

Cllr Christopher's E-mailed Report.

There are so many common issues in the Marshwood Vale Ward across the individual parish councils
There are also quite a few points arising from this Full Council meeting.

Before I go further, I will write about the sad death of Colonel Geoffrey Brierley OBE former Dorset County Councillor for the Marshwood Vale Ward and head of transport and highways in his capacity as Councillor to May 2013 Geoffrey was totally professional and very direct, I paid tribute to the Colonel at Full Council following detailed thoughts from Dorset Councillor Daryl Turner who succeeded him as Dorset County Councillor for the remaining years of the old Council to May 2019. The Colonel and Mrs Brierley moved from Whitchurch Canonicham to Charmouth in 2007 . I cherish what I learned from them and clearly am saddened by the news

I turn now to the A35 which is so busy this year and concerns so many of you
Mr Ben Hampton Route Manager South West Operations Highways England is in the course of arranging a meeting with me to discuss safety matters in respect of the A35 through the Marshwood Vale Dorset Council Ward It is envisaged that this meeting will take place in the next few weeks.

On 14 July 2021 in connection with the Chideock to Bridport path / Cycleway Leader of Dorset Council Councillor Spencer Flower stated :

“ I am in the process of having a conversation internally about your request and hope to get back to you within the next week or so”

Many people have been lobbying for the project for a number of years and I will keep on arguing for this project to move forward.

I invited the lead member for Highways responsible for Hell Lane and Shutes Lane to visit

His response by e mail on 23 July 2021 was to state that “the Hell Lane discussion has been fully answered from my understanding “ (I would be interested to hear the reaction of Chideock Parish Council to that statement!)

He did add that “the cycleway / foot way on the A35 is something more strategic than the level I work at so would be best if you ask Ray (meaning Dorset Council Highways portfolio holder Councilor Ray Bryan”

Clearly, I look forward to discussing these items at the Parish Council meeting

Our roads are particularly busy. People of working age are often particularly busy and stressed at this time of year. Therefore I would encourage residents to drive with extra care.

It is perhaps also appropriate that last week was farm safety week . This is the 9th annual Farm Safety Week, a collaborative campaign organised by various farming organisations and I quote from the relevant website “united in the aim to reduce the number of accidents on farms and bring about a change in culture that makes unsafe practices socially unacceptable.”

The message for the 2021 Farm Safety Campaign was RETHINK SAFETY.

It would also be a failure on my part to not highlight the increased concern about likely cliff falls on the coast line particularly close to Seatown.

As I mentioned earlier 15 July saw a virtual meeting of the full Dorset Council
Amongst items voted on included The Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and also a motion for a move away from Cabinet Style administration.

Clearly these items will have attracted some press attention and you will be able to read about this elsewhere in detail . However in brief the climate strategy was approved there was much praise for the architect of the all-party strategy Councilor Ray Bryan . However it has to be said that some members did not think that the strategy went far enough .

There will be a community governance review of parish councils in the Dorset Council area

Dorset Councillors debated the merits of moving from a Cabinet System it was agreed that this would be debated further with a view to moving away from the Cabinet Style arrangements after the 2024 Dorset Council elections

Before I leave matters relating to full Council, I would add two further points firstly the resolve of Dorset Council to improve social mobility as discussed at the meeting and secondly the demise of Cheddington Parish Council which has ceased to exist due to lack of people coming forward to serve as parish councillors .

It has to be said that being a Councillor one has to be aware that you become acutely aware of the conduct of others. I will leave you to reflect on the demise of Cheddington Parish Council . The Dorset Council given the current Covid restrictions resolved that it was minded to delegate to the Chief Executive of Dorset Council to dissolve Cheddington Parish Council under part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 after due consultation with the Dorset Council Ward member Councillor Mrs Rebecca Knox

With respect to environmental matters I have to report that I was invited to attend a very brief meeting held in a socially distanced way by the Dorset branch of the Country Land and Business Association . I say with respect to environmental matters as this was followed by a tour of the farm to see the site for a small number of large wind turbines on a brown field site

It is good to see so much physical activity in keeping our local village halls and churches up together and meeting the aspirations of residents both in terms of their actual use, but also their environmental impact. There was much discussion of what was termed the big society a decade or so ago and evidence of collaboration is very much in my mind in the Dorset Council Marshwood Vale Ward

Dorset Council Cabinet has continued to have virtual meetings.

The most recent meeting of the Cabinet was on 22 June 2021 as social distancing requirements were not lifted on 21 June 2021. Members were advised that where a Cabinet decision was required the appropriate Portfolio holder would be the responsible individual to make the decision whilst considering the views expressed by the wider Cabinet membership

Indeed this will also be the case this week as the Dorset Council cabinet is also meeting on Tuesday 27 July at 10 am . This will be a virtual meeting and it has been announced that all Dorset Committee and Cabinet meetings etc will be virtual meetings until September

You will be aware that the 2 main budgets in Dorset Council are in respect of care for Adults and Care of Children . There are also huge challenges around mental health generally and in respect of learning difficulties .

One report that was considered was the Dorset Care, Support Housing and Community Safety Framework. Against a backdrop of an ageing population The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health Laura Miller, advised that the Council Sought to provide high quality personalised care and support services meeting the needs of service users whilst ensuring that they are delivered and financed in a sustainable way. The current Dorset Care Framework for Older People expires shortly and the Dorset Care Framework for Learning Disabilities needs to be refreshed to include mental health.

Procurement is governed by the Public Contract Regulations 2015 which allows Public Sector Bodies such as Dorset Council in terms of health and social care to adopt /innovate procurement models to best meet the needs of service users.

The framework will be in place for up to 10 years and will enable providers to join at any time (provided clearly that specific criteria is met) instead of fixed opening periods.

The proposed new Framework tool is the key to delivering flexible contracting with all sectors of the provider market including (and I believe this is absolutely crucial) micro enterprises.

It is fair to say that Dorset Council continues to be under pressure both in terms of dealing with an increase in the number of planning applications and has been attempting to deal with an increase in the level of land charges searches. Across Dorset we are seeing changes in rural property ownership and re-evaluation of business models within the rural community , (which I will write more about later,)but often these changes involve the need for planning applications.

One of the common areas of concern across the Marshwood Vale Ward is the desire for better bus services

With respect to Bus Back Better which was first publicised by H M Government in March 2021, I would like to reiterate that the Dorset Council bus service improvement plan will be published in Autumn 2021. Now it has to be said some residents are desperate , some are not and indeed some are quite happy to engage in car sharing which works very well for many

Councillor Ray Bryan ,portfolio holder for Highways Travel and Environment ,has been working on the Dorset Council Bus Service Improvement Plan.

He is quoted as saying “In response to the Government’s new National Bus Strategy which aims to make bus services more attractive, cheaper, easier to use, Faster, more reliable and greener

The plan, is the so-called Bus Service Improvement (i.e. BSIP Plan)

As a recap a plan will be a collaboration with local bus operators, community groups, and with passengers themselves

The Council has reviewed the operations that Dorset has through the National Bus Strategy. Their preferred approach is to develop an Enhanced Partnership for the council area

An Enhanced Partnership is an agreement between the council and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. It requires an agreed vision of improvements and an action plan that will form the Bus Service Improvement Plan”

The plan will involve 5 key aspects:

- Network and services
- Fares
- Ticketing
- Passenger facilities
- Bus priority measures

Councillor Bryan has further said that

“By working in close collaboration with the operators and local groups we will develop and deliver an ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan for Dorset that puts the passenger first, raises further the perception of bus travel ,generates mode shift away from private cars, and sees decarbonisation of the local transport fleet

As a point of record the official notice is as follows

“By executive notice dated 29 June 2021 Dorset Council gave approval to proceed with the Development of and Enhanced notice of the intention to prepare an Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme, as required and set out in section 138F of the Transport Act 2000

As part of the process to develop the BSIP, the Council will be talking with community groups ,business groups passengers and the public to collect a wide range of thoughts and ideas which will help to shape the future vision and priorities for our bus network.

The BSIP will be published in the Autumn”

Since the Full Council meeting on Thursday there has been confirmation of a Dorset Councillors members webinar at the end of the month together with clarification of timescale

Before I set out the timescale a reminder of the abbreviations

BSIP is Bus Service Improvement Plan
EP is Enhance Partnership

Commence July 2021 Stakeholder engagement round 1 and public survey
August 2021 Define level of ambition, stakeholder engagement round 2 and Bus Service Improvement Plan outline

September 2021 Stakeholder engagement round 3 and adopted draft BSIP
with a Cabinet Meeting 7 September)

October 2021 Publish BSIP and EP formal discussion and notice

EP Statutory Consultation

December 2021 Finalise EP

January 2022 Second formal notice (if required)

March 2022 Formal Making of the EP

April 2022 Activate EP

I make no apology for stressing the importance of the Bus Service Improvement Plan that will be published in Autumn 2021 but the importance of public transport generally to include improvements to rail services and stations

Several parish councillors are aware that I have continued to lobby Councillor Ray Bryan (mentioned above) and the lead member for Highway Surfaces Councillor Cherry Brooks to address the need for extensive parts of our local road network to be re surfaced. There are assurances that further resurfacing , and I refer in particular to the B3165 will take place this autumn. The B 3165 is used by many residents from both Char Valley and Upper Marshwood Vale Ward and unlike the A35 is managed by Dorset Council

We are of course in the middle of the most intensive part of the farming year
While there are many who like seeing so much agricultural machinery working in the fields the fact that the machinery has to travel on our roads causes concern to some residents who write to me in connection with damaged roads, drains and verges. Of course, some damage may for instance be caused by say buses and lorries .

I would naturally be interested to hear the further thoughts of parish councillors and residents . I say this as I have within the Marshwood Vale Ward experience of receipt of communication citing oversized agricultural machinery. In my experience agricultural machinery does not appear to be any larger than that you would see across the West Country

I am writing this as we anticipate further easing of Covid restrictions and at a time when Covid cases are rising again across Dorset.

Hospitalisations have been increasing .The vaccine programme is however assessed as having a significant impact on the number of people being seriously unwell. That is the number of people requiring hospital treatment is at a much lower level compared to when Dorset was experiencing similar case rates in previous waves.

I thought I would now turn to the question of the management of Dorset Council Owned Tree Policy . It is my understanding that Dorset Council is responsible for approximately 250,000 trees . The responsible Portfolio holder stated that town and parish councils were continually consulted and also confirmed that he was working closely with the County Farms in respect of tree replacement.

This now leads to the portfolio holder being quoted as stating that it was important to plant the right tree in the right place. This may seem an obvious comment but never more relevant

I write this as it is a H M Government target to plant 30,000 hectares a year by 2025 this is under the DEFRA England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024

As part of the plan ,it was announced that the Forestry Commission would launch a new England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)

There is much discussion of carbon sequestration biodiversity and timber production. And which tree species and location to assist in a fight to prevent soil erosion

We are now seeing tickets being sold for some local agricultural shows e.g. Honiton at the start of August and Gillingham and Shaftesbury in the 3rd week of August . Both shows are unusually going to operate as 2 day shows due to ongoing concerns and capacity numbers appear somewhat uncertain Dorset County show in Dorchester and Melplash are both Cancelled

These events are hugely important as are the functioning of livestock dispersal sales , as farming is seen to operate in a manner closer to normality and a time when there is so much stress in the farming community . This stress includes the high incidence of TB in cattle and increasing testing requirements and cuts in Basic Payment i.e. support payments. Income is being lost in the reduction in the Basic Payment Scheme which is being phased out Payment rates for the new sustainable farming incentive have now been set out by Defra Secretary George Eustace . This will have an impact naturally on farmers in the Marshwood Vale ward and indeed for farmers on the Dorset Council Farms Estate.

Many of you will be aware that HM Government are encouraging farmers to move towards what is termed sustainable farming but also encouraging farmers to collaborate be more efficient and diversify .

In fact, with enhanced capital allowances for businesses in assisting with their tax it can be argued that HMG is being very generous in encouraging all rural business to be more efficient but increased efficiency and indeed diversification is not without broadband challenges.....

Finally, within the Marshwood Vale Ward I have received notice of difficulties in respect of private drainage. You will be aware that not all of the extensive Marshwood Vale Ward is on mains drainage. The specific difficulties involve soakaways and I would welcome your thoughts by e mail as to the extent to which private drainage is a problem for individual householders and their neighbours and the wider community

While I understand there are no imminent parish council meetings after Tuesday 27 July , please do not hesitate to contact me

Best regards

Simon

Councillor Simon Christopher
Dorset Councillor Marshwood Vale
077988 33715