

As I write this it has been announced that there have now been in excess of 150,000 Covid deaths.

Despite the current HM Government advice, which continues to restrict normal living whether through advice to work from home , the wearing of masks in certain places or indeed the predominance of virtual meeting as opposed to face to face meetings there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel. This takes many forms, whether through Melplash show planning their AGM and also the Annual Dinner to tour operators for overseas travel reporting bookings returning to normal .

Clearly the vast majority of us want a return to normality as soon possible.

Before I set out the latest Covid news and report on other matters, I want to write about road safety.

I have to comment that there can be few things more harrowing to receive than a road safety report after a fatality . The reports give details of road circumstances, weather conditions on how an accident is perceived to have occurred and is completed after work undertaken by both Dorset Police and the Dorset Road Safety expert . I know from my discussions with our MP Chris Loder , that he is truly shocked at the number of fatalities and serious injuries as a result of accidents.

## FARMING

In the same way that there is concern about the financial viability of shops, retail units and pubs, there is also concern about the financial viability of farming operations.

There is, and always has been in my time as Local Authority Councillor some speculation about the Dorset Council Farms Estate. Regardless of this, what we do know is that there may never have been a greater time of change for the farming industry than now. The reason I devote so much of this report to Agriculture in this January 2022 report is a result of the following.

1. The lack of Dorset Council meetings since the last BGPC meeting, In the interim our waste collection service has, I believe, continued to perform very well.
2. The importance that I am sure we place on the appearance of the country side and the survival of small family farms in particular.

Following our departure from the EU the Marshwood Vale farmers and indeed Dorset Council tenant farmers and farmers across the Country are impacted by the introduction of a new farming policy under the Agriculture Act 2020.

There is huge concentration on key farming issues, succession , capital investment and profitability . Few farmers will be unaware that half of their Basic Payment Scheme ie BPS money will no longer be available by 2024. This is I would argue a main concern of the farming community .As farmers seek to diversify this will have an impact on all of our residents . Other uncertainties include whether relatively high sales prices that have prevailed in many ( but not all ) sectors will continue. if consumers change their buying habits post pandemic . There is also the requirement to be legally compliant and to address environmental issues especially climate change .

One of the greatest concerns is for small farms and tenanted farms, in particular It is my understanding that approximately 50 per cent of land is farmed by tenant farmers ( including of course the tenants of the Dorset Council farm's estate.) My concern is based on the fact that BPS

is being gradually reduced this has been hugely important to all active farmers and that tenant farmers should not be excluded from receiving agri- environmental subsidies.

For those farmers amongst you there should be a concern that safeguards that exist for those who rent under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 should extend to Farm Business Tenancies such that tenants will not be prevented by landlords from accessing the schemes .

I will detail the concern .There are three proposed ELM ( Environmental Land Management) schemes and in respect of the first 2 of them there are uncertainties as to the extent to which tenant farmers will benefit. The reasons for the uncertainties with respect to the first 2 schemes involve :

1 ) The Local Nature Recovery Scheme, which will not be widely available until 2024, that amongst other things, encourages farmers to create new habitats and plant trees

2) The Lanscape Recovery Scheme which seeks a more dramatic approach assisting farmers and land owners who manage 500 to 5000 hectares (and note hectares not acres) and so only benefiting larger agricultural concerns

3) The sustainable Farming Incentive which will fund sustainable farming practices and should be widely available

You may wish to contact your Member of Parliament to address any particular concern you may have for the future of the countryside and indeed family farms. There are a great many who are uncertain about the future prospects for farming and would welcome clarification of eligibility, rules and payment rates for schemes 1 and 2 above .

## RIVER CHAR

Char Valley Parish Council commissioned Dorset AONB and Dorset Wildlife Trust to prepare an initial report on the State of the River Char and Monkton Wyld Stream. The Community project has stated aims to clean, revive and restore the River Char .

I am pleased to say that following the report being published I along with many Char Valley Parish Councillors and members of the public attended the launch of the River Char Community Project on Saturday 11th December with a short talk about the report and the setting out of plans for working parties and other actions in 2022. This was followed by an informal riverside walk commencing from Becklands Organic Farm. Speakers included :

**Ian Rees, Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Dorset AONB)**  
**Nick Gray, Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT)**

## BUSES

Work on the Enhanced Partnership is continuing though there is no definite date by which the Department for Transport will respond to the request for £92million of funding both capital and revenue within the submitted BSIP .

The Enhanced Partnership Plan high level vision will have objectives which is expected to closely follow the Bus Service Improvement Plan. It is expected that the Enhanced Partnership scheme will

set out the precise details of how the Bus Service Improvement Plan vision and objectives will be achieved . These details will include any commitment made by the Local Transport Authority and standards to be met bus operators.

The legal framework mentioned in (2) above will include governance and user representation.

Town and Parish councils have I understand been invited to stakeholder meetings next week  
If there are any issues arising, please e mail me.

## DORSET COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN

Following the consultation last year ,Dorset Council continue to gather information to inform the proposals for the plan. This will involve consideration of national planning policy including the NPPF ( National Planning Policy Framework and the expected housing need for the County. The Local Plan is an important document as it will assist in the delivery of appropriate housing facilities and employment in the long period to 2038.

Dorset Council is aiming to publish the final draft, which will be available for comments in the middle of this year. The timescale then on is for the comments on the final draft to be considered prior to submission to a planning inspector in the Autumn of this year. If all these dates are adhered to public examination will then follow on from the comments of the planning inspectorate in 2023 with adoption in late 2023.

## Latest updates on COVID-19 in Dorset

**Published: 7 January 2022**

### This week's overview

Case rates have continued to rise quickly over the past week across Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, and remain higher than at any other point during the pandemic. Infection rates are very high across the country.

In Dorset we have started to see hospitalisations related to COVID-19 rise, up to 74 from 55 in a week. Our hospitals and other critical services are also under increasing pressure due to staff absences related to COVID-19. The number of deaths related to COVID-19 has remained relatively stable and continue to be much lower than during previous waves of the pandemic.

Testing remains key to stopping the spread and protecting others. If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, you must [get a PCR test](#) and self-isolate whilst waiting for the result. [Lateral flow tests](#) should be used by anyone without symptoms, particularly before meeting others - if you get a positive test, you must log the result and follow self-isolation guidance. Most people no longer need to get a PCR test to confirm a positive lateral flow test.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself from serious illness caused by COVID-19. As well as people getting boosted, it's been great to see people in Dorset coming forward for their first and second doses in recent weeks, and we'd urge anyone who hasn't yet had their jabs to come forward. There are plenty of [opportunities to get vaccinated in Dorset](#).

## Latest data

The visualisation below shows the seven-day case rate, people in hospital beds and deaths for the latest data periods available. There can be a time lag to allow us to report the most complete data. We provide this local update weekly, but you can find information daily on the [UK Health Security Agency data page](#).

*N.B. the dip in the number of hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients on 28 November is due to missing data for one of the hospital trusts.*

## Summary

Summary of the most recent data:

- 7 day case rates per 100,000
  - BCP: 1,406.6 (compared to 1,087.9 in last update on 31 December)
  - Dorset: 1,190.1 (compared to 783.1 in last update on 31 December)
- Confirmed cases in last 7 days
  - BCP: 5,584 (compared to 4,319 in last update on 31 December)
  - Dorset: 4,521 (compared to 2,974 in last update on 31 December)
- Current COVID-19 patients in hospital beds in Dorset: 74 (compared to 55 in last update on 31 December)

COUNCIL TAX .

Many of you will have read reports that the Dorset Council tax budget could have been worse. In fact, Council Tax will be determined at a full council meeting in February 2022. Dorset Council has been helped by larger than expected settlement from the Government although only for one year. I thought I would share with you some thoughts on additional Government funding. First of all, the extra funding will assist with our perceived budget in circumstances where income has been reduced as a consequence of Covid whether reduced income associated with property or through reduced use of paid for services eg reduced income from leisure centres The Council should then reflect on allocating further funds to assist with housing delivery .The Council is under an obligation to fund work to prepare for the social care market reforms In addition, funds should be earmarked for social care demand and inflationary pressures next year.

Best regards.

Councillor Simon Christopher

Dorset Councillor Marshwood Vale