

Cllr Lindsay MacDougall District report – August 2020

Fewer district meetings this month; officers and members are taking a huge sigh of relief that the initial wave of Corona virus has subsided and many are taking time out for their annual leave.

Meanwhile, Cllr Shane Collins, Leader of the Green group at Mendip District Council (MDC) and based in Frome, has made a short video to inspire us all to get weeding:

<https://we.tl/t-B6oq4unnCJ>

As he points out, Bayer (who have bought out Monsanto) have put aside a £15 billion fund for lawsuits from those suing over the glyphosate-based weedkiller, Roundup. This speaks volumes as to how we should be managing our weeds, and without Roundup; Shane suggests a once yearly volunteer hoeing team would tidy things up and keep the street weeds from getting too unmanageable. This plan is due to be piloted imminently by MDC's Neighbourhood Services in Wells. The town council team of course continue to use the steam detergent-based Foamstream for central parts of the town.

On the Planning front, the government has brought out a White Paper setting out proposals for some radical changes to the planning system. A summary may be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-for-the-future-explained>

The features of this paper, which is out for consultation, include:

- 1. Zoning:** dividing areas for “growth”, “renewal” or “protection”.
- 2. Renewal:** Areas zoned for renewal will be seen as suitable for some development, such as densification and infill development, and will benefit from a statutory “presumption in favour” of development. Schemes that accord with locally-drawn up design codes will benefit from a “fast-track for beauty” recommended by the government’s Building Better Building Beautiful Commission.
- 3. Stripped back local plans:** to be produced in 30 months rather than the current average of 7 years, and to include “an interactive web-based map of the administrative area where data and policies are easily searchable”.
- 4. Section 106 scrapped** whilst the existing Community Infrastructure Levy will be morphed into a nationally-set levy on development value.
- 5. Top down housing targets:** The government now envisages that every local authority will be bound by targets set by a renewed “standard method” for calculating housing need.
- 6. “Duty to co-operate” ditched**
Given the imposition of a top-down target, councils will no longer have a duty to co-operate with each other over the drawing up of local plans, as the numbers will be set by government.
- 7. Protection**
Areas zoned as “protected” will essentially continue with the existing planning process, with all existing Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and similar such designations remaining in force. Importantly, areas of open countryside with no specific wildlife or landscape protections currently can be designated “protected”.
- 8. New design code body:** local authorities will be expected to employ a chief officer for design and place-making to oversee quality. Local design codes must have community input to be valid.
- 9. More permitted development**
Within the “renewal” areas, certain pre-approved development types – such as the densification of suburban semis – will be given automatic pre-approval via new permitted development rights. These new permitted development rights will also have to take account of local design codes.
- 10. Digital planning**
Public involvement in local planning is to be hugely expanded by digitising the service, to allow much easier public access to planning documents.