



Local Community Network

Chard and Blackdowns LCN meeting notes – Monday 14th October 2024, held at Churchinford and District Village Hall

Attendees:

Keith Read	Chair
Cllr Sarah Wakefield	Somerset Council (Vice Chair)
Ben Ambrose	Community Retrofit Officer, Somerset Council
Christian Trevelyan	Partnership Manager, Somerset Independent Plus
Fodo Higginson	Community Health & Wellbeing Officer, SALC
Mark Palmer	Neroche grouped villages
Beth Poole	LCN Link Officer
Micheal Hardwick Ford	LCN Project Officer

Virtual attendees:

Sue Hayman	Neroche grouped villages
Craig Daters	Woodland Creation Officer
Beth Poole	LCN Link Officer
Alex Mountain	LCN Link Officer
Micheal Hardwick Ford	LCN Project Officer

1. Approval of AGM notes

The meeting opened with a review of the minutes from the previous Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on July 22, 2024. The Chair requested any objections or amendments to the notes, but none were raised. The AGM minutes were unanimously approved, confirming the records as an accurate reflection of the previous meeting. Actions from this meeting to be reported on at our next meeting.

2. Joint update from working groups

Highways and Transport working group update by Mark Palmer, on behalf of Andy Grant:

- Mark addressed current challenges, especially around blocked gullies, which have created drainage issues impacting roads and the local environment. He noted that while volunteer-led efforts have cleared some drains, the group seeks more effective methods to systematically manage these issues, such as access to Somerset Council's records on drain maintenance.
- Andy Grant, the lead for this group, was unable to attend due to a family bereavement, but he had initiated a project involving parish audits of local issues, from potholes to blocked gullies. These audits aim to gather data on issues that are visible at the parish level but may not be on Somerset Council's radar.

- The group discussed possible solutions, including a shared spreadsheet for tracking issues across parishes and simplified online reporting options for faster updates. Graham Oak, another group member, mentioned the importance of identifying drains at risk due to underreporting by Somerset's current system and ensuring that repairs align with local needs.

Environment and Conservation working group:

- Mark Palmer also shared updates on environmental initiatives, specifically those focused on improving access to outdoor areas and creating sustainable environments. He highlighted communication with Forestry England about "Wilding" projects and the inclusion of other species in forested areas to enhance biodiversity and resilience.
- The working group has identified the need for cycle trails and additional outdoor facilities close to urban centres. Despite limited attendance at some working group meetings, they are advancing these projects with achievable goals and are seeking Somerset Council support to review existing maps of forested areas for planning further environmental enhancements.

3. Guest speakers

Ben Ambrose, Community Retrofit Officer – Somerset Independent Plus

- Ben presented the community retrofit initiatives by Somerset Independent Plus, which focus on improving energy efficiency in local housing through retrofitting, making homes easier to heat, and reducing energy costs.
- He outlined funding opportunities, such as the Home Upgrade Grant Scheme (HUGS) and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which offer financial support for low-income households to retrofit homes. The schemes specifically target homes with poor energy efficiency (EPC ratings of D or below) and those not connected to main gas.
- He emphasized that energy-efficient homes reduce CO₂ emissions, improve indoor air quality, and lower strain on health services. The importance of partnerships was also highlighted, as they've collaborated with the Centre for Sustainable Energy to optimize grant reach.
- Community Involvement and Outreach: Ben proposed additional ways to engage community members in retrofit initiatives and offered to conduct future presentations for community groups to spread awareness.

A copy of Ben's PowerPoint presentation is here:



Chard and
Blackdown Presentati

Craig Daters, Woodland Creation Officer – Somerset Council

- Craig discussed Somerset's commitment to expanding its tree planting efforts as outlined in the Somerset Tree Strategy, which targets an

increase in tree cover from its current 7% towards the national average of 13%.

- **Community and School Engagement:** He promoted the Woodland Trust's Free Trees Program for schools and community groups, which provides up to 400 trees per application. Craig encouraged community members to participate and suggested that LCN attendees promote the program within their networks.
- **Land Access and Sustainable Forestry:** Craig acknowledged challenges in identifying suitable land for tree planting, especially as many landowners may hesitate to commit their land. He suggested working with local landowners to secure land access and exploring shared land-use options for planting.
- **Tree Planting Register:** He introduced the Somerset Tree Planting Register, a tool for recording and tracking tree planting efforts across the county. This tool allows for community members to log their planting efforts, helping the council track and meet tree planting targets.

A copy of Craig's PowerPoint presentation is here:



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4. Table talk – Environment/Conservation Group discussion

This segment focused on gathering input from attendees regarding priority areas for the Environment and Conservation Working Group. Attendees discussed the importance of enhancing tree coverage, the need for sustainable forestry practices, and ideas for local partnerships to facilitate conservation projects.

Additional suggestions included better leveraging of government support for energy efficiency and exploring potential collaborations to address both community energy needs and environmental goals. The group identified that community education on sustainable practices, particularly through local workshops, could be beneficial.

5. Any other business

- Fodo Higginson, Community Health & Wellbeing Officer, Somerset Association of Local Councils spoke briefly about a grant funding opportunity to improve community health & wellbeing.
- A survey for National Highways who manage the Strategic Road Network (motorways & major A-roads) about how to capture views on their engagement was highlighted (closed 20 October 2024).
- A consultation by Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Clare Moody, who is developing a new Police and Crime Plan that will inform policing efforts in our area for the next 5 years was highlighted,

seeking comments on: strengthening neighbourhood policing, reducing violent crime, preventing crime, supporting victims and improving policing standards (closed on 21st October 2024).

6. Date and Venues of future meetings

Monday 20th January 2025 – Holyrood Academy

Tuesday 29th April 2025 – Otterford Parish Hall

Tuesday 15th July 2025 – Venue to be confirmed

Actions arising:

Date	Action	Completed by
14/10/2024	Blocked Gullies: Improve reporting and coordination for blocked gullies, leveraging parish audit data to create a more systematic process	Highways working group
14/10/2024	Energy Efficiency: Increase community engagement with retrofit initiatives by organising awareness sessions and promoting available grants (HUGS and ECO)	Ben Ambrose and Somerset Independent Plus/Environment working group
14/10/2024	Tree planting partnerships: Build partnerships with local landowners for securing more land for tree planting; promote Woodland Trust's Free Trees program to community.	Craig Daters, Woodland Creation Team/Environment working group
14/10/2024	Simplify reporting tools: Develop a simplified online reporting tool for parishes to log road maintenance issues directly to Somerset Council for faster response.	Highways working group