

SOMERSET COUNCIL

OCTOBER 2024

Community heroes recognised

Community heroes from across Somerset have been recognised for their unstinting service with a Somerset Council Chair's Award.

The awards were presented by Somerset Council Chair, Cllr Mike Best, at a ceremony in Taunton Rugby Football Club attended by the nominees and their guests, and the Deputy Leader of Somerset Council, Cllr Liz Leyshon.

The award recipients were nominated by their city, town and parish councils in recognition of their outstanding contribution to their communities.

Among those on the list of honours was **Chatty Hour Tuesdays**, nominated by Lympsham Parish Council, whose citation said:

This wonderful group was started by our own Julia Rosser to combat loneliness, provide a warm space in winter, help those with memory and sight issues and provide a subsidised meal once a week in the community café at the Sports Club in the heart of Lympsham.

This nomination is for the whole group who come to chat, support and laugh together. I can honestly say their enthusiasm to greet newcomers is both endearing and heart-warming, everyone is made to feel welcome regardless of age, sex or impairment.

Among the many individuals to be recognised was **Mike Marshall**, nominated by Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council for giving over forty years of unwavering dedication and service to the Ruishton community.

Their citation said:

His steadfast commitment, leadership, and tireless efforts have profoundly enriched the lives of residents, fostering a spirit of unity and progress. Mike's contributions are a testament to his enduring devotion and altruism.

There were 48 award winners in total including a posthumous honour for former Somerset Council, Somerton Town Council, and South Somerset District Council member **Dean Ruddie**, who was nominated by Somerton Town Council.

The citation said:

A well-respected colleague, formidable advocate of Somerton and truly remarkable man. He had an abundance of energy and enthusiasm, giving endless time in support of Somerton. A wonderful and kind man. His guidance, advice, knowledge and encouragement are sorely missed.

His knowledge of Somerton was encyclopaedic. Described as "Mr Somerton" truly reflects how passionate he was about the town, how committed to ensuring the voices of Somerton residents

were heard. He was approachable, forthright and committed to resolving issues, this is reflected in the heavy loss felt by so many at his sudden passing.

The nine recipients who were unable to attend on the night will be visited by Cllr Best who will personally present their awards.

Cllr Best said:

West Somerset and Taunton area

- John Lewis – Taunton
- Mike Marshall – Ruishton
- Richard Holland – Staple Fitzpaine
- Alan Hall – West Monkton
- Kevin Sully – Dunster
- Mandy Bool – Fitzhead
- Paul Hart – Neroche
- Kingston St Mary Village Hall Committee
- Ian Aldridge – Watchet and Williton
- Jenny Barker – Dulverton
- Ian Duncan – Old Cleeve
- Andrea Gibbs – Churchstanton
- Graham Gleed – Stoke St Gregory
- Charles Cudlip – Creech St Michael
- David Patterson – Wiveliscombe

Bridge as big as a bus lifted into Shepton Mallet means a big step forward for Active Travel plans

In a unique partnership with volunteers, councils, charities and contractors, Somerset Council is working to create a traffic-free path from the Mendips to the sea along the former railway line, known as the Strawberry Line.

The new bridge – which is as long as a double-decker bus – over the B3136 in Shepton Mallet is another step towards eventually connecting Ridge Road to Collett Park in the town centre. Although now in place, the bridge is not yet open to the public.

Construction was supervised by volunteer led charitable organisation Greenways and Cycle routes and work carried out by local contractors MP and KM Golding.

The Strawberry Line volunteers together with volunteers from the neighbouring Friends of Windsor Hill Tunnels project have provided key support and helped with clearance and construction through regular weekly volunteer sessions and at Greenways workcamps.

This has included supporting with all aspects of the path, from land access negotiations, vegetation clearing and preparatory works ahead of construction, to planting the verges and surrounding areas, creating local walking routes, managing the local ecology and maintaining the path itself.

The Strawberry Line project encourages people out of cars, reducing congestion and pollution, while promoting active travel and a healthy lifestyle. The new bridge, coupled with Shepton Town Council led improvements to Collett Park and future aspirations to create an Arts Trail and support local businesses along the route and gives Shepton Mallet a boost for now and generations to come.

More information can be found on the Strawberry Line's [Discover the line](#) webpage.

Somerset Councillors raise concerns over Winter Fuel Allowance

The Leaders of all political groups in Somerset have written to the Prime Minister to express deep concerns about the recent decision to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance.

The letter has been sent following a motion and debate at Full Council last week. It has cross-party support and is signed by Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council and the Liberal Democrat Group, Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of the Conservative Group, Cllr Leigh Redman, Leader of the Labour Group, Cllr Dave Mansell, Leader of the Green Group, and Cllr John Hunt, Leader of the Independent Group.

The letter says:

This letter is a cross-party appeal to you to urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to carry out a thorough review of the decision to remove the Winter Fuel Payment. We are particularly concerned about the impact this will have on vulnerable pensioners, especially those who do not claim Pension Credit and are therefore at a heightened risk of fuel poverty.

It adds:

The Winter Fuel Allowance has been a crucial lifeline for many elderly residents in Somerset, helping them to stay warm during the harsh winter months. Removing this benefit could lead to increased health issues and financial strain for those already struggling to make ends meet.

This winter, Somerset Council will again be working with partners in the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector to support vulnerable residents across the county.

This includes distributing £3.8m from the Government's Household Support Fund which can be used to provide food, fuel vouchers and essential items to those in need. Find out more by visiting the Council's [Somerset Household Support Fund](#) page.

Residents are also encouraged to check if they could be eligible for Pension Credit, which provides extra money to help with living costs for people over state pension age and on a low income. You can apply online at gov.uk/pension-credit, or call the Pension Credit claim line on [0800 99 1234](tel:0800991234).

Frome businessman prosecuted for fly tipping commercial waste and Duty of Care offences

A Somerset takeaway owner faces a bill of more than £5,000 for improperly disposing of business waste in public litter bins.

In February 2023, Somerset Council's waste contractor reported a fast food takeaway outlet in Frome disposing of business waste in public litter bins and other locations around the local area.

Council Environmental Protection officers carried out a trade waste inspection at UK Kebab, 7 Bath Street. Its owner, Eyub Saliev, could not provide evidence of holding a current commercial waste contract and could not account for how commercial waste generated by the business was lawfully being disposed of.

In 2021, the business owner had been issued Fixed Penalty Notices and a formal caution for unlawfully disposing of waste in contravention of Regulations.

Mr Saliev pleaded guilty at Taunton Magistrates' Court on Tuesday, 8 October, admitting contraventions relating to fly tipping and commercial waste duty of care, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The Lay Magistrates ordered Saliev to pay a fine of £865, reduced from £1,297 due to his early guilty plea, along with a compensation order of £2,052 to Somerset Council.

Additionally, he was also required to cover the Council's legal and investigation costs of £1,887 and a Victim Surcharge of £346, bringing the total amount to £5,150.

The Lay Magistrates accepted the parties' submissions that Mr Saliev had acted recklessly in the duty of care he owed in respect of controlled waste, especially given past interactions with the Council.

Councillor Federica Smith Roberts, Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture, and Equalities and Diversity said:

Businesses owners have a legal responsibility to dispose of their business waste in accordance with the law. Proceedings like this are time- consuming and challenging, and while we would always rather help business do the right thing, we will seek prosecutions for fly tipping where necessary.

More information about the businesses Duty of Care responsibilities with respects to waste the [DEFRA Code of Practice](#) can be found online.

Celebrating International Repair Day

International Repair Day takes place on Saturday 19th October.

The day is an annual celebration for everyone who makes repair happen in their communities around the world.

In Somerset, more than 20 repair groups span the county, all run by volunteers and each able to fix a variety of items.

And Somerset Council is making it easier for residents to get involved, with an **interactive map** that can help them find their nearest group.

Volunteers at repair groups can help with anything from sewing repairs, fixing a vacuum cleaner to a bicycle. It is always best to check with your local group to see what it can do.

Councillor Richard Wilkins, Lead Member Transport and Waste Services said:

This year's International Repair Day celebrates that 'Repair is for Everyone'. This is the perfect opportunity to gather up your broken items and get them fixed.

Repairing is great for the environment and our wallets, it's usually far cheaper than replacing the item.

The things we use everyday contain precious materials, such as metals, so when these items are repaired rather than replaced it stops the materials going to waste.

Recycling is great, but repair and reuse are even better.

Somerset repair groups are run by volunteers and several in Somerset are supported by **CAG Somerset**, a free-to-join membership organisation that help a thriving network of local Community Action Groups.

Taunton business prosecuted after vape sale to under 18

The owner of a corner shop has been ordered to pay £2,326 after an employee sold a disposable vape to a customer who was under 18.

It's the third prosecution for selling vapes to an underage customer in the service area in as many months.

A business owner in Bridgwater was sentenced in August and another in Paignton was sentenced in September.

Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy Malapati, 38, sole director of Reddysgroup Ltd, which owns and runs Reddy's News, at Priorswood Place, Taunton pleaded guilty on behalf of Reddysgroup Ltd at Taunton Magistrates' Court on Tuesday, October 8 2024.

The prosecution follows an investigation by the Heart of the South West Trading Standards Service after an employee sold a disposable cherry Elf Bar to a 15-year-old volunteer in February of this year.

The court heard that Reddys News was one of several premises visited as part of a test purchasing operation based on information from complaints by residents.

Two trading standards officers, who were also in the shop, saw the sale take place and at no point did the seller ask for identification, proof of age, or ask the volunteer how old they were.

Following the sale the two officers spoke to the seller who denied he was an employee and said he was 'helping out' Mr Malapati.

The officers asked about what systems were in place to prevent underage sales, such as a refusals register, and the seller did not seem to know about any such measures but added that he had verbally been told not to sell to children.

The sale of any kind of e-cigarette to a person under the age of 18 is illegal and classed as an offence under The Children and Families Act 2014.

Mr Malapati acknowledged that he had not responded to several requests for information from trading standards during the investigation, but in mitigation said this was because of health and family issues.

He said that he had not been on the premises at the time the sale was made, and he had sacked the employee that had sold the vape.

He added that he has now provided training to staff and put in place a No ID, No Sale policy.

Alex Fry, the operations manager for Heart of the South West Trading Standards service said:

The bright colours and sweet flavours of vapes are attracting young people and so it is essential that store owners ensure that they do not sell these products to children and that systems are in place to prevent that from happening.

In this case there were no procedures in place and the employer had not trained the employee and that led to the prosecution.

We will continue to respond to community concerns in this area, prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents and our young people.

Where premises fail test purchase operations, we will take a good look at the measures which were in place before deciding what action to take. In this case the employee was given ample opportunity to ask for ID and he did not.

Retailers must understand that selling age restricted products to a minor is an offence and by doing so they are gambling with their livelihoods.

The Chair of the Bench said that as owner Malapati had a responsibility to ensure vapes were not sold to children.

He was fined £883 (reduced from £1,250 for an early guilty plea); a £333 surcharge and has to pay full costs of £1,160.

Public drop-in for Bridgwater Dunball roundabout improvement

Local people and businesses were given the chance to find out more about a major project to upgrade the busy Dunball roundabout linking Bridgwater and Junction 23 of the M5.

Construction on the multi-million pound scheme begins 11 November – as well as improving traffic flow and capacity it will make it easier to walk and cycle at the roundabout.

The project is wholly funded by ring-fenced Government and partner funding, and developer contributions. The condition of the funding is that it must be used to deliver the Dunball scheme.

The project will see the roundabout improved with signals introduced and the addition of a 'throughabout' lane which allows traffic to flow through the middle of it for greater capacity. This will ease peak traffic flow through this crucial route which links the town to Junction 23 of the M5, along with the Gravity Smart Campus in Puriton, site of the proposed Agratas Gigafactory which is set to create [4,000 jobs in Somerset](#).

Dunball's pedestrian and cycling improvements will be part of a complete active travel route along the A38 corridor, which will stretch from the Gravity site to the town centre.

The road network in Bridgwater is extremely busy at the moment, with works linked to major investment in and around the town.

- Agratas power supply works: This is work on several roads in Bridgwater needed to connect the battery cell facility in Puriton to the Bridgwater substation. These include some [closures and traffic management](#) expected to continue into early spring next year, including some work on Puriton Hill.
- The Celebration Mile: [Bridgwater's Celebration Mile](#), is a walking, and cycling between the station and the town centre is continuing apace. This also involves road closures and traffic management and is set to complete autumn 2025.

The Council's Streetworks Team is working closely with the contractors on all 3 schemes to minimise disruption for residents and businesses when work commences on Dunball.

The team is constantly reviewing traffic management with the contractor working for Agratas and making changes where possible. However, a level of disruption is unavoidable.

Somerset Council will be giving as much notice as we can when there is significant disruption, to allow people to plan and to promote alternative routes where possible