



Asbatch Farm, Bitterley

Wireless broadband solves connectivity issues in southern Shropshire

We recently caught up with Vanessa Watkins, who lives on Asbatch Farm a 160 acre livestock farm, raising cattle and sheep on the western slopes of Clee Hill in south Shropshire.

Vanessa contacted Connecting Shropshire in July 2018, asking how to go about getting a faster broadband connection. Having reviewed the options, we put her in touch with Secure Web Services (SWS), a Shropshire company that has been delivering rural broadband over its fixed wireless network since 2005.

Having spoken to SWS the very same day, Vanessa applied to the Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme, a national Government Scheme to provide a subsidised connection to eligible premises with download speeds of 2mbps or lower. The following day, Vanessa's application was approved and she placed her order with SWS. The Subsidy Scheme covered the cost of a standard installation which meant a saving of £235, which SWS recoups from DCMS, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport.

The new broadband service was installed in August 2018 connecting to the SWS transmitter on Weston Hill, some 5½ kms distant. The SWS broadband service requires a direct and unobstructed Line of Sight between the property and one of their transmitters. Line of Sight is important because the broadband signal is transmitted via highly focused, very low power radio waves and any obstruction can degrade the signal making it unusable.

Vanessa told us that she found SWS staff very approachable and they kept her well-informed throughout the ordering and installation process. Vanessa went on to say that the SWS broadband service is much better (and cheaper) than her previous broadband connection, to which she was often unable to connect at all. Vanessa did say that the new service does slow down on occasion and, although she's not raised this with SWS, she will do so in the future.

Now that Vanessa has a decent broadband connection, it has made so many improvements to her home and work life, here are a few examples:

As a District Nurse, Vanessa is now able to log into her work account from home to check her workload/caseload, making it easier to plan her working day.

Asbatch Farm is now able to easily complete Defra and other official forms, such as updating their holding register on the British Cattle Movement Service website.

Other applications that Vanessa is now able to use quickly and easily, include downloading television programmes from on-demand services, such as BBC iPlayer.

Since 2016, Vanessa has been letting out a deluxe Shepherd's Hut as holiday accommodation. Having a good broadband connection now means that Vanessa can easily manage bookings that come in by email from the agents, with UK Holiday Cottages (<https://www.holidaycottages.co.uk/heart-of-england/shropshire/bitterley--shepherds-rest>). A review from a guest earlier this month said, "Absolutely lovely hut. Could not ask for more. Comfy, cosy, private with a stunning view! Owners are great, nothing

too much trouble". Having a good broadband connection on the Farm also means that guests can access the internet during their stay.



Shepherd's Rest: holiday accommodation with a view

In the future, Vanessa says that she'll definitely be exploring other uses of her faster broadband connection, such as online banking and managing the farm accounts.

Vanessa is so happy with the service from SWS that she's passed their details on to other local residents. The good news is that, SWS is continuing to expand its network in the area, with a new transmitter at Titterstone providing coverage to more homes and businesses in the SY8 postcode.

If anyone living or working in the Shropshire Council area is struggling to get the broadband connection they need, please get in touch with the Connecting Shropshire broadband team by email on: connecting.shropshire@shropshire.gov.uk or call 01743 252203.