

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Cheddar and Axbridge

Date: Wednesday, 6 March 2024

Time: 6.30 pm - 8.20 pm

Location: Draycott Memorial Hall, Latches Lane, Draycott, Cheddar, Somerset, BS27 3UE

Chaired by: Pauline Ham (Chair)

Vice Chair: Councillor Francesca Mitton

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Councillor Pauline Ham	Somerset Council
Councillor Ben Ferguson	Somerset Council
Councillor Ros Wyke	Somerset Council
Councillor Francesca Mitton	Axbridge Town Council
Councillor Val Bullen	Rodney Stoke & Draycott Parish Council
Councillor Jacky Farley	Wedmore Parish Council
Councillor Shaun Thorogood	Wedmore Parish Council
Councillor Fiona Torrens-Spence	Chapel Allerton Parish Council

Officer attendance:

Name:	Representing
Sunita Mills	Somerset Council
Rod Semple	Somerset Council
Sam	Somerset Council
Julie Cooper	Somerset Council

Other attendees:

Name:

Councillor Derek Bradley Balmer
Councillor Bob Abbott
Councillor Jackie Burley
Councillor Barbara Wells
Councillor D Bradley-Palmer

Representing

Cheddar Parish Council
Independent for Cheddar
Wedmore Parish Council
Axbridge Town Council
Cheddar Parish Council

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Andrew Turner
Terry Mason
Gemma Gaut
Lynn Myland

Representing

Highways
SALC & Compton Bishop
Shipham Parish Council
Weare Parish Council & Chairman Somerset
Local Access Forum

Lewis Clarke
Doreen Smith
Jim Hardcastle
Dave Champion
Lina Curiale-Hopkinson

The Space Cheddar & Connect Somerset
Mendip Hills National Landscape

Somerset Community Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 26: **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Heather Shearer
- Councillor Tony Grimes
- Councillor Matt Martin
- Councillor Bob Filmer

- Councillor Paul Fineran, substituted by Councillor D Bradley-Palmer
- Delia McCarthy

Item 27: **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

Item 28: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

It was noted that the notes of the meeting held on 9 January 2024 were titled 'minutes' which was incorrect and should be changed to 'notes'.

Cllr Pauline Ham must be recorded as chairing the meeting and listed in the core membership.

Cllr Francesca Mitton must be recorded as Vice Chair of the meeting and listed as in attendance.

The Notes from the meeting held on 19 February 2024 were approved as a true record of the meeting.

It was confirmed that Paul Fineran would send through a list of items he believed were missing from the notes. This list must be sent around so that it can be considered by the Chair and Vice Chair. These will be agreed at the minutes item in the next meeting.

Item 29: **Actions from last meeting**

There were none.

Item 30: **Brief update on Somerset Council's current financial position**

Councillor Ros Wyke reported on the current situation regarding Somerset Council's financial position.

She confirmed that:

- A balanced budget had been put together, which was passed

by Full Council.

- A large number of savings had been made and they had been supported by the Town and Parish Councils to achieve this, for example carrying the cost of CCTV.
- Central Government had listed Somerset at one of 19 counties who had received a capitalisation directive, which meant they Somerset could sell assets and use the capital.
- Somerset was awarded a £4 billion investment because they were chosen as the new location for the UK's new gigafactory. This would also create 4 000 jobs and money to support the skills agenda, which would help young people to better themselves.
- The factory would be located in Puritan, near Bridgwater, on the old munitions factory site as there is already a Local Development Order (LDO) over that site which speeds up planning permissions.
- This was advantageous to the company as well as to others, as business rates would be charged on the enterprise zone. For Somerset Council, this meant that 100% of the rates could be collected by them for a long period of time.
- Somerset Council was continuing to heavily control costs within the Council and they have reduced their overspend down to £16M.
- The Council has opened the voluntary redundancy scheme in order to slim down the staff and compulsory redundancies will be executed after that period is over.

Item 31: **Public Question Time (not covered by the agenda)**

There were none.

Item 32: **Discussion: Highway Steward proposal**

Andrew Turner considered the letter sent by Mike O'Dowd-Jones, Service Direct Infrastructure and Transport to all Parish Councils and drew the following to everyone's attention:

- The savings that the council were considering, namely, the proposed highways savings of around £200k (a reduction of about 15%) is what they spend on grass cutting, gully emptying, hedge trimming and treating noxious weeds. He confirmed that the vast majority of highways services would continue to April 2025 to give time for local agreements to be reached.
- Currently Somerset Council was responsible for maintaining around 6,700km of carriageway and 2,600km of footways across Somerset, which is funded through capital grants from Government.
- They also operate area highways offices and undertake routine planned maintenance which is a service and is funded from Council Tax.
- There is planned maintenance and reactive maintenance. Planned maintenance was, for example, cleaning highway surface water drains on roads, cleaning gullies etc.

Reactive maintenance is issues identified by inspectors or reported by communities.

As part of Somerset Council's response to the financial emergency, the highway service plans to reduce the budget for reactive maintenance activity from April 2025. However, planned maintenance would still be undertaken.

- The next step would be putting a range of measures into place which would enable enhanced local delivery and new local arrangements prior to budgets reducing in 25/26.
- A Highway Steward, Kier Transportation, could be supplied subject to the local community confirming funding which is about £50,000 per annum.
- There is potential for local councils across Somerset to buy into this service, which would bring the additional benefit of close links with the highways service and would address concerns about taking on health and safety and insurance

obligations.

- There is flexibility in how the service is commissioned; a Parish could buy one whole Steward or they could pool resources with a cluster of parishes within the LCN area.
- If this was an option and a parish would like to register then they must email devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing 'Highways Steward' in the subject line of the email.
- A similar scope of services to the Highways Steward scheme could be 'self-delivered' by localities, either through local suppliers commissioned by a Parish, or by Parish collaboration, or through a volunteer network.
- Activities could include verge maintenance, drainage maintenance, weed removal, sign cleaning, vegetation clearance, tree and hedge cutting, minor repairs to non-regulatory signs etc.
- Somerset Council is preparing a training package which will be available in the summer to enable people such as volunteers or locally skilled people to undertake agreed types of work safely in the vicinity of the highway with appropriate risk assessment.
- If you'd like to learn more about this training, contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk by placing 'Training' in the subject line of your email.
- Somerset Council are enabling City, Town, and Parish Councils to purchase highway maintenance services direct from our contractor Kier. Our contractor is preparing a parish price list and an ordering process for this.
- If you would like to express an interest in buying services from the parish price list, then please contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing 'Price List' in the subject line of your email.
- There may be opportunities in the next City, Town and Parish precept round to raise funds and 'buy back' a level of service

for a particular locality.

- At present the Council's budgets and programmes are planned on a countywide and area basis, so we recommend that localities wishing to buy back a level of service are better placed to do so in clusters.
- To ensure enhanced levels of service continue in the localities - over and above the basic offer - Somerset Council require their local Parishes to step forward and take on these tasks. More information can be found here: www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/city-town-and-parish-councils/.
- Somerset Council will remain responsible for the ownership and safe operation and maintenance of the highway network in this locality. They will continue to discharge their duty of care within available funding levels and in accordance with their published policies.

It was noted that there was value in working with the Council to employ an experienced contractor.

A highways working group will be set up and expressions of interest will be provided to the LCN officers. Terms of reference which were used for Exmoor will be provided to this LCN as a starting point of their way forward.

Item 37: **Presentation on Active Travel**

The Head of Transportation, Sunita Mills, presented a slide show on active travel highlighting:

- The Local transport plan and active travel strategy
 - The Department for Transport requires all councils to develop a new plan and a draft be made available by summer 2024
 - Local cycling and walking infrastructure plans
 - 10 year plan to guide the development of future active travel investment, primarily for built up areas, but not a delivery plan

- They are engaging with local communities and enthusiast groups vital to developing best proposals
- Completed in Mendip (Glastonbury, Street, Shepton Mallet, Wells)
- In progress in Chard
- Community-led active travel
 - The Strawberry Line – led by the Strawberry Line Society, and Somerset Council, to complete sections of the path between Clevedon and Shepton Mallet
 - Ability to create off-highway routes in a more cost-effective way as there is no need to stick rigidly to highways construction standards.
 - Somerset Council would like to produce a step-by-step guide for communities who are interested in creating new links, which could include information on:
 - Assessing route feasibility;
 - Accessing and assessing different sources of mapping and topographical information;
 - Considerations and strategies for negotiating with landowners;
 - How to undertake local consultations and engagement;
 - Guidance on maintenance and liabilities;
 - Advice of funding streams and bidding for funding;
 - Information on small-scale construction (including surfaces, ecology, environmental etc);
 - Mobilising and working with volunteers.

During the discussion which followed, the following points were raised:

- Sunita Mills confirmed that more talks could be organised for groups if she was made aware of which groups.
- The work which was done was evidence based from information gathered and checks and balances were done with neighbouring communities.
- Active travel seemed to separate horse riders and equestrians and this would be considered in the future.
- Guidance would be provided to aid in understanding what liabilities there might be for new routes which

were identified. The Head of Transportation advised getting in touch with other communities who have already done this, such as Taunton and Bridgwater, in order to gain some insight from experience. A suggested route was a heritage and wildlife trail linking places like the Grade 2 listed Ashton Windmill in Axbridge with King John's Hunting Lodge as a cycling route. The Head of Transportation was able to supply a contact in order to put interested parties in touch with each other and could be contacted at Sunita.mills@somerset.gov.uk.

- It was suggested that these routes may benefit tourism and therefore be a crossover with funding from tourism.

Item 38: **Dates and topics of future meetings**

Actions

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Topics for next meeting:

Kate Hellard to find out more about the future of Planning in Somerset Council and an update on the Local Plan discussed during the Mendip District Council.

Topics were listed as follows:

- Transport – local solutions, active travel (Highways)
- Economy
- Community Safety
- Housing
- Planning
- Climate and Environment
- Access to services
- Communications (with Somerset Council and between towns & parishes)

It was noted that there would not be enough time for the Highways Working Group to have met before the next meeting in April.

Dates of next meeting

Tuesday 16 April at 6:30
Thursday 18 July AGM at 6:30

Contact details for the meeting:
cheddarandaxbridgelcn@somerset.gov.uk

Meeting ended at 8:20

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