



## Quest to save village's pub

Ad man advises **The Royal Oak** – page 3

## Talks held over parking problem

End in sight to motorhomes invasion? – page 9

Helping hand for crisis-hit businesses

# £500,000 Covid aid

STRUGGLING local business communities have been thrown a £500,000 lifeline to help them survive the Covid-19 crisis.

The money comes from an emergency town centre recovery fund created by Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWAT) to support towns and villages across the district.

Minehead has been awarded £100,000 and other areas to benefit from £25,000 grants include Dunster, Watchet, Dulverton, Porlock and Wiveliscombe.

Minehead's BID business organisation will control the funding and a spokesman said the plan included a programme with a strong focus on marketing, public realm improvements and training for businesses. It was hoped this would encourage people to come back to Minehead when Covid restrictions are lifted.

By **TONY JAMES**

A steering group to deliver projects over the next 12 months will be chaired by Julian Abraham, owner of the Old Ship Aground pub. Other members are: Jon Lee of Stuarts Home Furnishers, Debbie Sawatzki of Lovely Boutique and Graham Sizer, Minehead BID chairmam.

Cllr Anne Lawton will represent Minehead Town Council, Cllr Andy Hadley, SWT, and Cllr Mandy Chilcott, Somerset County Council.

Julian Abrahams said: "This is an opportunity for BID to demonstrate a great show of strength by supporting its retail community in these unprecedented times."

"This emergency fund will help reset the local economy towards a recovery with well-implemented strategies in marketing and training,

as well as looking to further invest in public realm enhancements.

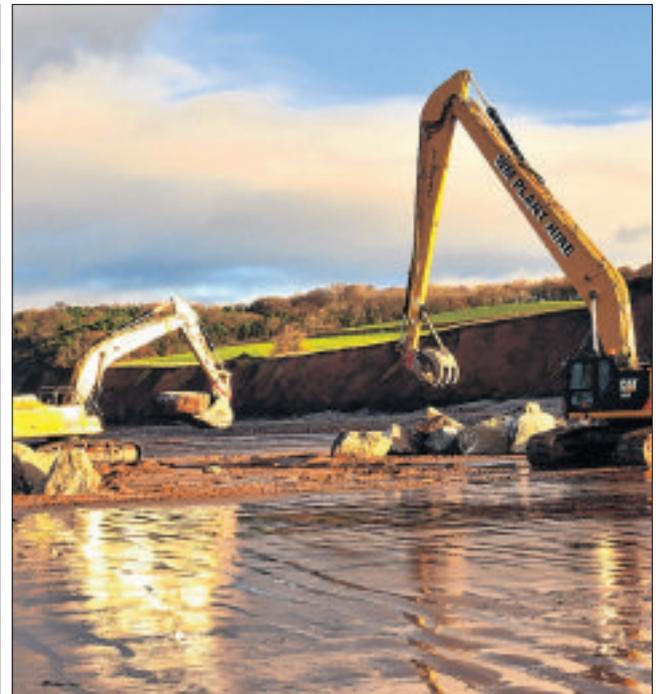
"Clearly our business community faces huge challenges, but by working together we can take bold steps toward the better future, which is undoubtedly around the corner."

Cllr Marcus Kravis, district council portfolio holder for asset management and economic development, said "We have been working to do everything we can to support our businesses and traders as they take these steps towards re-opening our high streets and retail centres."

"I would like to thank all those who have worked with us and share our commitment to re-opening our shops and supporting our traders."

"This will be an evolving situation as restrictions change, and we will continue working with our partners to tailor our response to any needs identified as we move forwards

Continued on page 8



Huge diggers move the ten-ton boulders at Blue Anchor. PHOTO: Peter Mather

## Race against time to fill the gap

A £385,000 EMERGENCY scheme to protect the crumbling cliffs at Blue Anchor from further sea damage was in full swing this week

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## Changes to Santa Express schedule

THREE of the West Somerset Railway's popular Santa Express Christmas services have been cancelled, including the first two planned to launch this year's service on December 5-6.

This is due to the lack of time available for preparing trains after the lockdown ends on December 2. The trip scheduled for Monday, December 21, has also been called off.

However, all other services are unaffected, at this time, and the last Santa Expresses will run on Christmas Eve.

These will be the first trains on the WSR tracks since services were suspended in March. It is hoped the trains will bring visitors to the area during the festive season to help railway finances and to boost the local economy hard hit by the Covid-19 crisis.

A WSR spokesman said: "We have contacted all passengers booked on the cancelled services and are in the process of moving these bookings."

"We would like to assure passengers that our plan is to run the remaining services in our programme. However, if we are unable to do so, and these events are cancelled on a future date, passengers will be refunded in full."

# Santas galore to fill village

PORLOCK will be showing off its festive side when Santas of all shapes and sizes descend on the village.

The annual Santa Festival and Santa Trail kicks off on Friday, December 4, when shops, businesses, pubs and community groups will be displaying their efforts in the hope of winning top prizes.

Porlock High Street will be packed with a variety of creations, from small toy Santas to life-sized models, in inventive and fun poses.

The Santa Trail leaflet will be available from shops in the village for visitors to pick up and follow the trail to choose their favourites.

Independent judges will tour the village at the beginning of the festival to vote for their favourites.

The overall winner will be awarded the 'Porlock Newsletter Best Santa' cup and additional cups will

be awarded for 'The Lorna Doone Best Comic Santa' and 'The Porlock Visitor Centre Most Festive Santa'.

Festival organiser Chris Gladstone said: "The level of inventiveness and cheeky ideas has been increasing every year and we have seen some fantastic creations. We are really hoping for a record level of entries this year to ensure Porlock looks its most festive."

The Santas will stay in place through to the end of December so there will be plenty of time to enjoy all the Santas and do a spot of Christmas shopping along the way.

To add to the festive feel, new Christmas lights have been added throughout the village by Light Up Porlock, a group led by Denise Sage which has been raising funds for lights to be strung up throughout the village.



Myrtle Cottage bed and breakfast created Santa Potter Goes to Hogwarts last year.

# £500k handout brings hope for the future

Continued from front page towards economic recovery."

Dulverton will use its £25,000 grant on two major projects, according to town council chairman and mayor Cllr Gerry Lewis.

He said: "We need to expand our image through marketing and rebranding exercises and will be working with Visit Exmoor to rationalise and improve our Facebook pages and websites."

"We also hope to employ an online and marketing expert for at least a year to bring us into line with other tourist centres on Exmoor."

Cllr Lewis said the money would also go towards providing the town with a major tourist attraction. "We don't have a castle or a beach and we need something to bring more people into Dulverton."

"We have recently bought Exmoor Lawns, an area of land near the river, which we plan to enhance, with perhaps a bandstand for weekend concerts. This could make a real difference to what the town has to offer."

Watchet's £25,000 grant will be spent on a range of improvements including cycle racks in the town and additional flower displays and seating, according to WACET chairman John Richards of the Town Centre Working Party.

He said other projects involved improved marketing and promotion, refurbishing the town's noticeboards, an app for smartphones and new Christmas lights. Electronic signs were also planned in the main car park giving the location of businesses in the town.

"We are hoping that bike parking racks, under CCTV surveillance, will encourage visitors and local people to be healthy and to cycle to the shops," Mr Richards said.

Dunster's recovery working group, which has also been granted £25,000, has picked seven 'work-streams' which are planned to aid the village's recovery after the pandemic.

They include a website with complete listings for all village traders and accommodation providers which would include links to all

traders' websites or booking platforms. The new site will be supported by a five-year maintenance contract.

There are also plans for digital media promotion and social media training for village businesses. This project is based on statistics of 75 per cent of day visitors and 91 per cent of all longer stayers researching on digital media before booking accommodation.

A webcam will be installed in the High Street, re-usable banners introduced to highlight events, and improvements made to the village gardens. A seventh project - to improve the village streets with benches and planters - will be implemented later.

Parish council clerk Sarah Towells said: "The grant is already raising interest outside the community - the BBC would like to visit Dunster as we approach Christmas to showcase the work that is going into preparing the village for visitors in 2021."

Williton parish council is still in negotiation with SWAT over details of future funding but the clerk, Michelle Francis, said a possible re-opening of the village's toilets was included in their talks.

Porlock High Street Partnership's plans for the village's traders include a shop-front restoration fund, an increased social media and public relations presence, and a promotional video. Grant money will also be used to enhance floral displays, provide Christmas trees and finance cycle racks for the village.

Partnership chairman, district councillor Andrew Milne said: "Our shops and businesses have had a tough time this summer. They are largely reliant on tourism and anything we can do to offset some of the damage done by the pandemic will be a top priority."

"This emergency fund money is very welcome and we are grateful to the district council for this generous contribution which will be administered jointly by SWAT and Porlock parish council. Any return to normality is obviously still some way off but grants like this can help lay the foundation for the return to more prosperous days."

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## Drink-driving ban

JEFFREY Graddon, 50, of Paganel Road, Minehead, has been disqualified from driving for 23 months after pleading guilty at Taunton Magistrates' Court to driving under the influence of alcohol. He was also fined £666 and ordered to pay £85 costs and £66 surcharge.

## Drug-driver banned

ROY Stephen Rogers, 36, of Teal Road, Minehead, has been given a 12-month driving ban after pleading guilty at Taunton Magistrates' Court to drug-driving. He was also fined £120 and ordered to pay £85 costs and £34 victim surcharge.