

Guardian: Charles Clover, Dedham Vale Society chairman, with his dog Tinker, in High Street, Dedham, showing St Mary's Church and The Rose tea rooms.

Pictures: Steve Brading C071411

Blood, sweat and tears do not matter – Dedham does



Wendy Brading

THERE are few more beautiful villages in the country than Dedham.

Nestled on the banks of the River Stour, the village's Royal Square is lined with historic, characterful houses punctuated by ancient inns and tea rooms.

The lofty spire of the impressive 15th-century St Mary the Virgin Church looks imperiously over the rolling countryside so

famously immortalised by artist John Constable.

But the village has not remained frozen in time by accident. It has taken blood, sweat and tears to preserve it – and the fight is not over yet.

After the Second World War, the Government sought to move people out from overcrowded London. It created new towns and then turned its attention to existing settlements, including Dedham.

The villagers were having

none of it and the Dedham Vale Society led the protest to Westminster.

"Dedham has always had its share of well-connected people determined to preserve it," said Charles Clover, the society's current chairman. "People like Alfred Munnings and Raymond Erith, the great classic architect, who rebuilt Downing Street. That is why Dedham is as it is."

He should know. Mr Clover's parents, Harold

and Diana, a spitfire and transport pilot in the Second World War, were among those who organised the march on Downing Street.

They carried banners and sacks full of petitions demanding the Government Save Dedham Vale.

Their campaign was not only successful, it paved the way for the 1968 Countryside Act, which created areas of outstanding natural beauty.

There are now 36 across the country, including Dedham, which have a high level of protection from development.

Mr Clover is, it is fair to say, somewhat into conservation.

An environmental journalist, he is chairman of the Blue Marine Foundation following on from his landmark book on the threat of global overfishing, *The End of the Line*.

Mr Clover's family were involved in the milling business dating back to the 1400s and the family moved into Essex in the 19th century.

His great uncle Ebenezer bought Dedham Mill, which had previously belonged to Constable's father, Golding.

Mr Clover lived with his family in Dedham Hall as a child, going to Holmwood House school before attending the prestigious Westminster School.

However, he left Dedham after his parents died. His father fell down the stairs of Dedham Mill and two years later, when Mr Clover, was 17, his mother died of cancer.

An outdated will saw Mr Clover leave the hall to live in the Lock Keeper's Cottage, previously painted by another former resident, John Constable.

After university, Mr Clover moved to Spitalfields, in London.

He might never have returned to Dedham, but saw life through a new lens when his sons, Harry, now 19, and Jack, 17, were born.

Mr Clover and his wife, Pamela, did not want to raise the boys in East London and they looked to move out of the City.

They drew a commuting circle and originally put in an offer to buy a farmhouse in Kent.

But the deal fell through and Well House in Dedham came on the market.

The Clovers have lived in the Grade I-listed house in Royal Square, Dedham, for 15 years now. It is a decision they have never regretted.

"It has given the boys enormous confidence to bring them up in a place where people from their family have lived for hundreds of years."

The Clovers' front room was the assembly room of the former Dedham Grammar School, once attended by that man

Constable again. It is a small world.

Dedham exudes an air of prosperity.

The beautiful houses sell for top dollar due to their agreeable location in the heart of the Dedham Vale, their relative closeness to London and the fact they are aesthetically pleasing.

It was ever thus. Dedham enjoyed wealth through its successful wool industry and in the 18th century became a centre for education.

The grammar school was founded by Elizabeth I, although the present building dates from 1732.

Sherman's Hall, also a Grade I-listed townhouse, which sits opposite Well House, was also used as a school. It now belongs to the National Trust.

Mr Clover said: "If you look at some of the buildings opposite, they were clearly support buildings to this one when it was a school."

"Look around Harrow or Eton – Dedham could have gone that way."

But Dedham did not keep pace with education changes in the late 19th century and the school was split and sold as two houses.

Great uncle Ebenezer was involved in that too in 1888, due to his position as one of the village's leading businessmen.

The challenge now facing Dedham is to retain its character while remaining sustainable.

Mr Clover said: "The village design statement is partly about maintaining smaller houses for people to retire to or for young people to buy, which are not prohibitively expensive."

However, overdevelopment, or anything which would threaten Dedham's character is fiercely fought.

For now, the village is thriving. It has two pubs, three quality restaurants, a pharmacy, shops, and arts centre and tea rooms.

A new doctor's surgery is now operating after a long, hard battle.

And tourists bring welcome revenue to the village. "Dedham has had tourism for centuries," said Mr Clover. "Tourists are extremely good for the economy."

Battles endure. Villagers are still trying to get the flight path to Stansted Airport moved away from Dedham and the area of outstanding natural beauty.

And the fight to contain development is fought on a near daily basis.

Mr Clover said: "Everyone forgets the enormous amount of time people have volunteered to preserve the environment."

"Think how many years of pro bono good work has gone into it. But the reward is around you."

wendy.brading@nqe.com

Disabled charity has served 2000th customer

A CHARITY which lends wheelchairs to those in need has helped its 2,000th person.

The Short-term Wheelchair Loan Charity was set up three years ago and provides free loan of wheelchairs for up to three months to people who may have had an accident or an operation, or to accommodate a visiting relative.

Now it has provided its 2,000th wheelchair to Vic Mead.

Charity spokesman Bartholomew Walsh said: "We started up the charity three years ago with a few second-hand wheelchairs, but have since been able to increase our stock to 110 mostly lightweight, folding wheelchairs, as well as having accessories, such as elevators, for those who may have to keep a leg raised at all times."

The charity is based at Catalyst House, in Newcomen Way, Colchester, and has wheelchairs available between 10am and 12 noon Monday to Thursday.

No medical referrals or appointments are necessary. Those needing to borrow wheelchairs can call on 01206 518524.

New plans for sailing club shed

A SAILING club has revealed new plans for a controversial storage shed, while hitting back at claims it has not acted fairly when drawing up proposals.

Stour Sailing Club was slammed by residents and some of its own members when it submitted plans for a black storage shed on the banks of the river Stour in front of its club house in Quay Street, Manningtree.

They said they had not been consulted about the five metre wooden building, which would block views of the Stour from Wherry Corner in High Street and nearby homes.

Stour Sailing Club withdrew the application and has revealed details of a new hut, which will soon be submitted to planners. The height has been reduced to 3.95 metres.

David Warner, club commodore, said: "This shed is vital for the storage of the club's equipment. There is no other site and it should also be borne in mind that the shed has to be in this position for race starting."