

29th May 2024



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Dear friend,

Thank you for taking the time to read my May update - a snapshot of the work I'm doing in Parliament to champion our area.

Please be aware that, following the formal dissolution of Parliament on Thursday 30 May, I will no longer be the MP for Somerton & Frome by the end of the week.

My office will continue to function during the general election as I am allowed to progress constituency casework of an emergency nature. **Therefore, please contact me in the usual way should you require emergency assistance: sarah.dyke.mp@parliament.uk.**

Very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah".

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Council Funding - roads and Net Zero

Raising Council funding (particularly the lack of it) in Parliament has become quite a hobby of mine. This month, I raised two specific issues. **Firstly**, I raised the lack of funding for long-term [road repairs and resilience](#). It's time our Highways Authorities had long-term funding settlements linked with a detailed highway strategy to future-proof our roads. Shifting money over from the HS2 budget without any thought is simply not enough and residents deserve better.

Secondly, I wrote to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to raise concerns about the lack of financial support given to Councils to achieve their Net Zero targets. A survey by the Local Government Association has found that 9 in 10 Councils believe their targets are now unattainable due to Government intransigence.

One of the benefits of Councils targeting Carbon Net Zero is that doing so generates a cost saving which benefits the taxpayer. Saving money is exactly what many Local Councils need to be doing in the current economic climate. Paradoxically, however, Councils are unable to decarbonise as quickly as they would like because this involves spending money up-front - money which many Councils simply do not have. The Government (whether it's this one or a new one after 4th July) has to act now in order to support Councils to save money whilst achieving their Net Zero ambitions.

Women in Sport

At the start of May, I had some very productive meetings about women in sport, one of which was with Rachel Williams of **Women in Sport**. Among the many topics we discussed was *Make Space for Us*, the charity's research on parks. Their research indicates that 49% of teenage girls say they feel unsafe in their local park and only 34% enjoy exercising there. Everyone has the right to enjoy the wealth of health and wellbeing benefits of being active in the great outdoors, and we need to make sure that the needs of girls and women are taken into account when designing our parks.

I also met with Annamarie Phelps, Olympian, former World Champion in Rowing and Chair of the International Working Group of Women and Sport's UK Secretariat. The International Working Group (IWG) on Women and Sport is the world's largest network dedicated to advancing gender equity and equality in sport, physical education and physical activity. Annamarie and I discussed the IWG's ambitions and their plans for a global summit in 2026. The most recent summit took place in Aotearoa, New Zealand and was attended by more than 1,850 global sports leaders from over 300 organisations in 90 countries.

Bathing Water Status for River Frome at Farleigh Hungerford

I visited Farleigh Hungerford river swimming club at the start of May. It was founded in 1933 and is probably the oldest river swimming club in the country.

Since my visit, I was delighted to read the announcement that this stretch of the River Frome now enjoys [designated 'bathing water' status](#)! This status comes with stringent water-testing requirements and a commitment from the Environment Agency to act to

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preserve wild swimming at this location. Previously I have written in support of the club's protected status and am simply delighted with the news.

However, far more needs to be done to clean up our watercourses. In Parliament I have spoken on many occasions about the need for tougher action against sewage dumping in local rivers, including replacing Ofwat with a stricter regulator. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I will continue to campaign on this important issue and will demand the changes in law necessary to clean up all of our watercourses whether or not they have 'bathing water' status.

Parliament's Assisted Dying Debate

This month [I spoke in Parliament's Assisted Dying debate](#). I took the opportunity to champion [Dorothy House](#), a charity which offers free end-of-life care across much of Somerton & Frome and surrounding areas. In the Parliamentary debate I expressed my support for assisted dying, in-line with polling in the new constituency of Glastonbury and Somerton which shows that 80% of people would support such a policy.

Farming grant system chaos

In May, [I spoke up for farmers](#) in a Parliamentary debate about the draft Agriculture Regulations which is part of the Government's plan to replace the Basic Payment Scheme with a new payment system dubbed the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). I raised the plight of a local farmer in Langport whose farm has been under water for half the year. Without the Basic Payment Scheme, and no chance of attracting ELMS grant money because of the floods, the farm's viability is at serious risk.

My Liberal Democrat colleague, Tim Farron MP (Westmorland & Lonsdale, Yorkshire), raised an alarming fact that £400 million of the £2.4bn set aside for farmers by the DEFRA (the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) is unspent. This is an absolute scandal, when so many in our farming community are struggling with productive farmland under water and the soaring cost of red diesel and other inputs.

Alarm bells for UK festival sector

This month I wrote to the Chancellor and urged him to support the UK festival sector. Somerset plays host to some brilliant festivals, including Home Farm Festival in Chilthorne Domer, Somerstock in Somerton and a little-known shindig at Worthy Farm known globally as Glastonbury.

According to the Association of Independent Festivals, however, at least 36 UK festivals have announced a postponement, cancellation or complete closure this year. The festival sector generates £32m for businesses based in Somerset. The growing list of postponements and cancellations poses a potential risk to Somerset's festival sector, so I urged the Chancellor to take action.

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Frome Bank Closure

I was really disappointed to learn that TSB plans to close its branch in Frome, leaving the town with no high street banks at all. I'm committed to meeting LINK, Frome Town Council, and Prosper Frome to try to secure a bank deposit service in the town - early signs are promising and I'm pleased to have learned that Frome meets the population threshold for a LINK banking hub. [I raised the issue of bank closures in Parliament](#) this month, championing the wishes of residents across our area who tell me they value in-person banking.

Somerton/Langport train station

I was delighted to [formally submit](#) my petition for a Somerton/Langport train station to the House of Commons this month. If re-elected on 4th July I plan to pursue this campaign with the utmost diligence.

WASPI Women

In May, I stood up for WASPI women and [demanded](#) that the Government honour the ombudsman's recommendations, and come forward with a plan to compensate the millions of affected women.

Out and About in the Constituency

I visited the Flood Café at Somerset Rural Life Museum early in May. It was a good opportunity to listen to those affected by flooding, discuss their concerns & hear about current initiatives & future mitigations. While I was there I also visited a photography exhibition *Under the Surface: Somerset Floods – Ten Years On*, by Matilda Temperley, which documents the serious flooding to hit the Somerset Levels ten years ago. A large proportion of my constituency casework is in relation to flooding, and I'm working hard to ensure everyone gets the compensation and, importantly, the protection they deserve.



This month I chaired a business panel at "SomerScience", held at Haynes Motor Museum in Sparkford. SomerScience is Somerset's only rural STEM festival for young people to explore the opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. I was thrilled to be joined by panellists David Evans of Thales Group, Clive Higgins of Leonardo, Mat Thewlis of Yeo Valley, and Karl Tucker of the Great South West.

It was lovely to join Castle Cary & Ansford Christian Aid Group at their coffee morning earlier this month. The charity is committed to working to eradicate extreme poverty by tackling its root causes and empowering people through campaigning for justice around the world. Please support them if you can!



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I was delighted to be invited onto the panel for the Farm Safety Foundation - Yellow Wellies' 10th anniversary conference this month, to discuss farmers' physical safety and mental wellbeing. The Farm Safety Foundation is doing a brilliant job in raising awareness of these issues and I'm proud to be a supporter and to champion their work in Parliament. Earlier this year, the charity and I co-hosted an event in Westminster for MPs and peers, promoting Mind Your Head week, and I continue to spend a lot of time talking to farmers and engaging with organisations that support them.



It was a great pleasure to meet the CEO of the South West Heritage Trust, Sam Astill, and the Trust's Chair, Mike Motum, this month to discuss how I can best support the cultural and heritage sector in Somerset.

Sam and Mike have ambitious plans for the Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury, and it was great to hear about their work with social prescribing.

This month, I also met with Post Office staff to talk about the role of post offices in rural communities, including the benefits and challenges of running a branch, and all about the valuable banking services provided by post offices and their mobile hubs.

I raised concerns about post office closures in rural areas and heard about how the Government subsidy for post offices has been slashed over the last decade.

