

LCN 18 CHARD and BLACKDOWNS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

Chair: Cllr Keith Read, CBE

Cllr Keith Read has been Chair of the LCN since it was formed in August 23 and also Chair of West Hatch Parish Council for the past six years. Ill health is forcing him to relinquish a number of his current roles, regrettably this includes both Chair of West Hatch Parish Council and the Chard and Blackdowns LCN. He will be standing down at the AGM in August.

Chair's Introduction

'It has been a privilege for me to Chair the LCN from its inception in 2023, my regret is that, as set out in last year's Annual Report, the initial slow but steady progress has not transformed and quickened to the extent that we might have anticipated. There have been a number of reasons for this including Somerset Council's financial emergency, which has meant that our Council support/link staff have lacked continuity and although doing their very best for us, it is only now with the whole-hearted efforts of Beth Poole and the LCN Team that we have received the support that we initially expected. Allied to this has been the lack of funding available to LCNs, which would have enabled them to pursue some of the more ambitious goals that our two LCN working Groups have envisaged. Perhaps, even more importantly, we and Somerset Council have not been able to communicate to our parishioners and constituents the real purposes and capabilities of the LCNs. A regular news update reporting to the wider local press could have a transformative effect on peoples' perception of what can be achieved and how they might contribute to their community.

That said, the fundamental reason why the LCN has not delivered as we had hoped is the difficulty in persuading core members, stakeholders and others from our parish communities, to engage as committed, active members of the Working Groups. There are many understandable reasons why this is the case but the frustration of our two Working Group Chairs has been palpable while they have endeavoured to convene constructive but, in the event, poorly supported meetings. It is to be hoped that with the advent of a new Chair to drive the LCN forward, in 2025/26 we will be able to make a much more effective contribution to the local community. Notwithstanding this rather gloomy prognosis I believe that the LCN and its Working Groups can deliver great benefit in matters of 'Roads and Transport', 'The Environment' and 'Health and Wellbeing'. We should attack these with greater enthusiasm and commitment in the coming year.

As ever, our thanks must go to our two working group Chairs, Andy Grant (Hatch Beauchamp) who unfortunately has recently had to stand down and Mark Palmer (Neroche) and to all who are engaged with the working groups. Particular thanks to Beth Poole who has had the unenviable task of attempting to keep the show on the road whilst all about her has been the uncertainty of Somerset Council's structure and manning difficulties. Our Vice Chair, Sarah Wakefield, has taken on yet more Council responsibilities and if she is able to continue as the LCN's Vice Chair her wisdom, energy and down to earth common sense will be of inestimable value to the future of the LCN.'

I am sure the LCN has a great future – we have to make it happen!!

Cllr Keith Read, CBE Chair, Chard and Blackdowns LCN