

Somerset West and Taunton

Newsletter to SWT Councillors and Parish Councils.

Issue 23. Week ending 30/08/20

#StayAlert #Controlthevirus#SaveLives

Up to date information on the Council's response can be found on the SWT website:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-and-information/>

SWT Council priorities

Somerset West and Taunton Council's updated priorities during the coronavirus outbreak are as follows:

- Preserve critical services;
- Safeguard the public;
- Ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported; and
- Planning economic resilience and recovery

The situation is being reviewed on a daily basis to ensure that the Council follows the [latest advice from Public Health England](#).

Key Messages this week

1. Stronger Somerset- Ambitious Plan to Deliver A Stronger Future

Somerset urgently needs change to ensure our communities gain greater control over the things that matter to them, our children get the best start in life and our economy grows stronger.

Somerset has been offered a once in a generation chance to improve the lives of everyone in the county. **Stronger Somerset** is the combined plan from the district councils of Somerset; Sedgemoor, Mendip, South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton to take that opportunity and deliver a stronger future for all.

To see all the details of the ambitious and exciting plan for reform, please visit www.strongersomerset.co.uk

2. Democracy and Governance

Committee Meetings

You can search by Committee or by the monthly calendar for details of all [Committee meetings](#). Here you can find the agendas and minutes of all meetings, as well as which Councillors sit on each Committee.

A number of meetings are scheduled to take place over the next couple of weeks, which are as follows:

- Wednesday 2 September - **Scrutiny Committee**, 6.15pm. Items on the agenda include Emergency Town Centre Recovery and back-fill of Economic Growth and Prosperity Fund and the creation of a Community Chest Fund. There are also confidential, commercially sensitive reports on Delivering Regeneration: Setting up a Special Purpose Vehicle and Tangier.
- Thursday 3 September - **Planning Committee**, 1pm (deadline for public questions or statements is 4pm on Friday 28 August). There is one planning application on the agenda relating to Wiveliscombe.
- Monday 7 September - **Audit, Governance and Standards Committee**, 6.15pm (deadline for public questions or statements is 4pm on Wednesday 2 September).
- Wednesday 9 September - **Special Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee**, 6.15pm (deadline for public questions or statements is 4pm on Friday 4 September)
- Thursday 10 September - **Special Meeting of Full Council**, 6.15pm (deadline for public questions or statements is 4pm on Monday 7 September)
- Monday 14 September - **Licensing Committee** - CANCELLED

The meetings will all be live streamed so that members of the public can watch at home. To watch the live stream when the meeting commences please visit the SWT website by [clicking here](#). If you are not able to watch the meeting live, you can also watch it after the meeting.

Members of the public are still able to participate in the meeting by submitting their questions or statement to the Governance Team via governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk and these will be read out by an officer at the meeting. Please see the dates listed above re deadlines for submitting questions or statements.

SWT Councillors are reminded that if they do not wish to receive paper copies of agendas to please let the Governance Team know.

3. Reminder parking charges set to resume

Charging will be reintroduced in SWT owned car parks from **Monday 31 August**. The Council introduced free parking at the start of the coronavirus lockdown and extended the offer as part of its wider plan to support the re-opening of High Streets and help rejuvenate the local economy.

SWT has taken the decision to start charging again in line with other district councils in Somerset, although key health workers, on duty who display permits provided by their NHS Trust can continue to park for free. Signage will be placed in the car parks reminding people that charges now apply. All SWT car parks are now fully open except Paul Street Car Park where the top three levels remain closed until they can be opened safely under COVID-19 guidance.

Please [click here](#) for the full SWT press release.

4. Taunton Visitor Centre - New Opening Times

The [Taunton Visitor Centre](#) is pleased to announce that it is now open. The Visitor Centre team will be on hand to help you with information on the local area and attractions, travel and event bookings, and town centre and digital marketing opportunities.

The Visitor Centre has a selection of walking and cycling route maps, together with a range of locally-produced merchandise and souvenirs.

Following advice from Public Health England (PHE) they have implemented social distancing measures and safe working practices, so you'll notice a few changes when you next visit. The team look forward to welcoming you back into the Taunton Visitor Centre and they would like to thank everyone for their support and understanding during these exceptional times.

New Opening Hours (subject to change)

Monday - Saturday

9.30am - 12.45pm

1.30pm - 4.30pm

For further information please contact the Taunton Visitor Centre team on tauntonvisitorcentre@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

5. SWP Sites and Services

No collections on the Summer Bank Holiday Monday 31 August, means recycling and rubbish services are one day later all week, including Friday pick-ups on **Saturday 5 September**.

The changes affect collections of recycling, refuse and garden waste, as well as assisted collections. Residents should sort and segregate materials, ensure no recycling - especially food - is in the rubbish bin, and put all waste containers out by 7am.

Recycling sites remain on their usual timetables, with all 16 sites open 9am-4pm on the Bank Holiday Saturday and Sunday weekend. 12 sites will be open 9am-6pm on Bank Holiday Monday: **Bridgwater, Minehead, Taunton, and Williton.**

All kerbside collections return to their usual schedules from **Monday 7 September.**

Partner Engagement - Key messages from other Public Service Areas Somerset County Council (SCC)

Highway Maintenance Update

SCC Highways are currently focusing on the routine tasks of gully emptying, safety defect repairs and patching. You may well also see the carriageway surface dressing team out and about, carrying out aftercare tasks on the dressings that were laid in June.

Another unseasonal week for weather. After “Storm Ellen” the previous week, this time it was “Storm Francis”. Probably not as wet or long lived as “Ellen” but a more intense event with stronger winds for a shorter period of time. The afternoon of Tuesday 25 August was probably the worst and a number of trees and branches fell onto the highway in quick succession.

Although there were problems right across the county, with the winds on this occasion being predominantly westerlies, Somerset West and Taunton was worst hit. The A38 Wellington Relief road was closed overnight and the B3227 Milverton Bypass was closed into the evening as difficult tree extractions were carried out in very adverse conditions.

The week finished off with more rain as another unseasonal low blew in off the Atlantic. Let’s hope that the Bank Holiday and the last week of the school holidays have much better weather for us all.

Rural verge cutting on the “A” and “B” road networks has now been completed.

More information on this can be found on the [Travel Somerset website.](#)

For more information on highway maintenance works and to stay up to date visit www.travelsomerset.co.uk or follow @TravelSomerset on Twitter.

Concessionary fares: change from 1 September

In March SCC decided to relax the Concessionary Fare Scheme times, for concessionary bus pass holders to make essential journeys before 9.30am during the Covid-19 pandemic.

From 1 September SCC is re-introducing the 9.30am scheme start time, so that there is sufficient capacity on the network for the return of school and college students. Bus operators have been notified of this change, and bus passes will not be accepted on ticket machines before 9.30am unless travelling on an exempted route.

Student Bus Tickets

Due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, Somerset County Council will not be offering the County Ticket scheme for the 2020/21 academic year.

Due to potential social distancing measures and possible changes to the level of College attendance required from September 2020, an annual pre-paid ticket is not the most viable option.

Due to the potential reduction in the number of days students may need to attend College, the County Ticket option would not be the most cost-effective solution for students at this stage. For those students needing to travel via public transport, then purchasing one of the ticket options offered by the public transport operators would be more cost-effective.

To explore the options available and find out more information about school transport please [click here](#).

M5 Junction 25 Improvement Scheme Toneway - Creech Castle Works Update

Works undertaken by contractor, Alun Griffiths at Junction 25 are progressing well, and in conjunction with Somerset County Council they will shortly be starting some advanced works along the **A38 Bridgwater Road** ahead of the main Creech Castle project which has been postponed until next year.

A letter explaining these advanced works on the **A38 Bridgwater Road near Aldi and Hyde Lane**, can be viewed [HERE](#). In addition, hard copy letters are being sent to residents and businesses that are directly affected. Please share with friends, family, colleagues etc and add to social media.

For additional project information, please visit the Griffiths in the Community website [here](#).

HMRC Self-Employment Income Support Scheme Webinar

Self-employed people whose business earnings have been hit by coronavirus can now apply for a second support grant from the government until 19 October. HM Revenue and Customs have added new dates for their webinar about the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), Universal Credit and Child Benefit. Businesses can also register for webinars on topics including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. [Click here](#) to find out more.

Kick Start Grant- Tourism and Business Recovery

The Government confirmed [£10 million of funding to boost tourism](#) and a further [£20 million to boost business recovery](#) in England. The Kickstart Grant

Scheme will give small businesses grants of up to £5,000 to help them adapt their businesses following the pandemic.- to register your interest, please complete the [online contact form](#) and reference 'Kickstart Grant Scheme' in the Enquiry Message section. You will be contacted when more information is available.

The grant scheme is not yet live. It is hoped the grant will be launched by the end of the month.

In the meantime, you can consider whether the [grant scheme](#) is right for your business and start to prepare your application.

Exmoor Dark Skies Festival 16 to 31 October 2020

This year's festival will be going ahead with a fantastic range of events for families and adults. Great care has been taken by event organisers to ensure that all events will be COVID-safe and most are therefore exclusively for small groups/bubbles or less than 30 people. As such, you stand to get an even more personal experience. Some events are run by the Exmoor National Park Authority, and others are organised by local groups and businesses.

For general festival enquiries please contact Katrina KJMunro@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

For the full list of events [click here](#).

The webpage is being updated daily with more event details and booking links as they are confirmed. As events are generally for smaller numbers, early booking for all is highly advisable. Booking in advance will always be required - there will be no events where you can just turn up on the day.

Coronavirus: Changes to MOTs

There are some changes to MOT tests because of coronavirus. How this affects you depends on when your MOT was due to expire.

If your MOT was due between 30 March and 31 July 2020 your MOT will be automatically extended for 6 months because of coronavirus.

Example: Your vehicle's MOT was due to expire on 3 April 2020 this will automatically be extended to 3 October 2020. You will need to get your MOT by this date.

If your MOT was due before 30 March or after 31 July 2020 you must [book an MOT as usual](#).

You must not take your vehicle for its MOT if either:

- [you or someone you live with has coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms](#)
- you've been told by the NHS Test and Trace service that you've been in contact with someone who has coronavirus.

You must stay at home (self-isolate) if either of these situations apply.

If you have got a MOT exemption, beat the rush and get your MOT booked this September. For further information relating to MOTs, please [click here](#).

Community Support - What help is out there?

Voluntary and Community Sector Support

VCS Newsletter - Survey and Break

SWT will be taking a break from publication during September and will consider the options for autumn 2020.

Thank you to those who have completed the reader survey. It is great to know that the newsletter has been of use and appreciated by those who replied. The survey remains open until **31 August** for anyone still able to respond. [VCS News survey](#).

Health and Welfare

Action on Addiction

A Change in Drinking Patterns during Coronavirus

Action on Addiction is seeing and hearing evidence that people in the UK are drinking differently as a result of coronavirus. In post COVID recovery we are attending our zoom meetings, building virtual communities, and, together over video chats, we address our fears, anxiety, share moments of celebration or sadness and support each other. But for others, this experience has meant persistent fear, anxiety and an unfathomed dimension of loneliness and isolation - the bedfellows that feed addiction.

So, when does an extra glass or two of wine to numb the effects of watching the news turn into problem drinking? How can you tell? How far into the afternoon does the 6pm beer, or prosecco need to move for it to be a sign that something's not quite right? And even if it's out of boredom rather than desire for anaesthesia, when does the tolerance developed by drinking become more like dependence? Where is the line?

If you think you or someone you know needs help, Action on Addiction can assist and advise you on the next steps. Please contact [Action on Addiction](#), and if not them, someone else. Drinkline is a confidential helpline for those worried about their own or someone else's drinking. They can put you in touch with your local alcohol advice centre for help and support. Phone: **0300 123 1110**.

Take Part in Coronavirus Research

Find out about coronavirus health research studies and how you may be able to take part. Research you can take part in can be found by clicking on the links below:

- [Coronavirus vaccine research](#)
- [Donate blood plasma if you've had coronavirus](#)

Get the latest NHS information and advice about coronavirus by [clicking here](#).

The Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline

A single phone number is available for anyone in Somerset who needs coronavirus-related support from their councils. The **0300 790 6275** number is available seven days per week 8am - 6pm.

Anyone who can't find help within their own local networks and volunteers, can use this number to get help and advice around:

- Personal care and support including food and delivery of prescriptions
- Support for the homeless
- Emotional support if you're feeling worried or anxious
- Transport to medical appointments
- Waste collection and disposal
- Financial support

This number won't cover medical advice, for which people will need to continue to use the 111 NHS phone number if they cannot get help online.

Please refer to the websites below for the latest advice, help and guidance:

Links to the most up to date COVID-19 guidance can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

[Public Health England](#)

[NHS - Help and Advice](#)

FAQS

Q. What else will change in the next few months?

A. From 1 September, schools, nurseries and colleges will open for all children and young people on a full-time basis. Universities are working to reopen as fully as possible. The Government is committed to doing everything possible to allow all children to go back to school safely, to support their wellbeing and education and help working parents. The Government's plan is for all students in England to return to education settings in September. You can find out more about [the government's approach to education](#) and how schools are preparing.

From 1 October, if prevalence remains around or below current levels, the Government hopes to bring back audiences in stadiums, and allow conferences and other business events to recommence in a COVID-19 Secure way. From November, the ambition is to scale back remaining social distancing measures, but this is contingent on a number of factors, including consideration of the specific challenges as we move into winter.

Q. Can I book a driving test for my son / daughter now?

A. Yes, you can book a driving test, however, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) has confirmed there has been an unprecedented demand for driving tests since it reopened to the general public on 21 August. The service will only be taking bookings for the next 6 weeks. DVSA has introduced a queuing system for people using the service. You'll get a number and see where you are in the queue. [Click here](#) to book your driving test.

Keep up to date with any further announcements about the DVSA booking service by [clicking here](#).

Crime / Safeguarding Avon & Somerset Police (A&SP)

Avon & Somerset Police & Crime Commissioner's Facebook Live

Deputy PCC John Smith and Chief Constable Andy Marsh answered your questions on policing in this week's Facebook Live. Please [click here](#) to watch the short video recorded on Wednesday 26 August.

Message from PCSO Supervisor Sam Bushen

There have been several reports recently in Taunton and the surrounding area of door to door pressurised sales of home and garden maintenance. Some of the activity has been suspicious and these people are believed to be rogue traders.

Please bear this in mind if someone does turn up on your door step offering work. Take time to do your own research on which companies you use to carry out this work. There are websites available where you can find a tradesperson you can trust.

Please spread the word. Those living alone and the elderly are more vulnerable and at risk of being targeted. If you come across anything suspicious, please don't hesitate to contact Avon & Somerset Police or alternatively, you can report directly to Trading Standards.

Be alert and stay safe!

Finally

It is important to keep up to date with the latest [information and advice from the government](#).

For quick up to date information regarding SWT services please follow us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWTCouncil/ or Twitter [@swtcouncil](https://twitter.com/swtcouncil)
Please see our dedicated [webpage](#) for updates.

If you have concerns about your own health and coronavirus please visit the [NHS](#) website.

#StayAlert

#Controlthevirus

#SaveLives