

SOMERSET COUNCIL

CONSERVATIVE GROUP BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS April 2024

Mendip local plan consultation: Following a High Court Order to make amendments to the Mendip Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2) Somerset Council is undertaking a formal consultation to review and reconsider housing sites for at least 505 dwellings in the Mendip area. The consultation runs until 12 April 2024 and as the Council is making changes to a development plan, proposed sites are subject to formal consultation before submission for public examination. The consultation only makes proposals in the former Mendip District (Somerset East) area and is intended to ensure that views of statutory consultees, communities and other stakeholders are captured and considered. More information can be accessed at <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/mendip-local-plan-part-ii-limited-update-reg-18/>

Somerset Road Safety: Tragically, 30 people died while travelling on Somerset's roads in 2023 – nearly 43 per cent up on the figure for 2022 and the highest number of fatalities in 10 years. According to Avon and Somerset Police 76 per cent of the collisions involve one or more of the following five behaviours: Intoxicated driving, (drink or drugs); Careless or inconsiderate driving; Excessive Speed; Mobile phone use or distraction or Failing to wear a seatbelt. Of the 30 fatal casualties, 11 were car drivers, 12 motorcyclists, four were car passengers, and three were pedestrians.

Britain in Bloom: Established by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), the Britain in Bloom initiative celebrates the best of community gardening. This year Yeovil in Bloom is a finalist of the Large Town category, after winning gold in the St Bridget Cup at the South West in Bloom Awards 2023. Glastonbury in Bloom is a finalist of the Town category, following their success at winning gold in the Preece Cup in last year's regional awards and Cannington in Bloom is a finalist of the Large Village category, following their win of the Cox Cup in the 2023 regional awards.

New electric buses: Twenty-five new electric buses are being funded by a £2.2 million grant from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Zero Emission Bus Regional Area scheme, along with a further £12.5million investment from Buses of Somerset. The electric buses will replace part of the current diesel fleet operating out of Hamilton Road depot and service the following routes 28 – Taunton to Minehead; 21 – Taunton to Bridgwater; 22 – Taunton to Wellington; 1 – Taunton Town Service and 2 – Taunton Town Service

Voter registration: Residents are being urged to register to vote and check their Voter ID so they can have their say on who represents them in the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner election. The deadline to register to vote is midnight on Tuesday 16 April.

It takes just a few minutes to apply online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. The deadline to apply for a postal vote is 5pm Wednesday 17 April.

Purple chair scheme: Purple chairs are being installed in Somerset's libraries in Bridgwater, Chard, Frome, Glastonbury, Taunton, Williton and Yeovil to provide a safe space for women and girls to get information about health and wellbeing, as well as support and resources available to them including: Antenatal and postnatal care, breast cancer support, domestic abuse support, cervical screening, anti-social behaviour and harassment.

Additional funding for swimming pools: Somerset Council has been awarded £316,700 of grant funding from Phase 2 of the government's Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF). The ringfenced money from Sport England and the National Lottery will be used to install new energy efficiency measures in four Somerset leisure centres – Wells, Chard, Yeovil and Frome. Somerset has previously been awarded £211,208 in 2023 as part of SPSF Phase 1 funding.

Digital Innovation Centre: The Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation is set to officially open its doors in Taunton. The centre has been made possible after successfully securing more than £7.3m of external ring-fenced funding including £3.6m investment from Somerset County Council secured ahead of the creation of the unitary council.

Former Bridgwater Hospital Site: Repair and maintenance works are being carried out on the former Bridgwater Hospital site at Salmon Parade in Bridgwater. The Grade II listed building, which has lain empty since 2014, will have a new lease of life as a state-of-the-art Somerset Academy for Health and Social Care. Former Sedgemoor District Council and its partners were successful in obtaining a £19.7million bid from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for project.

Go Green Scheme: Somerset Council has secured £100,000 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support 150 eligible companies under the Go Green Scheme. This scheme helps businesses to understand their energy consumption and show how it can be reduced. The scheme offers free energy audits and support to develop individual, costed and prioritised sustainability plans. Further information on the Go Green Scheme 'empowering Somerset businesses to go green' is available at www.gogreenscheme.org.uk

Green Business Grants: These grants are available for Somerset based SME's who already have sustainability plans in place. The aim of the grants is to provide financial assistance to take forward identified measures to reduce energy consumption and costs as well as carbon emissions. Grants can fund up to 50% of total eligible project costs, with the remainder funded by the applicant. Round 2 of the Green Business Grants is now open with an application deadline of 30 April 2024. If a grant is approved activity and expenditure will need to be completed by 30 November 2024. More information can be found at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/funding-and-grants-for-business/>