

Community celebrates victory over new homes

Report by Paul Wilson

EUPHORIC residents are celebrating a landmark victory over a developer who planned to almost double the size of their community.

More than 50 residents of Thorncombe attended a two-day public inquiry in the village hall in December to hear Philip Fry of C. J. Fry put his case to build 40 homes off High Street, against fierce opposition.

Campaigners said the development could devastate infrastructure and scar an area of outstanding natural beauty.

They have been on tenterhooks for more than a month but, in a historic ruling this week, planning inspector Nigel Payne backed West Dorset District Council's decision last August not to renew planning permission for the scheme, after the developer missed a deadline to resubmit detailed plans.

Summing up Mr Payne said: "In the final analysis it is the responsibility of the developer to ensure that all the necessary permission or approvals are in place before development commences, or at least relevant submissions are made, rather than the planning authority or any other party."

C. G. Fry is set to lose millions by the decision. It has six weeks to decide whether to take the matter to the Court



LANDMARK VICTORY: Thorncombe parish council chairman Mark Agnew and other villagers celebrate after a developer's plan to build 40 homes in their community was rejected after a public inquiry. **Picture by Len Copland.**

of Appeal, which could cost the developer even more.

Parish council chairman Mark Agnew, who spearheaded the campaign against development, said: "The Village Trust was set up specifically to oppose the plans. As a parish we have been fighting this for a long time.

"Now we hope this is the end of it and we can concentrate on integrating the 50 new houses we do have into the community. We will have a break from the diggers."

Parish councillor Terry Bennett said he

was euphoric at the ruling and felt an overwhelming sense of relief after a campaign which had lasted 12 years.

"I am delighted. Since the original application was granted in 1990 this village has been threatened by this very large development on top of others we have had.

"The majority of the parish will be pleased, not because they are anti-developer but because this would have been one development too far.

"This is a thriving village socially but the problems come when you get too

many people coming in from a different environment.

"If you come from a big city it takes a while to get involved. We have tried to welcome these people and, in the main, they have blended in well, but the more newcomers the more you skew the population.

"We had a situation where people were leaving the parish because they could not afford to buy houses here. This has always been a brilliant place to live and that is what we have been fighting to save, so there is a great sense of relief."