



Notice of Meeting of

LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORK - DOWSBOROUGH

Wednesday, 22 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

**Wembdon Village Hall, Homberg Way, Wembdon
TA6 7BY**

To: The members of the Local Community Network - Dowsborough

Chair: Cllr Mike Caswell
Vice-chair: Cllr Simon Stretton (Spaxton PC)

Cllr Brian Bolt	Cllr Hugh Davies	Cllr Lance Duddridge
Cllr Gill Slocombe	Cllr Rosemary Woods	Cannington PC
Chilton Trinity PC	Durleigh PC	Enmore PC
Fiddington PC	Goathurst PC	Holford PC
Kilve PC	Nether Stowey PC	Otterhampton PC
Over Stowey PC	Stockland Bristol PM	Stogursey PC
Strington PC	Wembdon PC	

For further information about the meeting, including how to join the meeting virtually, please contact LCN Team lcn@somerset.gov.uk.

All members of the public are welcome to attend our meetings and ask questions or make a statement **by giving advance notice** in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer at email: democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk by **5pm on Thursday, 16 November 2023**.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A: Access to Information.

The meeting will be webcast and an audio recording made.

Issued by (the Proper Officer) on Tuesday, 14 November 2023

AGENDA

**Local Community Network - Dowsborough - 7.00 pm Wednesday, 22 November
2023**

Core Membership 5 - 6

Click here to join the online meeting 7 - 8

1 Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The other registrable interests of Councillors of Somerset Council, arising from membership of City, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes: [City, Town & Parish Twin Hatters - Somerset Councillors 2023](#))

3 Notes from the Previous Meeting (Pages 9 - 16)

To approve the notes from the previous meeting.

4 Public Question Time

The Chair to advise of any questions, statements or petitions received that are not covered by items on the agenda for the meeting on which members of the public have requested to speak.

5 An update on Somerset Council's current financial position (Pages 17 - 22)

An urgent item that has been brought forward due to the parishes currently setting their precepts for the forthcoming financial year.

6 Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting

To discuss matters arising from the notes not covered in later agenda items.

7 Highways - Working group

To set up a Highways working group – proposals for volunteers.

8 Environmental Concerns

A particular emphasis on Flooding Preparedness.

9 Priorities for the forthcoming year

10 Communications, developing methodologies and identifying good practice

11 Suggested agenda items for the next meeting including start times

12 Dates for future meetings

Core Membership

Unitary Councillors:

Councillor Brian Bolt

Councillor Mike Caswell

Councillor Hugh Davies

Councillor Lance Duddridge

Councillor Gill Slocombe

Councillor Rosemary Woods

City, Town and Parish Councils (one voting member from each):

Cannington

Chilton Trinity

Durleigh

Enmore

Fiddington

Goathurst

Holford

Kilve

Nether Stowey

Otterhampton

Over Stowey

Spaxton

Stockland Bristol

Stogursey

Stringston

Wembdon

Other Stakeholders (one voting member from each):

Avon and Somerset Police

NHS

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue

Education

Spark Somerset

Society Local Council Clerks

Somerset Association Local Councils

Somerset Activity Sports Partnership

Community Council for Somerset

Citizens Advice

Department of Work and Pensions

Somerset Rivers Authority

Somerset Local Nature Partnership
Business Chamber
Quantocks AONB

Microsoft Teams meeting

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Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Dowsborough

Date: Wednesday, 13 September 2023

Time: 7.01 pm - 8.26 pm

Location: Spaxton Village Hall

Chaired by: Mike Caswell (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Brian Bolt	Somerset Council
Cannington, Cannington Parish Council	Cannington Parish Council
Chilton Trinity, Chilton Trinity Parish Council	Chilton Trinity Parish Council
Durleigh, Durleigh Parish Council	Durleigh Parish Council
Fiddington, Fiddington Parish Council	Fiddington Parish Council
Goathurst, Goathurst Parish Council	Goathurst Parish Council
Holford, Holford Parish Council	Holford Parish Council
Nether Stowey, Nether Stowey Parish Council	Nether Stowey Parish Council
Spaxton, Spaxton Parish Council	Spaxton Parish Council
Stogursey, Stogursey Parish Council	Stogursey Parish Council
Wembdon, Wembdon Parish Council	Wembdon Parish Council

Officer attendance:

Name:	Representing
Kate Hellard (Virtual)	Somerset Council

Emma Plummer	Somerset Council / LCN
Bev Norman	Somerset Council Highways
Pip Hughes	Somerset Council / LCN
Sam Murrell (clerk)	Somerset Council / Democratic Services
Tom Parkinson	Somerset Council / ICT Technician

Other attendees:

Name:	Representing
PCSO Lora Bray	Avon & Somerset Police
Peter Felton	Chilton Trinity PC
Sue Goss	Stogursey PC
Julian Gale	Member of the public
Karen Scott (Clerk)	Holford / Kilve PCs
Vernon Hughes	Member of the public

Virtual attendees:

Name:	Representing
Caro Slaymaker	Nether Stowey Parish Council
Lorna Edwards	Wembdon PC
Steve Skinner	Kilve PC
Luke Jackson	Somerset Activity Sports Partnership (SASP)

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Summary of key points of discussion and outcome: Action by: item:

Item 9: Election of Vice Chair

Councillor Simon Stretton (Spaxton PC) was proposed by the Chair Cllr Mike Caswell (Somerset Council) and seconded by

John Vassalli (Durleigh PC).

No other nominations were received from the Core Members in the room so Cllr Simon Stretton was duly elected to the position of Vice Chair.

Item 10: **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Somerset Councillors: Hugh Davies, Lance Duddridge, Gill Slocombe and Rosemary Woods.

Tina Gardner (Otterhampton PC).

Item 11: **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by the Somerset Councillors present.

Item 12: **Public Question Time**

Julian Gale – How well are these meetings advertised? They are public meetings but there is very little publicity from the parish and Somerset Council prior to them happening. It is important to maximise engagement and this can't happen if local people are unaware of them! *The interim LCN team have only initiated a soft launch until a permanent team is in place. The meetings are publicised on the Somerset Council website at least 5 days in advance and the agendas are published according to the Somerset Council terms of reference. Going forward it is hoped that the parishes will share the meeting dates via newsletters and noticeboards. Meeting dates when they are confirmed will also be shared in the minutes of the meetings and via emails to the membership and stakeholders. If participants have other suggestions on how to publicise the meetings, please contact the LCN team.*

Stogursey PC – Better communications need to come from Somerset Council especially around Planning Enforcement. Stogursey PC has written to Somerset Council on several planning issues and has not received a response from the officer team. This is a less than satisfactory service.

Cllr Chris Morgan (Stogursey PC) – Asked that there was more

publicity around the purpose of LCNs, as members of the public were still uninformed and had no idea what they were designed to accomplish. It would help to remove the mystery and thus increase engagement. There was marked less attendance in Spaxton than had been present at the first LCN in Stogursey. He was concerned that this showed interest was waning.

Item 13: **Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record and unanimously approved by those present.

Item 14: **Highlight of themes discussed at the last meeting**

An overview of the last meeting was provided by Kate Hellard. A series of slides were shown which highlighted the key issues.

The slide pack can be viewed here: [PowerPoint Presentation \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk).

Item 15: **Introduction to the data available**

- **Highways Issues – Including Road Safety and Maintenance**

Bev Norman – Strategic Manager for Traffic Management was introduced to the meeting. Bev stated that there was a very limited budget for Highway Improvement works and resources would be prioritised to areas that already have evidence-based need.

The Vice Chair, Cllr Simon Stretton presented some slides on the work being carried out by Spaxton Parish Council on a Road Sign and Roadside Management Project. These slides can be viewed via the website [here](#).

Spaxton PC currently has 4 volunteers willing to undertake the necessary training to carry out the work but is hampered by the lack of available courses. (The earliest date is March 2024). They are also looking to re-purpose and recondition existing finger post signs as there is no money for complete replacement.

Spaxton PC are now hoping to introduce a Community Speedwatch group.

- **Environmental Issues – Improving bio-diversity and increasing resilience**

The Chair highlighted a number of environmental issues which had been brought forward from the previous meeting:-

Hunting with Dogs – anti-social behaviour around this was a police matter and not something the LCN was equipped to deal with. The police worked closely with the Hunts to monitor anti-social behaviour around parking and the followers/protestors activity.

Flooding/Resilience/Preparedness – this was something that could be addressed going forward as climate change was very much in the forefront of everyone’s mind. Parishes united together could tackle the bigger issues and inform on community priorities.

Rewilding – Enmore PC have been working with Somerset Wildlife & Churches on a community rewilding project. It might be possible for Enmore to share the learning so that other parishes could participate in such work.

Hinkley Point – the negative environmental impacts of the Hinkley development which included fly-parking, noise, traffic congestion and light pollution. The Chair noted the lack of nocturnal wildlife since the HP development had got underway especially bats and foxes. He suggested this was because the night-time eco-system had been seriously disrupted by the light from the development site.

Item 16: **Discussion:**

Highways Issues

Following on from the Highways presentation parishes contributed to the discussion as follows:-

- **Chilton Trinity PC** – would like to see “Rumble Strips” or alternative traffic calming measures introduced on the main road through the village, especially on the approach to the pedestrian crossing. There had been a number of near misses, and it was just a matter of time before a serious accident occurred. *Bev Norman commented that there was no money set aside at present for new projects, and residents in other areas where rumble strips were laid, had complained about the noise.*

Community Speed Watch – Chilton Trinity PC had been advised that it would not be safe to engage volunteers to undertake a Speed Watch as the traffic was travelling too fast, and it would be too dangerous to implement.

Grit Bin Maintenance – It was suggested that it was a waste of money to employ an operative from Somerset Council to inspect the grit bin, when several parish councillors regularly passed the spot, and could report back if re-filling was required.

- **Holford PC** – The clerk for Holford/Kilve PC reported that better communications were needed around recent road closures especially along the A39 corridor. Recently Utilities had advised that a road closure would be in operation which would completely close the A39 between Holford and Kilve overnight. As such businesses including the local pub decided to remain closed, only to learn that the road closure did not in fact take place. They subsequently lost out on business, which was totally unnecessary. They also have to wait to determine when the works will take place instead and potentially lose another night of trading. It is vitally important to rural communities that any postponements or amendments to the work are communicated ahead of time!

Road Safety – Vitally important that the Police are involved with traffic management and slowing motorists. Signage needs to be clear and visible so that motorists can comply with the required speed limits. A Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) is currently being talked about between Holford and Kilve to reduce speeding.

- **Spaxton PC** – Who is the contractor for verge trimming and hedge cutting? It would be beneficial if the workers liaised with the parishes prior to undertaking the work. It would also be useful to understand the requirements and service standards as stated in the contracts.

Drains are blocked following hedge cutting and verge maintenance and there was no way to pass this information back to Somerset Council. A Highways sub-group such as employed on Exmoor would be good for

Dowsborough. Could such a sub-group be implemented?

- **Stogursey PC** – Is it possible to reinstate the Parish Lengthsman so that the parishes could share a workman and the cost?
- **Wembdon PC** – Could a bit of joined up thinking be employed please? Ditch maintenance alongside roads should coincide with the drain/gully emptying and resurfacing work. All these works have a direct impact on each other, and need to be coordinated to ensure benefit.

Bev Norman advised the LCN, that work to pilot a Highways Steward scheme on Exmoor had been very successful, and Somerset Council were evaluating how this project could be extended to other LCNs. This was overseen by a Highways working group made up of parish council representatives and highways officers. They met every other month to discuss suitable ways of working and communicate ongoing projects. This has been well received by the parishes and they are keen to continue.

Julian Gale asked if it was possible to communicate to the street sweeping team of the requirement to sweep the road following resurfacing.

Environmental Issues

For future meetings the Chair would like to extend an invitation to officers working in the Quantock Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This would be to provide an update on work currently being undertaken in the Dowsborough Area, and how the Dowsborough LCN may be able to contribute.

- **Vernon Hughes (Friends of the Quantocks)** said he was still waiting on a Freedom of Information request which was submitted in May 2023, and was now beyond the specified time frame for an answer. This concerned environmental issues in Spaxton.

Other discussion points

- Lorna Edwards (online) suggested that a Planning tile was required to cover the aspects of work around enforcement, new homes coming forward and the impacts on local communities.

Cllr Ian Dyer (Cannington PC) questioned the sustainability of the Dowsborough LCN as there was less engagement from the parishes and other stakeholders than there had been at the launch meeting. He was concerned with the budgetary pressures that Somerset Council faced, that it was not cost effective in terms of officer time and money to continue in this format. *The Chair addressed his concerns by stating that this was only the start of a much wider process and it was important that all representatives of the LCN fully engaged to make it work. There was a will on the part of Somerset Councillors to ensure it did.*

Item 17: **Date of the next meeting**

The provisional future meeting dates are :-

Wednesday 22nd November 2023 (Venue to be confirmed)

Wednesday 31st January 2024 (Venue to be confirmed)

The LCN team have worked hard to avoid diary clashes but please contact them on LCN@somerset.gov.uk if there are any issues. The team would also like information on alternative suitable venues within the Dowsborough area.

Contact officer for meeting: LCN Team lcn@somerset.gov.uk.

8 November 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Asset and Service Devolution

By now you will be aware of the enormous financial challenge facing Somerset Council. The rising cost of social care, together with inflation, plus a failure by government to bring forward the promised Fair Cost of Care policy, have contributed to the emergency. And then there's the decision by central government to dramatically reduce funding for local authorities over recent years, the decision of the previous administration to freeze council tax for six years in a row, and the limit on how much local authorities can increase this by - all of which has led us to an emergency position.

Since the creation of Somerset Council, we have been committed to working with communities who want greater influence over local assets and services. We know that some city, town and parish councils have clear ambitions for devolution of specific functions and assets in their areas. We also recognise that not everyone is in the same position, and that whilst devolution conversations are seen as opportunities for some, they can be concerning for others.

We have been working on a framework that acknowledges these differences, with a view to working with you to develop a prioritised programme of devolution for the coming months and years. The scale of the financial challenge facing Somerset Council means we are rapidly having to review all of our activities and prioritise where our limited resources are deployed. Therefore, in order to protect many of the services our communities value, we intend to speed up the pace of devolution.

We are asking city, town and parish councils to consider which (if any) of the services we've listed below, they think their communities would like them to support financially. We recognise of course that with Somerset Council recently having taken over from the former district and county councils, service provision is not uniform across Somerset, and that a number of our city, town and parish councils already provide some of those services listed below.

We will not make any decisions lightly; however our city, town and parish councils may want to help our communities continue to enjoy the services they currently have. Unlike Somerset Council, which has strict limits on how much it can raise for local services through Council Tax, our local councils have far more freedom to raise their precepts to protect those services their communities value.

Somerset Council's budget will not be finalised until February, and the first draft will not be ready until the start of December, so we cannot tell you definitively which discretionary services Somerset Council will be able to continue to provide next year. As proposals for the budget develop, we will keep you informed. In the meantime, I hope that the list below gives some indication of those areas you may wish to consider supporting.

There are many ways in which we would welcome city, town and parish councils contributing to the provision of services - these range from providing a financial contribution to enable the continuation of a specific service delivered by Somerset Council (or its contractors), working in partnership with or under delegated authority from Somerset Council, parishes taking full control of assets and services entirely, or working together to support communities in other ways if services have to cease and local devolution is not feasible.

The Local Community Networks (LCNs), set up following the creation of Somerset Council, will also have an important role to play. It has been encouraging to see these networks grow, develop their own priorities and begin to implement actions. While services cannot be devolved to LCNs, they are an essential forum to bring councils and partners together to prioritise and debate options. Neighbouring parishes and other stakeholders may wish to work together, to see how valuable services can be protected and delivered in the future. This could involve groups of parishes working in clusters or across boundaries to take on delegated responsibilities from Somerset Council. Each LCN can work with their constituent organisations as delivery partners to help facilitate those discussions.

By transferring the ownership and management of some assets and services to the local level, your local councils can potentially better tailor them to the specific needs and preferences of your communities. You can also access additional funding sources that are not available to the larger authorities and make use of local networks to mobilise volunteers and partners. Service devolution can also enhance the role of city, town and parish councils, as they become more involved in local decision-making and place-shaping.

If this is something that you wish to consider further, please contact my officers in the first instance via devolution@somerset.gov.uk and they will be get back to you to arrange discussions, which could be one-to-one or as groups of councils.

We are committed to keeping city, town and parish councils informed and consulted over the coming weeks and months as the picture of which services Somerset Council will and will not be able to continue, becomes clearer. In addition, we will carry on engaging with you as a sector, through regular briefings and forums. We are also working with our Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) colleagues with the aim of ensuring a true partnership approach in how we support our communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Revans', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Cllr Bill Revans
Leader of Somerset Council

Somerset services - devolution opportunities

Theme	<p style="text-align: center;">Services & Assets</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Risks & Opportunities</p>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community transport • Bus services/funding • Bus shelter cleaning and maintenance • Opportunity: Joint working on community and volunteer transport schemes; local contractor or volunteer work on bus shelters
Highways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street Cleaning covered in Street Scene but can include highway channels and litter removal from verges. • Winter Service - filling grit bins/dumpy bags • Roadside verges maintenance including grass cutting • Vegetation clearance and cutting on the Rights of Way network • Drain jetting/Gully cleansing – both ordering works from TMC Contractor and local self-delivery • Ditches and grips clearance • Hedge trimming • Non-illuminated sign cleaning and maintenance • Signage for new or changed speed limits • Weed treatment • Minor Highways functions such as footway and footpath repairs, • Planned path safety inspections • Opportunities: Parish Highway Steward Model (based on one per LCN area); P/T/C Council funding of most local highway services in accordance with community preferences eg on grass cutting regularity • Low tech preventative maintenance functions
Waste services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for household waste recycling sites • Opportunity: Funding to support existing opening hours at current sites
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School crossing patrols • Opportunity: Funding to schools/Somerset Council to support ongoing or new patrols

Public toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public toilets, provision and opening hours • Opportunities: Asset transfers to Parish/Town/City Councils; contributions to cleaning costs / opening hours through Somerset Council contracts
Street Scene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fly tipping • Street cleaning • Provision and collection of litter bins and dog waste bins • Carnival clean-up • Bedding planting • Management of allotments • Memorial maintenance • Opportunities: Asset transfers to P/T/C Councils; P/T/C Councils to take on more responsibility either through own provision of service or through contribution to Somerset Council service costs
Open Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and maintenance of open spaces assets - including both green spaces as well as “hard” open spaces • Grass cutting and open space maintenance, closed churchyards • Local parks • Opportunities: Asset transfers to P/T/C Councils; P/T/C Councils to take on more responsibility either through own provision of service or through contribution to Somerset Council service costs • Maintenance of play areas • Installation and maintenance of play equipment • Maintenance of sports grounds
Economic Development /Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local tourism • Local town economic development (incl. e.g. job clubs) • Control of markets • Opportunities: P/T/C Councils support for Visitor information; local Chamber of Commerce; management of markets
Leisure / Arts / Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to support Leisure Centres / Swimming pools • Support to theatres and arts centres • Additional support to libraries • Opportunities: Asset transfers to P/T/C Councils; P/T/C Councils support for existing services; asset transfers of cultural facilities; adoption of play areas; S106 funding for new play areas

<p>Community Wellbeing and Resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Centres • Provision of facilities and services for children and young people • Supporting Volunteering/Befriending • Community safety / neighbourhood watch • Local climate change initiatives (for example local green transport schemes while ensuring unitary has strategic overview) • Provision of sandbags/gel bags and some local flood response measures • Opportunities: Local provision of some flood response measures; P/T/C Council grants for community services (including young people) and climate change initiatives; LCN work on combining offers across LCN areas where geography allows; P/T/C Council grants for services for vulnerable people
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