



# **Local Community Network**

## Yearly Report 2023/2024

### **Wells and Rural**



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# Local Community Networks (LCNs)

## Purpose

“To be the focus for community development, engagement and partnership working at local level; improving the outcomes for residents through establishing strong connections between Somerset Council, our communities and partners.”

## Map

There are 18 LCNs in total.

They cover every city, town, and parish within the local authority area.

Full details of each LCN, including their demographics, characteristics, agendas, and meeting dates, can be found online.

Please visit the following webpage:

[www.somerset.gov.uk/local-communitynetworks/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-communitynetworks/)



# Wells and Rural LCN



The Wells and Rural area features 11 parishes. It includes the parish of Wells which has held city status since 1974.

Some of the parishes sit on the slopes of the Mendip Hills National Landscape - a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The magnificent Mendip Ridge stretches all the way from Brean Down in the west, towards Frome in the east.

**Visit:**

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-communitynetworks/lcn-areas/wells-rural/>

# Chair and Vice Chair



## Chair: Cllr Edric Hobbs

Edric is a Somerset Councillor who represents the Mendip Hills Division. He is also a member of the Shepton LCN, as well as serving on various planning and scrutiny committees.

His outside appointments include the Mendip Hills National Landscape, Mendip Quarries Advisory Group and Somerset Local Access Forum.

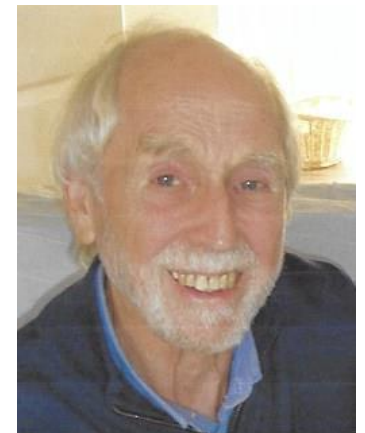
He is passionate about Active Travel (cycling, walking, running and road safety), and reducing emissions across the Shepton and Wells and Rural LCNs.

## Vice Chair: Cllr Tony Hathway

In 2019 Tony joined St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council.

He became Deputy Chair of the parish council in May 2023, and is an active member of various working groups.

Tony is currently Chair of the LCN Active Travel Working Group and enjoys various pastimes that are enhanced by living in the Wells and Rural LCN area.



# Vice Chair's Introduction

"Firstly, thank you to Edric, as chair for the last year. It has not been an easy year and I think everybody recognises that.

I'd like to thank all the people who helped and supported me getting into this new role over the last year. It has been a very difficult year for Somerset. For the Council who have had to make some very difficult decisions, and for the officers who've been supporting us. All the Link staff who started with us this time last year have been made redundant. So, it's been a very difficult time. But nevertheless, we've battled on and got through that.

I found this past year very beneficial, and I think other people have, in that we now understand each other's problems a lot better than we did a year ago. We're beginning to understand how different many of the organisations are. The whole concept of the LCN in bringing people together, is starting to work.

It's been problematic but going forward the LCN has my full support, because I think we've all got to work together and the LCN is the best way at the moment of us doing that. So, whilst I'm standing down as vice chair, I will continue to represent my parish at future meetings."

## LCN Meetings

We have used a number of venues across the Wells and Rural LCN area, with halls in Priddy, Gurney Slade and Binegar, Wells, Coxley and Godney all kindly hosting our meetings. There has been a hybrid option for members who are unable to attend in person, which has worked well. Going forward we hope the Wi-Fi connection will be more stable, and thus halls with good broadband will be the preferred venues. The halls used this year have been spread across the LCN area with the hope of connecting with the smaller parishes and maximising attendance.



## Data

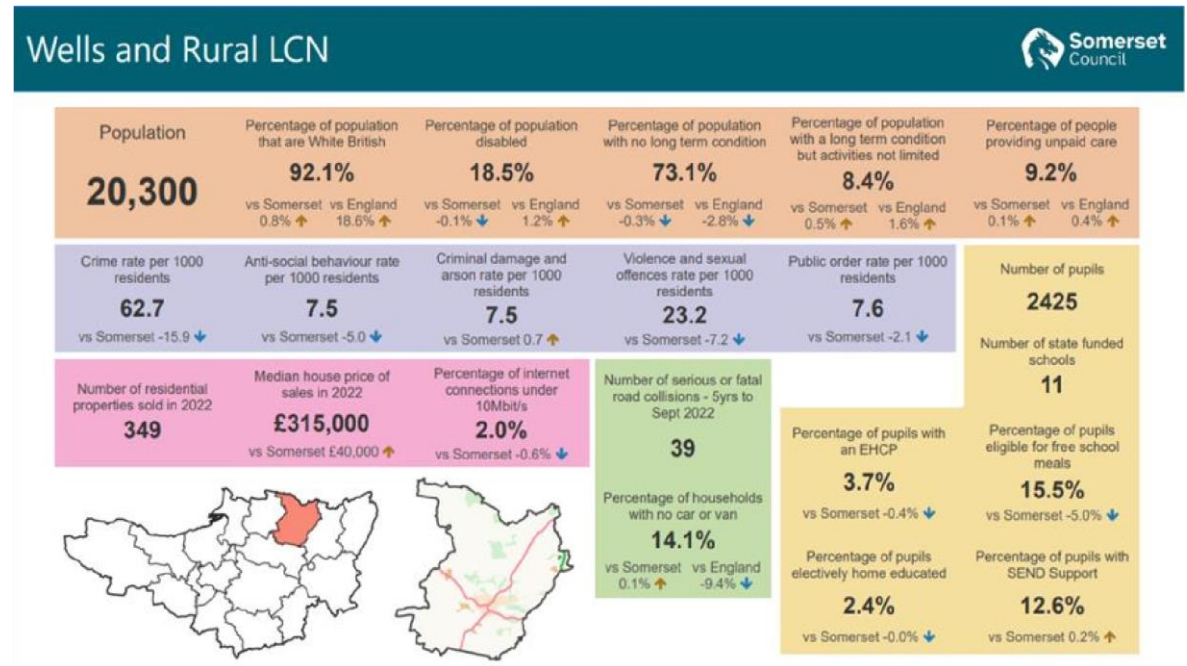
At the initial Wells and Rural LCN meeting, attendees were shown a data set (see below). It provided useful statistical information aimed at generating initial thoughts and discussions.

Those present at the LCN were asked to consider what this data meant to them in relation to their specific knowledge of the area.

They were asked to consider what they felt was important to their community, residents, and local businesses.

The answers from the data set discussions were grouped into themes.

You'll find a larger image of the data set at Appendix B of this report.

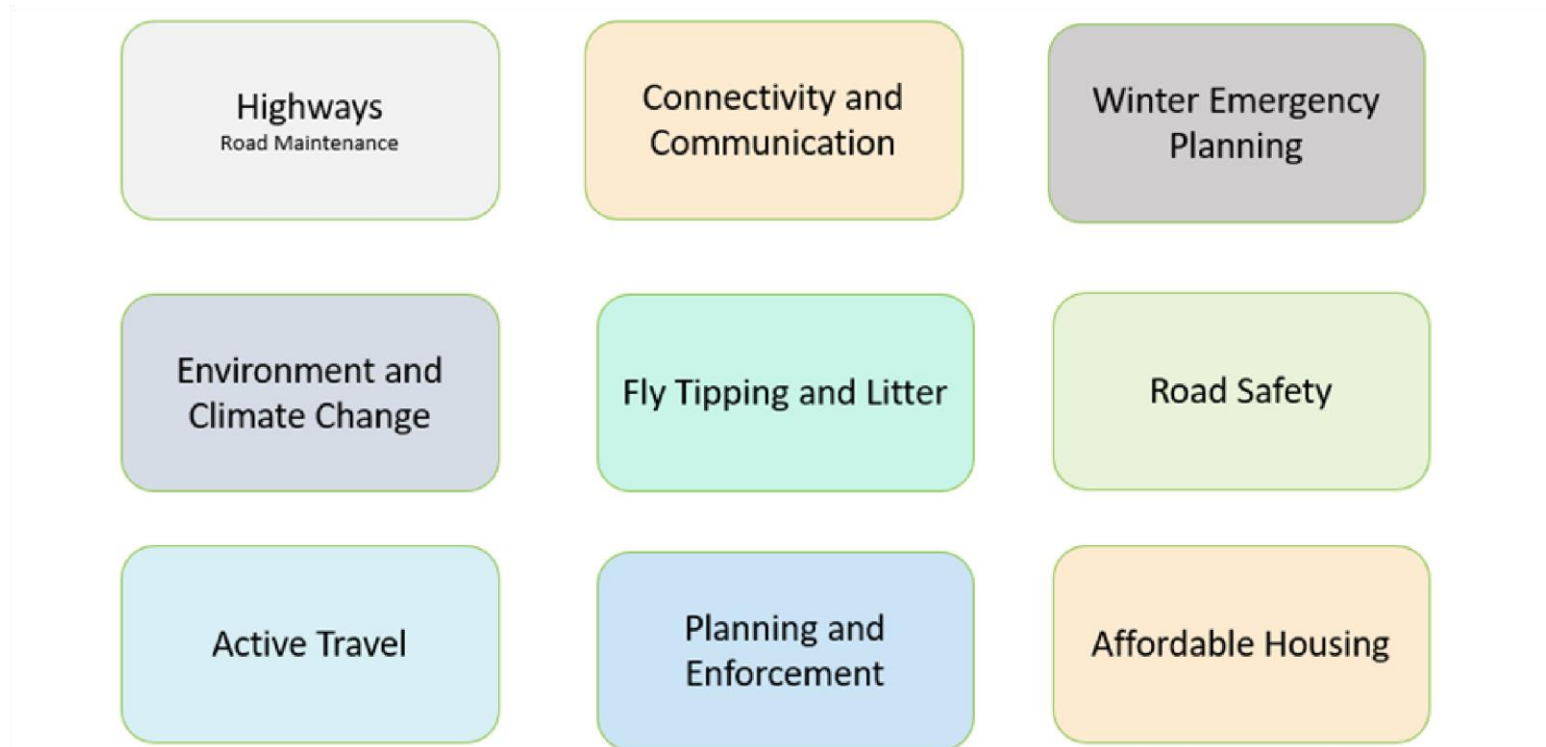


# Priorities and Ambitions

## Themes

The answers from the data set discussions were grouped into themes. These themes were then used to generate future 'to do' topics and eventually led to the initiation of working groups to carry out any actions needed, and agreed.

Below is summary of topics and issues explored by Wells and Rural LCN during its first year.





# Priorities and Ambitions

Throughout the year the group's understanding of the identified themes has evolved. This has resulted in the prioritisation of five themes as follows:

**Highways:** maintenance and road safety.

**Environment and Climate Change:** flooding mitigation and flood planning.

**Active Travel:** public transport, accessibility, Rights of Way.

**Winter Emergency Planning:** social isolation and warm hubs.

**Planning:** The Local Plan, and enforcement.

# Working Groups

## Highways Working Group

The Highways and Traffic Working Group has met once. This meeting was held in-person at Wells City Hall with the Highways team. It was well attended, with 13 attendees and five Highways officers. A great discussion took place, and the Highways team answered many questions and provided useful information.

The group also learned about the Highway Stewards scheme and how it can work across the LCN. It is hoped to build on this emerging work and continue to engage with the Highways team going forward. Cllr Edric Hobbs leads this group, and it is open to all to attend.

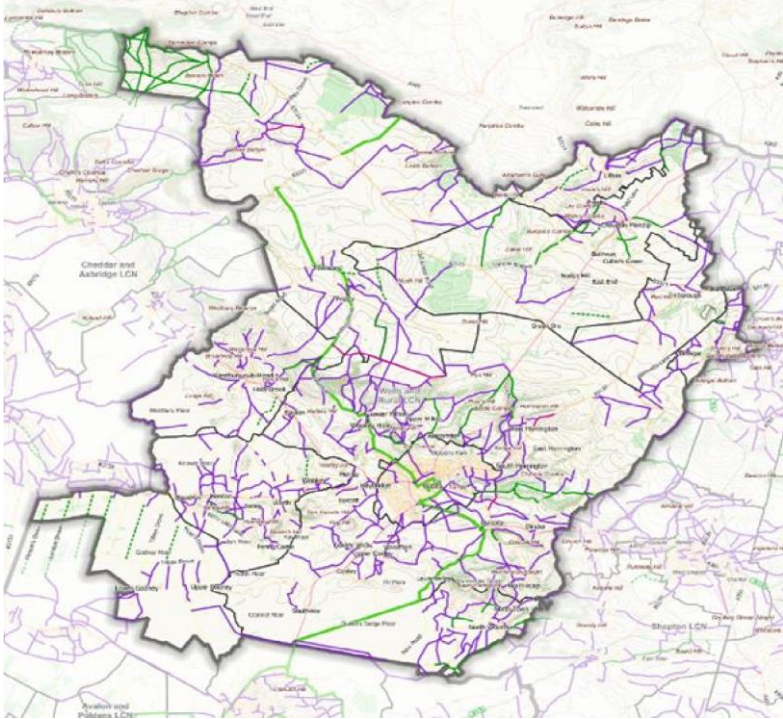
A second interim meeting will be scheduled to discuss the priorities the group wants to develop, once the dedicated LCN Link Officer is in post.

## Flood Working Group

The Flood Working Group held its first meeting. Attendance was high with 17 people. We had great discussion, and many questions were answered, through sharing the impact the recent weather had on many communities in the Wells and Rural LCN area.

It became apparent there are two main issues of concern: run-off of storm water from the Mendip Hills; and issues with blocked drains and gullies. Paul Elliston and Bel Deering from the Civil Contingency Team/Somerset Rivers Authority gave information and advice. Future meetings for the Flood Working Group will be to provide support with Emergency Plans and Emergency Planning Paul and Bel will be running workshops to support this area of work with the aim to give parishes the tools it needs to support their communities going forward.

# Working Groups



## Active Travel

The Active Travel Group, led by Cllr Tony Hathway, currently consists of around 15 members who represent the City of Wells and several parishes. In addition, there are members from cycling, walking/rambling and horse riding groups, plus bus users and those who are mobility impaired. The Group is looking at how facilities can be improved for these users and how funds can be raised to implement projects. Neighbouring parishes are working together to improve connectivity, with a network of “fast” and “slow” routes across the LCN. Footpath maps have been produced and shared with parishes. The interactive reporting system is proving to be a useful tool in notifying Somerset Council of issues that need attention.

To the right: a Rights of Way map for the Wells and Rural LCN area.

## Financial Emergency

Due to the work resulting from the Financial Emergency being declared by Somerset Council in November 2023, the other priorities of the Wells and Rural LCN were sidelined somewhat, as the parishes concentrated on setting their precepts around the possible devolution of assets and services.

# Achievements and Outcomes

- **Working Groups**

With good collaboration between Somerset Council staff, Members and the parishes these groups have started to influence the delivery of work at a local level.

- **Improved communication**

Parishes, stakeholders, partners and Somerset Council talk to each other. Key messages can disseminate quickly via LCN meetings and/or the LCN Link Officer. Most notably demonstrated when Somerset Council declared a Financial Emergency in November 2023.

- **Working with partners**

There is an opportunity for partners and other public services to reach a wider audience. Avon and Somerset Police were in attendance and advised the LCN on crime prevention and local campaigns aimed at improving the safety of rural communities. This results in better use of time and resources.

At the last LCN meeting held in Godney, time was dedicated to illegal raves which cause many parishes in this LCN area, stress and upset. The Police were in attendance, together with Forestry England, answering questions and listening to the concerns of our communities. It was a great platform to work with partners and stakeholders in the same room.

Links have also been forged with the Volunteer Network who have made contact with many of the parishes in this LCN area once they had heard about LCNs and the good work they do. The Volunteer Networks has provided advice and guidance, warm hubs and food banks during the winter months. They continue to provide a great support across this LCN.

# Challenges and Goals

- Sparse populations

Some of the rural parishes have a very low precept base whilst covering a large geographical area. This presents challenges around funding, especially regarding sharing services.

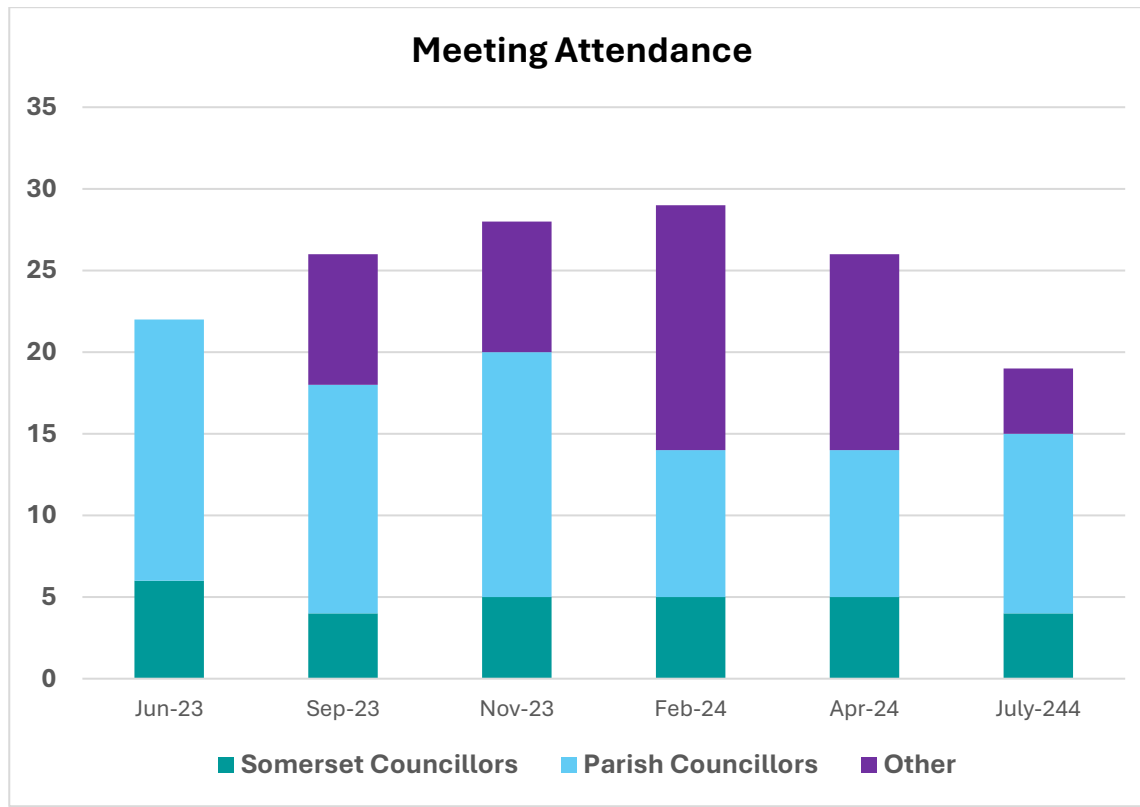
There is a heavy reliance on the main town and larger parishes to cover the administration and manage the finances.

- LCN staffing resource

The first year of Somerset Council did not have a dedicated LCN Link Officer but relied on an interim team. This meant that whilst some support was provided, resource was stretched and some of the working groups may not have received the level of support they might have needed.

- Expanding engagement

The Wells and Rural LCN meetings have had good attendance from the parishes and partner agencies but would benefit from even more collaboration with its voluntary sector and faith communities.



To the right: graph showing meeting attendance by group represented. A breakdown of groups represented at this year's meetings can be found in appendix D.



# Reflections

Wells and Rural LCN has worked hard to build strong relationships with parish councils and other partners, both in the public and voluntary sectors over the past 12 months.

It has discussed several topics and priorities and established Highways, Active Travel and Flood working groups.

Other working groups will hopefully follow into the new LCN year, now that a dedicated LCN Link Officer is in post.

The LCN has also provided a regular opportunity for face-to-face dialogue with Somerset Council, to update and discuss the Financial Emergency (for example) with communities, as well as its plans for devolution and sustainability.

Attendance has been consistent and the enthusiasm for, and interest generated by, the various topical discussions it surely all points to providing a really solid foundation to build collaboration, to improve other local issues, and improve outcomes for residents.

## Contacts

Email: [Wellsandrurallcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Wellsandrurallcn@somerset.gov.uk) Website: [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/)

Wells and Rural LCN: [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/wells-rural/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/wells-rural/)

# Appendices

### Parishes

Binegar  
Chewton Mendip  
Emborough  
Godney  
Litton  
North Wootton  
Priddy  
St Cuthbert Out  
Wells  
Westbury sub Mendip  
Wookey

### Electoral Divisions

Mendip Hills  
Mendip West  
Wells

### Organisations

Avon and Somerset Police  
NHS  
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue  
Education  
Spark Somerset  
Society Local Council Clerks  
Somerset Association of Local Councils  
Somerset Activity Sports Partnership  
Community Council for Somerset (Village Agents)  
Citizens Advice  
Department of Work and Pensions  
Somerset Rivers Authority  
Somerset Local Nature Partnership  
West Mendip Integrated Health & Wellbeing HUB  
Mendip AONB

## Appendix A - continued

### Wider Partners and Stakeholders

Connect Somerset

The Mendip Society

Strawberry Line MUP people

Heads Up

Orchard Vale Trust

Residents Group

Community Speedwatch

Somerset Wildlife Trust

Avalon Marshes

Mendip Ramblers

Wells & Mendip Museum

Mendip Hospital Cemetery

Wells Bus Users Group

Wells & District Wildlife Group

Connect Centre

Wells Food Bank

Wookey Hole Residents Forum

The Volunteer Network

The Bishops Place

Mendip Community Credit Union

Sustainable Wells

Shepton Mallet Dementia Action Alliance


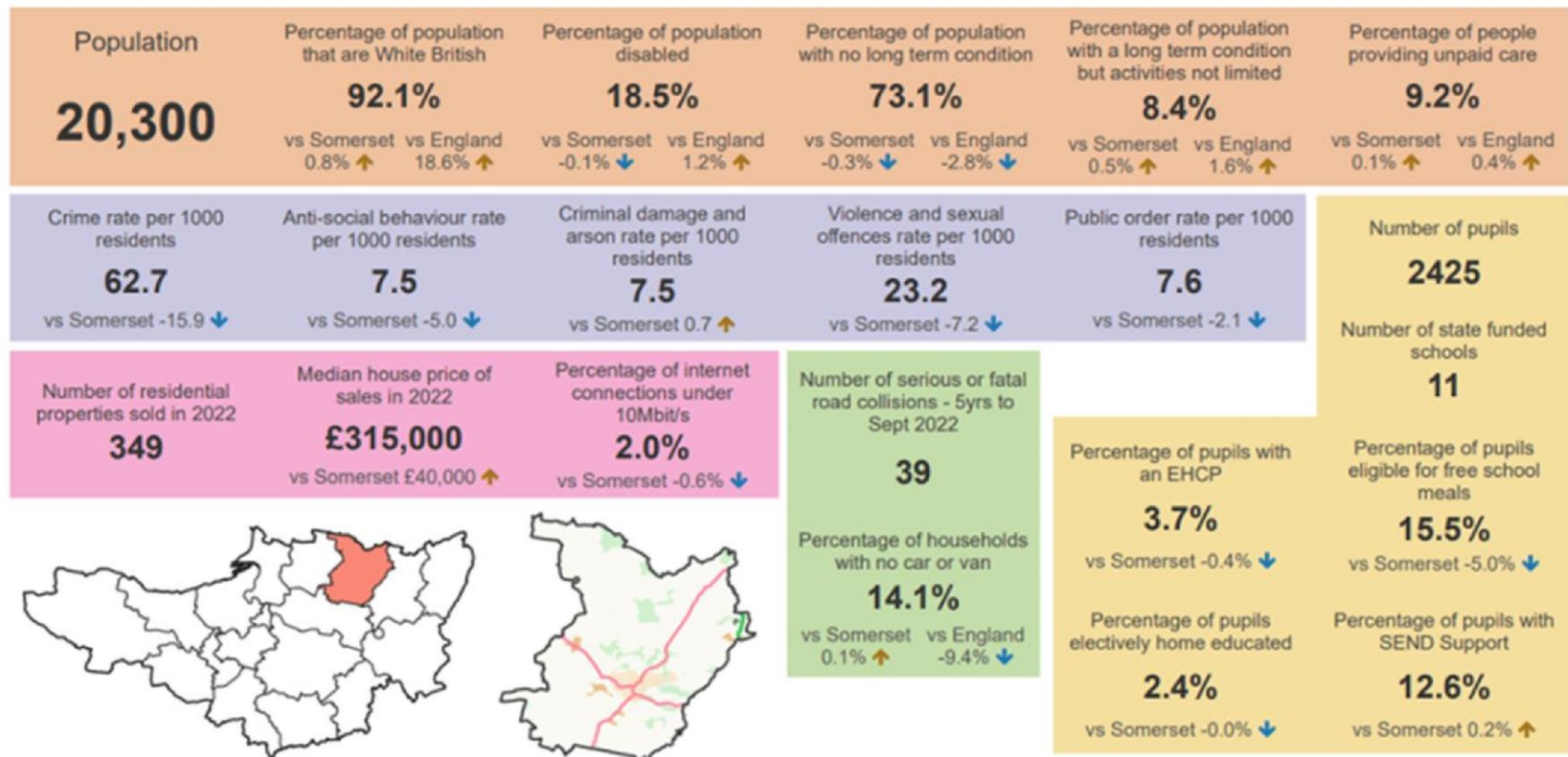
Somerset Foundation Trust

WellBe Link (adult mental health)

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor

Forestry England

# Wells and Rural LCN

## Appendix C – Meeting Dates and Notes

To browse all Wells and Rural LCN minutes visit:  
[democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=892](https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=892)

## Thursday 29 June 2023, Priddy Village Hall

1. To elect the Chair of the Local Community Network
2. To appoint the Vice Chair of the Local Community Network
3. To receive any apologies for absence
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
6. To determine the priorities and areas of focus for the Local Community Network for the next 12 months
  - a. What are LCNs and how will we work together
  - b. Discussion – What is important to residents and businesses in our area
7. To agree the frequency of meetings
8. The schedule of meetings for the next 12 months

## Thursday 14 September 2023, Gurney Slade & Binegar Memorial Hall

1. Apologies
2. Declaration of interest
3. Approval of minutes of the last meeting
4. Public Question Time (not covered in any other agenda item)
5. Highlights of themes discussed at the last meeting
6. Introduction to the Data
7. Discussion:
  - a. Active Travel: including footpaths, fast and slow ways
  - b. Planning for winter
8. Agree themes for future meeting – identify who and what we need
9. Dates for the next meetings

## Thursday 16 November 2023, Godney Village Hall – moved online due to weather conditions

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Approve the minutes of the last meeting.
4. Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
5. Topics continued from last meeting.
  - Winter Planning – Presentation, Scott Mcmillan from Volunteer Network
  - Active Travel – Discussion regarding maps, what we want from them?
  - Working groups going forward (Active Travel, Planning Policy)
6. Action and next Steps?
7. Dates of future meetings



## Thursday February 2024, Coxley Memorial Hall

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Approve the minutes of the last meeting.
4. Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
5. Topics continued from last meeting.
  - Winter Planning – update from Scott Mcmillan from Volunteer Network
  - Warm hub update
  - Working group update
6. Update on Somerset Councils Finances
7. Preparation for future meeting themes – police, crime and disorder.
8. Dates of future meetings

## Tuesday 30 April 2024, Godney Village Hall

1. Apologies
2. Declaration of interest
3. Approval of minutes of the last meeting
4. Public Question Time (not covered on the agenda)
5. Working Group Updates
  - Active Travel
  - Highways and Traffic
  - Flooding
6. Questions and Answers
  - Police and Forestry England regarding illegal raves

7. Preparation for future meeting
8. Actions and Summary
9. Dates of future meetings