

Dear Mike and Councillors

It is expected that improvements to the Whitchurch Canonorum to Charmouth footpath will be undertaken this month

I am pleased to see the work progressing on the Wooton Village Hall extension after so much discussion with planning officers and conservation officers

I have met with a Dorset Council officer to discuss road surfaces

I was pleased to receive the details of the River Char improvement .

I anticipate that we will be having future discussions on slurry, Environmental Land Management and the Sustainable Farm incentives in later months. Other parish councils are also discussing further matters such as the price burden of a cost of a cubic metre of water

These issues coupled with moves away from phosphates ,the cost of moving to covered slurry lagoons are causing concern amongst the farming community The current and continuing high incidence of TB in cattle add to the stress faced by the farmers. As I write this report Melplash Show has recently joined the Dorset County ie Dorchester Show in being cancelled for 2021. These cancellations are a real loss to the rural community

We are mourning the death of HRH the Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh a truly inspirational figure for many of us. Prince Philip had a great interest in conservation and technology.

Later in this report there will be mention of renewables and technology

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· Mobile Phone coverage

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· **Background**

**I have received a number of comments re poor mobile phone coverage**

**My understanding is as follows**

The council isn't responsible for mobile phone coverage of course – it's determined by the commercial operations of the four major MNOs (mobile network operators - EE, Vodafone, Three and O2). Their commercially-driven network roll-out plans have traditionally focused on the areas of highest population, leaving some rural areas with poor coverage.

Dorset Council recognises this is a significant issue for many communities. Lack of mobile coverage holds back economic growth, social opportunity and is downright frustrating! So in its community leadership role and in support of its digital place ambitions the council has begun a number of mobile-focused projects.

**5G RuralDorset**

This £7m Dorset Council-led project is looking at how next-generation wireless infrastructure could be deployed in traditionally challenging and sensitive areas like ours. The 5G network we build this spring and summer will be used to showcase how rural businesses and communities could benefit from these latest technologies. Many people have asked why we would get involved in 5G trials when residents can't get a 2G, 3G or 4G signal. Those previous technologies were focused on phone

users, whereas 5G opens up many more uses relevant to rural areas – from agriculture and coastal safety to defence and maritime. More about this work can be found on [the 5G RuralDorset website](#).

The project includes a [workstream](#) looking at how existing assets, such as buildings, under-road ducting and street furniture often owned by public sector organisations, could be used to speed up delivery of fixed and mobile connectivity.

5G RuralDorset is a research and development project to inform national learning rather than part of a mass improvement/roll-out programme. However, through the project we are working with Vodafone and other experts in the field and these contacts, as well as the national profile we are achieving, will certainly help us into the future.

### **Verifying real-world mobile coverage**

As we develop our mobile portfolio it's important that we have accurate data showing real-life coverage and how local communities are using mobile networks. Anecdotal evidence suggests the [Ofcom coverage maps](#) are not a reliable picture of coverage, informed as they are by data provided by the MNOs.

Dorset Council has kicked off a project to verify/map coverage by the four MNOs listed above using equipment placed in our refuse collection vehicles. This won't directly improve coverage but will give us independent data to inform future conversations with the industry around current coverage levels and will inform our thinking around where we might intervene/bid for new funding. Mobile networks need power and backhaul (connection to the internet) so we will increasingly co-ordinate our fixed fibre and mobile interventions.

This is a 6-month pilot and I understand we expect to have some meaningful initial results shortly .

### **Shared Rural Network**

This £1 billion deal between the Government and mobile operators promises to bring 4G coverage to 95 per cent of the UK landmass by end of 2025. For more information go to the [Shared Rural Network website](#).

This is potentially good news, but details remain sketchy at this point and, of course, it doesn't guarantee coverage for specific rural communities such as Char Valley

### **In conclusion**

To answer your question, the only people who can improve mobile coverage are the MNOs. They hold the majority of licensed spectrum - the invisible radio frequencies that wireless signals travel over – necessary to make mobile phone calls. [Ofcom](#) is continually reviewing how spectrum is allocated and by engaging in projects like those above the council is placing itself in the best position to understand the issues around mobile networks and secure the best possible connectivity for local people and businesses.

I have worked with Russell Goff of Dorset Council to bring forward the installation of replacement Footbridges on footpaths in the Marshwood Vale Ward. I understand that Dorset Council are looking to install some 42 footbridges in Dorset

I have received questions concerning the future of oil fired central heating systems as a consequence of the publishing of the Energy White Paper in December 2020

Having made enquiries it is my understanding there are no current proposal to outlaw oil fired central heating systems there is a move towards more renewable energy resources. This has already begun with the introduction of Minimum Efficiency Standards requiring properties in the rental sector to reach band E. The proposed trajectory is to have every property in the private rental sector to reach band C by 2028. I have also read that it is possible that even privately owned and occupied property to reach band C by 2035. This will a massive problem for rural property owners where properties are often older I further understand that there are possible failings of EPC methodology in respect of older traditional built solid wall properties

Clearly since the publication by HM Government of the Energy White Paper on 14 December 2020 there has been much discussion. about the whole energy sector as the Country looks to net zero emissions by 2050. There will be issues also such as how electricity grids will have to adapt if they are to cope with ore de centralised power generation in the future but also the greater demand for electric power as the Country moves further to switch towards electric vehicles.

The Government has the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) a grant designed to promote the use of renewable heat that I understand continues to 31 March 2022. Those who join the scheme and adhere to its rules receive quarterly payments for seven years for the amount of renewable heat that their system produces . This can help offset some of the cost of installing heat pumps as an alternative to traditional boilers

I have in previous months written about dogs not being kept on leads I was very angry to read of dog attacks on sheep , leading to the animals suffering and farmers suffering loss of stock and distress andvngst associated with the selfishness of others. I reiterate that there are legal rights for farmers which can extend to shooting dogs that attack livestock.

I am aware of continuing concern re bus and train time tables. It is ironic that these concerns persist given that Dorset is anticipated to have a very busy tourist season. I have corresponded with portfolio holder Councillor Ray Bryan who as being in charge of Dorset's buses is also responsible for the Dorset Council response to the climate and ecological emergency

· I have corresponded with the leader and Highways portfolio holder seeking their thoughts on whether further electric vehicle charging points could be installed in the Marshwood Vale

· The Annual Council meeting of Dorset Council has been brought forward to May 4  
· We look forward to hearing definitive recommendation as to how local government meetings should be conducted between May 7 and the general easing of lockdown on 21 June

Best regards

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