

COUNTY COUNCIL CONSERVATIVE GROUP

BRIEFING SHEET FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

JANUARY 2019

Bus subsidies consultation: Given the improving state of Somerset County Councils finances it has been agreed to reverse an earlier decision taken last September to consult on the future of all subsidised bus routes across the County. This consultation would have looked at the future for all such routes, which are currently part-funded by SCC. The decision effectively protects subsidised routes from any cuts as part of the 2019/20 budget process.

County Finances: The County Council was delighted to be made one of the pilot areas for the Business Rate Retention pilot in the recent Local Government Settlement. In total this will retain around £6.7 million in the County, shared between all the Somerset authorities including District Councils.

County Finances (2): The recent Public Health settlement reduced Somerset's grant for this important preventative work, by over half a million pounds. Most worryingly it again illustrated the disparity between local authorities with Somerset receiving £35 per head against a national average of £57 and some other authorities receiving over £70 per head! The difference for Somerset against average is £10million and will represent a key line of demand in next years 'Fairer Funding' review with central Government.

Somerset Wood, memorial to the fallen: Volunteers are being urged to join the first big tree-planting initiative for the Somerset Wood which will eventually create a community wood in honour of the 11,281 Somerset residents who died in World War One. The first batch of 1,200 broad-leaved trees will be delivered by The Woodland Trust in early January and organisers want to get them in the ground before the end of February. A second phase will take place in winter 2019/20, with a third phase (if needed) in the winter of 2020/21- creating a living memorial to the County's Fallen. Anyone from across Somerset interested to get involved should contact Alan Hall of West Monkton Parish Council on alanhall@westmonkton.net

New School Programme: Consultation on a proposal to build a 420-pupil, 14 class primary school with nursery provision in Somerton, will be held in late January. The new school will replace both the existing King Ina Academy sites and represents a further commitment to deliver on education places across the County. The Planning Application will be submitted to South Somerset District Council in February 2019 with the aim to open the school by September 2020.

At the same time approval has been given for a multi-million pound investment into Bishop Fox's Secondary School in Taunton to allow for expansion and a further 350 secondary places. The development plans include new classrooms

and extended dining areas to accommodate the additional pupils and improve existing facilities.

Major road investment: A multi-million pound scheme to upgrade the busy M5 Junction 25 roundabout at Taunton has been formally approved by SCC. It is expected to cost around £19.2m with allocated funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Growth Deal Fund, Taunton Deane Borough Council, Highways England, and developer contributions. This is the third major scheme which the County Council is currently delivering including the Yeovil Western Corridor and Colley Lane in Bridgwater representing a total of £52 million investment into local highways infrastructure.

Supporting Enterprise: The Highbridge Enterprise Centre, which is already home to 15 businesses and 35 jobs, has had a £470,000 expansion. Jointly funded by Somerset County Council and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership. An extra 234 square metres of suitable space has been provided aimed at making life easier for new and growing businesses. Highbridge is one of five Enterprise Centres established by the County Council to help small and medium-sized businesses start up and grow with other locations in Frome, Dulverton, Wheddon Cross and Minehead. These centres jointly provide 52,000 square feet of commercial office space and units – of which around 93 per cent is taken – supporting 54 businesses.

Foster carer recognition: Huge congratulations go to Elaine Koerner of Yeovil who was awarded an MBE in the New Years honours list. Together with her husband Ian, Elaine has been a Foster Carer with Somerset for over 39 years. During that time they have helped to improve the lives of over 100 children. With nearly 500 children in care in Somerset there is still a big demand for Foster Carers in the County. Full details can be found by visiting www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk or calling 0800 587 9900.

11th May, Somerset Day: 2019 will be the 5th year of Celebrating Somerset Day, on the 11th May. As the date falls on a Saturday this year Passion for Somerset are encouraging even more events across the county than ever before. It is hoped that many Parish and Town Councils will get involved and have a fund raising event for their own local charities. An "Ideas packs" will shortly be available with lots of information on the web site to help with planning the day. Check out the web site and register as soon as possible. www.somersetday.com

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