial development	1. Plan for full screening	Parish Council, Birchmere, EDDC, DCC, Dorset Police	Short
	2. Feasibility of alternative access		Medium (see also Traffic & Transport)
Retail outlets	1. Identification of suitable locations	Parish Council, EDDC, Retail groups	Medium
	2. Assess feasibility of provision		Medium
Rural land sales	1. Monitor speculative land sales and sub-division of plots, and alert appropriate authorities at earliest opportunity	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC, Parliament	Medium/Long

## Environment

Preservation of parish features	1. Survey to identify features of interest/value	Parish Council, EDDC, Civic Trust, local history groups, archaeological groups, volunteers, Dorset Wildlife Trust	Short/Continuous
	2. Prepare inventory		Medium/Continuous
	3. Action as necessary		Continuous
Wildlife management of public open spaces (Bartons Ground, Old Railway Line, Walnut Tree Field, Sturminster Marshall Parish Churchyard, Almer Churchyard)	1. Survey sites	Parish Council, Sturminster Marshall PCC, Almer PCC, Volunteers, Eton College, English Nature, Dorset Wildlife Trust	Short
	2. Set objectives		Short
	3. Prepare management plans		Medium/Continuous
	4. Implement		Continuous
Increase awareness of footpaths	1. Review distribution and condition of signs	Parish Council, volunteers	Continuous
	2. Review condition of footpaths		Continuous
	3. Institute "village walks"		Continuous
Flood response	1. Establish register of volunteers	Parish Council, Homewatch co-ordinator, potential volunteers	Short/Continuous

## Traffic & Transport

Extension of cycleways	1. Identify suitable routes	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC	Medium
	2. Assess costs of upgrading		Medium
	3. Seek necessary funding		Medium/Long
Road maintenance	1. Establish inventory to record unsatisfactory roads/pavements/verges etc.	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC, Highways Authority, volunteers	Short/Continuous
	2. Seek action from appropriate authorities		Continuous
Parking 1 - restrictions	1. Identify problem parking areas	Parish Council, volunteers, EDDC, DCC, Dorset Police, Highways Authority	Short
	2. Consult on implementation of restrictions		Medium
	3. Implement restrictions		Medium



Parking 2 - parking provision	1. Identify potential parking areas close to known problem areas (e.g. P.O.)	Parish Council, EDDC, volunteers	Short
	2. Consult on feasibility of providing additional parking	DCC, Dorset Police, Highways Authority, landowners (as appropriate)	Short/Medium
	3. Determine costs		Medium
	4. Provide additional parking, where necessary and practicable		Medium/Long
Speeding	1. Identify problem areas	Parish Council, EDDC, DCC,	Short
	2. Assess options for speed reduction	Highways Authority, Dorset Police	Medium
Traffic on White Mill Bridge	1. Survey of heavy vehicle use	Parish Council, volunteers, EDDC, DCC, Dorset Police,	Short/Medium
	2. Assess options for restricting traffic	Highways Authority, local farmers	Medium
Bus services	1. Produce village timetable with details of all services provided by all companies	Parish Council, Bus companies, EDDC	Short
	2. Publicise young people's voucher scheme		Short

## Crime and Security

<b>Police presence</b> There is a perceived need for additional and obvious policing as the most effective means of reducing levels of criminal or anti-social behaviour in the parish	1. Consult with local police to increase profile of police in the parish as a deterrent to criminal and anti-social behaviour	Parish Council, village Homewatch, EDDC, Dorset Police	Short term: by end 2004
<b>Vandalism</b> Areas of the village are subject to acts of vandalism (especially in vicinity of Memorial Hall)	1. Promote awareness and encourage reporting of incidents (see also 5 below)	Parish Council, village Homewatch, Dorset Police, EDDC, Youth Club	Short term: by end 2004
	2. Investigate use of youth wardens at shelter		Short term: by April 2005
<b>Tipping</b> This is a problem in parts of the parish, with individuals or commercial concerns depositing rubbish or abandoning cars/car components	1. Surveillance: investigate possible appointment of wardens, use of hidden cameras at selected hot spots	Parish Council, village Homewatch, Dorset Police, EDDC	Short term: by April 2005
	2. Initiatives to promote use of registered disposal sites		Long term

<b>Dog fouling</b> This is a particular health problem in areas used regularly by children	1. Erection of notices as reminders to dog owners	Parish Council	Short term: by end 2004
<b>CCTV</b> This has proved to be a useful tool in some areas, though there is some scepticism about its deployment in parish	1. Trial of CCTV to establish value as a deterrent	Parish Council, Memorial Hall Committee, EDDC	Short term: by April 2005
<b>Homewatch</b> Though well-supported, additional participation is to be encouraged	1. Promote participation in Homewatch	Village Homewatch, The Bridge	Continuous
<b>Education</b>			
a. Awareness of what general public can do to reduce offending	a. Institute programme of information dissemination	Village Homewatch, Dorset Police, Youth Club, EDDC	Continuous (see also Youth action)
b. Promotion of pride in local environment as counter to vandalism and littering	b. Campaign to inform young on consequences of vandalism and littering		

## Youth

Create a safe environment for young	1. Investigate use of youth wardens at shelter 2. Instigate education programme (see also Crime section)	Parish Council, village Homewatch, Youth Club, Dorset Police, EDDC, Dorset Youth Service	Continuous
Improve transport links	1. Support "Rail to Trail campaign" 2. Publicise under 18s travel voucher schemes	Parish Council, Bus companies, EDDC, Dorset Youth Service	
Amenity provision	1. Investigate potential use of tennis/netball court	Parish Council, Youth Club, EDDC	Short
a. Netball/tennis court provision	2. Identify possible sites for facility 3. Investigate external funding sources		Medium Medium
b. Skate park	1. Continue to investigate possible locations and funding sources		
Consultation	1. Establish Youth Forum to give young people the chance to meet Parish Council members & raise issues	Parish Council, Youth Club, Schools	Short

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## Appendix Societies, Organisations and Special interest Groups within the Parish.

A Parish Directory, giving contact names and telephone numbers for these organisations can be found on our website or on Parish Council notice boards. Some information is also printed in "The Bridge".

Aerobics  
Art Club  
Badminton  
Beavers  
Bell-ringing  
Book Club  
Bowls (short mat)

Bridge  
Brownies  
Choir  
Choral Society  
Computer tuition  
Craft Group  
Creative Writing  
Cricket  
Cubs  
Embroidery  
Football (men's)  
Football (youth)  
Gardening Club  
Guides/Rangers  
Homewatch  
Henbury Gardens Residents Association.  
Ladies' Group  
Mackrell Charity  
Methodist Ladies' Group  
Netball  
Over 60s  
Pre-School  
Quilters  
Religious Worship:  
Saint Mary's, Sturminster Marshall  
Saint Mary's, Almer  
Methodist Church  
Royal British Legion  
Royal British Legion (women's section)  
St. Mary's Preservation Trust  
School Society  
Scouts  
Table Tennis (league)  
Table Tennis (social)  
The Fitness League  
Toddler Group  
Toytime  
Tuneful Tots  
Women's Institute  
Yoga  
Youth Club





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