

## ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT APRIL 2021

### COUNCIL MEETINGS

This week parish and town councils will have been made aware of the high court judgment made confirming that permission for remote meetings would not be extended beyond 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021. This effectively means that all Council meetings scheduled for the 7<sup>th</sup> May or later will have to be held in public, face-to-face. No provision is available for remote attendance including mixed hybrid (part attendance) meetings. A further legal challenge has been launched but at the time of writing the result of this is not known. On 25<sup>th</sup> March the Government launched a twelve week call for evidence on allowing remote or hybrid meetings on a permanent basis via their website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence>

For further info. contact [Megan.McKibbin@communities.gov.uk](mailto:Megan.McKibbin@communities.gov.uk)

At this month's SSDC FC, it was agreed that under delegated powers given during Covid informal 'advisory' meetings could still be held remotely, with the final decision on matters discussed being taken by officers. This process will remain in place until early July.

### COVID PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

Weekly updates have been forwarded to all interested parties as and when they are received. Somerset's Covid-19 data has largely shown a decrease in the number of cases this month, whilst showing small variations daily, and with a minimum number of new cases in educational and social care settings. The latest data is attached along with this report.

The message remains - stay local, minimise travel and continue to follow 'hands, face, space and fresh air' to minimise catching Covid-19 and spreading it to others – even if you have been vaccinated. Transmission rates are highest in enclosed spaces and evidence shows the virus is overwhelmingly airborne, so it is important to consider proper ventilation at home, in workplaces and in the car. There is clear evidence of transmission through car sharing and in households, notably shared housing, with onward transmission in workplaces.

Rules on visiting care homes have relaxed slightly to allow two visitors; people are encouraged not to visit if they have any symptoms, make sure they test before entering, and even if a test is negative, continue to take all preventative measures.

Testing continues to be one of the greatest defences against Covid-19 and everybody can now access free regular Lateral Flow testing kits from local pharmacies. Although not 100% accurate, these have proven to be an excellent screening tool to identify cases that may have gone undetected.

Guidance on how to use a home lateral flow test kit is available on this link

[COVID-19 PCR home test kit instructions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/covid-19-pcr-home-test-kit-instructions)

Everybody over the age of 40 can now book a vaccination either online or by calling 119. We have now exceeded 1 million vaccinations in the South West.

Follow the Somerset Dashboard <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/covid-19-dashboard/> link.

A summary of decisions of the Somerset Covid Engagement Board can also be found on this link.

[Decisions - Somerset Covid-19 Engagement Board 23.04.2021](#)

### COVID BREACHES

In response to local enquiries the police have provided the following data:

13 breaches in the Ilminster area so far, which is considered very low.

- 3 party related (2 resulting in Penalty Notices being issued and one finished before arrival)
- 1 for someone not self-isolating
- 1 for incorrect use of a support bubble which resulted in 2 Covid Warnings
- 1 for someone visiting indoors which could not be proven
- 2 calls for a Gym opening against Government Restrictions, this could not be proved
- 5 turned out to be malicious calls with no breaches

I have also received a number of complaints about the aggressive approach of Covid Marshalls in the town.

## **DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY**

A new Finance Officer, Shayne Scott, has been appointed, with a start date yet to be confirmed. Key objectives and performance indicators for the coming year, in response to recent inspection results, are in the final stages of being agreed.

## **FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET**

As mentioned last month, the two bids (Stronger Somerset and One Somerset) have been submitted and the official government consultation has now ended, with an announcement of the outcome expected before Parliament's summer recess.

## **SSDC SCRUTINY**

Scrutiny meetings this month have largely focused on the future of local government in the county and the call by the district councils for a public poll. As a result of correspondence received from the Secretary of State legal advice has been sought. Further information is available below.

## **SSDC DISTRICT EXEC.**

The SSDC post-Covid Recovery & Renewal Strategy has been approved. This outlines the rationale and approach to be taken, in addition to explaining the objectives they seek to achieve, work streams, focus areas and resources required. £464,140 is to be transferred from the COVID Recovery Reserve to the revenue budget for 2021/22 within the Place & Recovery Directorate.

## **SSDC FULL COUNCIL**

There have been two full council meetings this month, mainly due to key decisions to be taken in relation to local government reform and the call for a poll.

An update to the Environment Strategy has also been approved.

At this week's meeting it was agreed to proceed with holding a poll in relation to the Future of Local Government in Somerset, further information will be provided when made available.

## **SSDC APPOINTMENTS PANEL**

Following this month's appointments panel meeting, of which I am a member, three new directors have been successfully appointed. All applicants for these roles were internal candidates.

Director of Service Delivery – Kirsty Larkins

Director of Strategy and Support Services – Nicola Hix

Director of Place and Recovery – Jan Gamon

In the wake of the resignation of CEO Alex Parmley, who is to move to New Zealand this summer, the appointments panel is due to meet again next week to interview and internal applicant for his replacement for a period of 18 months.

It is expected that where internal appointments are made interim officers will fill these roles.

## **HOUSING NEEDS**

Research covering the impact of proposed Government changes to the Standard Method for determining the annual housing need in each LA focusing on the SW reveals the extent to which the level of house building needed has been over-estimated by up to 11%.

The Government's final proposals are awaited. In the meantime, SSDC have re-calculated the 5-year housing land position and interest has been shown in how this will affect SSDC's Preferred Options proposals and the draft Local Plan. It is felt that final Government proposals will be too late to have an impact.

Locally, the extent to which it is felt that planning consents over and above real need have impacted adversely on rural communities has been noted.

<https://lichfields.uk/blog/2020/august/25/keeping-up-the-pace-what-does-the-new-standard-method-mean-for-the-south-west?north-east>

## UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Due to the impact of Coronavirus over 5.5 million people are claiming Universal Credit. Many of them are new claimants; people having been negatively impacted by Coronavirus.

Parish Councils are encouraged to circulate the following link on their website and via social media to support those who need to make claims. <https://www.jobcentrerearne.com/universal-credit/>

## SSDC PLANNING

I continue to receive a significant number of complaints from local residents and parish councils in relation to planning matters on a range of concerns.

To enable me to follow up specific cases it is useful if the planning reference could be included in any correspondence.

At this month's Regulation Committee concerns were raised that neither local parishes nor the locally elected member were made aware of the applications relevant to them that were being considered. I have raised this and am assured that this was an oversight and has now been addressed.

**Rural Designation** – there are currently no designated rural areas outside official AONBs in South Somerset and an application is to be made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to consider applying a rural designation status to parishes within South Somerset district under S.157 of the Housing Act 1985.

This designation will help to protect rural communities from potential future national policy changes that seek to accelerate housing delivery but which will reduce affordable housing delivery for them. Currently only a small area of the district within AONBs would qualify. If the application is successful, SSDC will be able to include a policy in the Local Plan Review for a lower threshold for affordable housing contributions in parishes with a rural designation, rather than the current requirement for affordable housing on residential schemes of over 10 homes, or where the site has an area of 0.5ha or more; a blanket approach introduced by national policy and guidance. The current affordable housing unit threshold policy limits the supply of much-needed rural affordable housing, often resulting in schemes that do not meet community needs. There is little evidence that requirements for affordable housing on small housing sites in rural areas is unviable as there is evidence to demonstrate that housing in rural areas commands much higher values compared to urban areas. A lower threshold can only be set in the Local Plan Review after the approach has been appropriately viability tested.

## GALION DEVELOPMENT – BROADWAY HILL

This application for 50 houses has generated considerable interest from local residents. Formal consultation has been delayed due to the lack of documentation provided by the developer.

## HIGHWAYS - A358

Following the previous A358 Community Forum event in March, further forum events are being held early in May. At these events Highways England will be delivering a presentation on their latest design plans for junctions and local access, followed by an interactive Q&A to obtain direct feedback on the plans.

At the request of previous attendees these forums will be held in smaller groups to enable greater discussion and dialogue with the project team. Session dates and times have been circulated to PCs. Places at each event are limited to 10 people. To register your interest, use the email address below, confirming which session you would like to attend along with a second preference. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

[A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk](mailto:A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk)

Web: <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/a358-taunton-to-southfields/>

## ROAD SIGNS

I have received several enquiries relating to SCC's policy in relation to road signs and markings, particularly in relation to requests from local residents for speed control in certain areas. This link provides further info. <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/road-signs-and-markings/>

## E-SCOOTERS

In March, SSDC, in collaboration with micromobility operator Zwings', introduced the DofT trial rental e-scooter operation into Chard and Crewkerne. Zwings are fully-funding the trial, which will help to meet SSDC's climate emergency pledge to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Uptake has been extremely strong, providing a widely used local travel option but there have been some problems with unauthorised use and damage. Zwings are working with local police to manage the trial and are being proactive in mitigating and preventing misuse by riders. The e-scooters are classified as a motorised vehicle and anyone who unlocks the vehicle and enables someone else to drive it will be penalised and could be issued points on their license, as it is a driving offence. More info. can be obtained from [community@zwings.co.uk](mailto:community@zwings.co.uk).

## BUS BACK BETTER

The Government has launched a new national bus strategy entitled Bus Back Better, backed by £3 billion of funding to aid "Levelling Up" and help the economy meet Net Zero carbon emissions. The newly formed Somerset Bus Partnership is supported by councillors and bus user groups to work with town and parish councils and SCC to input into a Bus Enhancement Partnership for Somerset to facilitate a switch from using private cars to travel by bus.

Somerset currently has the fourth lowest bus passenger journeys per population in England and is the lowest in the SW, having decreased by more than 40% over the past decade.

For further info. contact Tony Reese at [tony.reese@mail.com](mailto:tony.reese@mail.com). The Bus Strategy is online at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/969205/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969205/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf)

I have arranged to have a Zoom meeting with Tony Reese of Somerset Bus Partnership at **5pm on Mon. 10<sup>th</sup> May**. Anyone interested in joining the discussion please contact me for the link. There is the intention to focus on the 30 service at present, with the aim of having an hourly service that also operates in the evenings at weekends. In order to build the case for this it would be useful to gain specific knowledge of people who have been disadvantaged e.g. people who no longer use the bus because it does not run at suitable times; those who would use it if it ran more frequently. In order to collate data to help build our case a survey is planned, but if local residents have additional information, please feel free to pass it on to Tony Reese.

## BROADBAND

The South Somerset landscape varies between urban and rural, resulting in very patchy broadband services. SSDC are offering the opportunity for residents and businesses to become aware of the different types of broadband providers. As there are so many schemes, it can be confusing, but SSDC have attempted to put all the information in one place. For further info. about obtaining support for broadband in your community contact [econdev@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:econdev@southsomerset.gov.uk).

## SOMERSET WASTE PARTNERSHIP

At the end of June this year Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) will introduce its expanded recycling service 'Recycle More' to South Somerset. The service is intended to make it easier to recycle more, protecting the environment, tackle climate change, and save taxpayers' money. For those requiring additional info. briefing packs are available.

## CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

The draft terms of reference for how SCC propose to work together on the school reorganisation going forward have been produced. There are two areas for immediate progress:

**Finance** – every school will be provided with clarity about funding arrangements through the transition. Some schools have already considered the impact of the forecast and what their class structure may need to be. The remaining schools are encouraged to do this as soon as possible to enable financial arrangements to be put in place as soon as possible.

**Continuing Prof. Development** – SCC have committed to providing a skills audit for all staff, the results of which will be made available to them at the first project meeting to be held shortly. The responses will inform the plan and any bespoke CPD offer to be made.

## POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS

A virtual husting was held this month, to which all five candidates were invited, but only two chose to attend. Attendance was disappointing but those who did attend found the opportunity to question candidates very useful. Since then, I have been able to share information from one further candidate to interested parties.

Local electors are reminded of the importance of exercising their right to vote on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May

## SCAMS

You may recall the bogus email sent to all parishes last month cancelling a One Somerset briefing. This was reported to the Police cyber-crime unit who were able to trace the source, a gentleman in Kent, who has been interviewed and cautioned.

Ashley Jones is the new Regional Fraud Protect Advisor employed by the SW Regional Organised Crime Unit (SWROCU). His role is to undertake activity to reduce economic crime (fraud) by improving awareness and promoting preventative measures to individuals and organisations. Fraud makes up approx. a third of all reported crime. Frauds against individuals are frequently targeted at elderly and vulnerable citizens. However, as much as 80% of fraud is preventable with relatively simple safety measures to protect us from the scammers.

Ashley is offering to attend meetings of local organisations, to give an official fraud prevention presentation to raise awareness of the dangers of economic crime, highlight typical cases of previous offences, offer advice to keep people safe, as well as signposting people to resources. These sessions typically take 45-mins with additional time for questions and answers – the presentations can be delivered in-person, or via Zoom/MS Teams/Skype/etc.

Training that has been customised for individuals/groups that have frequent contact with vulnerable community members is also being offered to help identify the signs and symptoms of financial exploitation and what steps they should take to ameliorate the situation.

These sessions are particularly valuable for those who are in frequent contact with the elderly, disabled, those with cognitive impairment, or those impacted by socio-economic circumstances, such as loneliness and isolation.

Ashley is available for meetings in the daytime and evening as required – there is no charge for these services, as this is being delivered as part of a public service.

The Little Book of Big Scams, an excellent fraud prevention resource created to help raise awareness of the dangers of fraud and offering preventative safety measures, is also available. [Ashley.Jones@avonandsomerset.police.uk](mailto:Ashley.Jones@avonandsomerset.police.uk) Phone - 07889660015

## FINGER POSTS

I have received a number of enquiries in relation to the restoration of fingerposts, as some are in a poor state and require renovation. In the 1960s SCC chose not to follow government advice to replace old direction signs with more modern versions; the county is now thought to have the largest collection of historic direction signs in England, some of which are listed structures.

Whilst SCC owns fingerpost signs it is not under a legal obligation to maintain them. Given current financial constraints it is unlikely that restoration will be funded, and SCC are looking to local communities to do so. Approval from SCC is required prior to renovating fingerposts, along with agreement to the health and safety arrangements for doing so.

See the link below for the handbook produced by SCC and South West Heritage Trust.

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/somerset-fingerpost-restoration-project/>

## SOMERSET DAY

May 11<sup>th</sup> is Somerset Day and all local communities are being urged to participate.

This year the campaign [#FLYTHEFLAGFORSOMERSET](#) aims to encourage people to celebrate Somerset as a place to live, work, play and learn by flying the Somerset flag. Everyone can get involved. To find out more: [DOWNLOAD THE SOMERSET DAY EVENT PACK](#)

## STORY WALKS

A number of interesting Storywalks have been developed by the Somerset England Coast Path. These trails are a skimming stone of interesting facts, myth, history and tales linked to location.

<https://englandcoastpath.storywalks.info/>

## ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS

1/4	SSDC District Exec.
1/4	SSDC Appointments panel
1/4	Donyatt Good Friday walk
1/4	Isle Valley service
2/4	Easter Friday church walk Donyatt
4/4	Easter Sunday services
6/4	Broadway PC
7/4	DSFRA member forum
7/4	Winsham PC
8/4	SALC future of local government meeting
10/4	Samaritans training
11/4	Isle Valley services and communion
12/4	Isle Valley prayer meeting
12/4	One Somerset briefing
13/4	SSDC Scrutiny
13/4	Ilminster Lit Fest meeting
13/4	Horton PC
14/4	SSDC Area North committee
14/4	Horton quiz
15/4	SSDC district executive
15/4	SSDC group leader meeting
15/4	SSDC full council
17/4	MIND call handler training
18/4	Isle Valley communion service
18/4	Suicide Awareness training
19/4	DSFRA meeting
19/4	SSDC Regulation Committee
20/4	SSDC Regulation
21-22/4	Fiveways school headteacher recruitment
21/4	Horton quiz
23/4	Fiveways school governor meeting
23/4	Covid-19 board update
25/4	BHMC service
25/4	Isle Valley service
26/4	Isle Valley prayers
27/4	SSDC CEO meeting
27/4	SSDC appointments panel
27/4	Horton PC
27/4	Ilminster TC meeting
28/4	NHS Inclusion Gypsy/Traveller meeting
28/4	SSDC Scrutiny
28/4	Horton quiz
29/4	Isle Valley prayers
29/4	BHMC Chatterbox
30/4	SSDC District Exec.
30/4	SSDC full council