**SOMERSET COUNCIL REPORT**

**LONG LOAD PARISH COUNCIL 19 March 2024**

**1.0 - Somerset Council matters**

**1.1 -New way to access information on Health and Care Services in Somerset**

Leading a healthy life in Somerset has just got a little easier – thanks to [a new website](https://bit.ly/healthy-somerset) launched by Somerset Council’s Public Health Team.

The new site – [www.healthysomerset.co.uk](https://bit.ly/healthy-somerset) - is easy to use and features health and wellbeing resources tailored to all age ranges – making it even easier for users to find the information and support they are looking for. Free resources include everything from nutrition tips to mental health support and information on maintaining good health.

Public Health in Somerset has many responsibilities from birth to death, protecting and improving the health and wellbeing of the local population.

The new refreshed layout of the site breaks down services and support to represent the ages and stages of life from the ‘best start in life’ (0-5 yrs), through to ‘starting well’ (5-18 yrs), to ‘living well’ (18-65 yrs) and ‘ageing well’ (65+).

The new site also holds information for professionals, including the local Public Health training offer for staff working in health and care, workplace health, and local data and intelligence for Somerset.

To view the website and be empowered on your journey to a healthier lifestyle, visit: <https://bit.ly/healthy-somerset>.

**1.2 – Somerset Council Finance update**

On Tuesday, Somerset Council voted through plans to set a balanced budget for the coming financial year, but received a stark warning of significant challenges in the years ahead. Members agreed to a range of measures to bridge a funding gap of £100m for 2024/25, including significant savings, increasing Council Tax by 5%, and using reserves (a council’s equivalent of savings).  The proposals also include a ‘capitalisation direction’ of £36.9m – this is where councils are given permission by Government to borrow money or sell assets to pay for day-to-day running costs

1.3 – Safeguarding Bus Services

Four bus services, 58, 54, 28, and 25 that were at risk of being stopped or reduced due to low passenger numbers can continue to run for another year after Somerset Council and First Bus South which operates Buses of Somerset reached an agreement to keep the services running until the end of March 2025

# **1.4 - Somerset Libraries win praise in national review**

Somerset Libraries are being cited as examples of excellence nationally in an independent review of English Public Libraries carried out by Baroness Sanderson.

This review features six examples and case studies from Somerset, covering community libraries, health initiatives, digital innovation, thermal camera loans and comment from customers and frontline staff alike.

Somerset also had 11 named contributors listed – the highest for any individual Library Service.

Lady Sanderson visited libraries across England to see how the service is delivered and spoke to people working in libraries, as well as campaigners, volunteers, and users. Her eight recommendations are contained in [**An independent review of English public libraries – GOV.UK**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-independent-review-of-english-public-libraries-report-and-government-reponse/an-independent-review-of-english-public-libraries).

Community Managed Libraries are cited as examples of “well-used and much-loved cornerstones of the community” with the Castle Cary branch where links with carers’ groups have been established.

Lady Sanderson said many libraries now have health professionals on site, quoting a Yeovil nurse who said:

A lot of people get white coat syndrome in a surgery, so they find it easier here. I also get a lot of people coming in after a bereavement. They’ve maybe buried their head in the sand a bit about their own health and so they’ll pop along here.

If I was operating in a pharmacy or a surgery, say, I just don’t think people would come along in the same way. And the great thing about being here is if there’s an issue around weight, say, or just not knowing what to cook I’ll often suggest they have a browse in the cookery book section, or I’ll gently direct them to some of the books on general health.

The Glass Box at Taunton Library is cited as an example of how libraries are using digital technology creatively: “It has everything from Raspberry Pi, a device that enables people to learn computer engineering and programming to a 3D printer which was used by a man over lockdown to make a prosthetic foot for his child which he had made to his own design.”

Somerset Libraries also loan thermal imaging cameras and one customer explained that the service had allowed him to pinpoint cold spots in his property and as a result the housing association is taking action.

**1.5- Momentous day for Somerset as Gigafactory plans move forward**

The Leader of Somerset Council has described plans which could see Somerset become the UK’s biggest producer of electric vehicle (EV) batteries as ‘momentous’ and of global significance.

Agratas, a new business within the Tata Group, has today started writing to thousands of local residents to confirm its plans to build a gigafactory producing EV batteries at the Gravity Smart Campus site in Puriton, near Bridgwater.

A £4 billion investment, the Agratas factory will create up to 4,000 jobs and many more as part of the supply chain. It will put Somerset at the centre of the UK’s green energy revolution with the potential to kick-start countywide and regional economic growth and jobs.

Councillor Bill Revans said: “This is momentous for the County, its economy and for future generations. It’s about seizing an incredible opportunity to be at the heart of the UK’s green energy industry that will create thousands of highly-skilled, well-paid, green jobs.

“Agratas’ huge investment in the County has the potential to transform the local and regional economy.”

He added that the Council’s experience with Hinkley Point C makes it uniquely well-placed to support the development of the site.

“Together with Hinkley Point C and businesses like Leonardo, it shows that modern Somerset is leading the way in exciting, high-tech industry and puts us firmly on the international trade map.

“We are committed to making this work for Somerset, its residents and our business community. We know how to deliver significant projects and work with communities to maximise the benefits of investment into our County.”

It is envisioned that the plant will be operational in the second half of the decade, eventually producing 40GWh of battery cells annually, enough to supply approximately 500,000 passenger vehicles. Once fully operational, the factory is set to be Britain’s biggest battery factory, and one of the largest in Europe.

Over the next five years, the authority plans to invest in the infrastructure, skills, site access and connectivity needed to make sure Somerset benefits as much as possible from Agratas’ investment. This will be paid for by the Business Rates generated by the factory once it is operational.

The Council and Government are finalising an ‘in principle’ agreement for support, which will enable this massive long-term economic boost to the County to happen without extra cost to the Council and with no negative impact on the Council and its finances.

The Council’s Corporate and Resources Scrutiny committee will be asked to comment on the plans when it meets on the 7 March 2024. The Executive will then take decisions on the 12 March, including on the principle of the financial approach.

Early in the next financial year the Council expects to take further decisions through Full Council, including further details about the investment and how it will be funded.

**2.0 - Local Issues**

**2.1 - Drainage issues** Given the recent events, a discussion with you to update on current knowledge of drainage and floods. Nothing of note at this point.

**2.2 - Repairs to SIS Fence on the footpath and continuation of the permissive path use**

Ongoing discussions with landowner. (email of 17/10/23) JB Updated in email (16/11/23) Awaiting response from Long Load. Way forward to be agree at the PC meeting. (This will remain on the report until progress is made and an update is available)

Suitable sign produced. Awaiting response from landowner

**Regards John and Emily**