

SOMERSET COUNCIL

Curry Rivel & Langport Councillors

JULY 2023

Local councillor currently on sick leave

Cllr Richard Wilkins is now at home recovering from a severe viral infection which has incapacitated him for over a week. He spent three days and nights in Musgrove Hospital, receiving excellent care, after experiencing sudden stiffness and pain which eventually stopped him walking. Until he recovers, please contact Cllr Mike Stanton mike.stanton@somerset.gov.uk with any queries or issues.

Local Community Network (LCN) – first meeting held

Our LCN, the Levels & Moors LCN, met for the first time in Curry Rivel Village Hall on 19th June. 21 of our 33 parishes attended, several with their Parish Clerk, together with 11 of our 16 councillors and a representative of the police.

The meeting was facilitated by five Somerset Council officers, including the Secretary for our LCN, Stephanie Gold. Appointment of a permanent officer to work with Stephanie on managing our LCN will be made by the time of the next meeting in September.

Cllr Richard Wilkins was elected Chair, Cllr Anthony Betty of Othery PC as Vice-Chair: the rules require one of these posts to be filled by a Somerset Councillor and one by a Parish Councillor.

Informal discussions in groups produced a range of items for future discussion, of which the most important was that parishes should share experiences, learn from each other, gain from 33 councils working together. This could include sharing the cost of initiatives and projects.

Other issues included our recurring classics, Potholes, Poo & Planning – plus flood risk and its mitigation. There was a strong feeling of real potential in these meetings and their activities.

Progress on potential merger of two parish councils

At the June meetings of both Langport Town Council and Huish Episcopi Parish Council a motion to request that Somerset Council undertake a Governance Review into the merging of the two councils (Huish Episcopi Parish and Langport Town) into a single council based on the combined map of the two existing councils was carried: unanimously at Langport TC and by six votes to three at Huish Episcopi. This is a step forward for both councils, which have considered and reconsidered a merger for many years. There are many complex issues involved: the main potential gain is in combining the running and funding of these two communities which are geographically now a single conurbation and use each others' facilities and services.

Somerset tree strategy

A ten-year plan to enhance and protect Somerset trees and woodland has been adopted by Somerset Council. It envisages planting 240 hectares of new trees and woodlands each year across the county until 2033, which would increase the county's tree coverage from its current 8% to the national average of 13% .

A main aim of the new council is to create a greener, more sustainable Somerset. Our role in helping tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss has been developed in partnership with the Environment Agency, Somerset Local Nature Partnership, Exmoor National Park, Quantock Hills, AONB Partnership, The Forestry Commission and The Woodland Trust.

Work is already underway with the creation of three new posts, funded through a successful bid to Defra's Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund. With tasks including supporting existing tree groups and encouraging new ones; these roles are expected to be in place by the beginning of the summer.

As climate change brings higher temperatures and more extreme weather conditions, the strategy also aims to make Somerset's woodlands more resilient and adaptable to these changes by protecting, expanding, managing, and diversifying our existing treescapes.

Built around five themes, the strategy seeks to strengthen the county's bond with its trees, creating a 'wood culture' where the people of Somerset can access and be a part of caring about Somerset's woodland. By coming together to deliver this strategy everyone in Somerset can help prevent further decline of our natural environment and help to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Surface dressing underway for 2023

Somerset Council's Highways team have started to surface dress some roads as part of the summer maintenance programme: this is a nationally recognised maintenance way of sealing a road, improving skid resistance, and preventing water getting under the surface, to stop potholes forming. It works by coating an existing road with bitumen, covering it with stone chippings and then rolling it.

The work can only be carried out in dry weather, so the Council's surface dressing programme is flexible, and dates can change at short notice. You can check which roads are being surface dressed here:

www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/surface-dressing/

If you need to report an overgrown verge, pothole or more, you can do so here:

www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/.

You can see dates of planned works here: www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/roadworks-and-travel/, and make sure to follow Travel Somerset on Twitter and Facebook.

Introducing Maqbul – the beautiful game combining cricket with compassion

A new community initiative is helping support displaced people in Somerset through one of our county's favourite summer activities – cricket. The Maqbul Project has been organised by the Somerset Cricket Foundation with funding from Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) through Sport England's Together Fund.

Somerset has a long history of welcoming people who have been forced to leave their homes due to fear of violence or persecution. Anyone who finds themselves placed in Somerset will be supported by Somerset Council working alongside a range of charities and partner organisations.

Taking its name from the Afghan Persian word for 'beautiful' and 'accepted', Maqbul has a simple aim – to use cricket to impact positively on the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Somerset.

Training and matches have been taking place at North Petherton and Weston-super-Mare Cricket Clubs, supported by groups including Charis Refugees, SASP and Voluntary Action North Somerset. A film about the project can be found at: <https://youtu.be/LY66VXsQIWc>

On your marks, get set – read!

Children in Somerset can sharpen their mental and physical skills this summer by joining the Summer Reading Challenge at Somerset Council's Libraries. Youngsters aged 4-11 can visit Somerset Libraries to join a superstar team and their marvellous mascots and get involved in the Challenge, which is themed around the power of play, sport, games, and physical activity.

With free materials from Somerset Libraries and online via the Challenge website, children will be encouraged to keep physically and mentally active over the summer break. The characters – brought to life by children's author and illustrator Loretta Schauer – navigate a fictional summer obstacle course and track their reading as they go, rewarded by free incentives including stickers.

The Summer Reading Challenge aims to keep imaginations moving over the school holiday through activity challenge cards from the Youth Sports Trust, and an exciting, themed book collection.

Visit <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries/our-libraries/> to find out which services are available for families to enjoy.

In 2022, the Summer Reading Challenge reached more than 6,500 children in Somerset who read more than 175,000 children's books - a 42% increase on children's book issues from the previous challenge.

Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Award

Volunteers are often at the centre of our communities and the last few years have shown us the importance of their work, which is why the Somerset Prepared partnership launched its Community Resilience Award 2023 at the end of Volunteers Week (1 – 7 June).

These awards recognise people or groups who have gone above and beyond to improve their community's ability to deal with emergencies: nominations close on 7th September 2023 - enter [here](#).

The Awards will be a key element of the annual Somerset Prepared Community Day at Wincanton Racecourse on Thursday, October 5th. The partners welcome local people to celebrate Somerset's community emergency volunteers, with workshops, presentations, and equipment demonstrations. Places are free and can be booked [here](#).

As well as learning about how to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, this event will give the opportunity to connect with emergency services, community organisations, voluntary groups and other like-minded individuals.

Treatment to put Type 2 Diabetes into remission – Somerset Leads the Way

Public Health leaders in Somerset are urging people who suffer from Diabetes to take part in a programme which could radically improve their quality of life. Type 2 diabetes affects more than 30,000 people in Somerset. The county is one of just 21 areas of the country offering a free NHS programme to support residents with this life-threatening condition to lose weight and potentially achieve remission.

The NHS Type 2 Diabetes 'Path to Remission' programme began in Somerset in June last year and so far, 209 residents locally have signed up to take part. The 12-month programme of support from trained coaches aims to help people with the condition to achieve remission, reducing their risk of diabetes complications and the need for medication.

The initial phase involves 3 months of meal replacement with a range of soups, shakes and bars, provided free of charge, followed by reintroduction of healthy meals. On average, participants in Somerset have lost 14% of their starting weight after six months on the programme.

To be eligible for the programme residents must be aged between 18 and 65, have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in the last 6 years, and have a raised body mass index (BMI). If you think you might be eligible, do check the programme website and complete a self-assessment questionnaire. Then contact your GP practice about a referral. Places are limited, so it is best to do this as soon as possible.

Stamp out recycling fire starters

We can all help end a surge in dangerous fires caused by poorly sorted recycling and rubbish. Fire services have joined Somerset Council and its collections contractor SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK in asking for people to take more care or risk sparking dangerous and potentially deadly blazes.

In the last two years more than ten depot and truck fires are thought to have been caused by people putting batteries, gas cannisters or still warm disposable barbeques in their waste. The risk is on the rise, with three fires sparked in Somerset recycling depots in the last month.

In the last two weeks of May alone, vigilant crews have pulled more than 200 potentially explosive camping gas cannisters out of household recycling. But some inevitably sneak through to the sorting process.

Batteries and gas cannisters can ignite when crushed in the back of recycling trucks or as part of the sorting process in the Material Recovery Facilities at the Evercreech and Taunton depots.

Disposable barbeques put into refuse bins without being fully soaked and extinguished can retain heat, smoulder and cause fires in truck and when tipped back at the depot.

Fires cause damage and put lives at risk, and as the weather warms up Somerset Council and SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK are calling on residents to please do the right thing with these potentially dangerous items.

What should you do?

- Small household batteries - can be recycled in weekly kerbside collections but must be put in a clear, tied plastic bag put on the top of the recycling box. They must not be left loose in recycling boxes, put in the Bright Blue Bag or in the rubbish bin.
- Large batteries, such as car batteries, cannot be recycled at the kerbside and should be taken to your local recycling site.

- Small household batteries and electricals can also be taken to recycling sites, always check with team on-site for the correct area to put these.
- Small gas canisters - like those used in camping stoves are not recyclable in kerbside collections and must not be put in the rubbish bin. They must be taken to your local household recycling site. Always check with team on-site for the correct area to put these.
- Disposable barbecues – should be fully immersed in water and left to cool completely before putting into your refuse bin.

Need advice from Somerset Council? Your local library can help

Customer Access Points were initially set up in seven libraries in April when Somerset Council came into being, replacing Somerset County Council and the four district councils, Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset.

Customers who need in-person help or advice from Somerset Council will find support at every Somerset Library from July. Staff are trained to provide digital support to help customers self-serve when needed. From July, they will also be able to set up virtual, face-to-face meetings on the spot so people can speak directly to a member of the Customer Service team.

If a customer has a complex question or issue, the advisers will be able to pass the enquiry onto the right specialist to help. Customers will also be able to take documents that can be digitally uploaded and sent to the appropriate Somerset Council team.

Now, after a successful trial, it is being extended to all Somerset's libraries, providing customers with access to council services and support in a place that is convenient. The support will be provided during library opening hours, which, in most cases, includes weekends. The virtual meetings will only be available Monday to Friday from 8.30am-4.30pm.

Somerset Council flying the flag for LGBTQ+ rights

Somerset Council is flying the Progress Pride flag in a show of support for the LGBTQ+ community. It was raised at a ceremony attended by staff and councillors at County Hall in Taunton ahead of the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots on 28th June, which began in the early hours of June 28, 1969, in New York City and was the fundamental turning point for Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual rights across the world.

The anniversary falls during Pride Month where many organisations and individuals fly the "rainbow" flag - a symbol of the LGBTQ+ community with its colours representing the different communities within it.

During June Somerset Council has also changed the headers to our social media accounts and posted about the work that is happening in Somerset to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ people.

We are extending our support of the Somerset LGBTQ+ Equality Network and promoting 2BU-Somerset who are working with and supporting young LGBTQ+ people in Somerset.

The Progress Pride flag will be flown again in the run up to the Taunton Pride and Burnham-on-Sea Pride events on the 22 July. Somerset Council will be at both events making a visible statement to everyone that we are an inclusive and accepting council, that celebrates diversity.

Have your say on the Council's Licensing Policy

Somerset Council is inviting residents and businesses to comment on its updated Licensing Policy. A consultation is now open for six weeks until 13 July 2023: you can have your say here:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/licensing-policy/>

Somerset Council has to review its Statement of Licensing Policy every five years. The Policy document sets out an approach to the Council's licensing functions in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003.

After the consultation, the Council will consider responses and make any appropriate amendments to the Statement of Licensing Policy. The final draft will be considered and agreed at a Full Council meeting.

The closing date for comments is 13 July 2023 and the consultation is available to view online here:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/licensing/licensing-policy/>

Or you can request a printed copy by emailing consultations@somerset.gov.uk with your details.

Take on the challenge to go single-use plastic free this July

Somerset Council is backing the movement to go single-use plastic free and asking residents to be part of the solution to plastic pollution. Last year Somerset households recycled close to 6,500 tonnes of plastic, which equates to roughly 29 lorry loads a month.

Plastic recycling is great, but choosing to refuse single-use plastic is even better. Plastic Free July is a global initiative working towards a world free of plastic waste. And by taking up the challenge to make a change each day this July could create a good habit for life.

The Plastic Free July team are asking people to join the movement by taking on the Plastic Free July challenge and take the Pesky Plastics Quiz. Signing up to the Plastic Free July challenge is the easiest way to help people:

- discover the plastic free solutions that suit them
- be counted alongside the millions of people who are making a difference
- contribute to the global success of Plastic Free July

Mike Stanton & Richard Wilkins

3rd July 2023