

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Minehead and Watchet

Date: Wednesday, 7 February 2024

Time: 6.30 pm - 8.32 pm

Location: West Somerset House Council Chamber, Williton

Chaired by: Andy Sully (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

| Name: | Representing |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Cllr Mandy Chilcott | Somerset Council |
| Cllr Rosemary Woods | Somerset Council |
| Cllr Mike Rawle | Bicknoller PC |
| Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker (Vice Chair) | Carhampton PC |
| Cllr John Passingham | Combe Florey PC |
| Cllr Tony Brooks | Crowcombe PC |
| Cllr Robin Wichard | Nettlecombe PC |
| Cllr Ian Duncan | Old Cleeve PC |
| Cllr D J Swan | Sampford Brett PC |
| Cllr Jeremy Foley | Stogumber PC |
| Cllr John Irvén | Watchet TC |
| Cllr Mark Philipson | West Quantoxhead PC |
| Cllr Peter Payne | Williton PC |
| Cllr Loretta Whetlor | SALC |
| Bernard Maynard Smith | Minehead and Coast Development Trust |
| Martin Stevens | Watchet Coastal Community Team |

Officer attendance:

Mickey Green (Executive Director for Climate and Place), Emma Plummer (Interim LCN Officer), Pippa Hughes (Interim LCN Link Officer), Ollie Lindsell (ICT Specialist), Sam Murrell (Democratic Services)

Other attendees:

Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Alan Parslow
Cllr Geoff Williams
Cllr Chris Bramall
Jan Ayres
Kevin Francis
Maureen Smith
S.J. Smith
C.H Ellis
Hester Watson
A.Braven
E. Harbridge
Michelle Francis (Clerk)
T.Skinner
J. Armstrong
Jon Freeman
Karen Scott (clerk)
Wendy Philipson
Barbara Nye
Lesley Hayes
Cllr Ian Aldridge

Virtual attendees:**Name:**

Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr Andy Hadley
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Christine Lawrence
Cllr Geoff Dibble
Ben Parker (Clerk)
Cllr Craig Palmer
Paul Matcham
Bernice Scott Field
Ellie Bishop
Kate Hellard

Representing

Somerset Council
Crowcombe PC
Old Cleeve PC
Stogumber PC
Watchet Coastal Community Team
Williton & District Business Association
West Somerset Community Land Trust
Carhampton
Carhampton
West Somerset Green Forum
Dunster
West Somerset Community Land Trust
Williton PC
Sampford Brett
Watchet
Watchet
Holford / Kilve PC
West Quantoxhead PC
Williton
Williton
Williton PC

Representing

Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Dunster PC
Minehead TC
Minehead TC
Minehead Eye / Connect Somerset
Watchet Coastal Community Team
CCS Village Agent
Somerset Council LCN Development Lead

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 28: **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Mike Rigby (Somerset Council), Cllr Maggie Forkes (West Bagborough PC), Kali Martin (Somerset Council Highways) and PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams.

Cllrs Christine Lawrence, Hugh Davies, Marcus Kravis and Andy Hadley all tendered apologies but joined the meeting virtually.

The Chair welcomed Cllr Dixie Darch, Lead Member for the Environment and Climate Change to the meeting. She was joined by Mickey Green, Executive Director for Climate and Place.

Item 29: **Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

Item 30: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

A slight amendment was requested to wording relating to West Quantoxhead PC, but subject to this the minutes were unanimously agreed by those present.

Item 31: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

Update on the No28 Bus Service – Sam Murrell advised the meeting that the Bus Advisory Board had met the previous day (Tuesday 6 February). The agenda can be viewed on the Somerset Council website [here](#). An item for discussion was the proposed timetable changes from 15 April 2024.

It was proposed to reduce the No28 service to a frequency of every 45 minutes, and to incorporate Cotford St Luke on some journeys (as the No25 service will be withdrawn). Concern was expressed from the room about the reduction in service to Bishops Lydeard and Cotford St Luke as they were both “growing

villages". This would put pressure on the No28 at the Taunton end of the route.

In addition it was planned to introduce a x28 direct fast service for the summer months. This would run directly from Taunton to Butlins and would be specifically to cater for holiday makers.

The Exmoor Coaster Bus service would be re-introduced to cover the tourist season. (31 March – 28 September).

The meeting is available to view on [Youtube](#). The relevant part of the discussion starts at 1:03:19.

Cllr Richard Wilkins (Lead member for Transport & Digital) advised that he was disappointed that the service would be facing reductions. Meetings were being planned with the operator to discuss options going forward.

Item 32: **Update on Somerset Council's Financial Position**

Emma Plummer, Interim LCN Link Officer explained the current timeline and shared a presentation. This can be viewed [here](#).

Asset and Service Devolution

A question was raised about who would be responsible for paying the legal fees for asset transfers? *A £600k budget has been proposed to finance the Somerset Council asset devolution process, and this would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Cllr Loretta Whetlor also advised that SALC were looking at ways to assist Parishes and Towns in the transfer process. SALC was considering setting up a legal company to consolidate/assist with the legal fees.*

It was asked what was happening to Somerset Council's Commercial Investment Portfolio? Surely this would release capital money that could then be used to finance Somerset Council services? *It was explained that capital money would be ring-fenced and could not be used to fund revenue budgets unless dispensation was received from central government. It was basically selling off "the family silver" and could only be used once.*

Closure of the Williton Recycling Centre.

The meeting was attended by Cllr Dixie Darch and Executive Director Mickey Green. They had also been present at the Extraordinary Meeting, which was held by Williton PC on 30 January, to discuss the potential closure of the Williton Recycling Centre. (Minutes of this meeting can be viewed [here](#)).

Cllr Dixie Darch advised that following the Executive meeting that day, part of the budget proposals to close 5 household recycling centres (including Williton) was being re-assessed. Somerset Council were in consultation with the contractor to look at how savings could be made on the existing contract and reduce costs. There were £960K savings required, and the service was being thoroughly examined right across the board. If a decision was made to proceed with the closures, then a county wide consultation would take place.

There was a lot of debate in the room about this issue, some of which was a repeat of the public meeting.

General points made included:-

- The decision-making process must be clear and transparent to enable the populace to understand it. Attendees felt that the “wrong recycling site” had been selected for closure.
- Concern was expressed that Somerset Council was going to devolve the responsibility of dealing with Fly-Tippers down to the parishes, and they didn’t have the staff or resources to manage this! *Cllr Dixie Darch stated that there were no plans to devolve the fly-tipping service at this time.*
- Is there evidence to support that Somerset Council successfully prosecutes fly-tippers? This could generate some income streams and would be a deterrent to others. *Fly Tippers when found were actively prosecuted. The evidence suggested that most fly-tippers were actually rogue traders, masquerading as licenced waste carriers.*
- Not to throw the Minehead Recycling Centre “under the bus” to try and save Williton. A resolution should be sought to keep as many recycling centres open as

possible, and find ways to make cost savings in other areas.

Cllr Dixie Darch spoke passionately about the decisions that are being made and expressed her dismay at the current financial situation. It was important that services were preserved, but the current deficit in the statutory areas of protecting the vulnerable (Adult Social Care and Children's Services) meant that Somerset Council was faced with a stark choice. Cost savings had to be realised to ensure that the Council was not issued with a Bankruptcy notice. If that happened, the Commissioners would automatically cut the discretionary services, and a likely scenario could be that ALL recycling centres were closed.

Other discussion points:-

An attendee suggested that the LCN meetings were a waste of money and resource. A query was raised about how much it was costing to finance the LCNs and what had the Minehead and Watchet LCN achieved? *The Chair, Cllr Andy Sully reminded the LCN that two flooding events had taken place following the recent flooding in Minehead and Carhampton. This was to map the current provision and look into future preparedness. A Q&A had also been facilitated with the Homefinder Team to talk about how housing allocations were made, and an update on the Somerset Council Rainbow Way development had taken place. Cllr Dixie Darch advised that the cost implications of LCN meetings had been assessed as part of the budget process,. Now that they had been launched, the ongoing costs were minimal. Their value was in listening to and engaging with local communities, and if they were to be stood down, it would be due to lack of interest on the part of the membership rather than to make cost savings.*

Item 33: **Public Question Time**

Cllr Peter Payne (Williton PC) addressed the meeting and read out a statement regarding the proposed closure of the Williton Recycling Site. This statement can be viewed [here](#). Williton PC had collaborated with other parishes within the LCN area who were in collective agreement that they needed to lobby Somerset Council.

Cllr Mandy Chilcott advised that it would be good for Williton PC to send in their public question on behalf of the LCN to the next Somerset Council Full Council meeting. This was taking place on the 20 February 2024 and would be to agree the budget for the 2024/25 financial year. Cllr Chilcott advised that public speakers from West Somerset rarely came forward, but it was a powerful way to highlight local concerns and issues.

Cllr Peter Payne (Williton PC) was made aware of the submission deadlines.

Cllr Rosemary Woods asked how the public could participate in the Public Question Time at meetings, and this was responded to by Cllr Mandy Chilcott. *Public Questions can be emailed into Somerset Council Democratic Services, at least 3 days before the meeting date, and will receive a written response from the Executive Portfolio Holder. Sometimes at the discretion of the Chair, late speakers were allowed to present comments, statements and questions, providing there was sufficient space on the agenda.*

Item 34: **Update on the Highway Steward Scheme and Highways Working Subgroup - Terms of Reference**

Details on the Highway Steward scheme were presented to the meeting. The slide-pack is available to view [here](#).

The annual cost of the Highway Steward including transport is £50k and this could be shared across 2 LCN areas. (This would lessen the cost impact on individual parishes).

In addition it was also proposed that a Highway Working group be established to progress the concerns of the Minehead and Watchet LCN parishes. This would be held between the main LCN meetings and would be made up of parish representatives and staff from the Somerset Council Highways Team.

This did not incur a cost to the parishes beyond their time and would be a good opportunity to progress local issues directly with the Highways staff. This meeting would be held during the day at West Somerset House. (The Terms of Reference to be circulated and volunteers invited to participate). A show of hands

was made in the room, and interested parties were asked to leave their details with the clerk (Sam Murrell).

Questions from the floor included:-

- Concern about the cost of the Highway Steward, especially from the smaller parishes. They simply couldn't afford it!
- How the work would be fairly distributed on an operational level. Who would be responsible for overseeing the work and ensuring that it was completed to a satisfactory standard?
- It was important that all the parishes collaborated to ensure that if the model was adopted the cost was spread proportionately.
- It was stressed that the Highway subgroup was independent of the Steward and could be progressed whether the Steward scheme was adopted or not.

At the end of the meeting, 9 participants indicated that they would like to be part of an inaugural Highways subgroup meeting. A meeting date has been set for Friday 22 March 2024, to take place at West Somerset House. Meeting invitations and an agenda will be circulated in the preceding week.

Item 35: **Priorities for action in 2024 - items for future meetings**

- Progress with setting up a Highways working group.
- Partnering with the Exmoor LCN with the view to sharing the cost of a Highway Steward.
- Look to establishing a formal method of communication between West Somerset Flood Group and Somerset Council.
- Promote the Rainbow Way Housing Development and ensure local people are aware of Homefinder and the application process.

Item 36: **West Somerset Community Land Trust - Maureen Smith**

Maureen Smith presented a series of slides to highlight the aims and objectives of the West Somerset Community Land Trust. The slide pack is available to view [here](#).

Attendees at the meeting were invited to email info@wsclt.com if they wished to find out more information.

Item 37: **Dates and Agendas for the next meeting**

Future draft meeting dates for the Minehead and Watchet LCN proposed as follows:-

- Tuesday 30 April 2024 at 6:30pm
- Wednesday 17 July 2024 at 6:30pm

These to be held at the West Somerset House Council Chamber.

Also the inaugural meeting of the Highway Subgroup to be held on

Friday 22 March at 10am in the West Somerset House Council Chamber.

Meeting invites will be extended to those who expressed an interest and left their details with the clerk.

Contact officer for meeting: LCN Team lcnsomerset.gov.uk