

District Councillors report – June 2021 – Lindsay MacDougall

It has been suggested to me by a resident that I should use my district councillor report to write about the issue that is top of the Town Council's priorities at the moment, the **roadside living** (and High Street disruption that is seen by some - incorrectly I would say, most live in houses - to be associated with it); so I am relaying here my response to this resident.

You may be aware that there is a '**Multi-agency Group**' recently set up with the encouragement of our MP, James Heapey, which is taking steps to address such issues. I am sure you are aware that it is a complex problem, and we can't just 'dig a hole and bury it'. Nor do I agree with those who advocate making all travelling people unwelcome in this town; Glastonbury has been a place that attracts people from all walks of life for centuries, and many of them have stayed and helped to make this town the success that it is.

Regarding **anti-social behaviour**, in previous years the town has employed a dedicated police officer specifically to address these issues, with limited success; however, the town council does have a good dialogue with the police here and this is on-going. I think you will find that the apparent lawlessness that has occurred during lockdown is now being addressed, now instructions to resume enforcement and so on, have been received from central government.

It is a shame that the authorities have seen fit to remove the Turning Point (**drug addiction** advice) offices in town, so that this help can only be found now in Yeovil. I have suggested that all the shops that sell **alcoholic drinks** in the centre of town should be encouraged to avoid selling to those who (a) are already inebriated, and (b) are known to be a problem. I have asked the local police team to check that all of them are being advised in this way; it has to be a first line of defence.

As regards the **homeless**, there is currently a Homelessness and Housing Advisory Group on the town council looking at these problems. My own personal view is that the huge enthusiasm for short-term lets, AirBnB and the like, in Glastonbury, and the exorbitant rents for residents looking for longterm accommodation, only serve to exacerbate the homelessness problem; a problem that is due to balloon due to the end of the pandemic 'rent holiday' at the end of May. We are not the only community to be faced with these kind of problems; in Cornwall on 28 May a few days ago, AirBnB was advertising 10,290 **short-term lets** compared to Rightmove who only had 62 rental properties advertised for local people to choose from. I understand that a primary school teacher newly employed in Newquay is considering returning to Derbyshire as there is simply nowhere for them to live. MDC (Mendip District Council) is leaving no stone unturned to find land to build more social housing, and I fully support them in this venture (whilst having serious reservations about using allotment land, which abuts the flood plain, for this purpose). Likewise land for a traveller site, as recommended in the MDC Local Plan.

I hope this sheds some light on the challenges we all face as councillors in resolving our High Street issues and managing the 'encampments' (which by the way are only illegal if Somerset County Council decide to treat it as trespass, in other words, there is no law in this country that criminalises you for sleeping in a vehicle by the side of the road, well, as

yet). We may be thankful that, unlike other towns, we have a full occupancy of trading premises in our high street; this is something to be proud of, though I agree there is work to be done to ensure that the more difficult aspects in the centre of Glastonbury as well as further afield do not control the agenda.

My focus this month has not been entirely on this issue, though this has taken up much of my time and energy. I will continue to report on the **Equalities Steering group** which I feel does have some relevance for our own community; exclusion of minority groups is an issue for us all to understand better. To this end the group welcomed Vienna from Black Lives Matter in Taunton; the Equalities group is Somerset led and so reflects the diverse culture, including those of mixed race, in the Taunton community, as well as addressing other equalities issues across the county.

I also attended a **Domestic Abuse** (and how to recognise it is happening) training at MDC; during lockdown this has become an increasing problem, and resources have been made available by central government to increase provision for those who need protection, and also help for those who are perpetrators to change their behaviour.

Meetings at Mendip DC are now being conducted in person, with plastic screens and so on, under Covid rules as they are at present. Having only had one of my jobs I opted out of Planning Board this month. I have been busy on Zoom however with a number of meetings, including a Local Government Association webinar on Homelessness, and also a meeting of the Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) group. Our local LTN group has initiated a **new A361 action campaign**, this time aspiring to small changes, rather than a whole new road (more news to come, but new members welcome). We are looking to reduce the number and size of vehicles using the road and make it safer for cyclists and pedestrians, by assembling up-to-date data and holding various activist events such as the mass cycling/walking event from Glastonbury to Wells held on 25th April. There was some disappointment that the much heralded new pedestrian crossing, at the roundabout next to the Rural Life Museum, is only a 'safe crossing'. Those of us who have campaigned for years for this, are pleased with any recognition of the problems we face; we must continue to make small steps forward.

A quick heads-up on **Unitary** developments. We expect an announcement as to whether it is to be a single unitary or two (East and West Somerset) in 2023, from Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), by the end of this parliamentary session, ie 22 July.

I make no apology for the length of my report this month; it seems that people do actually read it, and more detail is required!