



Local Community Network

**Chard and Blackdown LCN meeting notes
7.00pm Tuesday 7th October 2025
Hybrid - Otterford Parish Hall and online**

Attendees:

Alex Mountain	Somerset Council
Beth Poole	Somerset Council
Ken Pearson	Blackdown Hills Parish Network & Blackdown Practice Patient Group

Virtual Attendees:

Colin Fisher	Stoke St Mary Parish Council
David Northey	Somerset Bus Partnership
Keith Read	West Hatch
Mark Palmer	Neroche Parish Council
Martin Middleton	West Hatch Parish Council

Apologies:

Cllr Sarah Wakefield	Somerset Council
----------------------	------------------

Summary of key points of discussion and outcomes:

Item 1: Welcome and apologies

The meeting began with technical checks and introductions.

The theme of this agenda is Environment and Flooding because of priorities identified at our AGM.

Item 2: Nominations for Chair / Vice-Chair or Acting

It was noted that there was no formal Chair or Vice Chair due to quorum not being met and insufficient nominations at the AGM. The option for a rotating or interim chair was discussed and remains open for future meetings.

It is recorded that one attendee (not listed) objected to the meeting being chaired by a Somerset Council Officer, believing it inappropriate, and they departed at the start.

[AMENDED]

LCN Link Officer Beth Poole acted as Chair for this meeting.

Item 3: Community Resilience and the Parish Preparedness Survey

Parishes are notified that the **Somerset Rivers Authority's Preparedness Survey** deadline is now extended to the end of December. The survey aims to assess community readiness for emergencies, such as flooding, and will inform activities that support communities to increase resilience.

The SRA and Somerset Council offer support for emergency planning, including tailored workshops and awareness training, and help with writing emergency plans

and assembling emergency kits. More information about the free support on offer is available online at somerseprepared.org.uk

Parishes are encouraged to complete the survey and consider additional support or workshops as needed. The survey can be completed online at [City, Town & Parish Preparedness Survey - Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#) or by returning a paper copy via email to Dr Paul Elliston at paul.elliston@somerset.gov.uk

Key Issues Raised by Partners in Attendance:

- Highways and drainage maintenance, including difficulties getting Somerset Council to address outstanding works, enforce contractor accountability and rectify faulty workmanship in a timely and expeditious manner – if at all.
- Planning concerns, especially regarding recent changes to the MDP and government policy shifts.
- Fibre broadband rollout.
- Water quality.
- Environmental issues, including fly tipping, pollution, and light pollution from agricultural practices.

Several parishes have mapped and cleared drains and ditches but lack resources or council support for more complex drainage issues beyond volunteer capability.

Attendees expressed frustration over slow or absent responses from Somerset Council regarding both highways and environmental enforcement.

LCNs offer the opportunity to provide constructive feedback and develop co-led solutions-focused activities through themed working groups. The offer to re-visit a Highways Working Group for this LCN was reiterated where there is interest.

Item 4: Climate and Environment

Enviro-Crime

The scheduled guest speaker, Nick Ryder (Enforcement Officer), was unable to attend due to illness. A brief overview of his role was provided, which focuses on environmental crime enforcement, such as dumped waste, littering, dog fouling and graffiti.

Concerns raised about lack of enforcement and follow-up on reported incidents, with specific examples given (e.g., fly tipping with unmistakable evidence but no apparent council action). Enforcement officers will be invited again to the next meeting for further discussion.

Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy:

The meeting included a presentation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Somerset; a statutory spatial planning tool aimed at reversing biodiversity decline. The LNRS is a collaborative, data-driven document intended to guide investment and action for nature recovery, with input from landowners, communities, and businesses.

The consultation is now open, and parish clerks are encouraged to publicise and participate. The strategy does not impose new legal duties but identifies priorities and opportunities for nature recovery. The LNRS will be reviewed and republished every 3–10 years, with feedback from the consultation informing the final document.

Item 5: Any other business

Updates provided on:

- The Octagon Theatre refurbishment appeal: Yeovil Town Council are appealing to parishes for financial contributions toward planned refurbishments, and LCN partners are asked to review potential funding options considering the broader advantages to LCN residents and the wider Somerset region (based on tickets sales data) of this asset, including to local arts, culture, tourism, health and wellbeing, and community cohesion.
- Current consultations, including for Sunday parking charges.
- A Community Resilience Day at Taunton Racecourse (15 October).
- Planned road safety workshops for parish councils, to be confirmed.

David Northey from the Somerset Bus Partnership provided an overview of the organisation's role and current issues affecting bus users in the region. The partnership advocates for bus passengers across Somerset, working closely with local networks to raise awareness and represent the interests of bus users.

Key points from David's update:

- There are ongoing challenges for students in Chard trying to access early morning bus services to Somerset College.
- Several bus routes serve the area, including the 30, 54, 97, and 99, but there are notable gaps, especially for evening services and connections to key destinations like Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton railway station, and Axminster station.
- The lack of evening services makes it difficult for residents to access venues such as the Octagon Theatre.
- David invited feedback from parish councils and residents about missing or inadequate bus services, with the aim of relaying this information to Somerset Council ahead of planned changes in April.
- He offered to be a point of contact for ongoing dialogue and encouraged parishes to identify gaps and suggest improvements.

Alex shared an example from Avalon and Poldens LCN where community mapping of all bus routes helped identify inconvenient timings and service gaps. This exercise led to discussions about community transport solutions and resulted in funding to extend a bus route and add a new stop. The process highlighted the value of collaborative mapping and sharing local knowledge to address rural isolation.

David Northey supported this approach, noting that some routes only operate on limited days or serve specific groups (like students), leaving many communities underserved. He expressed willingness to help coordinate a similar mapping exercise for the Chard & Blackdowns area.

Beth encouraged attendees to consider whether individuals or groups in their communities would benefit from participating in a mapping activity to identify transport needs and gaps and that she could facilitate a workshop if desired.

Rural Crime Strategy: Colin Fisher mentioned ongoing work with Joseph Pessina, who is drafting a rural crime strategy for Avon and Somerset Police. There was support for inviting Joseph to present the strategy at a future meeting.

The meeting was closed and thanks reiterated to those in attendance.

Future meeting dates:

- 2pm Tuesday 6th January 2026 – Churchinford Village Hall
- 2pm Tuesday 21st April 2026 – venue to be confirmed
- 7pm Tuesday 7th July 2026 (AGM) – Guildhall, Chard