



Local Community Network

Yearly Report 2023/2024

Cheddar and Axbridge



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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.

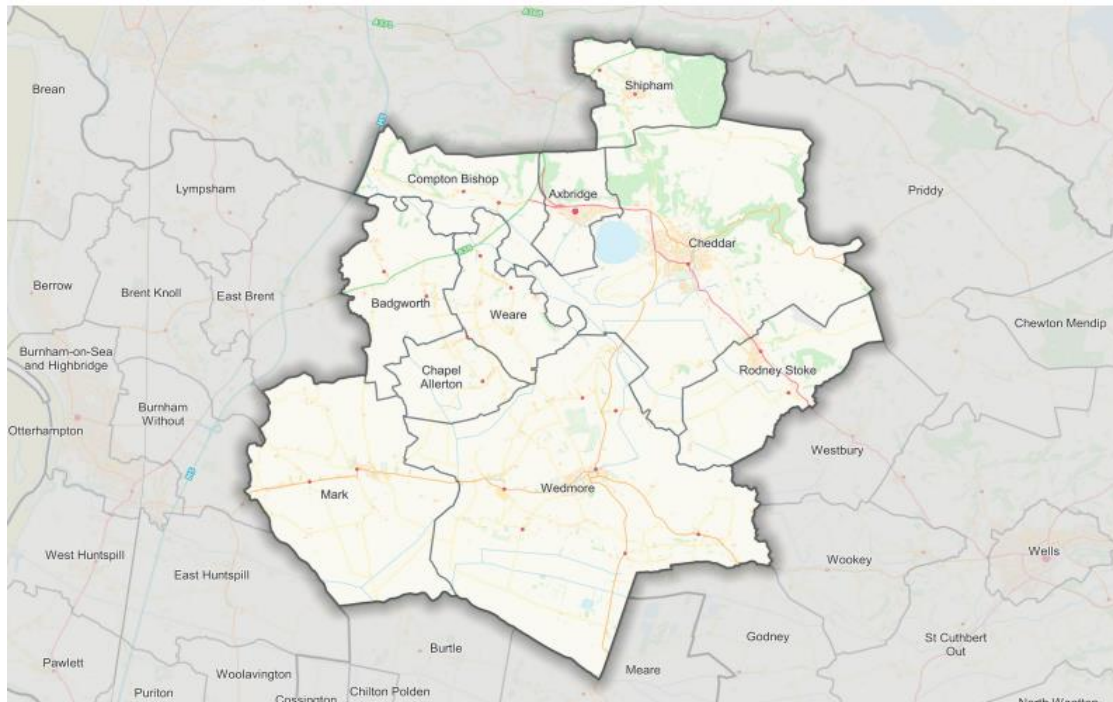
Please visit the following webpage:

www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/



Cheddar and Axbridge LCN

Cheddar and Axbridge LCN map



Cheddar and Axbridge LCN comprises of nine Parish Councils; Badgworth, Chapel Allerton, Cheddar, Compton Bishop, Mark, Rodney Stoke and Draycott, Shipham, Weare and Wedmore.

Plus there's one Town Council, which is Axbridge.

The area has amazing landscapes, notably the magnificent limestone Cheddar Gorge.

Recognised as one of the 'four wonders of England' and thought to originate around 1130 AD, it includes the Cheddar Caves.

Cheddar's source of wealth was farming and cheese-making, for which it is famous, and which dates back as early as 1170 AD.

Visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/cheddar-axbridge/>

Cheddar and Axbridge LCN

Cheddar and the neighbouring market town of Axbridge are situated at the foot of the beautiful Mendip Hills National Landscape.

The skeleton of Cheddar Man was discovered in Goughs Cave and is Britain's oldest, thought to date around 10,000 years old.

Axbridge was once a Saxon defence system against the Viking invaders.

Half-timbered buildings lean towards each other across narrow streets, leading to a medieval square. Pride of place in the Town Square is King John's Hunting Lodge. Despite its name, it is early Tudor and houses a museum of local history run by the Axbridge and District Museum Trust.

Wedmore has connections with King Alfred and was left to his son Edward The Elder. Wedmore is slightly raised, having been built on stone and has dramatic views of the Mendip Hills. It has many independent shops and some of the country's best dairy pasture.

Another claim to fame in this impressive LCN area is Ashton Windmill, a tower mill based in Chapel Allerton. The tower is over 7.5m tall with 60cm thick stone walls. The sails are 13m across and used to be covered in canvas. The last millstones were 1.2m across and would grind wheat for flour and beans for cattle food.



King John's Hunting Lodge, Axbridge



Ashton Windmill, Chapel Allerton



Cheddar Gorge, Cheddar



Church Street, Wedmore

Chair and Vice Chair



Chair: Cllr Pauline Ham

Pauline serves on Somerset Council.

She moved to Somerset, specifically Axbridge, back in 1982.

She is involved with the many voluntary organisations within Axbridge, and Elected to Axbridge Town Council.

Vice Chair: Cllr Frankie Mitton

Frankie is a member of Axbridge Town Council.

She served as Mayor of Axbridge on three occasions in the town, most recently for the year 2023/24.



Chair's Introduction

"I want to start by saying thank you to all who have attended and supported me at the Cheddar and Axbridge LCN this year.

The range of parish sizes, interests and requirements has meant it has been quite a difficult year, with the added complication of Somerset's financial issues.

The theme that provoked the most reaction and interest during meetings, was that of Highways and all associated aspects, including travel in general. As a result of this, a Highways Working Group was formed. This group has met twice so far.

The intention is that following on from the Highways Working Group, a further working group can be formed to look at travel requirements. These are very big issues which I hope can be broken down into component parts and then worked on together.

The other priority that came from the LCN meetings is that of community. All members feel very strongly that community support is very important.

There are many voluntary groups within our communities who do amazing work supporting their residents. It is hoped that during the next year we will be able to engage the help and expertise of the various voluntary groups as well as from the professional sector, i.e. our schools, doctors, the church etc.

We have an exciting opportunity in the next 12 months to work together for the benefit of all our communities. I am sure we have the confidence and personnel to thrive, achieve and succeed."

Cllr Pauline Ham
Chair, Cheddar and Axbridge LCN

Link Officer Summary

“The LCN has good attendance from the parish councils and Axbridge Town Council serving as a valuable space to share information.

The Financial Emergency, announced by Somerset Council in November 2023, is a particular example of how the LCN has enabled communication between its parishes and Somerset Council.

The LCN has been a useful forum to better understand local concerns relating to the potential impacts and to begin to explore opportunities to work together to navigate these inevitable changes in levels of service.

This will continue over the coming months and years.

The challenge moving forward will be to build on this engagement and involve a wider cross section of the community and local organisations to work in collaboration across the LCN area, to address local priorities, and improve local quality of life for all.

We have met in different places across the LCN area this year, including in Cheddar, Axbridge and in Shipham. At Fairlands Middle School, Draycott, and in Wedmore. We thank all for your warm welcome and for hosting us.

There has been a hybrid option for members unable to attend in person. This has worked well and has enabled greater attendance at meetings. The LCN is keen that there should be access for all and is always open to using a range of meeting venues.

Julie Cooper

(Interim) LCN Link Officer, Cheddar and Axbridge LCN

Priorities and Ambitions

Data

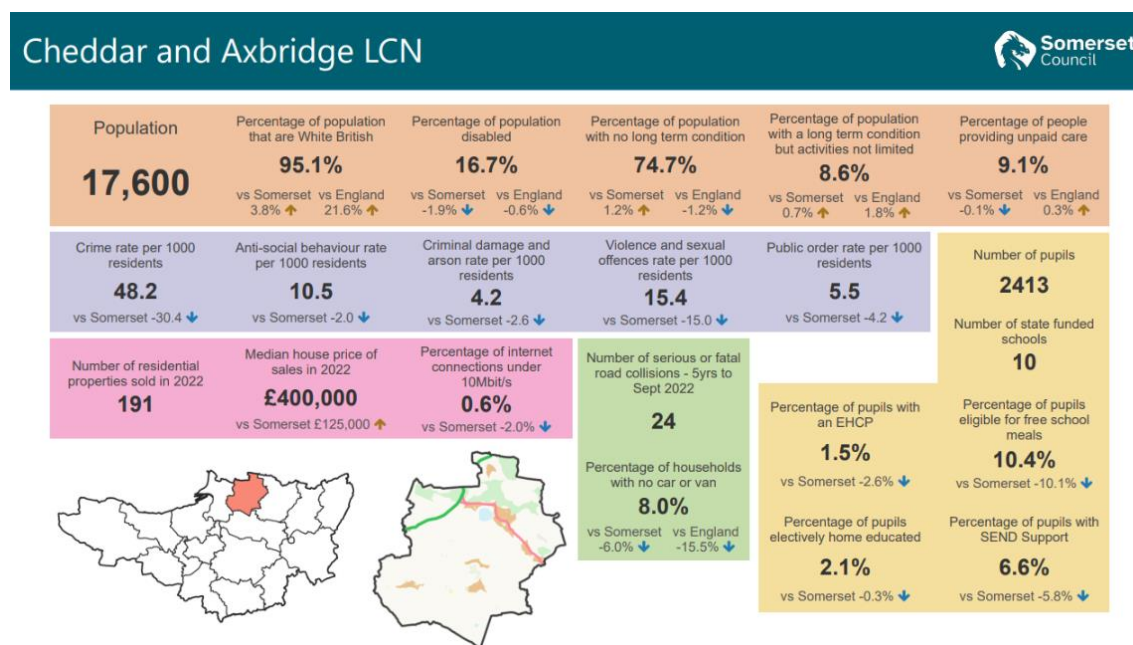
At the initial Cheddar and Axbridge LCN meeting, attendees were shown a data set (see below). It provided useful statistical information aimed at generating initial thoughts and discussions, unique to the local area.

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

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

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.



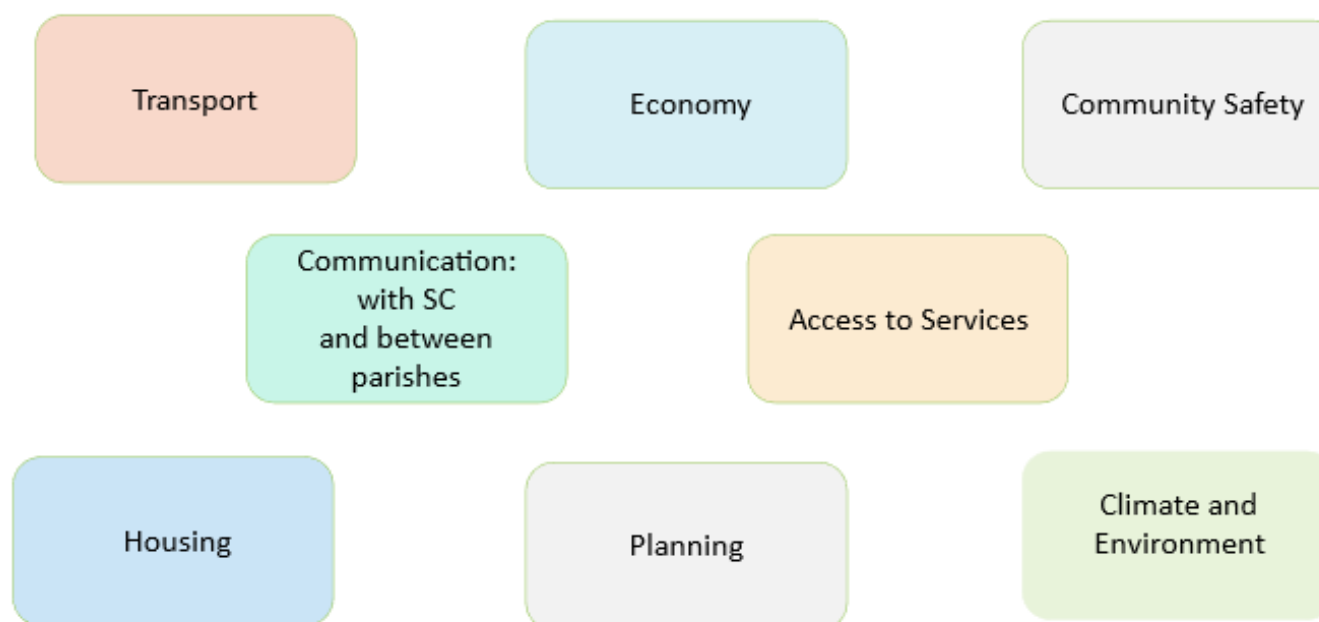
Priorities and Ambitions

Themes

At the first meeting in August 2023 the LCN discussed issues that affected the area relating to a number of topics. These were then organised into themes for our October meeting when the data summary (see page 9) was also presented.

It was recognised that any high level quantitative data needs to be sense checked with local knowledge to fully understand the lived experience of local communities and inform any potential actions needed to address any priorities that arise. The table (below) shows the themes that the LCN identified and discussed at the first meeting.

At the October meeting the LCN had a workshop to identify which of the themes to address first with each attendee using coloured dots to identify which of the themes they would like to prioritise. Transport, Planning, Climate and Environment and Access to Services were the top priorities for this LCN.



Priorities and Ambitions

The Financial Emergency facing Somerset Council meant that the third meeting in January was focussed on engaging the LCN with the implications and discussing opportunities for the devolution of services.

The LCN was well attended by Somerset Councillors providing a conduit directly back into Somerset Council and was a very valuable forum for debate and to hear the concerns of local town and parish councils.

These concerns included the closure of public facilities such as the Cheddar Household Waste Recycling Centre and public toilets.

Smaller councils raised issues relating to having a limited staff resource such as part time clerks and much smaller precepts to afford buying in services. All councils were concerned about the implications of employing staff, contract management, insurance, health and safety and legal support for drawing up contracts.

Somerset Council has listened to these concerns and as well as hosting fortnightly city, town and parish council clerks working group, has identified financial resources which will be utilised working with the sector to put in place strategic mechanisms to assist with the devolution of services where parish/towns wish to take them on.

The March 2024 meeting focussed on the priority theme of transport and highways with presentations and discussion from highways colleagues including Rights of Way staff from Somerset Council.

Devolution in relation to reactive Highways Maintenance was discussed in detail with a list of options being presented for town and parishes to consider amongst which was the Highways Steward Scheme which has been successfully piloted by the Exmoor LCN. The meeting concluded with agreement to set up a Highways Working Group.



LCN Meeting held at Draycott Village Hall

Priorities and Ambitions

In April, the LCN continued to explore priorities with an update from Somerset Council on the Climate Emergency and the new Biodiversity Net Gain legislation.

A discussion then followed on another of the LCN's top priorities Access to Services.

The LCN considered care and support within the community and Access to Services focussing on four questions:

1. Why is access to services important? (both clinical and non-clinical)
2. What are the benefits to accessing local services?
3. How do we identify where our community-based assets are?
4. How do we take our learning forward?

Responses included the importance of addressing loneliness and isolation and knowing what support was available. Local knowledge and networking clearly key here, and so it was that Village Agents were identified as a resource to assist with signposting to services.

Developing an online resource of services was mooted although it was noted that this would need to be straightforward to use and kept up to date which could be a challenge. The difficulty of finding and retaining volunteers was also identified as a major challenge.

The meeting proposed the setting up of an Access to Services Working Group, if this issue remained a priority after the LCN reviewed priorities at the AGM. This working group could then draw in other local actors from the local community and the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise sector to understand local needs and then explore how best to work together to respond.

Working Groups

Highways Working Group

Cheddar and Axbridge LCN has one working group for Highways with another proposed with a focus on Access to Services.

The Highways Working Group has 15 confirmed members.

The inaugural meeting took place on 18 April and was attended by highways colleagues from Somerset Council, delivering the whole range of highway services.

The discussion allowed attendees to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of different parts of the highways service, raise local issues of concern and begin to navigate solutions. The options for parish and town councils to increase reactive maintenance through the Highway Steward scheme for example, and how this could work across the LCN area was also discussed.

An introduction to the Programme of Structural Maintenance for the LCN Area was provided and this was circulated after the meeting so that the working group could review and advise of any issues.

The meeting also agreed that themed meetings will be useful such as on rights of way and speeding issues including on slip roads off major roads. Highways colleagues have now provided the group with a list of contact points for the different highway services.

Working Groups

The second meeting of this working group was held on 17 May 2023. At this meeting, the group nominated a Chair, agreed the Terms of Reference, and agreed that the next meeting would focus on speeding issues.

In advance of that next meeting the members would collate outstanding issues to provide to highways colleagues in advance of the quarterly meeting with them in September. The September meeting will have a focus on rights of way.

The Financial Emergency announced in November has been a challenge, but also an opportunity for developing closer working relationships.

The Highways Working Group has made a solid start in this regard. The ambition will be to embed this approach across other priority areas.

Access to Services Working Group (proposed)

Should Access to Services remain a priority for the LCN, and a working group formed in the next 12 months, then broader engagement with local communities to understand lived experience, and the drawing-in of wider partners, will be crucial.

Reflections

The LCN has had good representation from its parish councils and the town council, which has been of particular value with regards to enhancing dialogue with Somerset Council in relation to the Financial Emergency.

The Highways Working Group whilst mainly involving the parish and town councils has drawn in other partners like the Mendip Hills National Landscape and the Somerset Local Access Forum and has enhanced relationships and understanding between Somerset Council officers and the local councils. There now is the opportunity for focussed discussion not just to address local issues of concern but to provide local influence on the development of key strategic plans such as the Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

The challenge and focus during the next year is to broaden representation of the LCN. The development of working groups by other LCNs around key priorities has been shown to be a very successful mechanism to draw in a wide range of partners who have not been visible at the main LCN meetings thus far.

Bringing together working groups around priorities will be a valuable way forward for the Cheddar and Axbridge LCN in the coming year and will enable focussed working between the main LCN meetings which will maintain a strategic overview.

The LCN will need to ensure that it identifies ways to maximise opportunities to address challenges that arise through cooperation and collaboration recognising the central role of local representation through town and parish councils and Somerset Council but actively working to involve a spectrum of local actors and organisations to improve local quality of life.

Contacts

Email: cheddarandaxbridgelcn@somerset.gov.uk

Website: www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/

Cheddar and Axbridge LCN: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/cheddar-axbridge/>

Appendices

Appendix A – Core Membership

Parishes

Axbridge
Badgworth
Chapel Allerton
Cheddar
Compton Bishop
Mark
Rodney Stoke
and Draycott
Shipham
Weare
Wedmore

Electoral Divisions

Brent
Cheddar
Mendip West
King Alfred

Stakeholder Membership

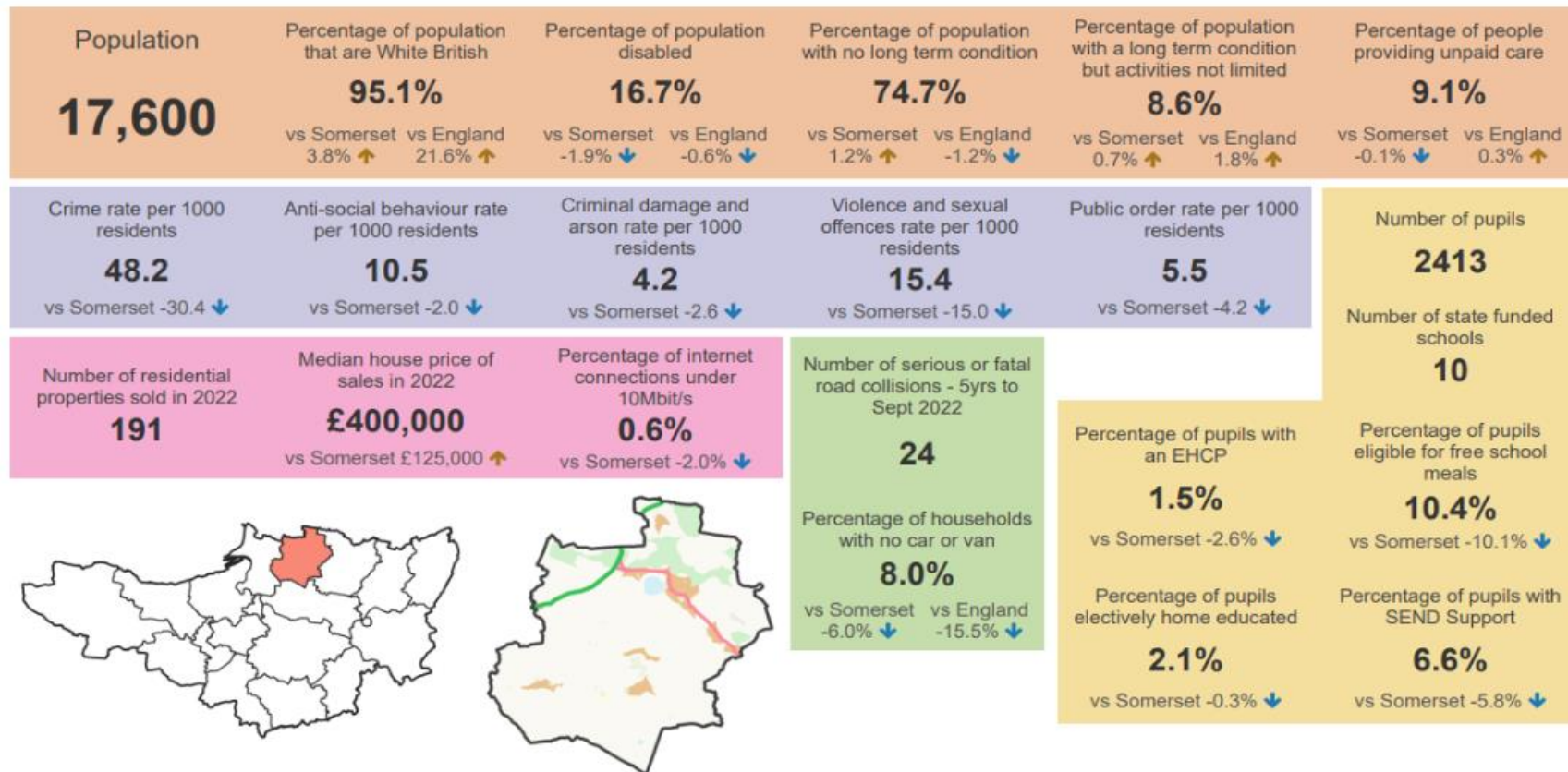
Avon and Somerset Police
NHS
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue
Education
Spark Somerset
Society Local Council Clerks (SLCC)
Somerset Association of Local Councils
(SALC)
Somerset Activity and Sports
Partnership (SASP)
Community Council for Somerset
(Village Agents)
Citizens Advice Somerset
Department of Work and Pensions
Somerset Rivers Authority
Somerset Local Nature Partnership
Business Chamber
Mendip Hills National Landscape

Stakeholder Membership

Connect Somerset
Somerset Foundation Trust
Somerset Climate Action
Network
Village agent
WellBe Link (adult mental
health)
First Aid for Mental Health
Instructor
Young Somerset
Somerset RCC
General public

Appendix B – Data

Cheddar and Axbridge LCN

Appendix C – Meeting Dates and Agenda Items

For more information about Cheddar and Axbridge LCN meetings please follow the link below:

<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=904&Year=0>

August 2023

- Elect Chair- Councillor Pauline Ham
- Appoint Vice Chair – Councillor Franchesca Mitton
- To determine priorities and areas of focus for the LCN over the next twelve months
 - Transport
 - Economy
 - Community Safety
 - Communications with SC and between parishes
 - Access to Services
 - Housing
 - Planning
 - Climate and Environment

October 2023

- Data Summary presented and discussed
- Activity to prioritise themes
 - Transport, Planning, Climate and Environment and Access to Services top priorities.

January 2024

- Discussion around Financial Emergency and potential for devolution of services.

March 2024

- Focus on priority theme of transport and highways presentations from Highways colleagues on options for devolution such as the Highways Steward Scheme and presentation on Active Travel.
- Decision to set up Highways Working Group

April 2024

- Update from Somerset Council on the Climate Emergency and the new Biodiversity Net Gain Legislation.
- Discussion on the priority of Access to Services.