District Councillors Report 2021

**FEBRUARY 2021**

**SEDGEMOOR DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Mark and Wedmore Ward**

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**View from Sedgemoor**

Firstly, Polly and Will would  like to wish all of their communities a very Happy New Year and let’s hope we can all start to resume our normal way of living soon.

Will attended a Teams Audit and Standards committee meeting at which the members looked at the council’s budget, did the number crunching and approved it to be put forward to Full Council this year. He also continues to help with Speed watch in Mark (although that has now been suspended due to the Virus) and has attended Parish Council meetings.

Both councillors were present at a Full Council meeting via Teams for the Recommendation from the Executive that Full Council support The Somerset Climate Energy Strategy and Draft Strategic Action Plan, Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset. There was one abstention but the rest of the councillors supported the recommendation.

Polly spoke at Planning Committee in support of an application in Cocklake, which was refused and against The Panborough Inn being turned into residential, which was granted. The committee were very torn about the Cattery application in Cocklake but the flood zone rather got in the way as it has on a previous application.

Polly chaired a Licensing Panel for a new premises licence at a shop in Bridgwater, following objections from the District Licensing Officer and Trading Standards. The applicant had a limited understanding of the Licensing Act or the Licensing Objectives and so the application was declined.

Both Polly and Will continue to help and support the community Covid projects around the Sedgemoor District and are also volunteers for the vaccination programme.

Covid numbers around the area and in particular in Mark and Wedmore continue to rise steeply. Polly and Will would ask all residents to be very careful and try to help curb the increases with distancing, mask wearing and staying at home wherever possible.

Polly has recently started to help out in the new ‘Old Spot Bakery’ and would be delighted to say hello (at a safe distance and with a mask) if you are passing.

**MARCH 2021**

View from Sedgemoor

It has been a very busy month since the last bulletin from Polly and Will.  Both attended the Axe Brue meeting which set the budget in line with anticipated works that are needed to keep the Ryhne drainage systems working well.  With higher than average rainfalls in recent years, this has become more and more challenging for the hard working engineers.  The Chief Executive has introduced new measures to be able to plan the future works and budgets more accurately for the next 5 years with the full support of the Board.  A new chairman for the Board was also elected.

Both also attended Full Council to agree the budget across Sedgemoor.  Although there will be the inevitable rise, Sedgemoor’s Council Tax rate is still one of the lowest in the Country whilst delivering an excellent service.  Sadly, the Chief Executive for Sedgemoor, Allison Griffin, is retiring and so a new one was appointed.  Robert Brown will be taking up the role with immediate effect but with Allison mentoring him until she leaves in April.  Robert has been with Sedgemoor since 2001and wants to carry on the great leadership that Allison has provided during her tenure as CEO.

Will spoke at a recent Planning Committee in opposition to the Strongvox application in Wedmore for an additional 38 houses on their existing build site.  Unfortunately, the Committee decided to support the Planning Officers recommendation and passed the application.

Will attended the recent Mark Parish council meeting (see Chairman’s report) and also took part in the first Speedwatch which has resumed after the lockdown period caused it to be suspended over last three months.

A number of ‘fly tips’ have been reported to Clean Surroundings over the last month and dealt with. Will has also reported some highways defects that will hopefully be addressed soon.  A tip when reporting fly tipping to aid collection is to use the ‘what three words’ app which locates anywhere in the Country to the nearest metre and is used by Clean Surroundings to find the location.  Report any fly tipping to clean.surroundings@sedgemoor.gov.uk

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**VIEW FROM SEDGEMOOR**

There have been 3 Full Council Meetings since the last newsletter with the most recent looking at the Government's proposals for Local Authority reorganisation in Somerset.  Many of you may be aware that Somerset County Council have applied for Unitary status which means that all local public services would be centralised under Somerset Unitary Authority.  The local District Councils including Sedgemoor put forward their own proposal, Stronger Somerset.  It is clear that there is not an option to remain ‘as we are’ and that the Government has questioned whether the Stronger Somerset proposal can be tested against a Somerset Unitary proposal by a poll of Somerset residents.  Sedgemoor is seeking legal advice on this matter.

Will attended the Drainage Board Consortium meeting and the Audit and Standards meeting this month.  Both Polly and Will attended the Licensing and General Purposes committee meeting.  This was interesting as they heard an update to licensing laws that may affect our area in the coming months and how Covid measures have impacted on the licensing team.  A report was also given by the officer in charge of the Covid Warden team which was set up in the first Lockdown period. The Wardens travel the area and give advice on Covid safe operations in retail / food/ leisure outlets. They also have the authority to fine where compliance isn’t followed.  However, they do follow the police approach of engagement and advice before resorting to fines. The officer reported that the majority of the areas outlets were only too keen to receive and follow advice given and seemed highly compliant.

The National Grid pylon work is moving forward at pace as most will be aware with the amount of ‘piling’ going on.

Will picked up from Mark Village Life FaceBook page that there were some issues with the gateways across Back Drove in Mark for horse riders in particular.  He is currently working with the National Grid liaison team to try and agree better arrangements for horse riders who want to use this bridleway.

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**VIEW FROM SEDGEMOOR**

**AUGUST 2021**

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The focus in the past couple of months has very much been on the Stronger Somerset vs One Somerset bids to Parliament.  The four District Councils thought it important to let the residents have their say, and organised a poll.  The results were as they have been on the previous occasions where SCC wanted to run the county as a unitary authority, and that was that the residents do not want SCC in control.

**111,589 votes were received:**

**72,561 Stronger Somerset, 65.3%  38,547  One Somerset 34.7%**

This demonstrates a strong cross-party feeling that has been evident all through the process.  The success of the poll demonstrates to Government that Somerset residents wanted to have their say, in a referendum that focussed on them, rather than key stakeholders and organisations.  The leaders of the District Councils have written to the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick, with the poll results.  Government shouild annouce their decision by 22nd July.

Other big issues have been the terrible lack of collections for recycling and garden waste.  Many of you have quite rightly been in touch with us regarding this and want refunds on your waste collection subscription.  We want to make it very clear that we support this and also that this is in fact a problem created by the new contractor, Suez.  SWP have been doing all they can to sort the issues and there have been several excuses, but this is not acceptable to any of us who pay for our council tax and services.  Suez were well aware that they were taking on this contract and should be held accountable.  This is not some Tory money saving ploy, as some have suggested, and this is again where politics get in the way in local authorities.  SDC are not to blame and all councillors are demanding SWP and Suez come before Full Council to explain themselves.  We shall continue to push for reimbursement.

Will attended PC meetings and also an Axe/Brue Drainage Board Finance committee meeting.  Polly chaired two Licensing Panels at Bridgewater House, for Street Trading Consent for burger vans.  The Policy for Street Trading is different to Taxi Licensing and other Licencing policies, so had to be held in the office rather than remotely.  The Panels were held as concerns had been highlighted by Somerset Highways, but after consideration by the Panel members, both were granted.

We are always here to help if we can.

Polly and Will

**VIEW FROM SEDGEMOOR**

**AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2021**

August is usually a quieter month and so not as much to report from Polly and Will.

Polly chaired a miscellaneous Licensing Panel of a Temporary Event Notice for a music festival in Berrow following objections from the Police.  The applicant had failed to submit a full Event Management Plan in time of the deadline and therefore the panel members had to  refuse permission.

Will attended the Special Full Council at SDC to discuss the outcome of the approved One Somerset bid.  He also attended a lengthy Audit and Standards meeting and continues with the Speedwatch duties in Mark.

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