

District Councillor Letter for October 2017

Last month the Liberal lead, Full Council, voted to approve SSDC becoming a more commercial organisation. Until recently, the main source of funding had always come from government grants. However, as we are aware there has been financial cuts to the public sector. As such, as well as trying to find efficiency savings, SSDC is attempting to protect services by adopting a Commercial Strategy – making investments that will deliver valuable income – with the idea to future proof itself against further cuts and in doing so, sustain its current standards.

Yet, as much as this idea looks good on paper, one cannot help being uneasy about it in practice. SSDC promised that the Octagon Theatre would be profitable three years after it came under council control, yet, eight years later, it is still receives £200,000 a year to make it viable. Westlands Leisure complex is already running at £350,000 over budget after just over a year in control and Huish Episcopi's new indoor swimming pool has already accrued an extra £100,000 to its original budget within months of starting its renovation.

Council Leader, Ric Pallister has said ‘this is a big step for the council’ and given SSDC’s recent business acumen that is somewhat of an understatement. He continues, ‘that they will be looking to recruit expertise and advice from the commercial sector to help us become more commercial’. But that expertise does not come cheap and nor are there vast amounts of commercial opportunities available to invest in to bring forth the income expected. These are very interesting times ahead for the future of this council.

The new Five Year Housing Supply paper is now on the Council’s website. Once again, the Council can only demonstrate a supply of sites equivalent to 4.2 years so in simple terms this means that the Local Plan housing policies is diminished in favour of the National Planning Policy Framework in the determination of planning applications.

In August, I mentioned the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) were undertaking an electoral review. The LGBC have accepted SSDC’s proposal to retain 600 councillors. Now they have started a period of consultation on ward boundaries and all parish councils will be asked to contribute to the consultation. If this is of interest to you, there is more information on www.lgbc.org.uk/current-reviews/south-west/somerset/south-somerset .



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