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Investment in Char Valley

It is a great shame that Char Valley, along with many other areas, is being hit by new cut backs and loss of local services.

It is an even bigger shame to have to report that rural areas are suffering more than the towns.

Two years ago the Lengthsman Scheme was 50% funded by the County Council—but no more. The verges are only cut very irregularly and, of course, we have no street lighting in most of the Parish Council area.

This year the 76 Bus Service has gone, leaving many isolated from medical centres, social contact and shopping expeditions.

There is a current replacement 'ring and ride' service provided by Dorset Community Transport but it does have to be booked and it does cost a £5 flat fare. It may well be discontinued if it doesn't attract enough interest.

For many the promise of Superfast Broadband is still just that—a promise—with no hope for early action.

Even our local fingerposts will no longer be maintained by the local highway authority.

BUT your Parish Council is working to reduce the impact where possible.

We are now paying for all the work completed by the Lengthsman, including drain clearing and other maintenance work. We also have a programme of works to repair/re-instate fingerposts where needed.

We will continue to press for high quality broadband to be made available all across the Valley.

AND we have held Char Valley's share of Council Tax at the same level, while the District and County have increased theirs.



New Council Offices cost many £millions

Ed Chat

It looks like it's down to us...

Looks like we'll have to be fending for ourselves in the coming years.

When the Government promised that the Pensioner Bus Pass was safe, no-one expected the buses to use it or would disappear. Every promise of guaranteed broadband speeds have left us waiting and waiting.

Our Parish Council will continue its sterling work to keep costs down. The Parish Council will keep a tight control on spending; maintain the Lengthsman; keep repairing finger posts and aim to keep drains and highways clear.

The PC will also continue to campaign for broadband improvements and faster road repairs.

You can help as well. If you know of neighbours who need help getting to medical appointments or collecting shopping etc., see if you can help with a lift. It's sure to be appreciated.

Let's see how much we can help each other out.

!! ALERT !!

Want to know about planned road closures in our area? Maybe alerts about possible flooding or other hazards?

Do submit your email address and we'll collate a mailing list to send out alerts as soon as we get them.

Send your email address to ivangollop@hotmail.com with **ALERT** in the subject line.

!! ALERT !!

OUR LENGTHSMAN SCHEME

The term Lengthsman dates back to the Middle Ages when parishes employed men to maintain a length of road. The term fell into decline after the late 1880s when road maintenance became the responsibility of county councils.

By the 1960s increasing mechanisation and the costs involved in keeping a lengthsman saw them disappear – and with them their close knowledge of local highway networks and the communities they served. In recent years they returned to Dorset.

Stephen Lee was appointed Lengthsman in 2010, on an initiative from the County Council, who covered 50% of the costs with the rest being made up by the partner parish (or parishes) in our case the parishes of Upper Marshwood Vale and Char Valley.

In 2014 the County Council withdrew its funding at short notice, because some of the schemes were not working productively. (Our scheme was always effective and efficient but the funding went anyway.)

The result was that CVPC pays for his labour directly.

He delivers an efficient service, doing jobs in quick order after a phone call. Clearing drains seems to be a major part of his job especially on



Stephen in the River Char at Stoke Mill Lane, clearing a large drain.

Gassons Lane. He knows every drain in the area and regular checks all of them.

One of his most interesting tasks was clearing a big drain at Stoke Mill Farm in the River Char.

Stephen Lee also does carpentry jobs and made and erected the new notice board at the Five Bells. He has also got the contract for the grass maintenance of the new affordable housing area.



At the Five Bells erecting Parish notice board



Near the War Memorial at the church – his men clearing the drains

Red and Blue Posts in Road Verges

You may have noticed recently that various posts have appeared on road verges. The red ones are new and have been put up by the Dorset CC to mark patches of Japanese Knotweed. The aim is to alert the verge cutters so that they do not inadvertently cut the weed and so spread the bits far and wide (as has happened in the past).

For those who are not already familiar with this plant, it is a rampantly invasive deciduous species, originally brought to the UK from Japan in about 1825 for its ornamental value. It is in fact quite decorative (see picture) and was widely planted in gardens in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Unfortunately, in this country it seems to have no natural enemies and can establish itself from the smallest scrap of root and quickly spread to dominate a large area where it shades out all other plants.

For this reason it is now classified as a notifiable weed and the Council aims to eradicate it on road verges (on private land it is the owner's responsibility to prevent it escaping into the wild or on to neighbouring property). A possible problem of the new post system is that the red posts were erected in winter when the plant had largely died down and was easy to miss among surrounding vegetation.

The result is that some of the red posts were erected in the wrong places.

DCC is aware of this problem and intends to have the verges inspected and posts moved as necessary before the first cut which is due in the second half of June.

The blue posts are replacements for the ones which have been in place for many years to mark "conservation verges" rich in wildflowers. The aim is to prevent cutting when the plants are in bloom or setting seed. In our parish, most of the roadside wildflowers bloom in the spring, so cutting is left until relatively late. This has not always been successful and later flowers like foxgloves may suffer, but the present policy is probably as good as it could be in present circumstances.

DCC is cutting back on verge maintenance and, in some parts of Dorset, it is currently carrying out 'conservation trials' to test new and cheaper maintenance methods. None of the trial areas is in West Dorset so, for the moment it seems that current maintenance arrangements will continue in our area.



superfast dorset
broadband for our future

Driven to the depths of despair by the failure of the much-trumpeted roll-out of Superfast rural broadband to deliver any improvement at all in your download speed?

You are not alone

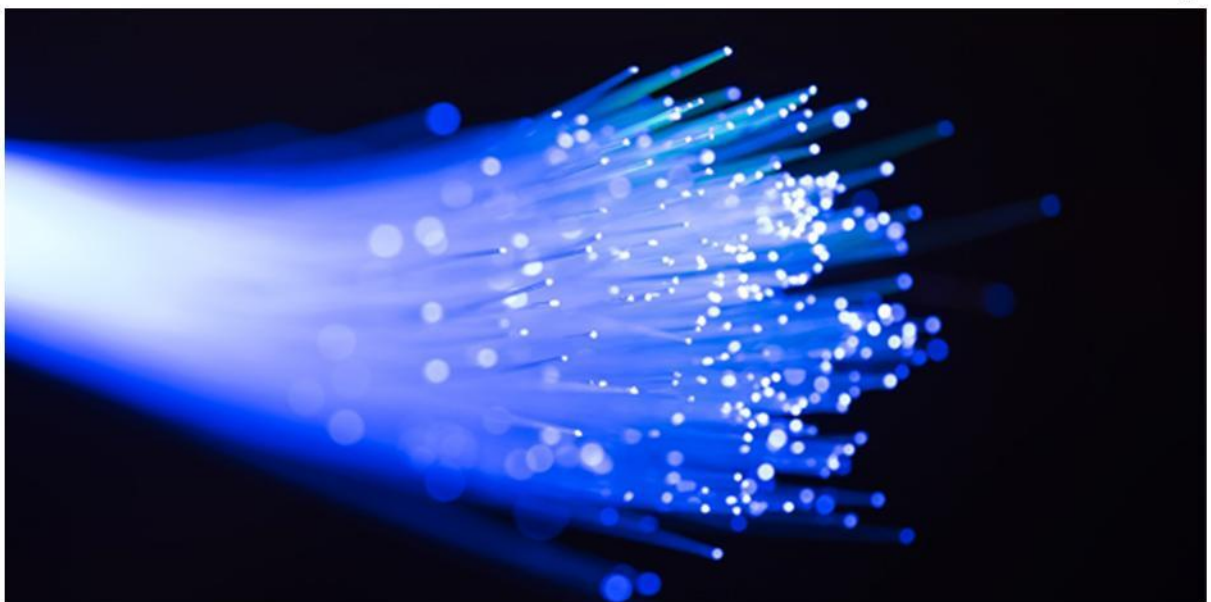
2 mbps. Not too much to ask for, is it? Not the 80 mbps that Londoners consider necessary to sustain life, nor the 40 mbps touted by BT's Infinity, not even the 24 mbps that constitutes "superfast" in the UK, nor the 10 mbps that David Cameron considers to be "a basic human right" (no, me neither), just 2 measly mbps would be nice.

Actually, we do get 2 mbps on the rare good days – on the more frequent bad days we get 0.1 mbps (or nothing), but usually we trudge along at 0.4 mbps. I should explain that we don't live half way up a mountain and an hour away from a pint of milk – our house is by the side of the road that runs between Whitchurch Canonicorum and Shaves Cross and is less than three miles from our telephone exchange. At these speeds e-mail is hit-and-miss, the more sophisticated websites (such as BBC and internet banking) are frequently unavailable because we are "timed-out"; video streaming is a dream, software upgrades take days to download, and our IT-savvy B&B guests think it "quaint" and tend not to return.

So imagine our glee when we saw BT's fibre cabinet in Ryall in April 2014! A quick look on the websites for both BT and Superfast Dorset told us that we would benefit from Superfast Broadband (SFBB) "within six months"! On the strength of this we changed ISP to BT and bought two Apple TV boxes, in the happy anticipation of streaming BT Sport just like the rest of the country. Glossing over that it took BT a year to activate the cabinet, we were gutted to see that, two weeks before it went live, BT changed our status from "Coming Soon" to "Exploring Solutions" – the small print told us that we could now expect SFBB between 18 months' time and never.

A flurry of e-mails with Superfast Dorset revealed that the problem was the 4km of copper cable between us and the cabinet - there is a "golden kilometer" from the cabinet in which you should get around 40 mbps, and this speed falls away so that more than 2km distance means no benefit at all. During the year that it took BT to activate their cabinet neither it nor our house moved an inch, so why

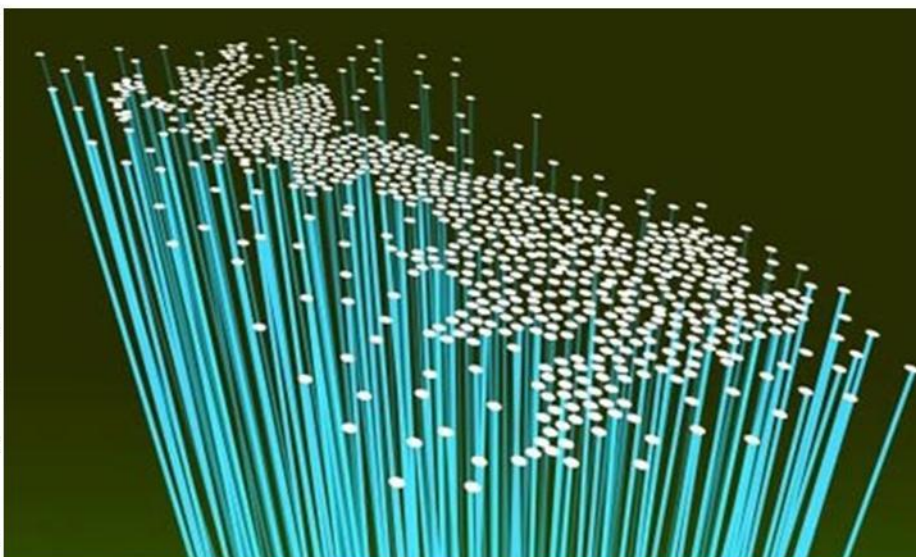
were we not told the truth from the outset? Yes, the websites did have weasel words like "actual speeds may vary", but it was physically impossible from the outset that any houses in our postcode would get any benefit at all from the new cabinet, so why say otherwise?



We also asked Superfast Dorset why the cabinet was located in Ryall – lucky for the people who live there but the “golden kilometer” towards Whitchurch contains just seven houses, so it’s a wasted opportunity. We were told that the fibre cabinet “would not work” if it were more than 50m from the existing cabinet – this is not true: the real reason is that BT specified in their contract that they would only dig a further 50m of conduit *and Superfast Dorset accepted this condition* – so the availability of SFBB is dictated not by where people actually live but by where boxes were located decades ago. If the solution had been driven by need rather than by history there would be a fibre cabinet in the middle of Whitchurch and all the houses in the village would already have SFBB.

You can’t blame BT – they are in it simply to make money. Superfast Dorset? Well, you can call it Deceit, Carelessness, An Honest Mistake, Incompetence, or whatever, but it is crystal clear that they utterly failed to manage expectations as to what would be available and to whom. To be fair, their more recent communications do seem to be more realistic in addressing the 3% - 5% of premises that can’t access SFBB, but I think that it was Harold Wilson who said “5% unemployment is all very well, but if it’s you then unemployment is 100%”.

Our MP met several of us to discuss our joint problem. . He promised that he would pressure BT to put a fibre box in the middle of the village – that was last July... but he’s had a lot on his mind since then! From a selfish point of view, even this would not solve our problem as we would still be more than 2km from the cabinet, so a BT solution to our glacial broadband seems as far off as ever.



There are two alternatives to BT’s fibre/copper network: more and more satellite dishes are appearing in the vale and Superfast Dorset is currently offering grants towards the set-up costs but the problem is, as ever, speed – maximum is around 20 mbps but in many cases this is severely restricted due to other users competing for the limited amount of capacity. The on-going monthly costs are also significantly higher than for fibre/copper solutions. Alternatively, the mobile phone network can supply broadband using the 3G or 4G networks – coverage varies, of course, but is generally much better outside of your house and 10’ or 15’ up in the air, and needs an external aerial, a minimal cable run to a router, a data-only SIM card and away you go the good news is that EE currently offer 4G to some of the Vale, and Vodafone are rumoured to be upgrading to 4G this spring ... The bad news is that (surprisingly) none of the mobile phone companies offer a hardware + software bundle, so we will have to source the component for ourselves and then try to get them working. 4G should supply between 40 mbps and 60 mbps, although there are the up-front and on-going costs and the usual potential snag of network capacity. What grates with both of these solutions is that we would be doing exactly what BT want – spending large amounts of our own money to let them off the hook of providing us with a decent broadband service. But, at some stage, you’ve just got to sigh deeply, accept the realities, and get the credit card out...

As a footnote, some commentators on the internet call people like us “scroungers” (and worse) because we expect people who live in towns to pay the cost of sorting out our infrastructure problems. I can see their argument – but the other side of the same coin is that we currently pay the same as them for Line Rental and a Broadband and Calls package for a speed “up to 18 mbps” – they can actually receive speeds near this upper limit but we get something like 1/50th or 1/100th the service, so why are we required to pay the same for it? Just who is subsidising whom?

Simon Taylor
Copse Gate Farm

The Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre



Opened to the public in June 1985 to educate visitors about sustainable fossil collection, the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre was set up by the local community and run by volunteers.

It is an educational charity and entry is free while donations are very welcome. It is housed in a former cement factory opposite the car park at Charmouth beach. It is now an important information point along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site designated in 2002, where over 180 million years of Earth's history is

recorded in 95 miles of the East Devon and Dorset coastline.

Richard Edmonds was appointed as the first warden in April 1986 and in 2003 the Heritage Coast Centre was awarded £300,000 by various bodies to improve facilities at the Centre. The displays and work inside the building are carried out by volunteers, and their help is vital to the running of the Centre. They help at the desk and on the fossil walks and rock pool rambles. There is also a winter working party who carry out essential maintenance during the quieter months.

"Our Centre takes on a very important role in helping visitors to enjoy and appreciate the natural things which make the area special and to help them play their part in maintaining and preserving this beauty for future generations," said Chris Horton, Chairman of the Friends of the Charmouth Heritage Coast in 2008.

Facilities at the Centre

include interactive computers, hands on displays, marine tanks, a video microscope and a film about how to find fossils. There are amazing fossil collections, the Charmouth Dinosaur and also a well stocked shop. Helpful wardens and volunteers will help visitors identify any fossils they have found. Guided walks and rock pooling rambles are held throughout the year.



In recent years, visitor numbers have consistently been in excess of 90,000 per year.

For more information, please visit :

www.charmouth.org/chcc/

Debby Snook, Friend and Trustee of Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre.



FINGERPOST RESTORATION PROJECT - AN UPDATE

Towards the back end of last year, I spent a cold, wet morning in the company of Angus Mitchell surveying some of the Parish's most dilapidated finger posts. He and Roger Bond are key volunteers in West Dorset's AONB finger post restoration project. A programme of work was costed and it was agreed that DCC would be asked to remove four posts singled out for immediate repair and deliver them to Roger and Alex. I had been warned that it would take some time for this job to get to the top of Highway's list.

Time passed ... quite a lot of time ... and finally ... I am able to report that the posts from Gassons Lane, Crooked Lane and Wootton Cross were taken for restoration very recently.

We are still seeking grants from WDDC and sponsorship from local businesses. We have already received a generous donation from Mr Simon Christopher of Whitchurch Canonorum and Janie and Christopher Roper have overseen the restoration of the finger post in their garden in Wootton Fitzpaine. So far we have only signed up one volunteer to help with the project, Alex Brooks in Wootton Fitzpaine. He is starting work on three posts in that area specifically. There are still plenty more needing repair. Some just need a clean and a coat of paint. Others need to be completely refurbished. We have all the information you need to source the materials needed to restore the signs, whether it's paint, post, letters or a cast iron roundel. The only cost to you will be time and effort!

It would be very sad to see these iconic way markers disappear. If you would like to get involved, please contact me at

carolyn56peck@gmail.com

Char Valley Finances

This is a brief overview of the Council's spending (full accounts are on the website). We are pleased to report that the Parish's share of the Council Tax has not been increased this year unlike the higher tiers of local government. We raised £18,525 from the Council Tax.

The Council is committed to maintaining the highway in its area in decent order. Our role is making sure drains are kept clear so that road surfaces are as dry as possible. There are a great many drains and the cost of these and completing other minor works is over £5,500 a year.

We are responsible for the playing field at Wootton Fitzpaine and the Play Area at Whitchurch. Grass cutting is a regular expense, along with safety inspections and play equipment maintenance, which is often expensive. Last year we spent a total of £1,630 on these items.

New expenditure is in maintaining our fingerposts. The net cost was covered almost entirely by grants and sponsorship last year and we hope to do the same in the next 12 months.

Village halls are a vital part of village life but are costly to run and maintain. We provide some much valued support to our three village halls through an annual grant. This amounts to just over £1,000. The Council also contributes to the upkeep of six local burial grounds at a total cost of £985. We provide support to a local bus service (Bopper Bus) that takes our young people to Bridport Leisure Centre and also provide small donations to other local organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Air Ambulance. These items amount to just over £1,000.

Finally, just to note that our councillors receive no allowances or expenses - the Clerk is the only paid employee. He carries out all the administrative tasks of organising meetings, agendas, minutes etc. He manages the council's finances, runs the website (saving us £700 this year) and provides general support and advice to the Council. His salary, including employers National Insurance payments is £5,300 per annum.



Char Valley Parish Council

About Us

Welcome to the Char Valley Parish Council website. Char Valley is a group council and comprises the parishes of Whitchurch Canonorum, Wootton Fitzpaine and Stanton St Gabriel. The area is all within the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is completely rural in character.

The parishes consist of :

- scattered farms,
- the small villages of Whitchurch Canonorum (population 640) , Wootton Fitzpaine (population 360) and Morcombelake (population 110),
- the settlements of Fishpond, Ryall and Monkton Wyld,
- further small settlements at Stonebarrow Lane and at Fern Hill on the outskirts of Charmouth.

The busy A35 trunk road bisects the parishes from east to west. Stanton St Gabriel parish, between the A35 and the sea, is nearly all owned and managed by the National Trust, as are the hilltop forts which look down on the landscape of small fields, deep streams and woods of the Marshwood Vale and the Wootton valleys. The southern part of the council's area includes a section of the Jurassic Coast, England's first natural World Heritage Site.

 Sign up to our Email Alerts

Latest News

Tue, 17 Apr 16

Temporary Road closure Monkton Wyld

[See all](#)

New Parish Council Website

As you may have noticed since last autumn the Parish council has a new website. It is provided by Hugo Fox, a commercial website provider, who make tools to create websites, available to Parish Councils and other voluntary bodies free of charge. The Parish Clerk, John West has taken over the work of setting up the website and keeping it up to date as part of his role.

The website is the place to go if you want to keep up to date with the Parish Council meeting agendas, minutes, etc. On the site you can also find contact details for your Parish Councillors and various other information including details of individual planning applications the council is consulted on.

You can also sign up for alerts whenever we post any "news" items on the site (this doesn't include updates for meetings and minutes). We use the facility when there are things like road closures for repairs, that we have been made aware of by the authorities.

Please visit us at www.charvalleypc.co.uk and let us know if you have any suggestions for improving the site.



John West, Parish Clerk

Char Valley & West Dorset - to build or not to build...

Local authorities are now doing strategic planning via **Local Plans**, and are working with neighbours and other partners (aiming to satisfy the Duty to Co-operate in the process) on housing provision, employment growth and infrastructure.

The **West Dorset Local Plan** should indicate where new developments will take place over a 10 year period. It should identify where land is reserved for employment and residential use. It has to show a 5 year 'bank' of land ready for development. It also has to show it is environmentally sustainable. Any Neighbourhood Plan has to be in compliance with the Local Plan.

There are different planning options available to local communities and the Parish Council will soon decide which approach will best meet the needs of our local communities.

The options include:

- A Neighbourhood Development Plan, more commonly referred to as a "Neighbourhood Plan", may be for the whole of the Char Valley area or it could be a series of plans based on a particular village or group of villages.
- Or
- Parish Plans. Some residents may recall that we have an existing Parish Plan, dating from 2003. Once again this may be one overall Plan or a compendium of individual Plans

Currently the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan is under renewed scrutiny. It has only a 5 year 'life' rather than 10 and it does not identify the required 5 year bank of land available for development.

This is a very worrying situation as, if the Local Plan does not meet the 5 year requirement, developers can make application for 'predatory' development of **any area** they like. We hope this will be sorted very urgently.

Neighbourhood Plans focus on the use and development of land and allocation of key sites for

specific kinds of development. Local communities are able to choose where they want new homes and other development to be built, what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, once completed. They can also cover other areas of interest to the local community, but all policies must be in conformity with existing strategic local planning policy – in our case the recently adopted West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan. A Neighbourhood Plan's adoption is subject to an independent examination and a public referendum, but once approved they form part of the local plan documentation.



Parish Plans have a more conventional approach. The format for producing them is not prescribed and the Parish has freedom to decide how it will work with the community to put the plan together. They are less focussed on housing development and land use and can cover a range of topics including social and environmentally related

issues. Due to its holistic nature a Parish Plan has the potential to influence a wide range of organisations and their policies and plans. It can be the focal point for an effective and positive role for the community in helping to guide proposals, manage change and address local needs.

In the coming months we plan to produce a questionnaire that will go out to all residents seeking their views about the area and identifying where their concerns and aspirations for the future lie. We hope the results of this will guide the council towards a decision on which planning approach will provide the best fit for the local community and will influence the issues that the council needs to focus upon in the coming years.

Unitary Authority

There are plans afoot to make Dorset into just two unitary authorities; one based on Bournemouth/Poole and the other being the rest of Dorset. This is not being widely discussed or consulted on but sorted out behind the scenes. This will have a major effect on services and we know most resources will not be focussed on the rural area!