

Latest News

Think twice

People in England are being urged to think twice about travelling to tourism hotspots over the bank holiday weekend, with warm weather again forecast. The National Trust, councils and the AA are urging people across England to stay close to home and explore local green spaces instead of travelling long distances to beaches and beauty spots.

It's important to keep to the rules: they're there to keep people safe. We can all help control the virus if we stay alert. This means you must:

- stay at home as much as possible
- work from home if you can
- limit contact with other people
- keep your distance if you go out (2m apart where possible)
- wash your hands regularly

Do not leave home if you or anyone in your household has symptoms.

Staying Alert and Safe (social distancing) guidance can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing

FAQs with advice on what you can and cannot do are here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do

Late May Bank Holiday pharmacies in Mendip

Find out when your local pharmacy will be open over the Bank Holiday:

www.england.nhs.uk/south/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/05/mendip-1.pdf

Avoid bonfires this Bank Holiday

Be considerate to your neighbours and spare our Fire Service from unnecessary demand. Avoid lighting bonfires this Bank Holiday. Smoke from fires can aggravate the symptoms of vulnerable residents and cause people stress when they are staying at home to shield, isolate or social distance.

www.mendip.gov.uk/article/7521/Smoke-Nuisance-and-Dark-Smoke

Extra Bank Holiday for October being considered

The Government is considering introducing an extra Bank Holiday, possibly in October around the time of half-term. The idea was put forward by the UK's tourism agency, Visit Britain, who said it expected the tourism industry to lose £37 billion because of the coronavirus lockdown, including lost earnings over the two Bank Holidays in May. The Government said it would "respond in due course" to the proposal. [Guardian](#), [BBC Online](#), [Telegraph](#)

Coronavirus Helpline: 0300 790 6275: 7 days a week, 8am to 6pm

Please use the helpline if you need help with food supplies, prescription delivery, and transport to medical appointments. It operates seven days a week between 8am and 6pm, including Bank Holidays.

No idling at the tip

All 16 of Somerset Waste Partnership's (SWP) recycling centres will be open after the Bank Holiday weekend. SWP is asking people to only visit sites if it's really necessary. Long queues are expected at certain times, especially first thing in the morning, as the number of unloading bays has been reduced to allow social distancing.

****Switch your engine off while waiting. Idling gets you nowhere and causes pollution****

For the latest information about services, opening arrangements and any disruption visit www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/coronavirus

High Court success for Mendip over Neighbourhood Plan challenge

A judge has ruled that Mendip District Council acted appropriately in approving a draft Neighbourhood Plan for referendum, in Norton St Philip.

The High Court victory means the Neighbourhood Plan for the Somerset parish can be given substantial weight in planning decisions. It also means the injunction placed on the parish referendum is now lifted, and local people can vote on whether or not their Neighbourhood Plan should be adopted.

Legal arguments brought against Mendip by developers Lochailort Investments Ltd, were dismissed *on all grounds* by the judge. Mrs Justice Lang also ordered that Lochailort pay the Council's legal costs. The District Council currently awaits the outcome of an application to the Court of Appeal.

Further information and updates can be found on the website:

www.mendip.gov.uk/nortonstphilip

Wildflowers for Mendip - action imminent

Coronavirus was/is devastating for many, but not all. There are some positives, especially for wildlife in Mendip – it's thriving.

The emergency meant large areas of amenity grass were left uncut, and still remain so, providing a unique opportunity for the Council.

Mendip was already looking at wildflower and rewilding proposals, now this idea has been accelerated. Areas have been identified for seasonal or Eco cuts.

There will now follow engagement with Town and Parish councils regarding these locations – working together for good of our neighbourhoods, the wildlife, and planet. The rewilding plans meet the objectives of the Council's Climate Emergency and Ecological Group (CEEG), and one of Mendip's key corporate priorities too.

The Council need to act fast. Decisions must be made in next couple of weeks to fit in with the season, but no doubt as more detail about these plans emerge, they will be welcomed by local people and wildlife groups.

Frome regeneration: Saxonvale works commence

Mendip District Council is commencing works as part of ongoing essential environmental and drainage assessments and improvements at Saxonvale, Frome.

The works will start on Wednesday 20th May off Garsdale in Frome and are expected to last four weeks, followed by periodic one day inspections over three months.

The Council's contractor will be working under strict Covid-19 site operating procedures.

Pay-outs made to 80% of local eligible local businesses

Another milestone at Mendip was reached this week with more than 80% of all eligible businesses having been paid a business grant. The Council continues to process forms with a whopping **£26 million+** issued in emergency funding, benefiting more than **2,000** local organisations, to date.

Any business who believes they are eligible for a grant but has not yet submitted their details online, can register here: www.mendip.gov.uk/businessrates

Mendip staff are working their way through the many complex enquiries as quickly as is possible. For enquiries relating to the current grants already being processed in the system, please email economy@mendip.gov.uk.

Test, track and trace

Local councils will be at the centre of developing new localised test, track and contain plans, thanks to our closeness to local communities, our wide expertise, and connections with trusted local partnerships.

An FAQ document answering all your questions on testing, eligibility, booking tests, and contact tracing is available here:

drive.google.com/open?id=15V__IRbWeoXPb49xahmBLvu-yPixP0eY

Access to food

The Department for the Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFRA) is to start communicating the different ways vulnerable people can access food next week. The launch date is likely to be Wednesday 27 May. This may result in an increase in the number of people contacting our council helpline.

Beware crime gangs and fraudsters

Keep reminding your communities – criminals are at work. Organised crime gangs are exploiting offers of financial help in the various coronavirus stimulus packages and there are fears that £1.5 billion has been lost to universal credit fraud alone, the National Crime Agency has warned. [Times](#)

Councils 'need four times more funding'

[Local government faces "unsustainable" financial pressures](#) as the sector continues to lead efforts to beat the coronavirus pandemic. The Government has so far allocated an additional £3.8 billion to councils, but many continue to see costs spiral at the same time as a huge drop in income, from things like car parking and leisure centres. The Local Government Association (LGA) has published [guidance on key questions and issues for finance portfolio holders](#) during the pandemic.

Tool to find your local council

A tool is available on GOV.UK to help point the public to their local council.

The tool: www.gov.uk/coronavirus-local-help

Keep connected

Mendip District Council has a corporate Facebook page. Please follow us for the latest news, commentary and campaigns. [MDC Official Facebook Page](#). We are

also on Twitter twitter.com/MendipCouncil and LinkedIn

www.linkedin.com/company/mendip-district-council

In focus: Landlords and tenants

Mendip District Council is urging tenants and landlords in financial hardship or at risk of homelessness to contact them, sooner rather than later.

The Council's Housing Options Team has professional, knowledgeable officers on hand to provide support and assistance, whatever the circumstances. And they are ready to help those who are struggling due to the coronavirus emergency and its impact on the economy.

Tenants and homeowners may be worried about how to pay the rent or mortgage. Some may fear they'll lose accommodation that's tied to their job. Others may be in an abusive relationship during lockdown, thinking they have nowhere to turn.

Landlords with tenancy issues, or suffering financial hardship through non-payment of rent, can speak with Mendip's Housing Options Team who are experts at resolving tenancy matters, can engage tenants with appropriate assistance and support, and ensure the smooth running of tenancies for both tenant and landlord to avoid costly evictions and potential homelessness.

If you have accommodation that is empty and ready to let, the Council has a number of clients who are looking for homes now. These clients are assessed and affordability-checked to ensure sustainable tenancies are created to the benefit of all concerned. The Council even provides ongoing advice and assistance throughout the length of the tenancy, if required.

Please contact the Housing Options Team if you have accommodation to let and can help with this need. Call 0300 303 8588.

Properties in need of repair and improvement may be eligible for council grants or loans so they can be safely lived in. Property owners should contact the Private Sector Housing Team in this instance, or visit: www.mendip.gov.uk/financialassistance

Where to get help:

- You can contact the Housing Options Team 0300 303 8588.
- Find advice for tenants and landlords relating to coronavirus here: www.mendip.gov.uk/housing
- Have you got accommodation empty and ready to let? Call 0300 303 8588.
- Properties in need of repair and improvement may be eligible for council grants or loans: www.mendip.gov.uk/financialassistance
- Are you, or someone you know, at risk of homelessness? Local services and support are available. Call 0300 303 8588 or make a homeless application online www.mendip.gov.uk/housing
- Perhaps you're rough sleeping, or concerned that someone is rough sleeping in Mendip? You can make a referral to StreetLink either online or by contacting the rough sleeper referral line on 0300 500 0914. [Visit www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk).
- For general advice on landlords and tenants rights and responsibilities during the COVID-19 browse here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities

Help our friends at YMCA Mendip and South Somerset

They are currently supporting 96 people (16yrs+) within their Housing Projects across Mendip and South Somerset; some of whom have lost their jobs and who are unable to go to college, or continue with their training. They are grateful for any contributions such as craft items, cooking ingredients, art equipment or gardening resources. They have a Crowdfunding page set up for anyone wishing to donate. www.crowdfunder.co.uk/mendipymca

Follow them on www.facebook.com/YMCAMendip and twitter.com/YMCAMendip and view their website mendipymca.org.uk/ for further information.

Supporting local business

Mendip moves forward

Mendip's officers from across the Council are linking up with the emergency services and other partners to see how best to support businesses as they make plans to reopen.

Safe workplaces

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has previously issued guidance for employers on making workplaces COVID secure. Employers can now also access a number of [free webinars addressing the challenges in different types of workplaces](#). These have been developed with input from HSE and so may be useful for Local Authorities in both their employer and regulator role.

On the HSE website employers can also find a [short guide](#) to working safely, a [guide on talking with your workers](#) about preventing coronavirus and [further information](#) on managing risks and risk assessment at work.

Legionnaires risk – please continue to spread this important public health message

Owners of all public buildings and volunteer-run premises should check and maintain their hot/cold water and air con systems before re-opening to customers, shoppers, staff and the public. Anywhere that has a water supply and is currently shut down is at heightened risk of Legionnaires' disease.

Mendip have been contacting local businesses about the threat. Call us if you need help or advice: 0300 303 8588 or email: environmental.health@mendip.gov.uk

NEW! Launching this week: Local Authority Discretionary Grant funding

News of a Local Authority Discretionary Grant fund has been announced by Government. The purpose of this fund is to provide additional support for some of those small businesses not covered by the current schemes.

The new fund is the result of feedback to Ministers provided by Mendip, plus other Local Authorities and business organisations, who highlighted flaws in existing grant schemes meant some small businesses were missing out.

The detail

- The Government has stated that allocation of funding will be at the discretion of Local Authorities.
- Mendip District Council will be paying out a maximum of £10,000 per application.
- There is a finite amount of money available, and a time limit imposed for applications.
- This fund is aimed at small businesses with ongoing fixed property-related costs.

To benefit, businesses will need to meet strict criteria, **including:**

- Businesses must have less than 50 employees
- Businesses must have been trading prior to 11th March 2020, and have evidence of this
- Businesses have not received cash grants from specified Government COVID-19 schemes to date
- The business must occupy property, or part of a property, with a rateable value or annual rent or annual mortgage payments below £51,000
- Local Authorities may choose to make payments to other businesses based on local economic need.

LIVE NEXT WEEK – watch this space

To apply for the grant you will need to be registered on our website

here: www.mendip.gov.uk/businessrates

Once registered you will be asked to upload evidence on the secure site, including bank statements and details of your accounts.

You can email us here: MendipGrants@mendip.gov.uk

Enquiries relating to the Business Grants

For enquiries relating to the current Grants, please email economy@mendip.gov.uk, rather than individual officers. Mendip staff are working their way through these increasingly complex enquiries as quickly as is possible.

Bounce Back Loans

Small and medium-sized businesses affected by coronavirus to access loans from £2,000 to £50,000. The government guarantees 100% of the loan and there won't be any fees or interest to pay for the first 12 months.

www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-coronavirus-bounce-back-loan

Village halls and community centres £10K Government grant offer

Don't forget, if you run a village or community hall you can apply for the COVID-19 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant.

You'll find the press release here: www.mendip.gov.uk/article/8984/Village-halls-Community-venues-across-the-district-benefit-from-10K-grants-don-t-miss-out

Check out the eligibility criteria from Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) here: acre.org.uk/cms/resources/guidance-on-eligibility-for-government-support-for-halls-2.4.20.pdf.

Register to get your grant: www.mendip.gov.uk/businessrates

Business Financial Support Tool

Use this Government tool to help find financial support during COVID-19. It will show which loans, tax relief and cash grants a business can access whether an employer or for those self-employed.

www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder

HMRC digital assistant

HMRC has created a digital assistant to help the public find information about the coronavirus support schemes available.

Digital assistant: www.tax.service.gov.uk/ask-hmrc/virtual-assistant/support-for-coronavirus?VA=GOVUK

Free support: HOTSW Growth Hub and Somerset Business Agency

These organisations have put together a programme of free business support to help businesses through the current crisis. They are offering **three hours of free remote support** with a dedicated Business Advisor.

To see if you are eligible or for more information check here:

www.heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk/covid-19-support-for-business/covid-business-recovery-support/

Free courses to boost job prospects

Explore the range of free courses, pitched at all levels here:

theskillstoolkit.campaign.gov.uk/#sw

Other business news

UK furlough scheme extended by four months

The UK scheme to pay wages of workers on leave because of coronavirus will be extended to October, Chancellor Rishi Sunak said. He confirmed that:

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will continue until end of October
- furloughed workers across UK will continue to receive 80% of their current salary, up to £2,500 per month
- new flexibility will be introduced from August to get employees back to work and boost economy

From the start of August, furloughed workers will be able to return to work part-time with employers being asked to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff. More specific details and information around its implementation will be made available by the end of this month.

[BBC Online](#), [Guardian](#), [ITV Online](#)

Job adverts increase in rural areas despite COVID-19

Some rural parts of the UK have seen a surge in job adverts posted, despite the coronavirus pandemic, a study by the Recruitment & Employment Confederation suggests. [BBC Online](#)

Extra help with finances

Council Tax Support for Mendip residents

Those people on low income are likely to be eligible for a discount under our Council Tax Support Policy. In particular, if you're claiming Universal Credit for the first time, you may also be eligible to claim. Do check here to ensure residents get the help they are entitled to: www.mendip.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport

Pension credit claimants can apply online

To help those who are self-isolating or shielding during the pandemic, Pension Credits can be claimed online. Make an application here: www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim.

Existing methods of claiming by phone or on paper, remain available to all claimants.

Community Pages

Loneliness and social isolation

We are seeing higher levels of loneliness and social isolation in our communities because of the impact of the restrictions necessary to combat COVID-19.

Even as restrictions begin to ease, loneliness and social isolation will continue to be a challenge, with people who are shielding or self-isolating and without emotionally fulfilling contact and/or practical support networks, particularly at risk.

Here is some [practical advice to help councils think through how they can support people who may experience loneliness or social isolation](#).

Information pack for Coronavirus volunteers

Spark Somerset have captured valuable volunteering insights into an information pack for volunteer groups. You'll find their super-useful publication here: sparksomerset.org.uk/VolunteerPack

Mendip directory of essential information – available online!

It's a one-stop resource for community groups, local organisations and residents. Packed with useful content.

www.mendip.gov.uk/article/8930/COVID-19-Information-and-Guidance-for-Parishes-and-Community-Groups

www.mendip.gov.uk/article/8971/COVID-19-Food-Collection-and-Delivery-Options-Local-

www.mendip.gov.uk/article/8963/COVID-19-Food-Delivery-Options-National-

www.mendip.gov.uk/article/9012/COVID-19-Other-Businesses-with-Collection-and-Delivery-Options-Local-

www.mendip.gov.uk/article/8945/COVID-19-Information-on-Banking-and-Payment-Options

Health Matters

Coronavirus – new symptoms

The UK Chief Medical Officers released a statement saying that individuals will need to self-isolate immediately if they develop a new continuous cough or fever or, as of today, anosmia. Anosmia is the loss of or a change in the normal sense of smell. It can also affect the sense of taste as the two are closely linked.

Statement here: www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-an-update-to-coronavirus-symptoms-18-march-2020

Face coverings

The public is advised to consider wearing face coverings in enclosed public spaces where they may be more likely to come into contact with people they do not normally meet. Face coverings may be beneficial in places where it is hard to follow maintain social distancing measures. This applies when using public transport or when visiting shops.

More information: www.gov.uk/government/news/public-advised-to-cover-faces-in-enclosed-spaces

Guidance on wearing and making face coverings:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering

Lockdown life can take toll on your mental health and wellbeing

There are lots of ways for you to keep yourself well. [Every Mind Matters](#) has loads of tips on managing stress, getting better sleep and how to support young people through the outbreak. If you or someone you know is in need of urgent mental health support, they can call 111 or visit www.111.nhs.uk.

Keep your vaccination appointments

NHS England is urging people to attend all regular vaccination appointments to prevent outbreaks of serious diseases and reduce pressure on the health service. A full list of vaccinations and when they are available, for children and adults, is accessible through the [NHS website](#).

Tackle harmful lockdown drinking - BMJ editorial warns

Tackling harmful drinking during the lockdown will be "an integral part of the nation's recovery", an editorial in the British Medical Journal has said. Cases of alcoholic liver disease could increase and drinking trends could be fuelling a rise in calls to domestic violence charities. They say greater investment in alcohol treatment services is needed. [BBC Online](#)

WEBINAR #QuitforCovid in the South West

Thursday 11th June 2020 10am-11am

There's an invitation to attend a webinar exploring the Quit for Covid Campaign, sharing examples of good practice in the South West and resources available for local authorities and Stop Smoking services to use to locally amplify the campaign. To register for the webinar please [sign up here](#).

For more information in the meantime please see [Today is the Day](#) and this press release [Around 300,000 smokers have #QuitforCovid](#).

Mental health weekly radio slot

[Mindline](#). The charity has teamed up with BBC Somerset and Spark to broadcast a weekly slot with Charlie Taylor on Wednesday evenings 7-8pm. They are available on 01823 276 892.

Trusted help and advice

Domestic Abuse

With 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetime, it is likely we all know someone suffering behind closed doors.

As much as we want you to stay at home, we also want you to be safe

www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help.

[Boots chemists are offering safe spaces](#) within their pharmacies for victims of domestic abuse. Anyone needing help can ask staff at the counter to use the consultation room, where they will be able to contact local services for help and advice. Call Victim Support on 0300 303 0554. Lines are open 12pm-6pm Monday to Friday. You can [access Victim Support's free live chat for 24/7 support](#).

LBGT services

Contact [The Intercom Trust](#), which has a helpline and counselling service.

Coronavirus links

Mendip District Council: www.mendip.gov.uk/coronavirus

Government information on coronavirus: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

NHS information: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

The latest travel advice can be found here:

www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus

Q&A from Public Health England on coronavirus:

publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/

The LGA have issued some general guidance specific to elected councillors that you may find useful: www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-outbreak-councillor-guidance

If you have missed an issue and would like a copy emailed to your inbox, please contact media@mendip.gov.uk