

The meeting with BT went as well as it could have done, we think. It was 'hosted' by Neighbourhood Watch, who apparently are organising these meetings nationwide with the BT representatives. BT was represented by Nav, who's from West Yorkshire.

Of course, it's not all sorted, not remotely, but Nav really did get the strength of feeling and understood the specific issues that we have here. He says he will be following everything up, including with the parish council, and it will be on the January parish council agenda. About 20 of us turned up overall – some at 12 noon, others joining us later.

Of course, the usual spiel was spieled....about how everything has to be shifted onto the new system because the old one is 100 years old, out-of-date and costing a lot to maintain, and it has to be done by the end of 2025 (why then, I'm not clear). The usual assumption that 'everyone' has a functioning mobile phone with a signal that works during a power cut is part of the national BT plan for rolling out Digital Voice.

Nav was left in no doubt whatsoever about the weakness of the mobile signal locally when it's not completely absent, and the failure of the masts in power cuts. Apparently BT won't shift you onto Digital Voice if you have NO mobile signal (how come people in Garrigill have been moved on to it, then?) but a weak or intermittent signal will be regarded as having a signal. Nav quickly grasped how unacceptable this is, and the serious difficulties likely for many people. He says that there is work ongoing to improve the mobile masts and signal, including improving the coverage, so we can hope that one day.... Of course, this won't solve everything for those without mobile phones, though I think there was some way in which that network might pick up Digital Voice calls in the event of a power cut.

The difficulty for the ambulance people/first responders was raised, something that didn't seem to have been realised. What also became clear was the lack of real helpfulness (and even some mis-selling) from some BT staff when they've been contacted and while Nav isn't in a position to solve that, he was concerned and will follow up what he can. We also got the sense that it really hadn't been recognised how remote we are, how dispersed the small population is, how poor the mobile signal – and that all these things should have led to an entirely different approach.

Anyway, Nav is following some specifics up, BT is getting in touch with the parish council and this will be on the parish council agenda on Monday 8 January. I'm sure we'll all keep doing all we can to keep everyone in our community safe – and that includes having phones and emergency equipment which work.