

Cllr Lindsay MacDougall – District Council report. December 2020

I have attended Planning Board and Full Council meetings this month; also Cabinet where I tabled a written question re. how the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy is to be funded. I therefore welcome that at their December Cabinet, the Libdem administration announced a £10,000 grant to support the funding of an officer to deliver the Natural Environment work stream of this Strategy, coordinated by the Somerset Local Nature Partnership (a body recognised by the planning authorities, and consisting of representatives of Somerset Wildlife Trust, Natural England, councillors and a number of other relevant stakeholders). This evening, prior to the town council meeting, I will be attending a briefing re. **Phosphates on the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar Site**. Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention, an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by UNESCO, which came into force in 1975. This has huge implications for the Local Plan and any housing developments in the district, which are largely on pause.

The issue of moving to a **unitary council model** at district/county level is currently top of the agenda: in 2021, government ministers will make a choice between the districts' plan for two new councils for Somerset and the single unitary suggested by Somerset County Council. This decision is likely to be made by early summer with a view to having any new councils in place by 2023. An IPSOs mori survey has found that residents favour the Stronger Somerset model (East/West Somerset split) by 2 to 1. The transition will involve a 'shadow council' which is expected to be in place sometime next year with elections to be held in 2022. Stronger Somerset news may be found at <http://www.strongersomerset.uk> and the Somerset County Council offer at <http://www.onesomerset.org.uk> (one single unitary council for the whole of Somerset to replace all 4 district councils and the county council).

**Solar Streets** are due to relaunch following the pause due to lockdown earlier in the year; for bulk discounts on solar panel installation, by joining with other households, watch this space or see: <http://avaloncommunityenergycoop.co.uk/new-collaboration-for-solar-streets/>

There is encouraging news on environmental issues in the government's **Spending Review** which impacts Mendip's fulfilment of the recent **Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy**; government accepts that their plans announced prior to this review close less than half the emissions gap needed to meet their own commitments, and the review offers a small improvement on this. In the much-delayed pipeline are:

- \* Transport Decarbonisation Plan
- \* Energy White paper, health Strategy & Buildings Strategy
- \* UK Hydrogen Strategy
- \* Environment Bill
- \* post-Brexit Agriculture subsidy changes
- \* post-Brexit emissions trading or carbon tax decision
- \* Future Homes Standard

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