

Local Community Network

Dowsborough LCN AGM meeting notes

At Spaxton Village Hall, Bridgwater

On Wednesday 17 June 2026

Attendees

Cllr Hugh Davies (HD)
Tina Gardener (TG)

Chris Morgan, Chair (CM)
Sue Goss (SM)
John Roberts (JR)
Sarah Bennett (SB)
Iain Porter (IP)
Sam Tyson (ST)

Somerset Council Officer Team

Anne Shilton (LCN Link Officer) (AS), Sam Murrell (LCN Link Officer) (SM)

Apologies:

Cllr Mike Caswell Somerset Council,
Spaxton PC,
Over Stowey PC,
Cllr G Slocombe Somerset Council,
PCSO Daryl Screech,
Joanne Whitehead (SC),
Paul King, Wembdon PC,
Mark Weston, Rep for Ashley Fox MP
Mo Young, Holford PC
Peter Felton, Chilton Trinity PC
John Vassalli, Durleigh PC
Martin Brown, Otterhampton
Fodo Higginson, SALC

Representing

Fiddington PC &
Otterhampton PC
Stogursey PC
Stogursey PC
SALC
Village Agent, Thrive
Quantock National Landscape
Forestry England

1. Welcome, apologies and introductions.

Parish and Community Introductions: Attendees introduced themselves and their affiliations, including a village agents, parish councillors and representatives from Somerset Association of Local Councils, to facilitate networking and clarify roles. This was intended to improve mutual awareness and collaboration.

2. **Speaker: Great Wood North – harvesting 2026 – Forestry England by Sam Tyson, Beat Forester, Somerset Beat (Exmoor & Quantocks)**

Forestry England Operations and Management: ST provided a comprehensive overview of Forestry England's operations, focusing on the upcoming harvesting at Great Wood, the organisation's structure, sustainable management practices and the ecological and economic considerations involved, with questions from attendees about species management and woodland restoration.

- **Forestry England overview:** ST explained that Forestry England is the land management branch of the Forestry Commission, responsible for producing timber, managing public forest estates and operating under DEFRA. The organisation balances economic, social, and ecological objectives, producing 1.9 million tonnes of timber annually and managing other forest products and natural capital valued at £1.9 billion per year.
- **Sustainable management and certification:** ST detailed that all Forestry England land is FSC certified, ensuring sustainable and sensitive management. The organisation was the first globally to achieve 100% FSC certification and also adheres to the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme, with independent verification of management practices.
- **Ecological and heritage considerations:** The team manages significant areas of ancient woodland and scheduled monuments, with ongoing projects in species reintroduction (e.g. pine martens, beavers) and habitat restoration, including blanket bogs and grasslands. ST highlighted the importance of gradual restoration of plantation on ancient woodland sites to preserve soil fungi and understory plants.
- **Harvesting operations planning:** ST described the detailed planning process for harvesting operations, which includes a 10-year forest plan, stakeholder engagement, ecological assessments and operational plans that address constraints such as protected species, weather and public access. The plan is independently verified and involves input from parish councils and the public.
- **Species management and questions:** Attendees asked about ash dieback, mountain ash and birch management. ST confirmed ongoing interventions for ash dieback, especially near roads for safety and clarified that mountain ash is retained for biodiversity. Birch is present but not a major focus in current operations, with natural recolonisation expected after conifer removal.

3. **Speaker: Quantocks Hill National Landscape – management planning by Iain Porter**

National Landscape Management Plan and Legislative Changes: IP presented the new National Landscape Management Plan, explaining the recent rebranding from AONB, the strengthened statutory duties under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, and the plan's four main themes, with examples of local application and stakeholder involvement.

- **Designation and Legislative Framework:** IP clarified that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are now called National Landscapes, though the legal designation remains under the 1949 Act. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 enhanced the duty of relevant authorities from 'due regard' to an active requirement to further statutory purposes, affecting all government departments, statutory undertakers, and parish councils.
- **Management plan themes:** The new management plan is structured around four themes: Place (landscape, land use, heritage, planning), Nature (recovery and connectivity), Climate (risks, adaptation, mitigation), and People (community, economy, skills, recreation, health). Each theme includes aims, guiding principles, objectives and policies, with actions detailed in a separate delivery plan.
- **Heathland Management Example:** IP used the Quantock Hills' heathland as an example, describing its national importance, legislative context (including the Environment Act and biodiversity targets), and the collaborative approach to management involving commoners, landowners, Natural England and other stakeholders. The plan identifies opportunities for habitat expansion and addresses economic viability for farmers.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Delivery:** The management plan was developed with extensive stakeholder input, aiming for consensus on vision and objectives. Actions are tracked annually in a delivery plan, with ongoing coordination between the National Landscape Team, Forestry England, local authorities and other partners to achieve targets such as increased tree cover and habitat restoration.

4. Elect the Chair

The meeting was not quorate so neither a chair nor vice chair could be elected for the coming year. C Morgan agreed to chair the meeting and also in September. The elections of chair and vice chair would be held at the September 2026 meeting.

The posts need to be nominated and seconded. If there is more than nomination, the core members vote. Or another option would be to agree two people hold the post as co-chair or co-vice chair. One of these posts should be an elected member of Somerset Council but if no one has been nominated, that post could remain vacant. In the event of neither chair nor vice chair being agreed or elected, a volunteer would be sought to chair each main meeting, without the responsibility of the post.

5. Elect the Vice-Chair

See item 4 above.

6. Presentation of report on the LCN's work in the last 12 months

- **Local Community Network (LCN) Governance and Annual Report:** AS discussed the current status of LCN governance, including the postponement of Chair and Vice Chair elections due to low attendance (possibly due to a clashing national sports fixture) and summarised the annual report on LCN activities and achievements, inviting attendees to review and distribute the report.
- - **Annual report distribution:** AS previously circulated the LCN annual report, highlighting a wide range of topics and achievements over the past 12 months. Attendees were encouraged to take printed copies or read a digital version for wider distribution within their group.
- **Transport and rural mobility initiatives:** Participants discussed ongoing and planned initiatives to address rural transport challenges in Dowsborough, including a forthcoming focus on transport at the September meeting, a drop-in event for community feedback and collaboration with the Somerset Bus Improvement Partnership to improve student access to education.
- - **September meeting focus:** The group agreed to focus the September meeting on transport issues, with plans to invite Sunita Mills (Head of Transportation, Somerset Council) and other relevant speakers to discuss public transport and active travel solutions. *Action: AS to invite speakers.*
 - **Community engagement and evidence gathering:** A drop-in afternoon was organised for 30th June 2026, 1 – 6 pm at Stogursey Victory Hall to collect views on rural transport, aiming to move beyond anecdotal evidence and gather data on current services, gaps, and potential improvements. Posters and information were distributed for display in local communities. *Action: AS to circulate pdf of poster so it can be used on social media.*
 - **Student transport and bus partnership:** SM described collaboration with the Somerset Bus Improvement Partnership to address student transport challenges, particularly for those attending University Centre Somerset (Bridgwater College). Volunteers are sought to staff information stands at open evenings to collect data on student travel needs, with the goal of informing service improvements before the new academic year. *Action: AS to circulate relevant email [Done 18/06/26]*
 - **Volunteer Transport Schemes:** Participants discussed the role and challenges of volunteer driver schemes, such as Otter Wheels, which provide transport for medical appointments and other needs. Issues

include volunteer recruitment and rising fuel costs, with suggestions to consider joint funding and careful evaluation of scheme sustainability.

7. Consider the priorities and areas of focus for the LCN for the next 12 months and working groups.

This topic was delayed to the next meeting in September, prior to which everyone is asked to consider topics for meetings for the coming year.

Action: All

- Future Meeting PCSO Update Circulation: *AS to circulate the brief update from the PCSO to all meeting participants.*
- Forest Plan Stakeholder Engagement: Inform and invite stakeholders, including Parish Councils and the general public listed, to participate in the next Quantocks Forest Plan consultation when it occurs. *Action: IP / AS*
- Slides Distribution: Send the slides from the management plan presentation to meeting participants and ensure they are available for those who request them. *Action: IP / ST / AS*
- Chair and Vice Chair Election: Confirm with the current post holder for Chair and Vice Chair if they wish to continue until the September meeting and bring the election back to the agenda for that meeting. *Action: AS.*
- Meeting Agenda for September: Arrange for a speaker on transport, such as Sunita Mills or Jon Fellingham, for the September meeting and confirm the topic focus with participants. *Action: AS*
- Bus Improvement Partnership Volunteer Recruitment: Circulate the email regarding volunteering for the Bus Improvement Partnership stands at Taunton and Bridgwater open evenings to all relevant Parish contacts and encourage participation. *Action: AS. [Done 18/06/26]*
- Annual Report Distribution: Send out copies of the annual report to anyone who requests it and ensure it is available online for wider access. *Action: AS*

8. Any other business
None arose.

9. Dates of future meetings (Venues to be confirmed)

8th September 2026
8th December 2026
9th March 2026
7th June 2027 (AGM)

- **Future Meeting Planning and Community Showcasing:** Anne proposed that future LCN meetings could include short presentations or displays from

parishes in which the venue was situated, to showcase local initiatives and priorities, inviting expressions of interest for hosting and participation.

- **Meeting Hosting and Showcasing:** Anne invited parishes or village halls to host future LCN meetings and suggested including a 10-minute presentation on the agenda or display table for local groups to present their current projects and priorities, aiming to highlight community achievements and encourage wider participation or opportunities for collaboration. (Venue would still be hired as per usual rate.) *Action:* AS / ALL

ACTIONS

		BY WHOM?
1	Forestry England. Slides to be provided and circulated.	ST / AS
2	Quantocks National Landscape Slides to be provided and circulated	IP / AS
3	Election of chair & vice chair Postponed to September 2026. Any further nominations (to be seconded) to AS at least one week prior to meeting.	ALL
4	Annual report for Dowsborough Previously circulated and on website. AS encouraged reading of report.	ALL
5	Theme for September meeting – transport. S Mills invited – sent prior apologies but substituted by J Perrett. 18/06/26 D Northey and J Fellingham also invited. 18/06/26	AS
6	Transport across Dowsborough Open drop in planned for 30/06/26, posters distributed and pdf to be sent with meeting notes.	AS
7	PCSO report To be circulated with meeting notes.	AS / DS
8	Themes for coming year All to consider meeting themes for Dec '26, March & June '27 and bring to Sept 2026 meeting for discussion.	ALL
9	Invitation to host venue/parish Opportunity to showcase their current & future activities to all, with possibility of increased support and/or collaboration	ALL
10	Bus Improvement Patnrship request for help Circulate the email regarding volunteering for the Bus Improvement Partnership stands at Taunton and Bridgwater open evenings to all relevant Parish contacts and encourage participation. Email circulated 18/06/26	ALL
11	Agenda items for 8th September 2026 Please send to Link Officer by 21 st August 2026	ALL