

Public Agenda Pack



Notice of Meeting of

LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORK - DOWSBOROUGH

Monday, 18 March 2024 at 7.00 pm

Stogursey Victory Hall - Victory Hall

To: The members of the Local Community Network - Dowsborough

Chair: Councillor Mike Caswell
Vice-chair: Councillor 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 Tuesday, 12 March 2024**.

The LCN team want everybody to have the opportunity to take part in the LCN meetings and have booked appropriate venues with accessibility requirements in

mind. If you have specific access needs, and are at all concerned, please contact the LCN Team so they can provide reassurance or seek solutions beforehand:
lcn@somerset.gov.uk.

Issued by David Clark (the Proper Officer) on Friday, 8 March 2024

AGENDA

Local Community Network - Dowsborough - 7.00 pm Monday, 18 March 2024

Core Membership (Pages 5 - 6)

Click here to join the online meeting (Pages 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 - 14)

To approve the notes from the previous meeting.

4 Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting

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

5 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.

6 An update on the Highways Working Group (Pages 15 - 28)

1. General feedback on the meeting of Thursday 29 February.
2. Ratify the Terms of Reference.
3. Ratify the frequency of meetings.

7 Connectivity - Connecting Devon and Somerset

It is hoped to have a representative from Connecting Devon and Somerset present at the meeting. If this does not happen, an update will be provided by the Chair, Cllr Mike Caswell.

8 Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy Consultation (Pages 29 - 30)

Somerset Council has launched an online survey to help shape the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

We want to hear from residents from all parts of the county, rural or urban. We encourage them to take the survey and tell us how and where nature matters to them.

Your views will help shape a greener more sustainable Somerset, and ensure this new strategy meets the needs of communities, farmers, businesses, and of course, above all, our precious wildlife.

To find out more visit www.somerset.gov.uk/LNRS and have your say. The survey should take between 5 and 20 minutes depending on how much detail you would like to provide.

9 Date of the next meeting

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



Local Community Network

Dowsborough

Monday 18th March 2024

7pm – 8.30pm

Stogursey Victory Village Hall
32 Tower Hill
Stogursey
TA5 1PR

We'd love to see you in person, but if you can't make it this time, we're trialling a hybrid set-up, so please use this

MS Teams Link

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device:

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 325 610 999 301

Passcode: rYD5j3

[Download Teams](#) | [Join on the web](#)

Please note:

Free parking is available onsite.

We want everybody to have the opportunity to take part in the LCN meetings - fully and comfortably - and have booked appropriate venues with accessibility requirements in mind.

If you've specific access needs, and are at all concerned, please contact us so we can provide reassurance, or seek solutions beforehand:

Dowsboroughlcn@somerset.gov.uk

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Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Dowsborough

Date: Wednesday, 31 January 2024

Time: 7.03 pm - 8.32 pm

Location: St Mary's Church Centre, Nether Stowey

Chaired by: Mike Caswell (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:

Cllr Brian Bolt
Cllr Ian Dyer
Cllr Lyn Hook
Cllr John Vassalli
Cllr Michael Hopkins
Cllr Robin Kinahan
Cllr Sarah Nason
Cllr Steve Skinner
Cllr Kevin Ferriday
Cllr Tina Gardener
Cllr Patrick Tully
Cllr Simon Stretton (Vice Chair)
Cllr John McVerry
Cllr Sue Goss
Cllr Bridget Hedaux

Representing

Somerset Council
Cannington Parish Council
Chilton Trinity Parish Council
Durleigh Parish Council
Enmore Parish Council
Fiddington Parish Council
Holford Parish Council
Kilve Parish Council
Nether Stowey Parish Council
Otterhampton Parish Council
Over Stowey Parish Council
Spaxton Parish Council
Stockland Bristol Parish Meeting
Stogursey Parish Council
Wembdon Parish Council

Officer attendance:

Kate Hellard (LCN Development Lead), Emma Plummer (LCN Interim Lead), Pippa Hughes (LCN Interim Link Officer), Ollie Lindsell (ICT Specialist), Sam Murrell (Democratic Services)

Other attendees:

Name:

Peter Felton
Cllr Andrew Hawkins
Karen Scott (Clerk)
Connie Sanders
Bryony Carver
Cllr Peter Major
John Roberts
Denise Hopkins

Representing

Chilton Trinity Parish Council
Enmore Parish Council
Holford / Kilve Parish Councils
Otterhampton Parish Council
Stockland Bristol Parish Meeting
Wembdon Parish Council
Member of the Public
Member of the Public

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Rosemary Woods
Richard Wand
Lorna Edwards
Anne Reed

Representing

Somerset Council
Member of the Public
Member of the Public
Wembdon Parish Council

Summary of discussion:

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

Item 30: Apologies for Absence

Somerset Councillors Lance Duddridge, Hugh Davies and Gill Slocombe. Cllr Chris Morgan (Stogursey PC) substituted by Sue Goss.

Cllr Rosemary Woods attended virtually.

The Chair on behalf of the LCN extended his condolences to Nether Stowey PC on the sad loss of councillor Penny Everett.

Item 31: Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

Item 32: Notes from the Previous Meeting

The notes from the previous meeting were unanimously agreed

by those present.

Item 33: **An 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](#).

Item 34: **Public Question Time**

Cllr Rosemary Woods advised that the Williton Recycling centre was marked for closure. Although outside the Dowsborough LCN area it would impact the nearby communities of Holford and Kilve. It was important that all parishes took part in any consultation that takes place.

Item 35: **An update on the Highway Steward Scheme and formation of a Highways Working Group - Terms of Reference.**

Kate Hellard, LCN Development Lead shared a presentation on the Highway Steward scheme which had been trialled on Exmoor. The presentation can be viewed [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 Dowsborough parishes. This would be held bi-monthly 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 a local venue.

(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.

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?
- The Exmoor Highways pilot had made use of Parish Online. Had the Somerset Council data sets relating to hedges and verge maintenance been updated in that area, and would this now be rolled out across Somerset? *(Sam Murrell advised that the Parish Online trial had finished and did not involve the former SCC uploading their data to the site. Parishes were able to pay a subscription if they wished to continue and could upload their own data, such as the location of defibrillators etc).*
- 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.
- It was requested that a senior highways officer was present at the next meeting to talk about current highway issues. Sue Goss stated that this used to work well at the former West Somerset Area Panel for Watchet, Williton and Quantock Vale.

Item 36: **Developing a way forward for the LCN**

It was agreed by a show of hands for a Highways working group to be set up. Can participants please email the dowsboroughlcn@somerset.gov.uk to register their interest. The first face-to-face meeting will be set up shortly, at an accessible venue with representatives from the Highways team.

It was agreed that the Highway Subgroup Terms of Reference (TOR) would be circulated to parishes so that they could have an idea of the time commitment required.

Item 37: **Discussion on Planning. What are our concerns and issues?**

The Chair stated that he felt strongly that the LCN should be a consultee on strategic planning issues, especially in respect of Infrastructure.

Concern was expressed about the lack of planning enforcement and general access to planning advice and information. The Chair advised that Planning Enforcement was not a statutory function of the Council, and as such could be subject to further service cuts. It was requested that the Somerset Council website was updated and the relevant outstanding enforcement notices listed for inspection.

It was acknowledged that there was a national problem with recruitment and retention of Development Control staff, which meant access to planning staff at local level was difficult.

Item 38: **Date for the next meeting**

Provisional dates proposed:-

- Monday 18 March 2024
- Wednesday 12 June 2024

Venues to be confirmed. Cllr Sue Goss suggested the Victory Hall, Stogursey for the March meeting.

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

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Dowsborough LCN – Highways Working Group Minutes of 29th February 2024

Held in West Somerset House, at 10am.

Attendees:

LCN Parishes Name		Parish	Somerset Council Name		Area
Cllr Simon Stretton	SS	Spaxton	Cllr Mike Caswell (ch)	MC	Somerset Council
Cllr Sue Goss	SG	Stogursey	Cllr Rosemary Woods	RW2	Somerset Council
Richard Wand	RW1	Stogursey	Cllr Hugh Davies	HD	Somerset Council
Cllr Mike Copleston	MC	Holford	Andrew Turner	AT	Highways Infrastructure Manager
Cllr John McVerry	JMV	Stockland Bristol	Katherine Tyson	KT	Traffic Manager
Cllr Paul King	PK	Wembdon	Luke Green	LG	Principal Street Works
Cllr Richard Curtis	RC	Over Stowey	Kali Martin	KM	Highway Maintenance
Cllr John Addison	JA	Cannington	Graig Gowan	CG	Planned Maintenance
Cllr Terry Yarwood	TY	Nether Stowey	George Simmonds	GS	Street Works
Karen Scott (clerk)	KS		Emma Plummer	EP	LCN Lead Officer
			Sam Murrell	SM	Interim Link Officer
			Pippa Hughes	PH	Interim Link Officer

- 1. Introductions** – all introduced themselves.
- 2. Highways Steward Presentation** – AT explained the history, method and impact of the Exmoor Highways Working Group Pilot and the Highways Steward initiative and then gave a brief overview of the purpose of the Highways Steward.

AT confirmed that this meeting will be led by the LCN and the agenda will be created by the LCN. Highways would try to anticipate the next agenda to ensure that the correct Somerset Council Highways personnel were in attendance.

It was suggested that it would be useful if Andy Cope could be in attendance. **SC Action.**

SG enquired about the attendees from the area office as some parishes were in the old Somerset West and Taunton Area and some from the old Sedgemoor Area. AT agreed that it needs to be considered how that will work to avoid 2 representatives at the meeting.

AT confirmed that Kier Group Plc have been awarded the maintenance contract for the entire road network from 1st April 2024 and will undertake all works required to ensure the safe surface and sustainable statutory requirements. There is a schedule for works which covers essential verge cutting, gully cleaning etc. A letter (dated 26th Feb) detailing what is covered, plus other options, was emailed to all Parish Clerks on 27th February 2024.

The letter contains a menu of works that parishes may want to procure, and it also lists the activities that parishes are able to undertake themselves. A price list will be available in the Summer (2024). If doing the work themselves, parishes need to consider the standard, training, insurance and the need to keep the public safe. More detail about this will be available in the Summer (2024).

Parish Online – For the Exmoor pilot all parish councils were given access to Parish Online (if they didn't already use it), some found it very useful and others, of limited use. At the moment, pertinent information is held on a variety of maps. It would be useful if all the Highways information in respect of maps could be made available. **SC Action.**

Dowsborough LCN – Highways Working Group Minutes of 29th February 2024

3. **Adoption of Terms of Reference (TOR)** – SG commented that the 3rd point is not applicable.

There needs to be a further component as follows:

The Highways Working Group is a sub-group and does not have the right to communicate outside of the Group.

The TOR will be ratified at the next Dowsborough LCN meeting. **D-LCN Action.**

4. **Agreement regarding parish representatives** – Agreed that this has to be a nominated person from each parish council. For continuity reasons it was suggested that maybe a councillor and clerk for continuity. Agreed that the need to cover old ground should be avoided, therefore, the person should be fully up-to-date.

Agreed that the recommendation is a nominated person and a back up.

All relevant Somerset Council Councillors are welcome to attend.

The meeting venue will move around, but they will always be during the day. **It should be noted, that there is not a budget to cover venue hire.** Fire Stations and Libraries are possible free venues.

5. **Pressing Highways concerns.**

- a. **Wembdon** – The new build that is occurring adjacent to the A39 is resulting in people using the back road which are flooding and some support is required.
 - i. The temporary 20mph is for 1 year in place of a safety zone. Liaise with the developer to see what can be done to mitigate the issues when no work is being done. For example, remove the temporary speed limit.
 - ii. Traffic lights are in plan for when the highways works commence but no start date is available yet. Agreed to provide a detailed update at the next meeting. **SC Action.**
 - iii. Where possible, they will try to avoid work on Mondays and Fridays as these are the heavier traffic days.
 - iv. Police have advised that they will not enforce the 20mph because too many are speeding. It needs to be linked to police and enforcement if it is to be effective.
 - v. AT confirmed that it is a wider issue and will arrange for someone from Development Control to attend. **SC Action.**
- b. **How do we communicate with Highways better?** AT confirmed that this working group will be where the detail and strategy can be discussed. This group will also be about quality regarding work and communication. A list of key point of contact email addresses will be provided. **SC Action.**
- c. **An issue with the non visibility of traffic signs was reported a year ago and it still has not been addressed. Will the new contractor be asked to clear up the back log?** The contractor will work on instruction from the council.
- d. **A blocked gully was reported, but the contractor did not clear it because it was too blocked and some residents did it instead.** Confirmed that this was a quality of work issue which this working group would report so it gets to the relevant people. With regard to gullies there is a plan of works in place.
- e. **When fixing a pot-hole, could the contractor fix adjacent pot holes.** No, the contractor will only do what they are employed to do.

Dowsborough LCN – Highways Working Group Minutes of 29th February 2024

- f. **Intervention criteria** – If it is a busy road it will get fixed quicker than one on a rural quiet road.
 - g. **The Intervention criteria needs to take into account how important that road is to the residents.** – In Stolford, the road is so bad that many residents do not venture out. However, it is vital to them as it is the only way in and out of the village. Biffers Corner is in a bad state. **SC Action**
 - h. **C182 – It is understood that EDF have a budget to meet the cost of repairs, but highways do not appear to want to.** – EDF only cover the capital costs not repairs.
 - i. **Resurfacing of the A39 by the VW garage – why has this not been done when the rest of the road was done?** It is in plan, but work has to be phased to take into account road closures, their impact on traffic and businesses. If they did the whole road in one go, it would need to be closed entirely so it is phased to reduce impact.
 - j. **The Cannington West Roundabout needs repairs, are these in plan?** Will check to see if there is work planned in the forward program. **SC Action.**
 - k. **C182 A deflectorgraph survey has been undertaken on the state of the road. The undulation of the road means that vehicles appear to lurch towards each other.** The report has been received and an update will be provided at the next meeting. **SC Action.**
 - l. **Why do we not seal the edges of pot-hole repairs any more?** They are now sealed on the vertical plane rather than horizontal. It was found to be dangerous for motor cycles. If the repair breaks away, it is a quality of works issue and should come to this meeting.
 - m. **TTRO emails to clerks – who updates the ‘one network’ and why is the duration so long?** The duration is applied for by the requesting company, not the council. When they have finished, a notification of completion of works should be submitted which will remove the road closure from the system. There are penalties that Somerset Council can apply. If it happens, please report it.
 - n. **Shurton Ford Issue (planned re-direction of traffic through the ford).** Apologies, it was a training issue.
 - o. **Timing of the Traffic Signals at Chiltern Trinity needs some observation.** Will investigate. **SC Action.**
6. **Recommendations to the Dowsborough LCN Meeting** – Agreed to meet quarterly. Next meeting in June. **D-LCN Action**
7. **Date, time and venue of next meeting** – We said that it would be after the June LCN meeting. (clerk comment) Upon reflection and following a short discussion, it would be useful if it was before the LCN meeting so that updates on the issues raised here could be provided. It can also be noted that the chair to the working group does not have to be the same person who is chair of the Dowsborough LCN. **D-LCN Action**
8. **Meeting closed 11.52.**

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Dowsborough LCN Highways Working Group - Actions

Actions as at 29th February 2024

Somerset Council Actions

no	Description	Comments	Status
S1	Invite Andy Cope to the meetings		Open
S2	Parish Online	See whether it is possible to provide parishes with the pertinent information held on Highways maps.	Open
S3	Invite a rep from Development Control	This relates specifically to the works on the A39 as you move west out of Bridgwater.	Open
S4	Temporary Traffic lights on A39	Agreed to provide a detailed update regarding the future highways plans for the new build reference in item 3.	Open
S5	Contact list	Provide the working group with a list of key point of contact email addresses	Open
S6	Cannington West Roundabout	Check whether there is anything in the forward program to cover the repairs	Open
S7	C182 Deflectorgraph Report	Update the working group on the results and actions to be taken	Open
S8	Biffers Corner and roads to Stolford	Investigate the issues	Open
S9	Chiltern Trinity Traffic Kight	Observation to check the timing	Open

Dowsborough LCN Actions

No	Description	Comments	Status
D1	Ratify Terms of Reference	Add to the agenda for the next LCN meeting	Open
D2	Ratify frequency of the meeting	Add to the next LCN agenda – recommendation is quarterly with the next meeting in June	Open
D3	Date of next meeting	Agree possible dates for June	Open
D4	Agree venue		Open
D5	Elect chair for working group		Open

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Model Terms Of Reference LCN Highways Working Group

The key components of all LCN Highways Working groups are as follows.

- The working group will be made up of up to 6 parish representatives and Highways officers from Somerset Council.
- Parish representatives will be responsible for representing a specified geographical area within their LCN which includes but is not exclusive to their own parish.
- A balance between City and Towns and other parishes
- The group will meet, face to face, once per quarter, during office hours.
- The meeting to be no longer than 3 Hours and will ideally take place in the morning.
- Each meeting to be hosted by a Parish/Town Council, who will provide appropriate meeting space.
- The meeting venue must have good Wi-Fi and accessible access and parking.
- The parishes will identify a designated person to take notes per meeting.

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Via email to:
All City, Town, and Parish Councils

All enquiries email:
devolution@somerset.gov.uk

Date: 26 February 2024

Dear Colleagues

Highway Maintenance Devolution - Options for local enhancement to routine highways maintenance services

Further to letters issued last year by the Leader of the council I am pleased to outline the options available to localities to enhance the level of highway service in their area; providing contact details to express an interest in the various initiatives which will become available over the next few months.

Following extensive budget consultation and Scrutiny process, the Council's Executive Board heard concerns about the potential impact of options for savings in highway services and agreed that localities need time to develop arrangements for any enhanced local delivery. The proposed highway savings were scaled back to around £200k which is a reduction of about 15% in terms of what we spend on grass cutting, gully emptying, hedge trimming and treating noxious weeds. The saving will not come into force until April 2025 to give time for local agreements to be reached.

Our services

Somerset Council is responsible for maintaining around 6,700km of carriageway and 2,600km of walkable footways across Somerset. We have a broad responsibility to ensure the network is maintained and safe and we aim to make sure we undertake timely repairs in line with our published policies on inspecting and maintaining the highway.

You can access these here: www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/highway-safety-inspections/

We spend in excess of £30m capital per year on maintaining the structure of the highway, through planned programmes such as re-surfacing, patching and reconstruction, and through reactive repairs to safety defects such as potholes.

We also have programmes for repair and renewal of aging assets such as street lighting, traffic signals and maintaining, repairing, and strengthening structures such as bridges, culverts and retaining walls.

This type of work is usually funded through our capital grants from Government.

We also operate area highways offices and undertake routine planned maintenance to keep people safe on our networks, such as cutting the grass for improved visibility, the emptying of gullies to prevent flooding, jetting drains, treating noxious weeds, and ensuring any signs and lines related to highway safety, are legible.

We currently spend about £4.7m on this type of activity (excluding winter and emergency service, rights of way and highway lighting).

As these are 'services' rather than construction works, they are typically funded from Council Tax.

Some of this work is 'planned maintenance' and is scheduled in each year (such as grass cutting and gully emptying), and some of the work is undertaken reactively, in response to issues being identified by our inspectors or the public (such as blocked drains).

Planned maintenance (explained)

We operate a planned maintenance programme for cleaning highway surface water drains on all the roads we maintain. How often we do this depends on where they are (the classification of the road) and the relative risk of flooding.

- Gullies in flood susceptible areas will be cleaned every year
- Gullies in rural non-flood susceptible areas (outside a 30mph or 40mph speed limit) will be cleaned every two years
- Gullies in urban non-flood susceptible areas (inside a 30 or 40mph speed limit) will be cleaned every four years

Another planned maintenance activity is cutting certain areas of grass on the A and B roads which we do twice a year at agreed locations where long grass would otherwise cause safety issues such as lack of visibility of oncoming traffic.

The planned programme is reviewed and adjusted each year to respond to the changing nature of risk and flooding on the county's road network.

Reactive maintenance (explained)

In addition to our planned maintenance programmes, we also currently budget for reactive work which is where issues (such as blocked drains or overgrown hedges) are identified by our inspectors or reported to us by communities. Where defects or flooding are identified, outside the planned programmes, these will be dealt with as necessary.

Changes arising from the recent budget setting process

As part of our response to the financial emergency, the highways service plans to reduce our budget for reactive maintenance activity such as hedge trimming, gully emptying, drain jetting and treating noxious weeds. The budget will reduce from April 2025.

We will still undertake our planned programmes but will have less funding to react to issues as they arise. Although please note that we will always address those issues which present an immediate safety hazard.

Changes to Highway Maintenance Services				
Highway Maintenance Activity	23/24	24/25	25/26	Status
Maintenance of structures such as bridges and retaining walls	✓	✓	✓	Continuing unchanged
Road and footpath patching, resurfacing and surface dressing	✓	✓	✓	Continuing unchanged
Repairing safety defects such as potholes.	✓	✓	✓	Continuing unchanged
Planned grass cutting programme	✓	✓	✓	Continuing unchanged
Planned gully emptying programme	✓	✓	✓	Continuing unchanged
Replenishment of grit bins when notified they are empty	✓	✓	✓	Continuing unchanged
Reactive response to blocked gullies, drains and ditches.	✓	✓	Reducing	Budget reducing from April 2025. Urgent safety-related issues will still be dealt with.
Reactive response to overgrown hedges	✓	✓	Reducing	
Reactive response to presence of noxious weeds	✓	✓	Reducing	
Local delivery options such as highway steward, self-delivery, and parish price list.	Not available	Available from summer 2024	✓	Aiming for as wide a take-up as possible by 25/26.

We would like to work with our City, Town, and Parish Councils during the coming few months to get ready for this change in our services and enable you to consider providing an enhanced level of service in your locality, either through undertaking or ordering certain agreed types of works yourselves, or through buying-back an agreed level of service.

Initiatives Available

We are putting in place a range of measures which will enable enhanced local delivery and would like to put in place as many local arrangements as possible prior to budgets reducing in 25/26.

Highways Steward

This is a skilled operative in a branded vehicle, who visits parishes and towns to a defined works programme, with priorities determined by the City, Town and Parish but is also empowered to undertake ad-hoc works when identified.

They would not undertake statutory safety related work such as repairing potholes or dealing with damaged regulatory signs etc. which would still be undertaken by Somerset Council, however they will be able to identify this type of issue and ensure action is taken through the appropriate channels.

They would be able to undertake activity such as verge maintenance, highway surface water drainage maintenance, weed removal, sign cleaning and cutting back vegetation.

A Highways Steward can be supplied by the Council's highways contractor Kier Transportation subject to the locality confirming funding to cover the cost annually. A single Highways Steward with a vehicle, all tools and equipment, costs £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; no minimum number of Stewards, and contracts can start from April 1st or at any time during the year. The minimum contract length is one year, and each Steward needs to be fully funded to work in a workable geographic area.

It is possible for a parish to 'buy' one whole Steward for their individual parish, or to pool resources with a local cluster of parishes within an LCN area, or consider a full time or a half time Steward for their parish or cluster, sharing the other half with a neighbouring parish cluster or LCN area.

If you would like to register your interest in the Highways Steward scheme, please contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing '**Highways Steward**' in the subject line of your email. This will allow Somerset Council to sensibly gauge and co-ordinate interest across the county.

Local 'self-delivery'

A similar yet alternative 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 and 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.

People undertaking the work would need the correct insurance and Somerset Council will be able to provide advice on risk assessment, together with any permissions, licenses, traffic orders or temporary traffic signals needed.

If you'd like to learn more about this training, contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing '**Training**' in the subject line of your email.

Parish 'price list'

We 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.

The new Kier contract commences on 1 April 2024. Please be patient as it will take a couple of months to mobilise and set up the relevant processes for the parish price list. We currently envisage the price list and ordering process being available from Summer 2024, and services can commence shortly after 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.

'Buying back'

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 our 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.

It may be difficult for the Council to agree to a certain level of service for an isolated parish in a cost-effective way, due to the nature of how works are ordered, planned, and delivered. We therefore recommend that parishes work together through their Local Community Networks

(LCNs), preferably by setting up highways sub-groups, to discuss and agree any enhanced service delivery with our highway officers, (who can attend those sub-groups).

We have worked closely with Parish Councils through the Exmoor Pilot scheme to establish the value that highways sub-groups can have, and at the time of writing seven other LCNs have agreed to form such a group.

To ensure enhanced levels of service continue in your localities - over and above the basic offer – we will need our local Parishes to step forward and take on these tasks. To assist you in your decision-making, we've set up dedicated pages on our website. Please take the time to explore the resources. Bookmark the link, and don't forget to revisit it, as these pages are frequently updated.

You'll find the information here: www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/city-town-and-parish-councils/.

Finally, please be assured that Somerset Council will remain responsible for the ownership and safe operation and maintenance of the highway network in your locality. We will continue to discharge our duty of care within available funding levels and in accordance with our published policies.

Reporting highway issues:

If you spot a specific highways risk that you want to report then the quickest way to report issues like this is through the 'report it' function on the Councils website, accessed from www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/ . This enables operatives on the ground to be notified quickly and efficiently, and you can track the progress of reported issues.

Yours sincerely



Mike O'Dowd-Jones
Service Director Infrastructure and Transport



Somerset's wildlife

needs you

Can you spare a few minutes to tell us how nature matters to you?

Somerset Council is working on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Somerset. It will map the locations of our most precious habitats and wildlife and identify the priorities and places most suitable for nature restoration. This work is fully funded by Defra.

Take part in our survey to help shape the strategy.



Scan the QR code to take part in the survey or find out more at www.somerset.gov.uk/nrs



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