

**Minutes of NP meeting held in St Mary's Church, Marshwood on
Saturday 6 May at 10am**

Present were :

Mr M. Van de Weyer	Mr C. Somers
Ms V. Burt	Mr D. Hitchcock
Mrs R. Chiverton	Mr A. Cameron
Mr R. England	Mrs S. Hudston
Mr R. Ames	Mr C. Gray
Mr C. Arend-Russell	Mr M. Bowditch
Mrs J. Parsons	Ms J. Witherden
Mrs A. Hitchcock	Mr D. French
Mrs S. Hutchings	Ms J. Sewell
Mrs S. Lewers	
Mr & Mrs F. Bailey	
Ms S. Martin	
Mr & Mrs M. Brooks	

1. Welcome by Matthew Bowditch, chairman of the Upper Marshwood Vale Parish Council.
2. Independent planning consultant for the NP, Jo Witherden, presented the findings of her report. She highlighted the following points:
 - Sparse population of the area with 0.2 people per hectare
 - Aging population with an average age of 56 years
 - High level of vacant homes (23%)
 - High level of self-employment (45%)
 - Very few sites identified for possibility of building more homes
3. Charles Somers, chairman of the NP committee, outlined the responses to the questionnaires sent out at Christmas. 300

questionnaires were distributed, plus a further 100 to additional addresses within the parish boundary but with no corresponding names on the electoral register (some of these may be second homes or holiday lets) and a few others just beyond the parish boundary but adjacent to our main communities. By mid February we had received 101 replies, a response rate of 34% of the 300 on the electoral register (or 25% of the 400 total).

4. Sara Hudston, NP committee member and editor of Beneath the Vale, presented the draft Vision and Goals. She stressed that these were summaries of the main findings in the questionnaire and were open to discussion and alteration. They were as follows:

GOALS

Main priorities that emerge from questionnaires and consultation sessions:

- **Housing.** Need for more affordable homes. (In practice this can be a mixture of solutions: both private and housing association rented, shared ownership, self-build, change of AOCs etc.)
- **Community facilities.** Existing facilities need to be protected and new facilities need to be provided. Existing facilities include pubs, Marshwood shop and post office, halls, churches, garage, the Millennium Woodland Marshwood Primary School. New facilities needed include play areas, a community shop in Stoke Abbott, sewage treatment works in Marshwood and toilets in Marshwood church.
- **Traffic.** Need a safe walking route to school in Marshwood, better parking in Stoke Abbott (possibly a car park), more passing places in the lanes.
- **Environment:** Protect the ecology of the natural environment and improve access to the network of rights of way.

- **Business:** support for converting buildings into workspaces or tourist facilities.

VISION

- **Housing:** The need for some housing growth at a rate that reflects local needs and the rural nature of the area. Where possible, we wish to provide for younger people with children, as well as older people needing to downsize.
- **Environment:** To protect the landscape and features that contribute to the area's unique character, the enjoyment of the area in terms of countryside access and views, the general tranquility of the area and its dark skies. Also important is the design of the buildings and settlements, contributing to the area's character.
- **Economy:** Support home working, rural workshops and small-scale tourism to strengthen the local economy and provide further job opportunities.
- **Community:** Support a range of community facilities that can be sustained given the sparsity of the local population.

5. The meeting then took questions and comments from the floor.

District Cllr Jacqui Sewell said that the issue of empty homes needed tackling. She suggested that the community consider a measure similar to St Ives in Cornwall where new homes have to be lived in full-time. She also said she supported the removal of agricultural occupancy conditions where appropriate, each case to be considered on its merits.

Jo Witherden said that the defence to a legal challenge to the St Ives' measure demonstrated that having a high proportion of empty homes had a bad effect on local communities.

David Hitchcock, chairman of Marshwood Community Land Trust, said that the CLT was keeping a close watch on the demand for affordable homes in the area. They currently stood at 8 homes – 2 of these in Stoke Abbott. He explained that for the CLT to provide new houses, there needed to be a greater demand than the number of houses provided to make it viable. This meant that to build 8 houses, there would need to be demand for at least 12, possibly 15.

Sandra Hutchings said that the need is for housing for local people and that the issue of AOCs needed to be fed back into the NP.

Parish Cllr Cassian Gray asked if there was any way the NP could encourage smaller scale agriculture as the land in the area was unsuited to large-scale farming methods.

Charles Somers replied that the problem arose from the enormous size of farm machinery. He asked if anything could be done.

Parish Cllr and local farmer Fred Bailey replied that the large machinery was needed due to economies of scale and farmers had to move with the times.

Sandra Hutchings added that farmers couldn't get the number of people needed to farm in the older way and so needed larger machinery to compensate.

Cllr Gray said tourists and visitors wanted to see something other than large scale agri-business and that this desire brought benefits.

Charles Somers said the debate was about agricultural policy and was outside the scope of the NP.

Jo Witherden said that the next step would be to see if the meeting accepted the draft Vision and Goals.

Cllr Gray said he didn't accept them and that no more housing was required. He added that the area 'had a quality of otherness that should be preserved'.

David French retorted that families move out because there is no place for them.

David Hitchcock said that the NP covered the next 15-20 years and it was impossible to say that there would be no demand for new homes in 10 or 15 years time. The plan should not be curtailed by the views of a few people today.

David French said this was a chance to look at the bigger issues. There were very few young people living in Stoke Abbott and he didn't believe that a community could give itself a future without families and young people.

A local woman said that the reason why there are so few families and young people is that they can't afford houses on their wages and there was a problem of social housing going to people outside the area.

Charles Somers replied that Marshwood affordable housing at Bramblehay is restricted to local people and working well. What was needed was a long-term policy repeating that success.

Cllr Sewell summed her views on the draft Vision and Goals. She said that dialogue was needed on housing and that 23% vacant was a lot. Her message on community facilities was 'use it or lose it'. On broadband and mobile coverage she suggested the parish council might think about setting up an emergency plan. On environment, that places cannot be preserved in aspic and on traffic, while this was a working environment for farmers, that juggernauts should be kept off small roads.

The local woman who spoke earlier added that the problem with empty properties came from holiday homes that were priced out of local people's reach and were empty except at Easter, Christmas and the summer holidays.

Charles Somers asked the meeting if the committee should continue with the NP.

David French said he wanted to comment further on the Vision and Goals.

It was generally agreed that "the removal of AOCs, where appropriate" should be added to the Vision section.

Jo Witherden pointed out that there was a far higher representation at the meeting from Marshwood than Stoke Abbott. It was possible for the NP to have two chapters for the two communities. They needed to check the Stoke Abbott view on the Vision and Goals.

Charles Somers proposed holding a second meeting in Stoke Abbott. He then asked the meeting to vote that the NP should continue, that there should be a meeting in Stoke Abbott and that the current committee should take the NP through to the next step. The proposals were supported.