

## ILMINSTER DIVISION COUNTY/DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT MAY 2021

### REMOTE COUNCIL MEETINGS

Please note that whereas during lockdown I have, by virtue of virtual meetings, been able to attend a significant number of online meetings and activities, as we begin to return to a more normal life it will not be possible for me to attend these at quite the same level. On some evenings I find myself juggling anything up to five meetings simultaneously and cannot physically be in so many places at once!

Although many organisations are cautiously reverting back to face-to-face meetings, or a combination with virtual attendance, at SSDC for the time being remote Zoom meetings will continue. As central government has not agreed to extend the period during which remote meetings are deemed to be valid decision-making entities the decision was taken at the last full council meeting to allow 'informal' meetings to continue with delegated powers extended to the CEO to ratify key recommendations. Whilst some concern has been expressed about this delegation of powers, I am satisfied that this will not result in a significant decline in the democratic powers of elected members.

### COVID PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

Regular updates have been forwarded to interested parties on a regular basis when received. There is still a need to be cautious, particularly as we are granted more freedoms to socialise. Some concern has been expressed about the spread of new variances of the pandemic, which is being closely monitored. At present the SW is performing better than other areas of the country. As at 28th May the number of confirmed Covid cases in Somerset was 20,455 (up from 20,272 on 30th April) and the number of Covid-attributed deaths 800 (796). The rate per 100,000 stands at 5.5 for Somerset (South Somerset 3.6). The number of total deaths across the County is currently 8% below the 5-year average and the latest R-value for Somerset is between 0.8 and 1.1. Somerset has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country with the latest figures showing 324,147 having received at least their first vaccination or 77.5% of the 16+ population. 246,983 (53.3%) have received their second dose. Take up rates for both is very high: 80+ (95.8%), 75-79 (100%), 70-74 (97.7%), 65-69 (86.2%), 60-64 (73.0%), 55-59 (50.4%) and 50-54 (47.4).

**Extra investment into Public Health:** SCC is allocating an additional £10m to embed public health across all council services. This includes £2m to support Somerset communities (helping address anxiety and those with mild mental health issues) and £2m to expand Somerset's health protection programme including controlling outbreaks, managing testing, providing localised contact tracing, and supporting businesses and communities.

Some funding will be invested in research and work to improve local understanding of Covid and changing needs, and a further £500k will be made available for town and parish councils to help them safely reopen facilities with good prevention control measures in place.

### FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

All electors will have received ballot papers enabling them to express their preference prior to the closing date of 4<sup>th</sup> June. I have received a number of enquiries over this matter during the past month where much attention, particularly in the media, has been paid to the current poll being held, and possible breaches of protocol due to errors that have been made, which may call into question the validity of the poll.

### SW COUNCILS

The County Councils Network has announced that the Leader of SCC, David Fothergill, is to take over as Acting Chairman until a permanent successor to David Williams is elected.

## **SCC REGULATION**

The application to Add a Restricted Byway and Upgrade Part of Footpath CH 5/57 to a Restricted Byway over Paintmoor Lane, Chard and Chaffcombe was considered and agreed at this month's SCC Regulation Committee.

## **SSDC FULL COUNCIL**

Following the imminent departure of Alex Parmley, SSDC's CEO, an internal interview was held to appoint his replacement this month.

It was agreed to appoint Clare Pestell as the Chief Executive Officer, Head of Paid Service, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for SSDC on an interim basis for 18 months. Decisions were taken to confirm appointments and Chairmanship of the various SSDC committees, which are included in full in a separate attachment.

In addition to Area West, I remain on the following committees: Scrutiny; Regulation; Licensing; Appointments; Appeals Panel; Strategic Alliance with Sedgemoor; SW Provincial Employers

## **PENSION FUND**

In response to recent enquiries relating to de-carbonisation, and policies covering fossil fuels, an update was received this month from Anton Sweet. Currently there is no specific provision around climate change in the investment strategy but it is under review this year. Following government guidance in 2015, which recommended that investments should be pooled, 94% of SCC's pension fund is now handled by Brunel Pension Partnership, which does have a climate change policy. SCC's pension fund has no autonomy over decisions on how funds are invested but are able to influence decisions. The aim is to be carbon neutral by 2050, with a 7% annual reduction in the meantime. This strategy puts SCC ahead of others at present. Whilst Brunel does not have a blanket fossil fuel divestment policy at present, investment in fossil fuels is lower than most other investment companies in the market. Brunel is also considered forward thinking in pushing for climate awareness investment. It is SCC's intention to start to mirror this policy this year.

## **SSDC PLANNING**

Anyone wishing for me to make enquiries or follow up on planning matters is asked to please be sure to quote the application number in order to facilitate my access to the relevant information.

Concern has been raised about the recent failure to alert PCs and neighbouring residents of amendments to submitted plans, denying them the opportunity to consider any alterations and comment. This has been raised with the planning team and is to be reinstated.

Barry James, Interim Lead Specialist, Built Environment has now left SSDC and his position has been taken over by Lesley Barakchizadeh on an interim basis; an appointment that has raised some questions from local residents.

## **GALION DEVELOPMENT – BROADWAY HILL - 20/03277/FUL**

There has been considerable correspondence recently in relation to this application for the development of 50 properties. Anyone wishing to find out more information can view documents and comments on SSDC's planning site, quoting the application number above.

## **ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS**

The EV charging Network that SSDC, in partnership with the DELETTI Devon EV Charging Network project, is in its final stage for installation, by Scottish Power, this summer at selected sites, which will be phased across SSDC owned and operated car parks and completed by the end of the year. Scottish Power will be installing one dual charger each of 22kW supply to be able to charge 2 EVs at the same time and will be supplying the power from their own renewable energy supplies. At this month's SSDC Scrutiny meeting concern was raised over the roll out of EV points for new developments, lack of funding for village halls, the continued focus on town centres, and fears over reliance on one form of energy.

## HIGHWAYS

### A358

Following the previous A358 Community Forum event in March, a further forum event was held this month. Unfortunately, Highways England failed to keep interested parties sufficiently informed of the relevant links, resulting in a number of people being unable to attend.

Highways England did however deliver a presentation on their latest design plans for junctions and local access, followed by a Q&A session to obtain feedback on the plans. Those who did attend felt that the event was of limited value. To register interest in attending future events email -

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

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

The Planning Inspectorate has published its Opinion, following the Environmental Impact Assessment consultation.

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/TR010061/TR010061-000001-T2SF%20-%20Scoping%20Opinion.pdf>

Local consultation responses are attached to the document, to which, according to the Inspectorate, Highways England is required to respond.

It has been noted that neither SCC nor SSDC responded to the consultation.

Concern has been raised over the volume and speed of through traffic using Windmill Hill Lane, Ashill as a short cut, instead of Wood Road and the old A358. Given recent planning permissions (which the community were strongly opposed to) it is felt that this issue will increase with the building of new developments in the area and plans for the dualling of the A358 progress.

## ROAD SIGNS/FINGER POSTS

In a number of cases the poor state of some road signs has given cause for concern, which I have raised. This is the response received: 'SCC Highways Inspectors and Superintendents assess, record and report highway signage defects as set out in the Highway Safety Inspection Manual. Inspections are also initiated by an Enquiry raised by a member of the public, the emergency services, Parish Councils and County Councillors. We also undertake targeted Route Reviews to implement signage improvements to areas highlighted by the Road Safety team following analysis of Police accident data.

We have a dedicated county wide revenue budget which we carefully manage to maintain our existing signing asset. As funds are limited, we prioritise regulatory and warning signage. As the appropriate Highway Authority, SCC has historically maintained fingerposts, but as our funding from central government has fallen drastically, it has become increasingly difficult to justify spending precious resources on non-mandatory services. Despite this we continue to recognise the importance of fingerposts as a valuable part of our county's heritage and appreciate that there is a strong desire from within our local communities to ensure fingerposts are preserved for future generations to enjoy. We also recognise that parish councils and community groups are extremely adept when it comes to mobilising volunteers and seeking bids for grants funding. This does unfortunately mean that SCC are currently unable to assist with funding or resources for any fingerpost works across Somerset. Any works required (refurbishments/dismantling/erection and new components/parts) will need to be managed and paid for by the Parish Council.

Tourism's signage on the network remains the ownership of SCC but the establishments applicant will be responsible for the cost of any maintenance to the signs, including cleaning and replacement.'

**Rights of Way:** During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a big rise in the number of people using the county's 9,000 public rights of way, which totals 3,843 miles. This has meant an upsurge in the number of reports being received; double that from previous years. The Rights of Way team and nearly 400 volunteers have increased the 'easy to use' grading to 85.7%, the highest since records began in 2003 when the percentage was just 39.2%. Anyone interested in helping the team can find out more at [www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.volunteering.somerset.gov.uk)

## **ILMINSTER - DITTON STREET**

In the absence of a response from Highways, a large number of Ilminster residents have raised with me the issue of the traffic lights and bollards installed along Ditton Street, and the resulting lack of pavement to enable pedestrian access.

I did however receive the following response from the police – ‘As requested by Building Control the lights are in place to provide a footway around a property that was recently hit by a car. The temporary traffic lights at Ditton Street, opposite the Tesco petrol station, were put in place by Highways after the house, that the car crashed into, needed to be examined by a structural engineer. The lights will remain in place as the building firm that is going to commence works needs to build a protective wooden skirt and scaffolding around the front of the building so the pavement will remain out of use. As there is no pavement opposite unfortunately there seems to be no alternative but for the lights to remain.’

## **QUIET LANES**

The option of 'Quiet Lanes' in rural areas is something that has been raised with me this month, as some neighbouring authorities have introduced this. The intention is not to stop traffic but to alert drivers to walkers, horse riders etc.

The response from SCC was: ‘Thank you for your enquiry regarding the implementation of Quiet Lane Status at Windmill Hill Lane Ashill, I would like to assure you that we take matters of road safety extremely seriously. The procedure for the designation of quiet lanes and home zones by Local Traffic Authorities is set out in “The Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations 2006” and is enabled by section 268 of the “Transport Act 2000”. Uses might include recreation, social interaction and education.

SCC went through a significant policy review of quiet lanes and concluded that it was not appropriate to consider implementing such a scheme. They suit recreational areas where there is a desire to create a specific type of environment for cyclists (linked to tourism etc) and ensure that traffic is reduced as much as possible in the area. It was not clear in Somerset, what problem quiet lanes would have been a good solution for, in terms of a programme, so there was not a strong case to invest the capacity and funding that would be needed to develop proposals.’

## **SPEEDING**

A petition for submission to SCC has been set up by a local resident with the aim of making local roads safer by introducing traffic calming measures. <https://www.change.org/makelocalroadsafe>

## **SILVER STREET, ILMINSTER**

In response to concerns raised over speeding in Silver St. the local Speed Enforcement Officer made a visit and reports – ‘I viewed the area today and there is nowhere to put an enforcement vehicle. The volume of traffic does not seem to warrant a dedicated enforcement site.’

## **FAIRTRADE**

Activity continues to be carried out within Ilminster, and several businesses remain committed to supporting Fairtrade principles. During Fairtrade week, with the help of Greenfylde School, some activity was still able to take place to highlight the importance of ethical trading. I continue to be the Fairtrade community champion and, as always, we would welcome more volunteers

## **SSDC COMMUNITY GRANTS**

There were underspends on revenue grant allocations across the 4 areas. The ability for community groups to delivery projects has been hindered by the pandemic, therefore requests for grant funding decreased throughout the year. In Area West there was a £5,000 underspend, which was secured to support redundancy task force work relating to the closure of Oscar Mayer, Chard.

- Broadway and Horton Cricket Nets £4567
- Ilminster Tennis Recovery project £12,500
- Horton Playing Fields project £12,500
- Ilminster Flag Festival £900

## **SSDC LOCALITY SUPPORT**

**Stopleveline Way Cycle Path (SLW)** - Action is urged to continue to put pressure on the re-establishment of this part of the Sustrans Route 33 long Distance coast-to-coast walking and cycling route.

SSDC officer, Adrian Moore, responsible for Locality Links has been engaging with other authorities and agencies who have developed successful 'Long Distance Multi Use Trails'. This has included advice and support to Knowle St Giles in connection with improved access to the Stop Line Way, which has temporarily stalled until the lease agreement for the new parcel of land required for the project is finally agreed with the new landlord.

Research has also been carried out on archived SLW planning documents and the history of the route. Work is ongoing with SSDC planning colleagues and local developers to seek S106 contributions. In addition to this, alternative route options have been explored to progress the off-road route: considering the impact on environmental factors, tourism, economic and social benefits to improving the route, as well as disabled access, safe routes to school and commuter improvements.

Advice and support has been provided to Broadway PC, along with a site visit, to facilitate S106 funding and a possible community grant to deliver the project for Broadway play area improvements. Further advice has been given on other funding sources and links made with other successful play area improvement projects.

Horton play area improvements have been supported in facilitating funding and possible community grants to deliver the project. The initial phases of play equipment installation are underway.

## **BUS BACK BETTER**

The Government has concluded that bus deregulation, introduced in 1986, has failed in its promise to deliver better bus services in England, resulting in a significant fall in bus usage, especially in Somerset, by comparison with London, where locally-regulated buses continue to be well used.

Even prior to Covid, bus passenger journeys in Somerset had decreased by 40% over the previous decade. At 10 journeys per annum, Somerset currently has the fourth lowest bus passenger journeys per head of population in England, and the lowest in the SW.

The Government will fund bus services with £3b. of 'new money' but Somerset will only receive a share of this if it embarks on an Enhancement Partnership. It is expected that Somerset will opt for Enhancement Partnerships, working with bus operators.

Our local transport authority is SCC but given the importance of cross border buses it is felt that links with Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon could play a significant role in the future delivery of buses across Somerset.

Invitations to a Zoom meeting this month to help move this forward received no response, apart from one Ilminster resident, yet the absence of appropriate rural bus services in the area is an issue frequently raised with me.

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)

## CREWKERNE/ILMINSTER SCHOOLS

Local activists are continuing to fund raise to bring about a legal challenge to the recent decision relating to schools in Ilminster. What is not clear at present are the grounds under which such a legal challenge could be brought about. In order for a claimant to be able to take action against SCC and challenge the lawfulness of the way in which the decision relating to Crewkerne/Ilminster Schools has been made, there needs to be evidence of the claimant having directly suffered harm as a result of the decision. If the claimants opt for a judicial review then the claim should have been brought about within three months of the decision being made, and is likely to cost a minimum of £25k.

On a positive note, those schools involved will benefit from an additional £5m. investment to aid the transition.

Crewkerne schools are now working together more collaboratively, and the governing bodies of both Greenfyld and Swanmead schools have set up a joint working group and are receiving professional support from SCC and the diocese. It is intended that an independent Chair is also recruited to help this process. SCC is aware that there has naturally been some anxiety, and consideration is being given to how this, and the overall impact of the proposed changes, can be minimised.

**Summer activities for Year 11 pupils:** Somerset students heading from Year 11 into Year 12 will have access to a range of free educational opportunities this summer. There is a mixture of virtual and face-to-face events and activities taking place across the county including, Kilve Court, Charterhouse, and other key venues. These will include team-building exercises and physical activities such as climbing and low-ropes, as well as wellbeing and 'ready to study' sessions. Registration is now live via: [www.somersetworks.vfairs.com](http://www.somersetworks.vfairs.com)

## POLICE

Following the recent police and crime commissioner elections, Mark Shelford has been appointed to the post and sends this message.

'You may be pleased to know that I made a start within hours of being elected by visiting and listening to concerns of residents and some of the specialist officers from the Rural Crime team. Working closely with the Constabulary, I have set myself a challenging agenda to quickly translate my manifesto into a new Police and Crime plan, whilst at the same time starting the process of recruiting and selection a number of key staff including the new Chief Constable. Together we can achieve great things. Thank you for your help and support.'

## INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP

The service has been praised for its 'outstanding' use of data in enabling it to deploy available resources. Concern has been raised about the increase in county lines and domestic violence activity. The new domestic abuse law now enables children to be viewed as victims in their own right, in addition to widening the definition of abuse to include coercion and controlling behaviour and acknowledging that financial and economic abuse can be as harmful as physical abuse. £600k funding for one year has been received to increase activity in combating violent crime and anti-social behaviour.

## SCAMS

Following information given in last month's report I attended a presentation on Fraud Prevention given by Ashley Jones of the Regional Organised Crime Unit. I found the session particularly valuable and urge local groups to take advantage of this free session.

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

**ACTIVITIES/MEETINGS**

3/5	Highways meeting re; drains
4/5	SSDC appointments panel
4/5	Neroche School governor meeting
4/5	Donyatt PC
4/5	Broadway PC
4/5	Ashill PC
4/5	Ilminster town meeting
4/5	Isle Valley Compline
5/5	SCC full council
5/5	SSDC full council
5/5	Winsham PC AGM
6/5	SCC Regulation committee
6/5	MIND coffee morning
9/5	Isle Valley service
10/5	Bus partnership meeting
10/5	Horton PC
11/5	SSDC Scrutiny
12/5	Isle Valley prayers
12/5	Chard Museum
12/5	Horton quiz
12/5	MIND in Somerset
13/5	SSDC DX
13/5	Blackdown Hills Broadband update
13/5	A38 Highways England Community Forum
13/5	Ilminster Lit. fest meeting
16/5	Rogation service Horton
16/5	Isle Valley prayers
17/5	Neroche School
17/5	SSDC CEO meeting
17/5	Ashill PC
17/5	MINDline
18/5	Isle Valley compline
19/5	SSDC Area East
19/5	Independent Advisory Group – A&S Police
19/5	Small Charities Coalition – DBS training
19/5	SSDC Area West
20/5	Isle Valley prayers
20/5	Ilminster Literary Festival
23/5	Isle Valley prayers
24/5	Fiveways school staffing committee
24/5	MIND in Somerset
24/5	Horton PC
24/5	Fairtrade AGM
25/5	Chard Museum
25/5	Dowlish Wake PC
25/5	Ilminster TC town meeting
26/5	SCC meeting re: Crewkerne/Ilminster schools
26/5	Scam awareness presentation
26/5	SSDC Area North meeting
26/5	Horton quiz
26/5	MINDline
27/5	SSDC Audit committee
30/5	Isle Valley evening worship
31/5	Isle Valley prayers