

Full Council Meeting – 15 December 2020

Report of Councillor Sarah Wakefield – Environmental Services

Service: Commercial Services (Assistant Director Stuart Noyce)

Parks and Open Spaces

Trial of Electric Hand Tools

- A trial has started within the operations team using electric hand tools (blowers, strimmer's, chainsaws etc) so when the scheduled replacement of equipment is due next year a view to replacing our petrol equipment with battery powered equivalents can be made. This should both contribute to our climate change emergency and reduce noise.

Programmes of work

- Grass cutting for the season has now concluded. Complaints about the cutting service has reduced by a third over the summer compared to the previous year, from 47 complaints in 2019 to 29 in 2020.
- The winter maintenance programme is now underway, focusing on shrub, stream and weed maintenance.
- As part of the winter programme, the team are sowing wildflower seeds across various locations within the district. Over 60kg of seed is being sown in areas including Seaward Way and Mollie's Patch in Minehead, Hoyles Road and the Rec in Wellington, and Leycroft Grove, Wellsprings and the Grange in Taunton. The team have also prepared a bed outside of Deane House for wildflower sowing.
- 70,000 winter bedding plants and 25,000 bulbs have been planted across our parks, open spaces and housing land.
- The nursery team have been supporting the Council's Free Trees programme, sourcing trees and distributing to Parish Councils and Friends Groups.

Street Cleansing (IdVerde)

- The contractor implemented Covid secure working practices to provide continuity to service delivery throughout the contract. The staff have continued to be flexible and supportive, working within Government and company guidelines with the aim of delivering service and support wherever it may be required.
- The contractor continued to support community litter picks by providing litter pick kits (pre-Covid) collecting the waste collected.

Refuse (Somerset Waste Partnership)

- Recycle More phase one has now been rolled out in the Mendip area, which has so far been a huge success, increasing the diversion of waste to new collection streams and promoting further recycling. Some lessons have been learnt from the first phase which officers are meeting to discuss to ensure when Somerset West and Taunton roll out the new scheme in phases 3 and 4 in 2021/22 these will inform and improve the roll out in our district.

- The new contractor is now performing well and above the levels of the previous contractor. Most of the issues experienced at the contract start (which did occur at the same time as the first lockdown) have now been resolved with performance in line with the contract targets.
- There were no changes to collections or recycling sites due to the current lockdown, although the Reuse Shop at Taunton Recycling Centre has been closed until further notice.
- Somerset's 16 recycling sites have been on their winter timetables from Thursday 1 October, with 9am-5pm weekday opening hours while weekends remain 9am-4pm. With an impressive average recycling rate of well over 77%, Somerset's network of recycling sites is open every day of the year except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Service: Coastal Protection, Harbours and Licensing (Assistant Director Chris Hall)

Coastal Protection

- Blue Anchor - the emergency works at the toe of the cliffs has been progressing in earnest since it started in the middle of November with the arrival of the rock armour by sea (1800 tonnes). I was extremely impressed with the progress they had made when I visited the site on 28 November and by the time this report reaches Full Council that work should have been completed. The next stage - the design and build of the protection for the public highway immediately adjacent to this cliff - should be able to proceed provided it was passed by Full Council on 1st December. That work is also urgently needed and it is hoped that it will be able to start some time in 2021.
- The work to the East Quay wall at Watchet near Splash Point is due to finish early in December and at the time of writing just the final finishing works were needed. The work to provide the new staircase access is also in hand and although some re-design was needed the works at this location have all been completed within budget and within a year of the original collapse. Thanks are due to my fellow Cllrs at SWT for their support for this repair and to the officers for their work in getting it carried out.

Harbour Board and Flood Board

- I have attended a couple of meetings of the Harbour Board and am pleased to report that the new harbour master has taken up his duties - albeit from a distance as he is not based on the Somerset Coast but his work is ably assisted by the assistant harbour master Craig Butler who is on site at Watchet and Minehead (as required). Dredging has been carried out and completed at the outer harbour and a scientific survey carried out. In places as much as a metre of material has been removed. This work needs to be carried out annually to maintain the improvement. I understand that all other ports along the Bristol Channel also need to and do the carry out regular dredging'
- I will have attended and chaired a meeting of the Flood Board (3 December) and am proposing that it changes its name to include coastal protection work

in its advisory remit. The West Somerset Flood Group, the SRA and drainage board amongst others have input into that body.

Licensing

The work of the licensing team is progressing well and they have been tasked, these last six months, with managing the on street licensing for cafes and food outlets in addition to the usual taxi and liquor and other licensing activities. It is now hoped that the backlog work of integrating the old West Somerset and TDBC licensing policies and procedures will be able to be progressed together with the strategic thinking required. Also planned is the updating of SWT's policies in several areas early in 2021 (such as street trading and gambling) and this will involve, where necessary, the setting up of working groups of Cllrs to advise on these matters.

Building Control

I have attended another meeting of the Somerset Building Control Partnership Joint Committee - which deals with the jointly operated building control functions for Mendip, Sedgemoor and SWT. It is hoped that SSDC might now be interested in joining this group which itself has met with considerable success in turning what was a loss making function into one which contributes to our council's finances while offering the service at a reasonable and competitive rate both to developers and home builders and improvers.

Crematorium Services

The service remains fully functional and is coping with the issue arising from Covid 19 and lockdown restrictions. A new heating system is going to be installed following a breakdown of the boiler and a recent inspection indicated that some re-wiring needs to be carried out. This work will be programmed in as soon as funds are available. Infrastructure work has been able to be carried out on a new part of the grounds well in advance of being needed to be used.

Seagulls

Seagulls living in towns can cause damage to property and nuisance to people too. Work to replace seagull eggs had to be cancelled this year but a licence will be applied for to replace eggs in the 2021 breeding season to cover parts of the district where this is needed (mostly parts of Taunton and Minehead).