



# Dorset Community Action

## ***RURAL TRENDS IN DORSET***

**APRIL 2010 – JUNE 2010**



*Portesham Outreach Post Office which opened  
at the Village Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2010*

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## INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

This is our second *quarterly* Rural Trends report. Clearly the national picture has changed dramatically in this quarter with the election of a new coalition government and the announcement of severe public spending cuts, some of them with immediate effect. Currently we are still in a period of some uncertainty as we are not yet sure quite how some of the proposed changes may affect us. Will the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies or the Commission for Rural Communities, for instance, have any noticeable effect on the ground in local communities? Perhaps, for projects currently obtaining funding through SWRDA, it will lead to confusion, delay and extra red tape, perhaps not. In the worst case scenario, perhaps with the abolition of the agency will come loss of funding for such projects, which of course would be a severe blow.

What seems clear however is that we are entering a period of far greater austerity than at any other time in the recent past and that in consequence it will prove harder to find sustainable solutions to some of the county's long-term problems such as the lack of affordable housing and poor transport links in rural areas. Never under-estimate however, the resourcefulness and adaptability of our local Dorset residents in coming up with sound local solutions to some of these difficulties, even in times such as these.

### 1. VILLAGE SHOPS, PUBS AND POST OFFICES

As reported in last quarter's Rural Trends, Post Offices seem to be particularly badly affected at the moment. Recent closures in Portesham, Chetnole and Shillingstone were followed by the closure of Stourpaine Post Office on April 18<sup>th</sup>. In Portesham, where the sub-postmaster retired in February after twenty-one years and no replacement could be found, the service has been replaced by a 'hosted' Outreach Service with the service running in the Village Hall two mornings a week. The service re-opened on 17<sup>th</sup> June. No replacement has yet been found at Chetnole and negotiations are still continuing in Shillingstone.

Despite a spirited campaign by local residents to protest against the proposed reduction of hours at East Stour Post Office from six hours on Wednesdays and Fridays to just one two-hour session, the Post Office intends to go ahead with this plan.

Where a Post Office is also a village shop, of course the closure may also entail the loss of the shop. This is the case in both Chetnole and Stourpaine. In Stourpaine the owners, who judge they have been hit by the recession, do intend to continue offering newspapers and magazines and doing a Sunday delivery of these. In Chetnole, although the village shop has closed, the owners of the Chetnole Inn next door intend opening a farm shop in a disused skittle alley in late August. The intention is to sell fresh fish, vegetables, poultry etc and it will be open seven days a week. This is part of a diversification plan by the pub landlord, and reflects the hard times rural pubs are also having in making a living.

On the pub front in fact there was some good news when the Bottle Inn at Marshwood re-opened in May. In June it held its traditional annual Nettle Eating Contest! On the other hand there is much anxiety at Melplash that the Half Moon will close. It has had seven landlords in the past fourteen years and the current landlords, who have run the pub since March of last year, have reluctantly handed in their notice after failing to make the pub work. Although Palmers, the brewery that owns the pub, insist the future of the Half Moon is secure, a local resident is mounting a 'Save Our Pub' campaign to ensure its survival. In Motcombe, North Dorset District Council rejected Hall and Woodhouse's application to convert the Royal Oak pub into three dwellings. The pub is currently closed by the brewers but local residents are running a 'Save The Royal Oak' campaign and hoping to get it re-opened.

On the community shop front, Motcombe have proved highly successful and energetic in getting one started in their village. In their April newsletter they reported that they needed £140,000 to buy, refurbish and restock the shop and that they had raised £70,000 by financial pledges from 130 people in the village, obtained a £20,000 grant from the Plunkett Foundation and applied to the Co-op bank for a £20,000 loan. On 8<sup>th</sup> June contracts were exchanged and completed and the village shop and Post Office became a community co-op, barely six months since the campaign was started!

The shop started trading the following day, albeit with a temporary skeleton service. At the moment it is only open for two hours each morning to sell newspapers, bread, milk and a few other basics and to offer Post Office services. However in July it intends to reopen the whole shop with a new team of staff and volunteers with fresh stock and a coffee shop. (<http://motcombevillage.co.uk/joomlanew/>)

## 2. VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY HALLS



*Rampisham VH (before cladding)*

This quarter saw the completion of the re-cladding of Rampisham Village Hall. The hall is actually a World War Two accommodation block from the Rampisham communications centre of the time and its outside timber was breaking up. However the community love their hall and didn't want a new one so they decided instead to re-clad it.

With the aid of a capital grant from their District Council, other grants from Awards for All and the parish council, their own fundraising plus their own volunteer labour the project has now been finished and the village hall is again fit for purpose.

Elsewhere at the end of June the trustees at Harman's Cross took over their brand new village hall from the builders and the official opening will now take place in August.



*Rampisham VH (after cladding)*

Meanwhile the restored Town Mill Malthouse in Lyme Regis was officially opened by the Mayor at the beginning of June. This building is not perhaps our usual idea of a community hall but the main part of the restored building is now a multifunctional space that can be used for meetings, exhibitions, rehearsals and wedding receptions. This building had fallen into a state of severe disrepair once it ceased to be used as an electricity generating station in 1946 and has undergone thousands of pounds of restoration work, led by the Town Mill Trust, and part funded by the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA).

Clearly the next few years are likely to be challenging times for village and community halls, as funds dry up and District Councils may well find themselves unable to be as generous as at present in their capital grants programme. It is unlikely we will see ambitious large-scale new builds such as those we have seen in recent years in places such as Charlton Down, Durweston, Leigh and Harman's Cross. It is much more likely that we will see more of the Rampisham type schemes of the 'make-do and mend' variety.

### 3. **SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE**

The Purbeck Review of schools continues to be one of the biggest issues in the county. The County Council cabinet approved the plan to shut the four middle schools in Swanage, Bovington, Wareham and Sandford paving the way for the thirteen first schools in Purbeck to become primaries. The plans are currently out for consultation and a final decision will be made on 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

There was much local anxiety about the plans, particularly in Swanage where a group formed to oppose the removal of all post-11 education in Swanage. Known as Education Swanage, in an interesting development, the group are currently considering the possibility of setting up a 'free school' on the site of the old Swanage Grammar School, where the building is currently standing empty, in line with the new government's policy of allowing parents to set up schools not under local authority control. ([www.educationswanage.co.uk](http://www.educationswanage.co.uk)).

There is also controversy on Portland where feelings are mixed about the proposal to replace all the island's schools with a 0-19 academy. The governing bodies and head teachers of all but one of the island's schools support the plans. However the governing body and head teacher of St. George's, a large primary school in Easton vigorously oppose them. A fourteen week public consultation on the proposal will run until 17<sup>th</sup> September.

Meanwhile the County Council have agreed to fund a new £8.5m primary school to replace the existing Underhill Junior School (described as 'past its sell-by date') and Brackenbury Infant School, now known as the Chesil Cove Federation School. The site will be leased to the council by SWERDA (or presumably its replacement) and will accommodate 315 pupils plus a 28 place nursery. There were several reasons why the cost of the proposal was so high, including the slope of the land and the need to fund a link road and a pedestrian crossing. However since there is very little available land in the area and lots of children this seemed the best location. If the academy plans come to fruition the new school forms part of the plans for this. There is pressure for the building to be finished before the start of the Olympics although it will not be occupied until after the Games end.

Elsewhere the plans to re-locate Mountjoy School from Bridport to Beaminster were delayed a little after concerns over increases to its £8m budget. However the plans have now been approved.

The Dorchester Opportunities Group, a charity that runs a pre-school for children with special needs based at the Prince of Wales School announced a cash crisis in May with warnings that it could close at the end of the summer term. The school is equipped with a hydrotherapy pool, a soft play room, a sensory room and also provides speech therapists and other specialist staff. However it lost funding from a SureStart initiative as it could not match fund the amount. It has now received funding of £20,000 which will enable it to re-open in September but only for a couple of months unless more funding is found soon. ([www.dorchesteropportunitygroup.co.uk](http://www.dorchesteropportunitygroup.co.uk)).

In a more encouraging development Thomas Hardye School and Kingston Maurward College announced they would be joining forces in a partnership to expand opportunities for students aged over sixteen. The idea is that sixth formers at the school will be able to combine traditional A levels with a BTEC in a variety of subjects

at the college and vice versa. The aim is to increase the choice available to young people in a rural area.

A less encouraging development however was the announcement of further redundancies at Weymouth College this year after cuts in government funding for adult learning. It was not clear at first how many teaching posts would be lost but it was believed to be around thirty-four. But in fact the final number of redundancies is now fixed at nine, so the news is not quite as bad as initially feared. However since thirty people were made redundant last year and we are now entering a period of financial cutbacks the future here does not look too promising.

A piece of good news however was the opening of a childcare facility at the Winfrith Technology Centre. ([www.starlightchildcare.co.uk](http://www.starlightchildcare.co.uk)). This will be a welcome replacement for the previous day nursery which closed suddenly in October 2006. The nursery is open Monday to Friday from 7 am to 6 pm but with twenty-four hours notice will also stay open until 10 pm and on Saturdays.

The interest in green issues in local schools continues unabated. St Mary's First School in Dorchester, Hayeswood First School in Wimborne and Westfield Arts College and St Johns Primary School, both in Weymouth, were chosen as part of the Dig Down South West campaign to receive organic vegetable gardens of rocket, leeks, carrots, courgettes etc. The campaign aims to educate children about the source of their food, to encourage them to grow their own and to understand the benefits of living a more sustainable and healthier lifestyle.

Meanwhile in Thorncombe the very active Transition Thorncombe group have been working with the village school including planting a hedge of currant bushes near the school entrance with children from the School Council, sowing seeds, constructing a raised bed for tomatoes and digging in a donated green cone which will take all the cooked food waste from the school. They are hoping to raise some more funds to extend their work with the school. The group had already been in previously and planted two dwarf apple trees.

In another innovative project a new wildlife walk opened at the National Trust's Corfe Castle designed by nine students from The Purbeck School in Wareham. The walk features a series of fixed wooden posts, each post having an arm that can be lifted up to reveal facts about the landscape and the wildlife along the half mile walk linking the visitor centre and car park to the castle and the village square. The headmaster explained he was always keen for his students to get involved in any projects that benefit and enhance the local community.

Meanwhile the continuing work to create a pioneering eco-friendly school at the Queen Elizabeth's School in Wimborne reached a new milestone with a 'topping out' ceremony to mark the completion of the building frame. The replacement building is on schedule for completion later in the summer. As mentioned in an earlier Rural Trends report the accompanying sustainable education centre (SEC) has already been completed on the site. The timber-framed centre - which is insulated with recycled newspapers, straw bales and sheep's wool - won the Environmental Building Award at last year's national Education Business Awards.

#### **4. TRANSPORT**

The news on the transport front is rather mixed. Although it is good news that the funding for the Weymouth - Dorchester transport package has meant a start on the work, it currently means delays and inconvenience for all travellers, including bus

passengers, along the route, whilst the work is under way. We all hope the end result will be an improvement that justifies this cost and inconvenience!

Having written in last quarter's Rural Trends of the extension of the Marshwood school bus to Chard on schooldays, the first time there had been a bus in Marshwood for years, we now have to report that Stagecoach have announced their intention of withdrawing **all** their services from the Thorncombe / Marshwood / Corscombe area from 24<sup>th</sup> August onwards. Presumably this is because they did not find the services financially viable, suggesting it will prove difficult to find another contractor to take this on.

On the plus side the re-instated 213 service to Broadwindsor has proved very successful, with an average of twenty passengers on every journey. April saw the launch of a new Friday direct bus service from Abbotsbury, Portesham and Chickerell to Dorchester. Funded through the West Dorset Partnership this is a trial scheme for a year. There was however dismay in Weymouth and Portland when it was realised that this year concessionary bus passes are not valid on the open top buses from Weymouth to Portland Bill. First Bus say that service 501 is deemed a tourist bus service and so concessionary bus pass holders are not entitled to free travel on it.

Wool Parish news reported in its May edition that the latest figures just released from the Office of Rail Regulation show that there were 173648 arrivals and departures from Wool for the year 08-09, up 3.75% from the previous year, which itself was up 10.7% on the year before that. It will be interesting to see whether this steady rise in rail usage remains during a time of recession.

Also on the rail front the volunteers at Swanage Railway have taken delivery of a specially-converted railway carriage able to accommodate up to ten wheelchairs and with a disabled toilet. Although it was restored at Derby, Swanage Railway volunteers carried out overhaul work on the bogies and wheels and of course raised the £50,000 cost. This means disabled people will now be able to travel easily on the railway. Readers may recall that the Purbeck Community Partnership was given a time extension to find the money needed to upgrade this line so that the Swanage line can be reconnected to the national rail network. The time has now been extended to 30<sup>th</sup> July and it is hoped we will be able to report positively on this in the next report.

Volunteer car schemes continue to be re-structured and as usual continue to need volunteers. Gillingham Car Link held a volunteering day in June in the Methodist Hall to encourage people to get involved. The situation as regards hospital transport is still unclear and discussions between the County Council and the Ambulance Trust appear to have stalled.

## **5. HOUSING**

It appears highly unlikely that there will be much progress on addressing the shortage of affordable housing in the county in the near future. With large cuts in public spending certain, but some services such as health ring-fenced, it is clear that departments such as housing will bear the brunt of the cuts. Locally there was a potentially worrying turn of events when a developer in Gillingham won an appeal that it no longer has to pay £508,000 towards affordable housing. The company had originally agreed to the payment as a condition of consent to develop the site of the former Royal Hotel but subsequently withdrew its original plans for another scheme and successfully claimed the development could not produce enough profit to allow for the affordable homes payment. Although North Dorset District Council were very disappointed by the decision of the appeal inspector it decided it would not take the

case to the High Court. Clearly this case has possible implications for other schemes and reduces still further the already small pot of money available for building affordable houses.

There was a more hopeful development when the Carnegie Trust set up a £130,000 pilot project in Somerset and Dorset to research and support community-owned housing. The two-year initiative aims to assist the development of community land trusts (CLTs) in rural towns and villages, build relationships and identify communities that have unmet housing needs and the capacity to develop a CLT. ([http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/news\\_and\\_events/new\\_boost\\_for\\_rural\\_homes\\_initiatives](http://rural.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/news_and_events/new_boost_for_rural_homes_initiatives))

Elsewhere there was disappointment in Sherborne when a consultation day organised by the Sherborne Area Housing Forum showed that nearly 60% of votes cast were against the development of any of the sites identified as potential sites for building affordable homes. The housing forum considers this shows the need for greater understanding of the social and economic implications of the affordable housing shortage in the area. In Purbeck the Purbeck Housing Trust, which is part of Synergy Housing now, was rated 'fair' by the Audit Commission with 'promising prospects for improvement'. This was an improvement from its last rating in 2008 when it was considered poor and got zero stars. (This time it got one). Inspectors made a variety of recommendations, including reviewing the way complaints are dealt with.

The struggle to save the Weymouth women's refuge from closure continues. Stonham Housing Association vacated the building at the end of June but campaigners are still hopeful a charity might be able to make a viable proposal to run a refuge in the borough. If no viable option is forthcoming it is still possible councillors could authorise the sale of the building and ring-fence the money for a new refuge. In the meantime the campaign has secured funding to deliver a Freedom Programme for abused women in the town, where victims are supported through a twelve session course. The first stage of the course will run until November and hopefully continue until a refuge is re-established in the town.

Also in Weymouth homelessness charity Alabaré has announced plans to open a home for ex-servicemen and women. The aim is to rent two or three buildings to turn into centres with each house home to seven or eight people at a time. Each house will have two full-time care staff with trained extra staff brought in to provide specialist care including mental health issues, post traumatic stress disorder and drug and alcohol dependency. The Royal British Legion is supporting the plan, saying there has been a marked increase in the number of homeless cases across Dorset. If the funding proposal is accepted Alabaré hope to open the centres in the Autumn. ([www.alabaré.org](http://www.alabaré.org))

The struggle to find enough transit travellers' sites in the county continues. All the councils in Dorset (including Poole and Bournemouth) have agreed to team up in a bid to identify sites over the next fifteen years. Altogether the area was assessed as needing a total of 425 pitches but the partnership has already admitted this target is unrealistic. Obviously as long as there is a shortage of authorised pitches, people will use unauthorised sites. In May a teenage girl from a 'new' traveller family made a documentary about the discrimination she has suffered, for viewing across youth clubs and colleges in the South West. The family live in a double-decker bus in a lay-by west of Shaftesbury where their presence is tolerated by the District Council as there is no official site in the area. As reported last quarter, there is much local hostility to the proposal to build an eight-pitch site in the Shaftesbury area and this has yet to be resolved.

Six new homes opened in Hazelbury Bryan at the end of June. The chairman of Signpost Housing took the opportunity to re-affirm the housing group's commitment to providing quality housing despite current uncertainty around the availability of grant funding for future schemes.

On a less local note, the incoming government has announced it will be scrapping all Regional Spatial Strategies. This paves the way for planning and housing powers to be devolved back down to local government.

## **6. HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE**

As we know from last quarter's Rural Trends the financial situation at the County Hospital in Dorchester has been a big cause of anxiety to many in recent months, especially when it was thought it would lead to large-scale redundancies and re-location of some services to Poole or elsewhere. All these plans appear at least to be on hold and the deficit at the financial year end was actually £5.1m rather than the projected £7.4m. A new Chief Executive has been appointed but not yet taken up her post so only time will tell what effect reducing the deficit has on frontline services.

Elsewhere there was much disquiet at Blandford Hospital when NHS Dorset proposed making savings by cutting nearly £400,000 from the community hospital's budget next financial year. At the moment the hospital has two in-patient wards with a combined forty-six beds. The proposal is to close the ground floor ward to establish a single in-patient unit of twenty-four beds. The Friends of Blandford Hospital, who have made a substantial investment in the downstairs ward, including a brand new sunroom costing £82,000 are opposed to this and proposing the upstairs ward should be closed instead. In total NHS Dorset are looking to make savings of £8m throughout its range of services in the next financial year so there may be some more gloomy news to come then.

A mental health unit in Dorchester closed its doors nine months earlier than planned and before its replacement service was ready because of building safety concerns. A new centre is due to open at Maiden Castle in January but in the meantime users of the service are very concerned. One mother whose daughter attended the unit as a day patient said she will be going from two or three days a week being with nurses to one hour a month. There are interim plans for day patients to go to a unit elsewhere and for inpatients to go to Sherborne, Bridport and Weymouth. Hopefully the new unit will be ready on time!

More hopeful news included the awarding of a grant of £4446,000 to Weldmar Hospicecare Trust to improve facilities. The money came from the Department of Health and it is expected the improvements will be completed by March of next year. Plans include activity areas for computer use, gardening, arts and cooking, new consultation and treatment rooms and bistro type dining for patients attending day facilities.

An easy-read guide to help people with learning disabilities keep an accurate record of their health was launched by NHS Dorset and the Dorset People First charity. Known as the Yellow Health Book, the aim is to help service users to better look after their own health. The book was originally produced by NHS Bournemouth and Poole but has now been extended to cover the whole of Dorset.

A new initiative to help stroke survivors regain their communication skills and overcome the isolation resulting from losing the power of speech was launched by the Stroke Association, with financial support from the County Council. The aim is to recruit and train volunteers to support stroke victims, particularly those suffering from

aphasia. The volunteers will then be able to offer home visits and help stroke survivors achieve the best possible recovery.

On the less positive side many voluntary organisations are struggling with finding enough volunteers to continue to run their services. In April the Dorset Blind Association's Dorchester club put out a desperate plea for a volunteer to run its monthly meetings. For many of the seventeen members of the group this is their only opportunity of socialising away from the family. If no volunteer is found the club will have to close. Similarly the South West Dorset Talking Newspaper urgently requires a replacement for their secretary who is retiring after twenty-two years in the role. The newspaper provides a weekly dose of local news and a talking magazine free of charge to people who are either blind or partially sighted. It serves the Weymouth, Portland, Dorchester, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Sherborne and Blandford areas and is based at the Portland town council offices.

On the care front as we reported last quarter the James Day Home in Swanage did close. However following the serious concerns expressed by the local community the County Council agreed to form a joint planning group to look at options for future care provision for older people in the town and in Purbeck more generally. In the meantime the County Council is maintaining the building so that all the options on its future can be carefully explored. The planning group includes representatives from the District and Town Council, NHS Dorset, Swanage Senior Forum and the Save James Day Home Action Group. The aim is to study evidence of need, taking into account growth in the older population and current provision, priorities and models of housing with care support such as Extra Care schemes. It is hoped they will be in a position to make recommendations to the County Council's Cabinet by the Autumn.

Elsewhere in the county the Sherborne over-50s group continue with their campaign to get a hydro-therapy pool locally. The popularity of over-50s forums in the county shows no sign of abating – indeed another one was launched in Sturminster Newton this quarter making the number of forums in the county seventeen.

Although we have been promised spending on the NHS is ring-fenced there are already in this report news of closures and cutbacks and it is clear this is an area where demand was already outstripping supply. Clearly this situation is likely to worsen unless the agencies and communities concerned can come up with exceptionally innovative ways of saving money whilst preserving services.

## **7. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION**

The switchover to digital TV is now complete for West and there are problems, particularly along the coast and up the Frome Valley, with the loss of ITV3 and 4 on relays. Meridian is still on schedule for digital switchover in 2012.

The BBC has approved of the initiative to establish a Radio Dorset as an exception to their 'no more local investment' policy. However the maps they have produced of coverage show some considerable gaps, particularly between Lyme Regis and Bridport. It appears these cannot be filled except by installing a new transmitter and it is felt unlikely that BBC budgets would stretch to the £100,000 cost of this. The prospect of any more localised TV than at present is extremely remote.

A new £7,000 IT suite was installed at West Rivers House in Bridport and it is hoped the facility will become a centre for training and education for local young people. The facilities are aimed at young people between sixteen and twenty-four who are not in work or education.

## 8. COMMUNITY SAFETY

This quarter saw the launch of a highly visible four month long 'No excuse' safety campaign on the roads. Officers have dealt with almost 7,000 traffic offences since the campaign began including 1,190 people who were not wearing their seat belts and 980 motorists using their mobile phone at the wheel of their vehicle. Not all those caught were prosecuted or fined, in some cases those not wearing their seat belt were asked to sit through a film. The campaign is a partnership project between the police and local authorities with the aim of making our roads safer and reducing the number of fatal or serious accidents.

Still on the theme of road safety the installation of the traffic-controlled pedestrian crossing on the A35 at Chideock had an unexpected result. Campaigners who wanted something done about the number of heavy lorries coming through the village took advantage of the new crossing to make a 'push button' protest ie constantly pushing the button so the light changed to red and the traffic was held up. The result was huge hold-ups on the road and much publicity for their campaign!

Work started on the demolition necessary before the building of the new fire station at Weymouth could take place. The current fire station is the oldest in Dorset, cramped and very affected by traffic congestion in the summer. The new one, as well as improving the emergency cover response, is also planned to have a much wider community role where much more fire education can take place. It is expected to open in July 2011.

Also on the fire front, a Dorset fire service manager won a national Equality and Diversity Award from the Fire and Rescue Service for his work with the new traveller community in the county. He set up workshops with young travellers to encourage them to fit smoke detectors and identify fire hazards at their camps. He got them to trial a variety of smoke detectors to see which one was best for them and was able to build confidence with this group by approaching issues sensitively.

Incidentally the fire service will soon be changing their uniform from traditional dark blue to new gold outfits so don't be surprised if you start to see fire officers in a different colour! The new outfits have a special outer layer that provides better protection from heat and fire and is designed to be comfortable and easy to wear whilst still giving as much protection as possible to the crews.

Dorset's Youth Offending Team drew praise from HM Inspectors when it was inspected recently. They found on the whole staff were committed to making a positive difference to young people's lives, crime victims were satisfied with the support they had received and young offenders said they were less likely to re-offend because of the work of the team. ([http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-probation/docs/Dorset\\_CCI\\_report-rps.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-probation/docs/Dorset_CCI_report-rps.pdf))

Last quarter we reported that Portland Coastguard's helicopter's future appeared secure. Unfortunately this no longer seems so certain as the new Government has suspended the scheme for a new fleet of helicopters as part of the savings programme to reduce the deficit. The Department of Transport has said that no decision has yet been made as to which individual areas will be affected by the proposed cuts. So it's a case of wait and see!

Again on a less positive note there have been some nasty cases of vandalism over this quarter including a bizarre act of vandalism where a visitor tore a page out of a valuable limited edition book of woodcut prints of the Stour on show at the County Museum. There was also widespread vandalism at the Blandford Town Museum's

Victorian Garden where two lads trashed the tool shed and then opened paint and poured it over the tools.

Dorset Police have also been told there will be a cut of over a million pounds in their budget as part of the cut of £125m for the policing budget for England and Wales this year. Dorset Police is the second lowest funded police force in the country but seems sanguine as to its ability to manage this cut. The chief constable says he will be able to keep officers on the beat and is sure the force will continue to keep up its high performance.

## **9. PLAY AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Play, as we reported last quarter, had received a considerable boost in recent years with the government's Playbuilder Project money. The incoming government has however removed the strings attached to this money and told District Councils it is no longer ring fenced specifically for play. It is possible therefore that some of the projects not yet completed may find their funds diverted elsewhere. In the meantime however several projects have reached completion.

In Durweston a grant of £16,000 from Playbuilder allowed the old wooden play equipment that had rotted to be replaced. The parish council used a local carpenter which also reduced costs. In Stourpaine the new Kidzone play area was officially opened in May, marking the end of over two years of grant applications and fund raising. A local seven-year old boy cut the ribbon, his name chosen from a draw of children who had helped design and select the equipment for the area.

There were celebrations in Abbotsbury when the Abbotsbury Playground Group received a £97,000 grant from the Big Lottery Community Spaces fund. The group have been working on the project for four years and now have the lion's share of the money needed. The project has faced a lot of difficulties but overcome them through determination and support from the parish council and Dorset Community Action. The play area should be ready by September and will be designed for all ages.

On Portland the popular Play on Portland was successfully handed over to a group of parent volunteers and re-named Island Play. The volunteers have all completed an NVQ training course and have been supported by the Extended Schools co-ordinator for the area. Also on Portland the island's Revive group organised a skate festival at Osprey Quay where a temporary skate park was set up during the Easter holidays. Entirely funded by local donations (including £600 raised at the local secondary school, Royal Manor Arts College from an 'own clothes day') the idea was to do something for young people whilst they wait for the completion of their new skate park later in the year.

In Dorchester a skate jam was held to celebrate the first anniversary of the Dorchester Skatepark. Also in Dorchester, Dorchester Youth Extra (DYE) again organised a Club Anonymous night during half term with proceeds going towards Anonymous 2010, a youth music and culture festival DYE are organising at Maumbury Rings in August. And showing you are never too young to express an opinion, an astonished seven year old girl wrote to the Town Council to say the one thing missing from the Borough Gardens play area was monkey bars. The response was the installation of a new climbing frame and an invitation to cut the ribbon to open the frame and to be the first person to try it out!

Another positive step was achieved in Osmington with the formation of a new Osmington Youth Club. The first session was held on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> June in the Village

Hall and the new committee, together with its youth worker are full of ideas as to how to make this work for the young people of the village.

## **10. EMPLOYMENT**

Unemployment figures saw a welcome fall according to the latest statistics. The May figures show the total number of people claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) to have fallen to 4,193, 1.9% of the working population, a steady fall from January when it stood at 2.5%. The figures are lower than those both for the South West Region (2.7%) and for the country as a whole (3.9%). There was a drop in all six Dorset districts, with the trend showing a steady fall all year.

Despite this good news there were some announcements of large-scale job losses this quarter. Two firms announced their decision to close on the Granby Industrial Estate on the outskirts of Weymouth, with a loss of forty-three jobs at Advanced Sheet Metal and of twenty-two jobs at defence firm Babcock Integrated Technology. ASM has gone into administration but Babcock has decided it is not cost effective to have a large number of different offices and facilities. Since Weymouth is one of their smallest facilities they have decided to consolidate their work in Plymouth and Bristol.

The job losses at Pork Farms meat processing factory at Shaftesbury have not been quite as severe as expected. Initially they announced ninety job losses but this has now been reduced to forty-five whilst the company looks to see whether they can get enough new business to avert further job cuts.

On a more positive note Cobham plc, a Wimborne based defence company, was awarded three contracts worth £12m. by the Ministry of Defence. This will see the firm upgrading and supporting air traffic control systems at least until 2015. There are possibilities for large scale job creation on Portland if plans for a wind farm go ahead. The Crown Estate has chosen Eneco, a Dutch firm, to develop a wind farm with the turbines being placed 25 km out at sea. They are looking at a variety of sites along the south coast to use for the construction and maintenance of the wind farm and Portland Port has been working on a proposal that it should be the chosen site.

New Look is developing its plans for its site in Weymouth. More than seven hundred jobs have been lost at the site as the firm moved its distribution centre out of Weymouth to the Midlands and later moved its marketing and buying department to London. The plans include retaining almost half the site for office space, light industry and warehousing whilst the rest is used for a supermarket, hotel and new offices for the New Look headquarters.

In Blandford St Mary Hall and Woodhouse have now submitted detailed plans for their new brewery, outline planning permission for which was granted back in January 2007. The new brewery should be operational by 2011 and the existing brewery will be demolished once the new one is up and running. The site will also accommodate two hundred new homes and some light industrial and business units.

In rural areas there are some interesting examples of new small enterprises. For example a business running a smokery has recently relocated from the New Forest to Rampisham. Although it currently still uses some of its New Forest suppliers it is looking energetically for local suppliers of venison, duck etc to develop its smoking business. In Hermitage, Pink's Organics has started up, reviving the original Pink's Jam and Pickles founded by the current owner's great-grandfather, albeit in Bermondsey rather than rural Dorset! The original firm was a household name and supplied plum jam to the troops during the First World War. The aim is to offer

products with the same quality and purity of those days before intensive farming with high levels of pesticide became the norm. ([www.pinksorganics.com](http://www.pinksorganics.com)).

A renewable energy company based in Chideock, Naturalwatt, has seen a 300% increase in orders over last year. Set up five years ago to deal with wind, solar photo-voltaic and solar thermal technologies it is now nearing a £2m turnover. The company has increased its small workforce and recently won an award for its online monitoring system to track energy usage, CO2 emissions and the amount of renewable energy generated from its installations. ([www.naturalwatt.com](http://www.naturalwatt.com))

In Sturminster Newton the local community partnership, SturQuest launched a new initiative in the form of a Jobs Club, similar to the one recently formed in Shaftesbury, to help the unemployed find work. It meets every Friday morning and helps members with writing CV's, preparing for interviews and may even run courses in the future.

It is to be hoped this largely positive picture continues, although as we said last quarter, some parts of the county that are heavily reliant on public sector jobs may see unemployment rise as spending cuts take effect.

## **11. ARTS AND CULTURE**

This quarter saw the start of the festival season in Dorset and once again a wide variety of events and talents have been on display. The African themed Dorchester festival organised by the local Arts Centre was blessed with good weather for a change and saw crowds flocking to its outdoor events in the Borough Gardens and elsewhere. The African theme took in a Tunisian street market, music from Zimbabwean band Bulawayo and a hilarious comedy night at Herrison Hall with London born of Nigerian parents Gina Yashere. Elsewhere Shaftesbury held its annual highly successful Festival of Local Food, Wimborne its annual Folk Festival, Beaminster its highly successful annual Festival - and there are of course plenty more to come!

This year saw the tenth of the Dorset Art Weeks biennial events, the largest Open Studio Event in the country. There were artists taking part in every corner of the county, from Thorncombe and Marshwood in the far west, to Burton and Mudeford in the far east, Milton-on-Stour in the north to Portland Bill in the south. Artists showed paintings, drawings, prints, photography, sculpture and carving, furniture and wood crafts, textiles, installations, ceramics, batiks, indeed virtually every form of visual art imaginable.

Plans continue for a new Arts Centre in Sherborne. The aim is to build a £1.5m community arts centre to be sited at the bottom of Paddock Gardens. There was initially some mistrust between the supporters of Sherborne House, a listed building falling into disrepair which had wanted to be renovated into a regional arts centre. The County Council however rejected the plans but support along with the Town Council and Sherborne's voluntary arts organisation ArtsLink the plans for a community based arts centre. The two groups appear to be working well together now with a plan that envisages Sherborne House being more a centre for important national exhibitions whilst the new centre will be for 'doing' art..

Initial architect designs were unveiled to the Town Council recently and greeted with approval. However the renovation of Sherborne House is much delayed with no planning application yet submitted and The Exchange at Sturminster Newton has warned Sherborne that they must look at the ongoing running costs carefully. An Exchange trustee has pointed out that balancing the books in the three years the

Exchange has been open has been a continual struggle. The level of use has meant that it quickly proved impossible to run it on volunteer labour alone and in fact The Exchange now employs the equivalent of four full-time workers. Like Sturminster Newton, the intention is for the Sherborne Arts Centre to be self-funding.

Arts centres seem to be very much the flavour of the times at the moment. In the heart of Weymouth the Old Town Hall is being transformed into an arts and heritage community centre by the people of Chapelhay. The building has been leased to the group at a peppercorn rent and has already been used for craft workshops, art exhibitions and film and music evenings. In Blandford the DT11 forum are discussing with the County Council the possibility of using the redundant Milldown building at Blandford School as an arts centre.

In another exciting piece of news for Dorset, a painting by Tintoretto, the last of the great Venetian Renaissance painters, went on public display for the first time at Kingston Lacy in June. The painting was bequeathed to the Trust in 1981 as part of the contents of the house but it was in such poor condition it was left in storage. £36,000 was needed for its restoration and this was finally raised (including by a raffle appeal where every £1 ticket sold cleaned one square inch of the canvas!). The painting was last known to have been displayed in the dining room – which is where it now hangs today!

On the more negative side it is known that the County Council is looking to make savings of £40m next year. It is hard to believe that this will not adversely affect the library service and support to arts organisations. Although much of arts provision in the county is provided by volunteer effort the support provided by public bodies (even in terms of libraries providing music scores or sets of plays for choirs and amateur dramatic societies let alone financial support) is much needed for the arts to continue to flourish.

## **12. OTHER ISSUES**

Interest in green issues continues to grow with Transition Town initiatives in particular sprouting up all over the county. A lively meeting at Beaminster with speakers from Transition Dorchester and Transition Thorncombe has led to the formation of a Transition sub-group of the local area partnership there. Transition Town Dorchester are founding a community farm and garden in an open field at Poundbury where the Duchy of Cornwall has leased them the land at a peppercorn rent. Produce will be grown communally rather than people having individual plots but exact plans are not yet finalised. Transition Town Sturminster Newton are working on a host of ideas such as going plastic free, garden sharing, home energy saving, setting up walking buses to school to help cut their carbon footprint and much more besides.

Allotments continue to be much in demand and there are many initiatives in hand to increase their supply. The owner of a field near the medical centre in West Allington has invited the town council to lease the land for twenty years at an annual rent of just £100 in order to create some forty-one new allotments in the town. Meanwhile Fry the builders have also offered a smaller piece of land free of charge to the council next to the site of the new Priory Gardens housing development. Taken together these two pieces of land should make a significant contribution towards meeting the increase in demand for allotments – the waiting list in Bridport is currently nearing a hundred.

Chesil Bank parish council got a grant of £4,800 from the Big Lottery Fund to improve the allotments opened last year on unused scrubland between Abbotsbury and Portesham. The cash will pay for new fencing, a shed and better access. Meanwhile

in Owermoigne Galton Garden Centre has unveiled 105 Grow Your Own plots for rent to local gardeners. Each plot will cost £5 a week or for £10 a week gardeners can get a greenhouse, shed and water butt and plot holders will be able to use the toilets and restaurant at the centre. Plots are also available to local schools or community groups.

At Kingston Lacy estate the National Trust has restored the old kitchen garden to create forty-six new allotments. Six of these have been adapted, with the aid of the Prince's Trust for less able people whilst the remaining forty should be available for local residents, schools and community groups next year. (Ten of them have been set aside specifically for schools).

The Community Orchard in Bridport has been busy with volunteers taking part in pond puddling to form a pond and a workshop on scything in the orchard. The Community Allotment Gardening Club also meets weekly every Thursday afternoon and has a fully accessible plot on which to garden.

The Sherborne area became the first part of West Dorset to have a kerbside food waste collection service (residents in Weymouth and Portland have had this for several years now). The scheme collects food waste including bread, meat, fish, dairy produce and cooked meals and takes it to the local household recycling centre to be bulked up before sending to Eco-Composting where the compost is used for growing turf. Six tonnes of food waste were collected in the first three days of the weekly collection scheme and an additional bonus seems to be an increase in the amount of items left out for other recycling.

There has been much promotion of re-cycling including a Compost Awareness Week where local councils encouraged local people to try out composting in their gardens. Clinics were held in a variety of places including the Red Lion pub in Wareham. Some businesses have also been active in promoting the benefits of recycling. J and G Environmental, a Blandford based firm, estimates that 93% of the printing waste it collects is now processed for reuse whereas five years ago that would only have been 60%. It has now come up with a novel scheme to make use of discarded cardboard by turning it into eco-friendly animal bedding. The company is eager to increase its supply of cardboard and will collect free of charge from businesses in the Blandford area.

The struggle to find a suitable site for Bridport's new waste transfer station continues. There are six shortlisted sites, including Gore Cross, around which there was much of the original controversy. It is always difficult to find a suitable site for a facility we all agree we need but that very few of us want to see on our own doorstep.

Volunteers continue to show their commitment to keeping their communities clean and tidy. Regular litter picks are organised in many areas, not only by the parish council but also by Scouts and Guides and a variety of other voluntary groups. Dorchester Morning WI joined up with the Keep Britain Tidy campaign undertook a blitz on litter throughout the town as their contribution to the national initiative, the Big Litter Pick. The 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Great Dorset Beach Clean saw people descend on twenty-seven beaches along the coast including Durdle Door, Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay. The event was well attended, with around one hundred volunteers turning out at Kimmeridge for example and was organised by the Coastal Ranger Team at the County Council's Countryside Service.

Green issues are not the only things occupying the minds of our local communities however. Financial issues continue to be of importance and a new branch of the First Dorset Credit Union was opened in Blandford in April. The service is open

every Saturday morning in the Methodist Church Room in The Close. The mayor hoped the arrival of the Credit Union would help to stop doorstep lending at a time when so many people were struggling. This message was reinforced at Sherborne where local credit union volunteers reported an increase in the number of people referred to them from the Citizens Advice Bureau who had agreed loans from doorstep lenders at exorbitant rates of interest. Some of these lenders have been charging 282% or even more, whereas the maximum interest on a Credit Union loan is 26%. Credit Unions are of course not for profit organisations, run on the principle of mutual self-help. A branch of the Coastal Credit Union has also recently opened in Swanage.

Volunteer effort in Dorset was celebrated during Volunteers' Week, the national celebration of volunteering that takes place every year in the first week of June. Celebrations included all the volunteers who run the shops and work in the hospices and day centres run by the Weldmar Hospicecare Trust. Examples of volunteer effort are of course to be found throughout this report and this is perhaps a fitting note on which to end this report!