



Dorset Community Action

RURAL TRENDS IN DORSET

JULY 2010 – SEPTEMBER 2010



Launch of new services for Axe Valley Ring and Ride (Dorset Media Co)

CONTACT DETAILS:

Rachelle Smith

*Dorset Community Action, Community House,
The Barracks, Bridport Road, Dorchester, DT1 1YG*

Direct phone: 01305 216411

Email: rachelle.smith@dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk

Website: www.dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk

Charity Registration Number: 1060910
Company Registration Number: 3320011

CONTENTS	PAGE
INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS	3
1. VILLAGE SHOPS, PUBS AND POST OFFICES	3
2. VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY HALLS	4
3. SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE	5
4. TRANSPORT	7
5. HOUSING	8
6. HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE	10
7. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	11
8. COMMUNITY SAFETY	12
9. PLAY AND YOUNG PEOPLE	13
10. EMPLOYMENT	14
11. ARTS AND CULTURE	15
12. OTHER ISSUES	16

INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

This is our third *quarterly* Rural Trends report. We knew in the last quarter that the national picture was changing rapidly and that a new era of austerity was upon us. Until the details of the October spending review come out however and perhaps not even then, the exact effects on our communities here in Dorset are uncertain. We know the County Council are considering some serious cuts in services that will have an adverse effect on many. But we are not yet clear what cuts the District Councils will feel compelled to impose, nor what the scale of job losses in the public sector will be and what impact this may have elsewhere.

Change is taking place at an astonishing speed. No sooner had the government announced the abolition of Regional Development Agencies, for instance, than they were calling for expressions of interest for their proposed replacements, Local Enterprise Partnerships. The announcement of the abolition of Primary Care Trusts means local GPs must start gearing themselves up for doing their own commissioning. As a variety of quangos go, we are left wondering where the services or grant streams they provided will be placed or whether they too will go.

At the moment then there is some confusion about who has responsibility for what now and in the future, as to what the cuts will really mean on the ground to our residents and communities and also as to how best to respond to the new challenges and opportunities this new era ushers in.

1. VILLAGE SHOPS, PUBS AND POST OFFICES

Pubs continue to operate in a very difficult environment. A report from the British Beer and Pub Association last year saw the sharpest annual decline in alcohol consumption since 1948. Anecdotally many pub owners expect to see fewer pubs over the next few years. Not only villages but also market towns are struggling to keep their pubs open. For example the tenants of the Phoenix Inn in Gillingham High Street do not intend renewing their licence when it expires in November.

This does not stop some very spirited campaigns to keep pubs open or even to re-open already closed ones. In Motcombe the Royal Oak Action Group are stepping up their campaign for Hall and Woodhouse to re-open their village pub after the rejection of their planning application to turn the building into three flats. Hall and Woodhouse has stated that it intends to re-submit a planning application before the end of the year that will 'satisfy the local population'.

Meanwhile in Toller Porcorum the Community Alert on Pubs and Hotels (www.communityalertonpubs.org.uk) are calling on West Dorset District Council (WDDC) to use their powers to compulsory purchase their derelict pub, the Old Swan, from Palmers brewery. The hope is a compulsory purchase order would oblige Palmers to either re-open the pub, to sell it on the open market or to sell it to the Council. The group are urging the Council to follow the example of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, which threatened to use such an order and thus convinced the owner to sell the pub to the Council. However WDDC, which would like to bring the pub back into use, says it does not have the funds for compulsory purchase, particularly at the present time.

There was disappointing news nationally when the coalition government axed the outgoing government's three year £3.3m package to make pubs more successful and help communities buy into struggling pubs in order to keep them operating.

However there were a few bright spots amidst the gloom. The Admiral Hood at Mosterton and the Old Ox Inn at Shillingstone re-opened as did the Albion Inn in Wimborne which was gutted by fire last summer in a blaze that also destroyed the post office. The Halsey Arms at Pulham was the regional winner in the Best Community Pub category of the Great British Pub Awards.

On the shop front Motcombe Community Shop and Post Office saw its official opening with a ribbon cutting ceremony at the shop followed by a ride on a decorated double-decker bus to the village hall for a celebratory tea party! The new shop has an amazing sixty volunteers trained to work the tills and run the shop. Local craftsmen from the village helped with the refit and much of the shop's food stock is local produce from within a ten mile radius. The shop also features a coffee shop and internet café

The owner of the village shop and post office in Cattistock has applied for planning permission for change of use. The application will be determined in November and a public meeting has been called before this to discuss the proposal. The owner has been unable to date to sell the business as a going concern. However, going by previous cases, it seems most unlikely that the application will be successful. In Stourpaine, Shillingstone and Chetnole the post offices have all closed and discussions are continuing to find suitable venues to host replacement outreach services. At the moment it looks possible an outreach service may be located in The White Hart at Stourpaine and in the village halls at Shillingstone and Chetnole.

In Tolpuddle a public meeting has been held and a group formed to progress the idea of a community shop. They have of course an excellent model nearby in Briantspuddle whose community shop won the new 'People's Project' Award at the recent Village of the Year competition. Plans to develop a community shop also continue in Trent.

At Hazelbury Bryan the owners of Star Farm who had been selling home reared meat two mornings a week decided to open a farm shop and deli in the barn next door. Now known as Oakleys Farm Shop (www.oakleysfarmshop.co.uk) it stocks a wide range of local produce and a deli counter of cheeses, pates, olives, charcuterie etc. All the meat on sale is reared at the farm where the owners keep Aberdeen Angus cattle, sheep and various traditional breeds of pigs.

2. VILLAGE AND COMMUNITY HALLS

One of the savings the County Council is considering making in the next financial year is to axe completely its Capital Grant Programme to village halls. As we said last quarter the age of large scale schemes to replace village halls seems to have come to an end and we are entering an age where 'make do and mend' are much more the order of the day.

This has not dimmed the enthusiasm of Village Hall committees to make improvements however. In Mosterton for example they have been successful in obtaining £8,000 from Awards for All plus £2,000 from Grassroots Grants towards improvements to the car park and the kitchen. Charminster Village Hall was granted £10,000 from Awards for All towards improvements to the heating and insulation and £5,000 from Grassroots Grants too. Gussage St Michael Village Hall was also granted £10,000 from Awards for All towards their hall's renovation whilst Toller Porcorum received £10,000 towards a new floor. Burton Bradstock Village Hall were granted £3,000 from the Grassroots fund too so altogether a very successful quarter for village hall grant applications!

In July Leigh became the first village hall in Dorset to obtain 'Hallmark 1' accreditation. Hallmark is a national quality scheme for Village Halls and demonstrates that Leigh is a truly well managed hall! In fact Dorset Village Halls seem to be very interested in ensuring their halls are run properly: an amazing twenty-six committee members from twenty halls attended the September training programme organised by the Village Halls Adviser, 'Trusted and Valued' on best practice in hall management.

The Dorset halls website (www.dorsethalls.net) now receives over four hundred hits a month and has forty halls listed in its venue finder. On the subject of ICT, Dorset Adult Education and Dorset Youth Association launched an innovative round of training in village halls in September. The sessions began with free computer workshops, continued with sessions on social networking (blogging, Facebook, Twitter etc) and finished with expert tutors answering questions and queries and ran in Millborne St Andrew, Leigh, Charlton Marshall and Corfe Mullen.

Meanwhile in Sixpenny Handley the Village Hall committee have started a monthly series of family films on Saturday or Sunday afternoons. The aim is for this to be part of the Artsreach programme and for there to be regular showings of films in the months where there is no live production.

A different kind of community building was in the news in the summer when the High Court ruled that a case concerning a long running dispute over the ownership of the Literary and Scientific Institute building in East Street in Bridport should be adjourned for six months. At an open meeting in July it was unanimously agreed to investigate whether it was feasible for Bridport Museum to relocate there and create a new Heritage and Study Centre, focusing of course on Bridport's historic rope and net industries. We await developments with interest!

After eighteen years hard work, Leigh Park Community Centre, on the outskirts of Wimborne, finally opened its doors on 24th September. (www.leighparkcommunitycentre.org.uk). Leigh Park is an estate that was without a meeting place of any kind and its Residents' Association have been arguing the case for a Centre for many years. A SureStart Centre is housed in the same building and already the building is booked for use by a parent and toddler group, for ballroom dancing, Pilates, art class, boxing training and the Guides.

Also following discussions between Christchurch Council and the Friends of Mudeford Wood (FoMW), an initial agreement has been reached that will keep Mudeford Wood Community Centre (www.mudefordwoodcommunitycentre.co.uk) open and managed by the community. A consultation carried out by the Council concerning the future of the facility resulted in the creation of FoMW who mounted a campaign to keep the Centre open. The agreement will lead to the drafting of a Business Plan allowing FoMW to take over the running of the facilities within two years. In this instance, this is probably the only way the Centre will be saved from closure.

3. SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE

Again there was much in the national news about the axing of the Building Schools for the Future Fund. Fortunately Dorset was less affected than other areas and the plans for the new extension to the Sir John Colfox School in Bridport went ahead over the summer and should be ready any day now. Work was due to start at Easter but the main contractor went into administration. The new facilities include a conference centre, media suite, kitchen, café and performance area.

Similarly extensive works are also currently taking place at the Gryphon School in Sherborne, designed to give students more space as the school has vastly increased in size from 850 pupils in 1992 to 1600 today. Queen Elizabeth's School in Wimborne is still expected to be complete by next summer but it has run vastly over the original budget.

However plans for a major consultation on the notion of developing a Portland Academy were cancelled after the coalition government's announcement on calling a halt to Building Schools for the Future. This would have seen in the first instance Royal Manor Arts College, the island's secondary school, having a major revamp and this will not now go ahead. However the plans for the new Chesil Cove Federation School, reported on in the last Rural Trends, will still go ahead with a new £8.5m school replacing the current Underhill Junior School and Brackenbury Infants. It will cater for 315 pupils in all and also have a 26-place day nursery. Still on Portland, the children at Grove Infants School could not return there at the beginning of term when high levels of radon were detected in the building. The children have been hastily temporarily relocated to St George's Primary in Easton and it is hoped the school will re-open after half-term by which time remedial work will be completed.

The re-building of Mountjoy School in Beaminster took a step forward when the plans got the go-ahead and building is expected to start in the spring. As part of the agreement Beaminster Technology College, on whose site the school is being built, will get improved sporting facilities and car parking and a better footpath linking the schools to the town centre. Meanwhile after two years of hard work a new building opened for Bourton and Zeals pre-school. The move to the purpose-built setting in the grounds of St George's School in Bourton was helped by financial support from the Big Lottery, the County Council, Zeals Parish Council and Signpost Housing amongst others.

Elsewhere plans to change the Purbeck system from three-tier to two-tier got the go-ahead at full Council. There were some fears about where the money was to come from (it is expected to cost £36.5m) but there is believed to be enough money available for the scheme even if there is a cut back in government funding. Under the plan thirteen first schools will become primaries, four middle schools will close and the Purbeck School will expand to cater for years seven and eight.

School uniform seems to have been an issue this summer, perhaps reflecting that some families are feeling the pinch in these times. There was concern at Beaminster School at the introduction of a regulation coat with warnings that if students were not wearing this, the coat they were wearing would be confiscated. At Milldown Primary in Blandford the issue was about shoes, with pupils being expected to wear different shoes indoors and outdoors. Although this was to protect the new carpets, some parents felt it required too much valuable teaching time being taken up with changing.

There was mixed news on the Ofsted front this quarter. Sturminster Newton High School was judged to have 'turned around' after a decline in standards and progress last year. It is now back to being considered a good school. However an Ofsted inspection of Outlooks Children's Centre on Portland was highly critical. Although it considered the level of care provided to be good with an enthusiastic and committed staff, it judged it did not effectively target its services at those families living in the locality who need the help most, including teenage parents. (It must be said this view was vigorously disputed by some local teenage mothers who thought it very good).

Some teachers have begun to express their anxieties about future budget cuts. As is well-known Dorset is one of the least well-funded education authorities in the country and is already attempting to make savings and may well be obliged to make more once the October spending review comes out. In his end of term newsletter to parents, the head of the Woodroffe School in Lyme Regis outlined some of his concerns. The school had intended to apply for a third specialism in modern languages - it already has two in visual arts and maths and computing – but was stopped for lack of funds. He wrote *'The key message at the moment is that funding will become even tighter, and for a school in one of the lowest-funded authorities in the country, this is potentially very serious indeed. The local authority is already tasked with making in-year savings of around £1.75m and this will undoubtedly have an effect on Dorset schools'*.

Let us hope these cuts will not affect GCSE and A level results, which yet again this year seemed to be outstanding in the County. Ferndown Upper School reported the best results in the school's history; results showed continuing improvement at the Sir John Colfox in Bridport, at Twynham School in Christchurch and Thomas Hardy School in Dorchester became the first Dorset school to achieve over 90% of pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A – C. And the list goes on!

Finally a brief outline of life in a Dorset rural primary school. Charminster First School recorded some of its activities during the school year in the Frampton News. The school was involved in a national story telling project with its younger children whilst Key Stage 2 children were involved with the national 'Every child a writer project'. The older children had specialist cricket and badminton coaching throughout the year and a huge variety of extra-curricular clubs were on offer. These included 'Let's get cooking' to help children and their families develop their cooking skills, gardening, aerobics, choir, computer, football and animation.

The breakfast and after school club was well used. There was much music, including participation in a choral festival. Then there was the Christmas play, with the whole school taking part and performing in the ballroom at Herrison Hall in Charlton Down. The choir club sang at the day centre at Broken Cross and other old people's homes. The link with the church was well-maintained and the school association organised a summer barbecue and a Christmas fair.

4. TRANSPORT

On the transport side news is again rather depressing. With services such as health ring-fenced against cuts it is obvious that services such as public transport will need deeper cuts to compensate. Already the County Council has reduced the transport budget and this is ahead of the spending review. The current chaos for car and bus users alike trying to travel anywhere between Portland and Dorchester has also caused much discontent. In September where in addition to the roadworks caused by the building of the relief road, sewerage improvements and the waterproofing of the bridge linking Portland to the mainland caused enormous tailbacks, any semblance of a bus timetable had to be abandoned.

There were a couple of bright spots nevertheless. Firstly Purbeck District Council and Dorset County Council managed between them to pledge the £3 million Network Rail required to re-signal Worgret Junction at the same time as they re-signal the main Weymouth – Waterloo line in 2012. The work means that the prospect of a permanent year-round train service running from the main line at Wareham through to Corfe Castle and Swanage comes one step closer.



*Launch of new services for Axe Valley Ring and Ride
(Dorset Media Co)*

In West Dorset a £60,000 grant from the District Council has allowed an extension to the Axe Valley Ring and Ride scheme to the villages of Askerswell, Hooke, Loders, Mapperton, Powerstock, North Poorton, Burton Bradstock, Chilcombe, Litton Cheney, Puncknowle, Shipton Gorge and Swyre. The new service will pick passengers up from their home and take them principally to Bridport but also to Dorchester and Weymouth at a cost of £4 return.

However as the funding for this comes from the underspend on concessionary fares it is not clear how long it will be sustainable. So the message here clearly is to make sure it is very well used!

In Christchurch the dial-a-bus service was re-launched, to celebrate five years of the service. Although it now has 225 registered users it was felt there were still members of the public unaware of the service and hence the aim of the re-launch was to ensure wider publicity to all those eligible to use it. Also in Christchurch three bus services were merged to create a more regular and useful route for local people. So the C1, C2 and 750 have now become the 111, which now serves parts of Highcliffe not previously on a bus route and also extends to Hurn outside of school hours.

A new way to enjoy the Jurassic coast was introduced as a trial scheme for three months in July with the introduction of the X43. The new link between Swanage and Weymouth via Lulworth Cove was introduced as a trial service until 5th September following requests from local people. The scheme was funded as part of the Purbeck Transportation Strategy. It is considered as one way of reducing traffic congestion whilst still enabling people to explore the coastline.

September saw European Mobility Week as part of which the County Council organised some cycle training events and activities in particular around being 'bike polite'. The Bike Polite code encourages cyclists to be considerate of other road users. The County Council have also been promoting safety for motorcyclists by organising 'Ride Safe' classes at four locations around the County – Chickerell, Morden, Osmington and Furzebrook. In each case the riders were then taken out on roads considered particularly dangerous such as the B3157 or the A35 and A31.

5. HOUSING

As we have repeatedly said over the years in Rural Trends affordable housing is the most pressing need in Dorset. However there is much uncertainty over funding, which will not become clear until after the October spending review but is obviously likely to be bad news. North Dorset CAB recently warned that the 'chronic shortage' of affordable housing is unlikely to improve, with the Council struggling to house over a thousand people a decade after it made affordable housing its top priority. The housing charity Shelter has warned that government cuts could plunge West Dorset into a housing crisis it will never recover from and lose vital jobs in the process. The construction industry in West Dorset employs 2% more people than the national average so obviously stands to be particularly hard hit by any cuts in the building programme. In Purbeck for the first time in many years the Council has been forced to revert to using bed and breakfast accommodation as the number of people presenting as homeless has increased and all their available temporary

accommodation is full. Other Districts also report that their temporary accommodation is full. It is too early to tell yet whether the proposed changes in housing benefit will have an effect locally.

On the plus side however diggers finally arrived on site at Buckland Newton to start construction of ten homes, three years after the initial planning application went in! Buckland Newton Community Property Trust (BNCPT) own the land on which the houses are being built and whether the homes are rented or shared ownership they will always revert to the Trust, thus ensuring the properties remain available for local people in perpetuity. The houses are being built as timber-framed and super energy efficient with rainwater harvesting and computer controlled underfloor heating. Applicants have to be on the housing needs register, but in addition must have strong work or family ties to the village.

Also in West Dorset the District Council agreed to set aside £160,000 towards the development by Magna of forty-six affordable homes in the Brewery Square scheme in Dorchester. Magna is now in the process of applying for funds from the Homes and Communities Agency for twenty-six flats for social renting and twenty flats for shared ownership. Magna revealed at its Annual General Meeting that it had built ninety-nine new affordable homes in the previous year and has plans to build another four hundred and thirty-five over the next three years. In August it announced it had won an award from Quality Housing Services for its 'outstanding achievement in sustaining the highest standards of service'.

In East Dorset the District Council gave planning permission for the re-development of Glynville Court at Colehill. The existing property was built as a sheltered housing block but no longer meets modern day standards and all the tenants have been rehoused. The intention is to erect five houses and seventeen flats on the site although the development is by no means certain because of government cuts. The housing association is in discussion with the District Council as to whether other funds might be available.

Synergy Housing reached the topping out stage of its new extra care scheme in Blandford which is now due for completion in October. Also in Blandford Persimmon Homes displayed its proposals for seventy-five homes, including some affordable housing, on land next to Archbishop Wake Primary School. Persimmon wishes to take local people's views into consideration before submitting a planning application.

In August the issue of the Weymouth Women's Refuge came to the fore again. Weymouth and Portland Borough Council ruled out selling the building but agreed to look at two other options proposed. They were to grant a new lease to a body prepared to run a domestic violence service in the existing building or to allow the sale of the building with the proceeds ring-fenced to buy a new refuge. Campaigners were given six months to come forward with a viable business plan and are busy working on this currently.

July saw the release of a study on the 'Housing Requirements of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Households in Dorset and Poole', conducted by the University of Salford. www.shusu.salford.ac.uk/page/bme_dorset_poole The study showed that most respondents lived in private rented housing with only 4% altogether living in social housing. The private rented sector was also the sector where households registered the greatest amount of dissatisfaction – although most people were satisfied with their accommodation whatever sector they lived in. However some tenants clearly had issues with poor conditions or landlords not doing repairs. The report suggests councils should work more pro-actively on licensing houses of multiple occupations (HMOs) and improving the standard of private accommodation.

Other points of interest the report uncovered are that Choice Based Lettings seemed poorly understood and that the Citizen Advice Bureau is easily the most used service for information. This suggests there should be very good co-ordination with local CABs and council housing officers to ensure BME residents get all the information and advice they need on housing.

6. HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE

Compared to the rather bleak picture elsewhere in this report there are a few good news stories to report on the health front. A new mobile optician has begun, known as the Eye Bus and offering services to five areas of the county: Beaminster; Holnest, Marnhull, Puddletown and Shillingstone. This is the only mobile opticians in the County and should prove a boon in particular to patients who find it hard to travel.

Earlier this year, mental health service users throughout the country were asked for their views on their experiences and Dorset services scored highly in the results that were released in September by the Care Quality Commission. Patients were asked their opinions on such topics as whether they were treated with dignity and respect, out of hours contact, having their views taken into account and so on. Overall patients rated the care they received at 76 out of 100. The top rated trust in England scored 78 and so Dorset Community Mental Health Service was scored (again) as one of the best in the country.

Dorset GPs again scored highly in the national GP patient survey. Out of 151 PCTs, Dorset was joint first for patient satisfaction in the care received, joint first for the frequency with which patients could see their preferred doctor and joint first too on being able to book ahead an appointment. They came joint third for how quickly patients were able to see a doctor, joint fourth on how easy it was for patients to contact them by phone and joint tenth for patient satisfaction with opening hours.

Significant progress is being made across the south west region as a whole in improving services for those with dementia and their carers, according to the South West Strategic Health Authority, and the Alzheimer's Society agrees with them. The charity says it is '*pleased with the advances*' made since the launch of the Dementia Awareness campaign.

Also good news was the launch of a new service at Dorset County Hospital to provide thrombolysis to stroke victims around the clock 24/7. Dorset is now the first County in the South West where such a service is available. Speedy treatment is of the essence after a stroke, particularly as far as prescribing clot-busting drugs is concerned.

On the other hand consultations on the obligatory Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment revealed the serious shortage of pharmacists in the County. There is a heavy reliance on locums and Boots have recently recruited four Spanish pharmacists locally in an attempt to fill vacancies. This means that even if it was considered a new pharmacy was a good idea – for example there is no 100 hour pharmacy in easy reach of the far west of the county (Bridport / Lyme Regis area) - realistically one has to ask where the pharmacists to staff it would come from. Anecdotally it appears young, newly qualified pharmacists are not attracted to an area of high house prices and little nightlife.

There was anger at the revelation in July that the Dorset County Hospital had paid £248,041 for 97 days work plus £19,539 in travel and food expenses to its interim Chief Executive whilst trying to cut its financial deficit. Nurses were incensed as

many claim frontline staff are being reduced or having their hours cut. The Audit Commission also issued a damning report on the way the hospital had tried to overcome its financial problems, saying *'some of the processes for implementing this change have been poor and do not demonstrate value for money.It has given insufficient consideration to the costs of employing interim directors and consultants and whether this represented value for money'*. The Auditor is also concerned that the previous trust board displayed poor financial leadership and the current board has yet to efficiently tackle the situation and finalise a plan to achieve a stable financial position.

Poole Hospital also has to deal with a £4.5m deficit, partly caused by the fact they treated more patients than anticipated. The result is a closure of sixty-five beds with more patients to be treated as day patients. The hospital is anxious to retain its track record – last year it was rated the safest hospital in the UK – but this may yet prove difficult.

At the moment it is too early to say what impact the abolition of the Primary Care Trust will have on healthcare services in the County, although clearly it is expected it will result in redundancies initially. The intention is for consortia of GPs to take over the role of commissioning the £70 billion worth of care currently commissioned by Dorset PCT and the Strategic Health Authority.

There was some good news on the community care front. Older people on Portland stand to gain when Island Community Action were awarded £198,000 over five years from the Big Lottery Fund towards maintaining and developing their services for older people. Exercise and fitness classes will be provided as well as swimming sessions, healthy eating workshops, cookery classes, walks and a lunch club. A community transport club will provide better access to doctor and hospital appointments. A gardening service, basic DIY and repair service and a befriending service are also planned. The intention is to work with other providers such as Age UK for example, to maximise the benefits and increase the range of activities available.

A new group, known as Bright Sparks, started at Broadmayne SureStart Children's Centre to offer help and support for parents of Down's syndrome children. It was the only support group in Dorset for such parents and so far thirteen families from across Dorset have registered to attend the monthly sessions. A similar group has also now started in Christchurch.

Otherwise there is relatively little to report on the community care front. However, clearly there are indications that adult services such as day centres may well be hit by impending cuts. At the moment, however, we are still in the 'wait and see' stage.

7. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The fight for improved broadband in the County continues. The Community Partnership Executive for North Dorset (CPEND) have obtained £10,000 of funding from Sowing Seeds to explore what best mix of technology would improve broadband for North Dorset. The research includes surveying computer users to find out what the level of demand is for fast broadband, what people use broadband for and what improvements in speed would allow them to do that they can't do at the moment.

As we have discussed previously BT will lay a new cable to Weymouth and Portland for the 2012 Olympic sailing events and it is hoped to persuade them to leave the infrastructure in place afterwards. However this will not help North Dorset as the current plan is to bypass the area and take the cable along the coast. BT is also

investing heavily in superfast broadband in much of the country but again not North Dorset.

There is little else to report in this section as digital switchover is now complete in the County.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY

Crime figures fell again this year: police figures for 2009 - 2010 show a total of 300 less crimes than the year before with a fall of 5.3% in violent crime and of 8.4% for burglary. The latest figures for Dorset from the British Crime Survey show that 53.8% of respondents agree that the police and councils are doing a good job in tackling crime, which is also a slight improvement on the previous quarter's figures. However police are expecting to face a reduction in manpower once spending cuts have been confirmed in the autumn.

Funding towards the Dorset Safety Camera Partnership has been cut by the County Council as well as Bournemouth and Poole. As a result the number of fixed speed cameras will be reduced and the Dorset Road Safe partnership will instead focus on mobile camera operations. Police community speed watch schemes such as the one used in Warmwell and the one recently started in Chideock will also continue. In these schemes volunteers are trained in the use of a camera device and can record the registration numbers of speeding vehicles.

Road safety is a big issue in the County and the police launched a 'No excuse' campaign throughout the County. The police stopped more than 10,000 people in the first six months of the campaign, 21% of them for failing to wear their seat belt. Figures for those using a mobile phone whilst driving at 680 were also high.

Other initiatives included the launch of a 'Horse Watch' scheme, similar to Home Watch, where members share information about suspicious incidents, attempted thefts and so on. The Horse Watch scheme also gives members the opportunity to mark their equine equipment at tack marking sessions, making it more likely to be recovered if it is stolen. (www.police.uk). Sherborne Pubwatch got itself into financial difficulties because licensees had failed to pay subscription fees but the new Chairman is hoping to bring the group's financial affairs back into proper order now. The group runs a radio-link system between the town's pubs to protect customers from troublemakers. This year three new members have signed up to the scheme, which should improve its financial viability.

The police also launched a campaign to tackle domestic violence, to coincide with the World Cup. Domestic violence increased during the last World Cup, possibly exacerbated by excessive drinking and the intention was to stop history repeating itself. Victims were encouraged to report incidents to the specially trained officers available to support and investigate.

The Gillingham Casualties Union were busy over the summer: this group of eighteen members act as 'casualties' for the emergency services, emergency planners etc when they act out simulations of fire evacuations, explosions and so on. The group joined other groups from across the South West for an exercise on Portland to help the Dorset RNLi, coastguards, police, air ambulance, paramedics and fire officers prepare for a hypothetical disaster at the Olympics. Two members from Beaminster and Bridport were obliged to spend a very cold day in the mortuary at the County hospital as part of this exercise!

There were a number of high profile arson attacks in Dorset over the summer leading the Fire Service to issue a warning to farmers to look out for possible arsonists. Crews from Dorchester and Bridport were called out in September to a barn fire which destroyed the building and thirty tonnes of straw and hay and crews from Poole and Bere Regis were called to another attack in East Morden when a pile of tyres and four hundred bales of hay were set alight. On a more positive note a family who helped save five children from a burning house in Abbotsbury received Certificates of Commendation from the Chief Fire Officer at the Fire and Rescue Service Annual Awards Ceremony.

9. PLAY AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There was disappointing news this quarter when the government axed the Playbuilder fund, meaning schemes scheduled for later in the programme will not now go ahead. Fortunately the long-awaited splashpark at Christchurch Quay had already received its £130,000 share of the funding and opened to delighted shrieks in August. The Borough Council contributed the other £100,000 with £5,000 also coming from Christchurch Community Partnership. The pool is shaped like the bow of a boat and is surrounded by water cannons. Local children had a say in choosing the design and it replaces a 1940's pool that had become too old to repair.



A new £100,000 play area also opened in Abbotsbury – finally after four years of persistence and hard work! The playground has been very cleverly designed on an area beneath St Catherine's Chapel and includes facilities for children with disabilities. The launch was a memorable day that included a drumming workshop, face painting, story telling, pony rides and refreshments.

Nearby Portesham also had something to celebrate when Portesham Playground re-opened: it was closed down three years ago when its old play equipment was deemed unsafe. A Portesham Playground Action Group was formed and raised £3,000 by its own fundraising efforts. Other sums were received from Community Spaces, the Parish Council and West Dorset District Council raising £30,000 in all, enough to re-instate the playground next door to Portesham First School.

In West Lulworth the need for a play area was identified in the Parish Plan in 2007 and now has been made possible thanks to the efforts of the community and local organisations. £26,000 has been raised to build a safe area in which a variety of sports such as basketball and miniature cricket can be played. In Charlton Down the cricket club has been able to install two bay nets which are free for the public to use after receiving £17,000 in grants.

The summer saw a variety of play activities and activities for young people, including the now familiar Holiday Hangouts organised by Dorchester Youth Extra with help from the District Council, Dorset V, Dorset Community Action and Poundbury Residents Association. All the activities were free, open to anyone aged between eight and eighteen and included activities such as junk modelling, badge making, arts and crafts workshops, table football, a bouncy castle, graffiti art, and the mobile skate park.

Skateparks were much in the news as Sherborne formed a Skatepark Project group to look at how the existing facilities could be upgraded. A new skatepark could cost in the order of £200,000 but the group have the model of the highly successful Skatepark in Dorchester to look towards. This has proved extremely popular and is also credited with producing a dramatic drop in instances of anti-social behaviour in the town.

For the seventh year running PlayPlus celebrated National Playday with a day of fun packed play activities at St Osmund's Community Sports Centre in Dorchester. This year the weather was particularly unkind with very heavy showers but nevertheless hundreds of children turned up to join in with all the activities. Funding from the Aiming High Project ensured the day could be enjoyed equally by disabled children as well and there was plenty for everyone to do.

As far as young people are concerned, Dorset Youth Association has been able to fit out a new room for disabled children and young people. The room is converted from an old integral double garage and was made possible by a grant of £38,660 from the Aiming High for Disabled Children Short Breaks Programme. Additional funding from various charities has enabled the room to be fitted with new equipment. The whole space has been designed to be fully accessible including the kitchen with low level worktops and so on, ramped areas, a wet floor etc. It is expected the room will be used for computer groups, training, art, cookery, life skills and a range of other activities and it is available for hire at very reasonable rates.

10. EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment figures fell throughout the County in July compared to the June figure but rose again slightly in August. This is a little worrying as seasonal work should be at its peak in this month. Unemployment is still well below the national average however.

There are a few worrying signs nevertheless. For instance the shock announcement that Stone Firms on Portland had gone into administration means the potential loss of fifty-nine jobs there. The firm operated three quarries and was a leading supplier of world-famous Portland stone to the construction and masonry industry. Apparently the company has got into difficulties as a result of the economic downturn, which has hit the construction industry particularly hard. Although the administrators are hoping to find a buyer to take it on as a going concern this is by no means certain.

As we know the County Council has announced job losses are 'inevitable' as it makes major cuts in order to save £40m. Although the intention is to manage the loss of posts as far as possible by natural turnover and internal redeployment, the Leader of the Council admitted '*it is inevitable that the savings required will mean a reduction in posts and staff employed*'.

One of the services to have its budget cut is Connexions, which provides the careers service to young people aged between thirteen and nineteen. £148,500 has been cut from its budget this year and staff who leave are not being replaced.

On the other hand Tesco have announced plans to double the trading area of its store at Blandford St Mary which it says should bring 125 new jobs to the area. However the announcement has not been met with much enthusiasm by other local traders who question the need for a larger supermarket particularly with the arrival of Waitrose in Wimborne. J & G Environmental, a Blandford based waste management company, intend expanding their recycling scheme across the country. Since last year the company has been turning waste corrugated cardboard into bedding for

horses and other animals. Using custom-built cutting and shredding equipment the company processes and bales cardboard for stables across Dorset. They are now planning to extend production as the product has been met with such enthusiasm. (www.jg-environmental.com).

The frequent tensions between economy and employment versus the environment came to the fore again this quarter when the wind energy company Ecotricity submitted revised plans for four wind turbines at Silton ([www.ecotricity.co.uk/wind-parks/\(active\)/planning](http://www.ecotricity.co.uk/wind-parks/(active)/planning)). The original plan for six turbines was turned down by North Dorset District Council in 2009 but they have now submitted new plans. The action group Save Our Silton (SOS) instantly re-launched its campaign of opposition. Such tensions are likely to arise again more frequently as the search to develop renewable energy sources continues.

11. ARTS AND CULTURE



Enjoying the band at Tolpuddle

This quarter has definitely been the quarter of the festivals! From the annual Tolpuddle festival in July through to the new and highly successful Bridport Hat Festival in September (www.bridportthatfest.org) a huge range of festivals have taken place across the County, most blessed with good weather this year. Some of the festivals are very well established such as Tolpuddle and Beaminster whereas others are very new. For example, this summer saw what was billed as the UK's first classical music festival, Serenata. Held on a three acre site near Kimmeridge on the Smedmore estate, the weather was unkind and attendance was disappointing, despite the allure of some top names in classical music such as Emma Johnston.

Most other festivals were highly successful however, including Stock Gaylard's Oak Far, the b-side multimedia arts festival in Weymouth and Portland, Swanage Jazz Festival, Sturminster Newton Cheese Festival and numerous others besides.

It has also been the quarter for films in Dorset. Firstly two British films came out filmed in Dorset, 'Tamara Drewe' with stunning parts for Yetminster and Halstock and 'From Time to Time' directed at a number of Dorset locations including Athelhampton House and Puddletown. Secondly film and multi-media more generally were the theme of many of the festivals, such as b-side, which included an open air showing of the film 'Neferatu'.

Yet again there were doubts cast on the future of Dorset carnivals when Wessex Circuit Carnival clubs were forced to introduce air brakes and reduce vehicle height at a cost of around £15,000 a float in order to comply with new regulations. The ten carnival clubs include Sturminster Newton, Blandford, Shaftesbury and Gillingham with the remainder being in Somerset.

On the museum front Chalk and Cheese awarded the Purbeck Mineral and Mining Group £100,000 towards its project to open a new ball clay mine museum next to the Norden park and ride station of the Swanage Railway. Lyme Regis Museum secured a generous £47,000 from the Monument Trust which will enable it to appoint a part time outreach and learning officer (www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk).

The Lyme Regis Development Trust is still optimistic about raising the £6.75 million it needs to bring an Education Centre to Lyme Regis within the next five years. Also in

Lyme B Sharp, a highly successful youth music group, has been saved from closure by obtaining a £10,000 grant from the West Dorset Partnership, £3,000 from Grassroots Grants, plus £800 from the Town Council and £500 from West Dorset Youth Bank. Most of the money will be spent on Peer to Peer, a scheme where B Sharp works with six new youth music groups across West Dorset (www.bsharp.uk.com) introducing them to music making and building their confidence in their ability to perform.

Bovington Middle School again hosted the 96th Dorset Arts and Crafts Association Exhibition with artists and craftspeople from across Dorset gathered to showcase their work. Dorset is now the only County still to hold such a show, although they were commonplace a hundred years ago or so. This year there was a special exhibition of beadwork as well as displays of Japanese embroidery and kimono, felt making, traditional Dorset buttons and smocking and much else besides.



Another interesting project got under way on Portland with the development of the MEMO (Mass Extinction Memorial Observatory) Project, a monument to all the species of animals and plants that have become extinct in modern times. The County Council Cabinet agreed to commit a one-off grant of £30,000 from its special projects budget for next year towards the £150,000 cost of developing the project. This contribution triggers two further pledges from private benefactors towards the development stage. The full cost of the memorial is expected to be £3 - 5m, with the aim of completing it by 2012. The County Council will not be asked to provide any further funding. The rest is expected to come from private donations, corporate sponsorship, charitable grants and in-kind contributions.

Portland was chosen because of its links with the earth sciences through its position on the Jurassic Coast where fossils of extinct species can be found in the cliffs. It is also hoped that the project would lead to the creation of new jobs on Portland and become a draw for many visitors. The project would see the construction of a memorial made from Portland stone blocks, each carved to depict the 850 species of animals and plants known to have become extinct since 1662 - when the last dodo was seen. Through the memorial and associated education projects, MEMO aims to raise international awareness of the ongoing threat to the world's biodiversity and the need to save the 17,000 species currently on the endangered list.

As can be seen from the above arts and culture appears to be thriving. However, although this picture is generally very positive, leaked reports suggest this sector may well suffer from cuts in funding and in particular the County Council intends to close up to nine libraries in its efforts to make budget savings.

12. OTHER ISSUES

Green issues have again been to the fore. Both County and District Councils continue to put their weight behind the 'Love food hate waste' campaign, which in September launched its autumn campaign to encourage people to make better use of their freezer rather than throwing food away. The new food waste collection in the Sherborne area of West Dorset has seen 115 tonnes of food recycled and made into compost to grow turf. Since the scheme started recycling rates have increased from 29 to 39%.

There was much concern in Swanage when it was learned that the proposal to build a new recycling centre at Prospect Business Park might be scrapped in the light of current financial constraints. However after weeks of speculation county councillors agreed to forge ahead with the new £2.8m. state of the art household recycling centre. Councillors felt that as they had already made a significant investment towards the project and that the new centre would cost around £50,000 a year less to run than the current one it was sensible to continue with the plan. In addition the Council are committed to achieving a 60% recycling rate in Dorset by 2015 - 16 and they are confident a new centre will increase the amount of waste recycled or composted.

Councillors are still trying to find a suitable waste transfer site in Bridport however. A report commissioned by the County Council looked at seven possible sites including Gore Cross which had been the subject of heavy campaigning against its use. The Cabinet has now agreed to look at the possibility of using Broomhills off the A35. Councillors also backed a planning application by Eco Sustainable Solutions to build a new anaerobic digester plant at Piddlehinton.

Allotments continue to be much in demand. Orchard Park Garden Centre at Gillingham have offered some of its unused land to Gillingham Town Council for allotment use and this has proved to be very popular. Ferndown Town Council is currently negotiating with Haskins Garden Centre over a three acre field at Green Lane as they have a waiting list of over eighty. Volunteers working on the Shaftesbury Home Grown project have successfully cultivated a four acre plot and have been busy planting – and harvesting! – mange tout, potatoes, courgettes, onions, lettuces, broad beans, beetroot, parsnips, runner and French beans, butternut squash and all kinds of brassicas. Unfortunately there have been legal problems with the establishment of twenty-six allotments at Lyme Regis so that project is now on hold.

A huge number of fish were killed in September when 180,000 litres of slurry leaked into the river Wriggle. The slurry containing poisonous ammonia leaked from a faulty sluice at a farm in Chetnole and as many as 18,000 fish may have died. Better news on the river front however is the project by Dorset Wildlife Trust to carry out a bio-diversity enhancement scheme along the Millstream of the river Frome in Dorchester. The intention is to increase the range of habitats available for wildlife.

Portland appears to have become a major battleground in the fight against bio-fuel power plants. NOPE (www.nope.org.uk) No to Oil Palm Energy organised a mass protest towards the end of September at the proposal to build a bio-fuel plant at Portland Port. The planning application has been accepted and the legal challenge has failed so it will be interesting to see what further action the organisation proposes to oppose this plan.