

SOMERSET UNITARY COUNCIL REPORT

CLLR SARAH DYKE & CLLR NICOLA CLARK

MAY 2024

This month's casework

Another busy month of planning casework, with ongoing concerns about enforcement queries and planning permissions. We've not had anything heard at Planning South for a couple of months and have some applications that we are waiting for decisions and/or recommendations on.

As always, please do ensure to keep us in the loop on any concerns you have with planning issues.

Summer Playday events

Somerset Council are running four Play Days this year in Yeovil, Wincanton, Langport and Chard:

-  Mudford Rec, Yeovil - Wednesday 7 August 2024
-  Cale Park, Wincanton - Tuesday 13 August 2024
-  Cocklemoor, Langport - Thursday 15 August 2024
-  Jocelyn Park, Chard - Thursday 29 August 2024

Each event will run from 11am – 3pm. You can find out more about each event here:

<https://www.westlandsyeovil.co.uk/whats-on/family/>

Each event will have a variety of workshops from circus skills to music-making, to arts and crafts, and live outdoor theatre performances.

Our latest climate bulletin

Our latest climate bulletin is out now, featuring:

-  Make your trees count & root for #Somerset
-  Rare butterfly seen on #Exmoor
-  New partnership to boost heat pumps
-  FREE school/community trees from The Woodland Trust

To catch up and subscribe for future updates - <https://orlo.uk/Fk2fM>

Parking scams

We've been may aware that fraudulent QR code stickers are being displayed on some of our parking machines. Remember, if your residents are paying for parking using their phone, they should only use one of these trusted payment methods:

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- Download the PayByPhone app directly from the App Store or Google Play Store.
- Visit the website by entering <https://orlo.uk/6RcQe> directly into the search bar.
- Dial 0330 400 7275 to use the automated phone line.

Please do not scan any QR codes and only use trusted websites.

Have your say on possible changes to Council Tax Reduction support

Somerset Council begins consultation on potential changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme for working age adults on low incomes.

Somerset residents are encouraged to have their say on possible changes to a scheme which offers financial support to working age adults on low incomes.

In November 2023, Somerset Council declared a financial emergency due to increasing costs of providing key services and agreed to a number of actions to reduce spending.

This included a commitment to consult with the public on potential changes to the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme.

Council Tax Reduction is a discount offered for Council Tax payers on low incomes. The proposed changes would only apply to working age adults – the support provided for pensioners would not be affected.

It was initially proposed to consult on changes that could save the council £12.1m a year. However, following debate at Executive last week, it was agreed to remove two proposals from the consultation. If all the revised proposals were to be approved it could potentially save Somerset Council £6.4m a year.

The options for consideration include reducing the maximum available discount from 100% to 75%.

You can find out more here - <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-possible-changes-to-council-tax-reduction-support/>

Calling all tree planters

Calling all Somerset tree planters. Can we count on you?

If you've planted trees since last October, we want to celebrate your efforts and track important tree-planting goals as part of the 10-year Somerset Tree Strategy.

Somerset's tree cover is only 8% - the national average is 13%. Join our mission to get it to where it should be or more! Map your trees on the Somerset Tree Planting Register. It only takes 5 minutes to make your trees count - <https://orlo.uk/2pFjW>

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Calls for a delay

England's largest councils have called for a delay in the introduction of the cap on adult social care costs, warning they will be 'impossible' to implement by October next year.

It comes as new analysis by Newton for the County Councils Network (CCN) reveals the costs of the new cap on care and more generous means-test have increased by a third – with the total costs of the reforms for older adults now totalling £30bn over the next decade – a figure councils say is unfunded.

Read more: <https://orlo.uk/o45yL>

Litter and dog waste bin charges 25/26 – Somerset South (legacy South Somerset district)

You should have received a communication outlining the future options re charges for the emptying of litter and dog waste bins on parish-owned land for the 25/26 financial year.

There have been ongoing conversations with our parishes in recent weeks and months about this issue. They have been anticipating this information and we trust our local councils will welcome the clarity the communication provides.

Not only does it feature a price point guide, but it also includes a data file listing the total number of bins and locations in their parishes. We hope, with their extensive local knowledge and co-operation, the parishes will be able to cross-check and validate the listings or correct any anomalies.

Please do let us know if your parish has not received this

New contract gets green light

A new contract which will see more energy efficient lighting on Somerset's roads has been signed by Somerset Council.

The Council's new lighting contractor, VolkerHighways Ltd will provide an eight-year maintenance contract covering all the council's street lights, lighted signs, bollards and other electrical equipment on highways and public open spaces across the county.

Somerset Council has 59,593 lighted assets to look after, consisting of street lights, illuminated signs and bollards. Of these, nearly 66 per cent have already been changed to greener and more efficient LED lighting. VolkerHighways will support the Council in its aim to convert all its lighting LED by the end of their contract, if possible, which will help the Council to lower their carbon footprint.

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Councillor Richard Wilkins, Lead Member for Transport and Digital, said: “We’re really pleased to announce this new contract, it means Somerset can continue to deliver an excellent service for the Council as well as the residents of Somerset.

“This was a robust procurement process involving potential suppliers from across the country, taking account of value for money, commitment to environmentally friendly practices and materials, and innovation in practice.”

Councillor Dixie Darch, Somerset Council’s Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, said: “We’ll be working closely with our new contractor to focus on LED installation, which is already well underway, alongside other energy and carbon-saving initiatives.”

Peter Walsh, Managing Director of VolkerHighways, added: “I would like to express our enthusiasm for the new contract with Somerset Council. This partnership marks a significant step towards a more sustainable future, as we work together to implement greener lighting solutions and reduce energy costs across the county's highways and public spaces. Together, we are lighting the way to a brighter, more eco-friendly Somerset.”

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