

Monthly Somerset Councillor Report

– Mendip South, Cllr Claire Sully

May 2026

Planning Application Extensions — Parish Councils Have the Right to Request More Time

Following concerns raised with me by Parish Clerks in my division, I contacted planning to clarify the position on extension requests. Parish Clerks had been told that extensions to consultation periods were not possible when requested to align with the timing of a Parish Full Council meeting. This was incorrect. Upon request, I can confirm that planning officers can agree to extensions to allow Parish Councils the opportunity to discuss applications at their Full Council meetings. If you are experiencing difficulties with this, please get in touch.

Planning Committee Reform — Pilton Parish Council Raises Concerns

The Government is consulting on significant reforms to planning committees under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025. The draft regulations propose a national scheme of delegation that would determine which planning applications must be decided by officers and which may be referred to a committee — with tighter Gateway Tests controlling the latter.

After I highlighted this consultation, Pilton Parish Council wrote to me, and their MP, expressing serious concerns. They warned that the proposed reforms risk “undermining an important element of local democratic accountability” — particularly the ability of parish councils to ensure that significant or contentious applications are considered by elected members. They noted that rural and smaller communities, where parish councils are often the primary democratic voice, will be disproportionately affected, and that public confidence in the planning system may be eroded if contentious applications are determined without visible, accountable decision-making. Pilton Parish Council called on Tessa Munt MP to advocate for a clear and proportionate mechanism by which parish councils can request that applications of significant local concern go to committee.

If you also want to raise your voice on behalf of your communities, contact your local MP and raise concerns about the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 and the impact on planning committees.

The Strawberry Line, the Somerset Circle, and a Conference of Trees

Have you ever wondered why the Strawberry Line appears in fragments across Mid-Somerset — stops and starts, interrupted by busy roads? The answer is a history lesson and a story of remarkable persistence spanning decades. The Strawberry Line takes its name from the old Cheddar Valley railway line, which once carried passengers and strawberries from Somerset’s farms to markets across the country until its closure in the late 1960s. Today, that same route is being brought back to life as a greenway for walkers, cyclists, wheelchair users, and equestrians.

In April, I joined local people and dignitaries at Collett Park in Shepton Mallet and at Wells Cathedral for the Somerset Circle Discovery Ride — a two-day, 150km ride organised to highlight both the progress and the challenges of completing the Somerset Circle. The Circle is an 88-mile, mostly traffic-free circuit linking Bristol, Bath, the Mendip Hills, the Somerset Levels and the coast. Over two thirds is already complete, with the Strawberry Line playing a vital role in closing the remaining gaps. Somerset Council has recently provided a grant of £730,000 for missing links in the walking and cycling network to the Strawberry Line and the wider Somerset Circle project.

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Useful links: greenwaysandcycleroutes.org | thestraberryline.org.uk/join

Read my full article here: [A people's path, in pieces, while determined as a train on the track to be a Somerset Circle](#)

And it is fitting that the Somerset Conference of Trees is being held on 12 June in Hornblotton — the village I grew up in, where my Dad lived until he died in 2016, and which sits within my Mendip South division. My Dad worked as a supervisor on one of the Youth Training Schemes, teaching young people about forestry maintenance, and he believed deeply in what those schemes offered. He used to say that after he passed, he would be under the trees. If he were alive today, I know I would have taken him. I am proud to be the Councillor for Mendip South — a division that is my memory lane, written into the landscape I have loved all my life. [Book your place here.](#)

Full article here: [Under the trees](#)

Fly Tipping Update — Pilton

Following the fly tipping incident in Pilton on 1 April, I have met with the Envirocrime team who are actively working on the case. I am pleased to report there are positive lines of enquiry — which would not have existed without the swift and determined actions of local residents working together. The site was cleaned up within 48 hours, and the team has a strong track record of successful prosecutions.

An important point for all residents: under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, anyone who arranges for a third party to collect their waste has a legal Duty of Care to ensure it is handled legally. If that waste is then fly tipped, the originator — not just the person who dumped it — can face prosecution. Always check your waste collector holds the relevant licence, and always obtain a Waste Transfer Note as your evidence. A further update is expected in approximately six weeks. Full article: clairesully.com/fly-tipping-incident-update-pilton

Cost of Living and Energy Crisis — Help Available Now

Somerset Council has received £22.6 million from the Government over three years to support residents facing financial hardship, with Citizens Advice Somerset appointed to lead delivery. If you are struggling, help is available — don't wait to reach out.

Heating Oil Help — If you can't afford to top up your heating oil, you may qualify for urgent help if oil is your main heating source, you have under 300 litres left, and you're on Universal Credit, Pension Credit, or can show you can't afford a delivery. [Apply here](#) or call 0808 278 7842.

Crisis Help — Facing a sudden financial shock? Support is available for Somerset residents on means-tested benefits or low incomes who can't cover essentials like food or energy. [Apply here.](#)

Other support includes: [Food Pantries](#) | [Council Tax Reduction](#) | [Full cost of living support](#)

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Safety Works Begin on Frome Bypass After Five Deaths in Five Years

Somerset Council is introducing new safety measures on the A361 Frome Bypass, which has seen five fatalities in the past five years, four of these between 2023 and 2024. Work starting from 11 May includes resurfacing, a reduced speed limit of 50mph, and central road hatching, carried out over three nights with a full overnight road closure. AI cameras installed in autumn 2024 recorded over 4,500 offences in their first four months, including 74 drivers exceeding 80mph. The works follow extensive campaigning by residents, local councillors including Lib Dem councillor Adam Boyden, and Lib Dem MP Anna Sabine.

£4 Million Roundabout to Replace Dangerous Junction Near Wells

A notorious collision spot near Wells is to be transformed into a roundabout this summer. The Whitnell Corner junction on the B3139/B3135 near West Horrington has seen 67 collisions over 20 years, including one fatality. Work on the £4 million Government-funded scheme will begin in mid-June, with the road closed 24/7 throughout and completion expected in the autumn.

Somerset Leisure Centres Kept Open After Operator Collapse

Somerset Council has moved swiftly to keep gyms, pools and leisure centres in Frome, Wells, Glastonbury and Street open after operator Fusion Lifestyle went into administration. The Council has agreed funding for three months to ensure time to appoint a new operator. The Shepton Mallet Lido has opened as expected on 1st May. Members are encouraged to keep using the facilities and maintain their memberships as usual.

New Bus Service to Connect Glastonbury and Street with Train Network

Somerset Council is launching a new bus service in June linking Glastonbury and Street with Castle Cary railway station. The 667X will run seven days a week, including Sundays, with connections timed to meet trains to London, Exeter, Plymouth, Salisbury, Weymouth and Gloucester. A similar link from Somerton and Langport is also being planned. I am disappointed that Pilton is not included in this route along with the Glastonbury TrainLink proposal. I will continue to advocate for Pilton and other villages in the Mendip South division to be included in this new and future services.

Have Your Say on Somerset's SEND Reform Plan

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities across Somerset are being urged to share their views as part of a [consultation on the Government's SEND Reform Plan](#). Somerset Council must submit its local SEND Reform Plan by 19 June. Young people with SEND can take part via the [SEND Reform Plan Survey](#), with responses needed by Friday 15 May 2026.

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Nominations Open for Celebrating Care and Achievement 2026

Somerset Council is inviting nominations for its Celebrating Care and Achievement event on Thursday 30 July 2026, expanded so all care-experienced children and young people across the county can attend. Nominations close Friday 29 May 2026.

Nominate a child/young person: forms.cloud.microsoft/e/pRs2ZVuGWC | Nominate an adult: forms.cloud.microsoft/e/wjZGyQR0uC

Somerset's Public Health Chief Urges Residents to Get Free Heart Check

Somerset's Director of Public Health, Alison Bell, is encouraging eligible residents to book a free NHS Health Check after having one herself. The checks, available to those aged 40–74 with no pre-existing heart conditions, assess cardiovascular health and risk of conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Appointments are available across the county including Chard, Frome, Glastonbury, Wellington, Minehead, Shepton Mallet, Taunton, Street, Wells and Wincanton. [Book your appointment here.](#)

New Tobacco Law Prompts Call for Somerset Smokers to Quit

The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 has received Royal Assent, introducing a generational ban on tobacco sales to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009, along with restrictions on vape advertising and a retail licensing scheme. Somerset's public health leaders are urging the county's 60,000 smokers to quit, with free support through Smokefree Somerset. Website: smokefreesomerset.org.uk | Phone: 01823 356222 (9am–5pm) | Email: smokefree@somerset.gov.uk

Somerset's Social Care Challenge: How the Council is Responding

Somerset Council's Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Housing, Councillor Sarah Wakefield, appeared on BBC Somerset to address questions about the growing pressures on social care. With Somerset having one of the oldest populations in the country, demand is rising. Steps being taken include working more closely with the NHS and voluntary sector, investing in technology to help people live independently for longer, and incorporating AI to save time. Listen at: bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002vc94 (available for 24 days from 29 April).

England's Chief Medical Officer Visits Somerset to Study Rural Health

Professor Sir Chris Whitty visited Glastonbury in March as part of his research into health in small towns and rural communities, which will inform his next Annual Report. He saw Somerset's community health initiatives at first hand, including food pantries, early years support, library-based NHS health checks, and services supporting people experiencing homelessness and substance use.

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Record 99% of Somerset Children Get Primary School of Their Choice

Somerset Council has announced that 99.43% of the 4,938 families who applied for a primary school place this year were offered one of their top three preferences — a record high. Of those, 95.38% received their first-choice school. Children will begin at their new schools in September 2026.

Somerset Pupil Referral Units Reorganised to Improve Consistency

Somerset's four Pupil Referral Units have been consolidated into two. From April 2026, the western unit is now called Willow Vale School and the eastern unit retains the name Tor School. Two behaviour partnerships in Frome and West Somerset will be fully integrated by September 2026. There will be no changes to funding or existing sites.

Youth Parliament Members Meet Council Chair at County Hall

Members of the Somerset Youth Parliament visited County Hall in Taunton in April to meet Council Chair Cllr Mike Best. The three members — Eva, Blake and Luca — outlined their campaign priorities, including mental health, online safety, access to sport, and financial literacy.

Are You Making the Most of Your Food Waste Recycling?

If you're already recycling your food waste, give yourself a pat on the back — but a couple of simple checks could make your efforts even more effective. When food scraps are collected separately, they can be turned into energy and fertiliser rather than ending up in landfill. Find out more at: somerset.gov.uk/bins-recycling-and-waste/join-the-food-waste-revolution-in-somerset

Wessex Water Fined Over Somerset Roadworks Breaches

Wessex Water has been ordered to pay over £13,000 by Taunton Magistrates after admitting two offences relating to street works on the A38 at North Petherton in July 2025. [More on this story here.](#)

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Report it first: Useful Links to share with your communities

Report a Problem on the Road - all reporting pages for roads, pavements, lighting:

[Report a problem on the road](#)

Potholes and road damage

[Potholes, road damage and edge loss](#)

Report a problem with a street light

[Report a problem with a street light](#)

Road signs, markings and lighting

[Road signs, bollards and road markings](#)

Speed limits

[Speed limits](#)

Street and roadworks

[Street and roadworks problems](#)

Traffic updates and roadworks — follow:

[Travel Somerset on X](#) and [Travel Somerset on Facebook](#)

All ongoing roadworks interactive map

[Roadworks and travel information](#)

Somerset Waste - collection days, replacement bins, missed collections

[Bins, recycling and waste](#)

Travel and Tourist Information

[Travel Somerset - Art, Culture, Events, History & More](#)

Climate newsletter sign-up

[Climate newsletter sign-up](#)

Open Somerset Council Consultations - shape the future of Somerset:

[Somerset Council - Citizen Space - Consultations](#)

SOMERSET COUNCIL TELEPHONE NO - 0300 123 2224