

# **Local Community Network**

## Yearly Report 2023/2024

Levels and Moors



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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/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/)



# Levels and Moors LCN

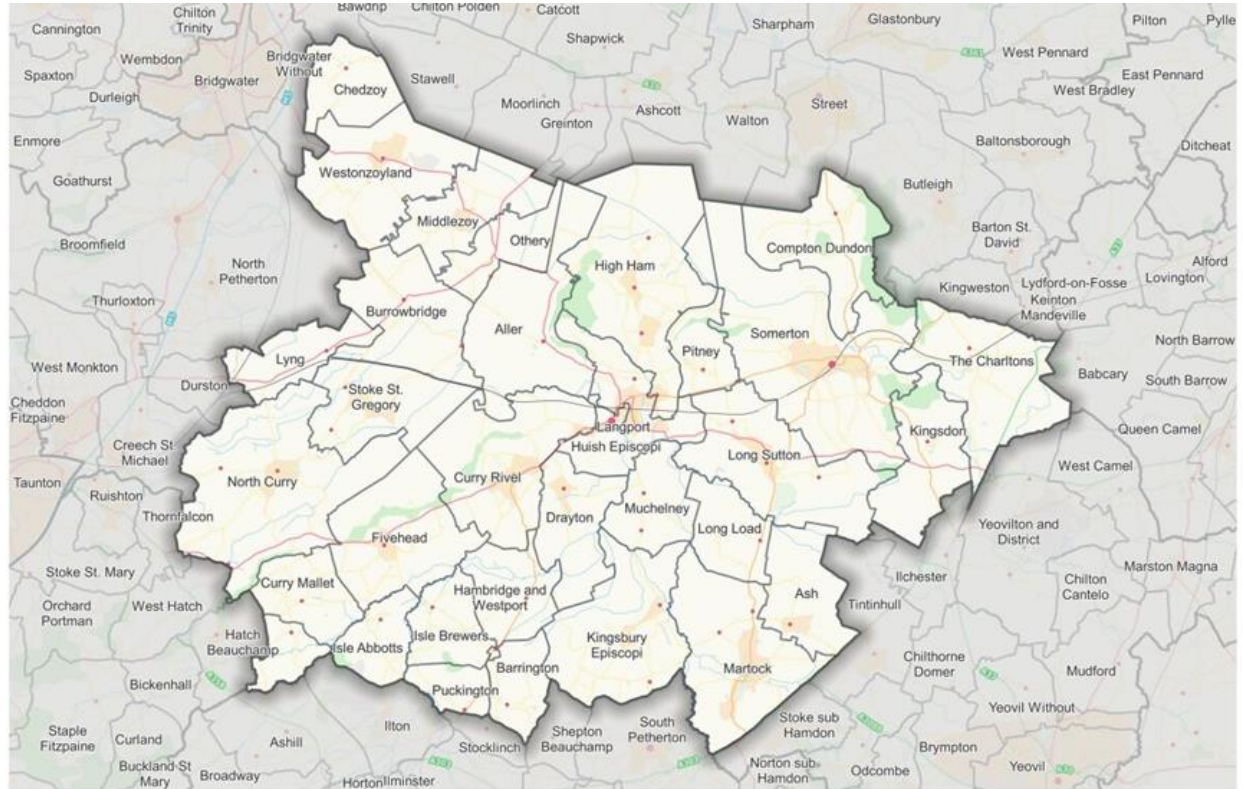
The Levels and Moors LCN sits in the centre of Somerset, bordering seven other LCNs.

Primarily a rural area, its parishes include Burrowbridge (famed for its Burrow Mump) Martock in the south, and North Curry to the southwest.

The LCN also includes the market towns of Somerton and Langport with their well-established grassroot community groups, local organisations and networks.

The area is characterised by the inland peat-based Moors and unique Somerset Levels - the Levels being the only place in the UK where basket willow is grown commercially.

Tributaries of the rivers Tone, Parrett, Axe and Brue run across this LCN area.



**Levels and Moors LCN**

# Chair and Vice Chair



## Chair: Levels and Moors LCN

### **Cllr Richard Wilkins**

Richard is the Executive Lead Member for Transport and Digital at Somerset Council.

He is also a member of the Bus Advisory Board, the Officer Appeals Committee, he sits on the Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee and the Property and Investments Executive Sub-Committee.

Richard has served as a councillor in Somerset since 2022.

## Vice Chair: Levels and Moors LCN

### **Cllr Anthony Betty**

Anthony has been a councillor on Othery Parish Council since 2011. He's currently their Deputy Chair.

He is also Chair of Othery Street Fayre Committee and Road Run Committee and the Vice Chair of the Parrett Drainage Board.

Anthony served on the former Sedgemoor District Council.



# Chair's Introduction

I have been delighted to Chair the first 12 months of the Levels and Moors LCN.

Over the course of the year we have seen relationships between the parishes and towns build and develop. And whilst poor weather and flooding has, on occasion, impacted our ability to meet in-person, we have not been deterred, meeting virtually instead when necessary.

It is worth noting that this LCN is responsible for improving the lives and experiences of more than 33,000 residents and countless visitors to (what I consider to be) the most iconic and cherished part of Somerset. The Levels and Moors are the lifeblood of the county, and we have a responsibility to make sure that we use every tool at our disposal to preserve and improve our way of life.

This LCN has covered many topics to date, and we have begun to better understand the needs of our communities and residents. During our first year of meetings we have heard from the local police, parish representatives, voluntary and community partners, Somerset Councillors, interested members of the public, and health colleagues. They have been informing our discussions and helping us identify priorities and develop action plans to address local need.

We've established no less than three working groups to address the priorities identified by the wider LCN.

Our Active Travel Working Group has made significant progress initiating new projects and building on existing ambitions to create new pedestrian and alternative travel routes across the area. Our Health and Wellbeing Working Group has started to make headway in understanding the needs of our communities and the Highways Working Group has identified the challenges we face regarding highways and traffic issues.

The working groups are key to the engagement of wider partners and stakeholders, and we look forward to developing these relationships further, during the coming year.

**Cllr Richard Wilkins**  
Chair, Levels and Moors LCN

# Priorities and Ambitions

During the first two meetings of the new LCN the discussion focussed on emerging issues for parishes, towns and their residents.

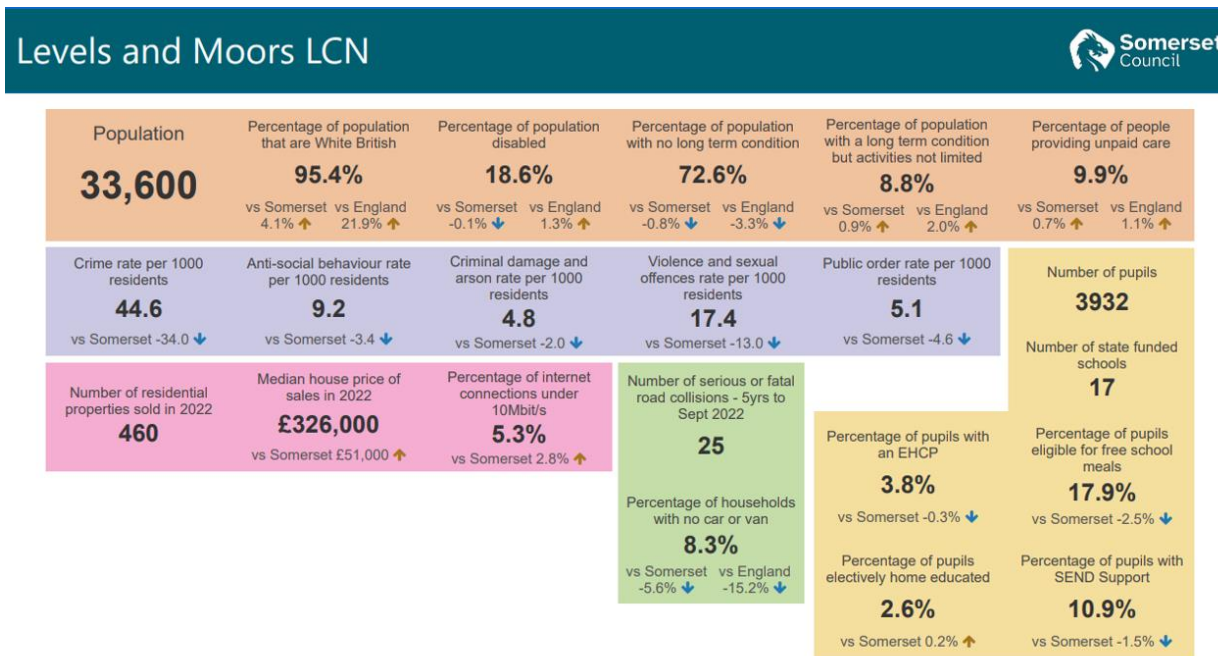
The list below was then prioritised by participants to agree areas of focus for the first year of the LCN with Active Travel, Highways and Health and Wellbeing identified as key topics for further exploration.



# Priorities and Ambitions

## Data

The LCN has been supported with a high-level data pack produced by Somerset Council, however there is recognition that more detailed data would be useful to support detailed discussion in any one topic area.



Nearly 10 percent of residents in the Levels and Moors LCN are unpaid carers.

House prices are higher than the Somerset average by £50k.

And 5.3% of premises have a lower than 10 Mbit/s broadband connection, significantly lower than the UK average download speed of 69.6Mbit/s.

See Appendix B for larger image

# Priorities and Ambitions

## Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

The Police provided an overview of the Crime and Anti-Social behaviour statistics for the LCN area and outlined their working practice, along with an explanation of current priorities for the LCN area, during a detailed presentation at the third meeting of the Levels and Moors LCN.

Following a question and answer session it was agreed that having a regular update from police colleagues would be a useful addition to the annual cycle of meetings, to ensure that priority-setting and future discussions were informed regarding policing issues.

## Financial Emergency

Following the announcement that Somerset Council had declared a Financial Emergency, the LCN provided a space for parish councils to participate in detailed discussions with Somerset Councillors about their concerns and the next steps for Somerset Council, as it faces a budget crisis.

Cllr Liz Leyshon, Deputy Leader of Somerset Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, provided a detailed overview of the situation in November 2023, advising that the Council was taking immediate steps to significantly reduce its non-statutory spending.

The LCN discussed how towns and parishes could work together to ensure any emerging gaps in community provision could be mitigated, it addressed the challenges of budget-setting for parishes, and started to consider how all of the parishes and parish meetings in the LCN area could work together on new projects including a potential Highways Steward programme.

# Working Groups

## Health and Wellbeing Working Group

A working group to better understand the health and wellbeing needs of residents across the LCN area was established, recognising that issues of loneliness and isolation are likely to be particularly prevalent in rural populations.

The working group is Chaired by Cllr David Fothergill. It has identified concerns regarding the rise in mental health issues in farming communities and has started work on how best to find out more about the health and wellbeing needs of residents in this LCN.

The group is mapping the services and opportunities available to residents. They've identified that the bulk of these activities take place in the more urban centres of Martock, Langport and Somerton. However, transport links in and out of these towns and larger villages are limited.

The next steps for this working group will be to meet regularly with wider partner organisations and stakeholders to better understand the data and lived experience of residents, and identify opportunities to address local need.

## Highways Working Group

Concerns about speeding, and the general state of the highways network across the LCN were identified early in the LCN meeting schedule.

Building on the work of the Exmoor Highways Pilot, the first meeting of the Levels and Moors Highways Working Group took place in March 2024. The meeting was supported by Somerset Council highways officers, who provided an overview of their areas of work.

It was agreed that Cllr Sean Dromgoole would Chair this group and that parish representatives would meet with highways colleagues at the Council in between the usual LCN quarterly meetings, where they would report back on progress.

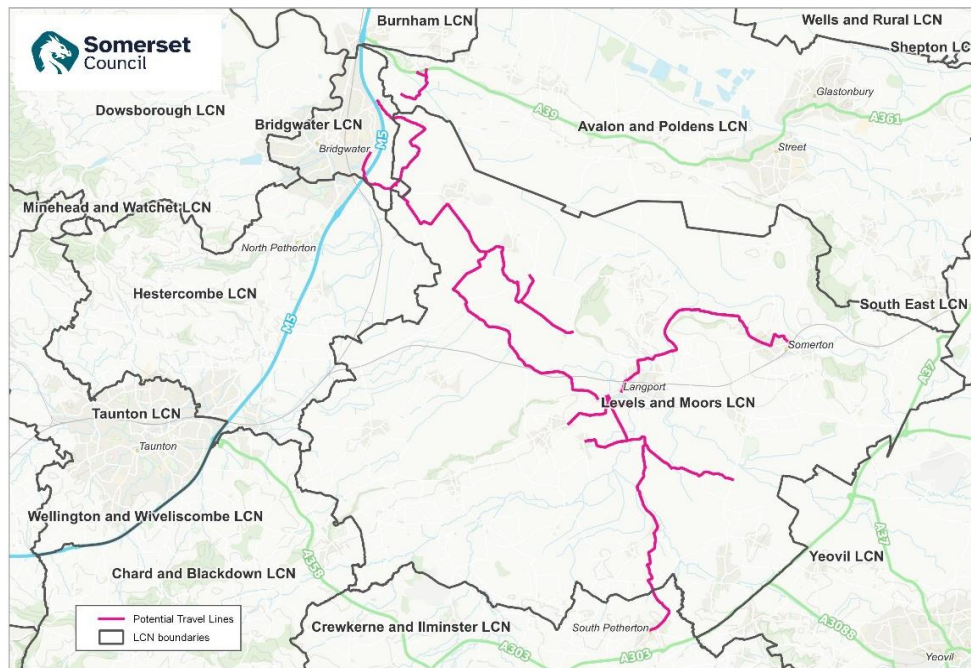
# Working Groups

## Active Travel Working Group

The Active Travel Working Group of the Levels and Moors LCN is Chaired by Cllr Gerard Tucker, Chair of Aller Parish Council and interim Clerk for Langport Town Council.

The group has made significant progress during the year on a number of projects across the LCN and aims to continue to build a network of active travel routes across the LCN and into adjoining LCN areas.

The Quiet Lane Network planned for the Levels and Moors, includes ambitions to build a connection between South Petherton and Bridgwater (see map below).



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Progress on parts of the connecting routes has already begun, supported by volunteer teams who have been clearing agreed areas.

New sections of path, such as the one pictured (above right), between Aller and Langport, have also progressed.

# Reflections

The main LCN meetings have been well attended throughout the first year of the Levels and Moors LCN.

The meetings have provided a valuable space for town and parish representatives to come together with other partners to consider the needs of residents, across the area, and start to identify priorities.

It has also enabled partners to work with officers and members of Somerset Council to better understand the pressures resulting from the financial emergency and together the towns and parishes have started to explore how they might overcome potential gaps in the future.

The Active Travel Group is making significant progress, as are the Highways Working Group and the Health and Wellbeing Working Group. All are making significant headway in better understanding the issues and opportunities needed to improve the lives of residents in this central part of Somerset.

Over the coming year I look forward to the support of an appointed Link Officer who will further develop the engagement of wider stakeholders and partners, identify clear priorities and deliver actions.

**Cllr Richard Wilkins**

Chair, Levels and Moors LCN

## Contacts

Email: [Levelsandmoorslcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Levelsandmoorslcn@somerset.gov.uk) Website: [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/)

Levels and Moors LCN: [www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/levelsandmoors](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/levelsandmoors)

# Appendices

## Appendix A – Core Membership

### Parishes

Aller  
Barrington  
Beercrocombe  
Burrowbridge  
Chedzoy  
Compton Dundon  
Curry Mallet  
Curry Rivel  
Drayton  
Fivehead  
Hambridge & Westport  
High Ham  
Huish Episcopi  
Isle Brewers  
Isle Abbots  
Kingsbury Episcopi  
Kingsdon  
Langport

### Parishes

Long Load  
Long Sutton  
Lyng  
Martock  
Middlezoy  
Muchelney  
North Curry  
Othery  
Pitney  
Puckington  
Somerton  
Stoke St. Gregory  
The Charltons  
Westonzoyland

### Electoral Divisions

Bridgwater East & Bawdrip  
Curry Rivel & Langport  
King Alfred  
Martock  
Monkton & North Curry  
North Petherton  
Somerton  
South Petherton & Islemoor

### Organisations

Avon and Somerset Police  
NHS  
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue  
Education  
Spark Somerset  
Society Local Council Clerks  
Somerset Association Local Councils  
Somerset Activity Sports Partnership  
Community Council for Somerset  
Citizens Advice  
Department of Work and Pensions  
Somerset Rivers Authority  
Somerset Local Nature Partnership  
Business Chamber  
Young Farmers

## Appendix A continued - Partners and Stakeholders

Langport Transport Group

Kingsbury Episcopi community centre

Thorney Lakes

North Curry Pavilion

Somerton Recreation Ground Trust

High Ham Community Land Trust

Connect Somerset

Somerset Foundation Trust

WellBe Link (adult mental health)

First Aid for Mental Health Instructor

## Appendix B – Data

# Levels and Moors LCN



<p>Population</p> <p><b>33,600</b></p>	<p>Percentage of population that are White British</p> <p><b>95.4%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset 4.1% ↑ vs England 21.9% ↑</p>	<p>Percentage of population disabled</p> <p><b>18.6%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -0.1% ↓ vs England 1.3% ↑</p>	<p>Percentage of population with no long term condition</p> <p><b>72.6%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -0.8% ↓ vs England -3.3% ↓</p>	<p>Percentage of population with a long term condition but activities not limited</p> <p><b>8.8%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset 0.9% ↑ vs England 2.0% ↑</p>	<p>Percentage of people providing unpaid care</p> <p><b>9.9%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset 0.7% ↑ vs England 1.1% ↑</p>
<p>Crime rate per 1000 residents</p> <p><b>44.6</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -34.0 ↓</p>	<p>Anti-social behaviour rate per 1000 residents</p> <p><b>9.2</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -3.4 ↓</p>	<p>Criminal damage and arson rate per 1000 residents</p> <p><b>4.8</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -2.0 ↓</p>	<p>Violence and sexual offences rate per 1000 residents</p> <p><b>17.4</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -13.0 ↓</p>	<p>Public order rate per 1000 residents</p> <p><b>5.1</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -4.6 ↓</p>	<p>Number of pupils</p> <p><b>3932</b></p>
<p>Number of residential properties sold in 2022</p> <p><b>460</b></p>	<p>Median house price of sales in 2022</p> <p><b>£326,000</b></p> <p>vs Somerset £51,000 ↑</p>	<p>Percentage of internet connections under 10Mbit/s</p> <p><b>5.3%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset 2.8% ↑</p>	<p>Number of serious or fatal road collisions - 5yrs to Sept 2022</p> <p><b>25</b></p>	<p>Percentage of pupils with an EHCP</p> <p><b>3.8%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -0.3% ↓</p>	<p>Number of state funded schools</p> <p><b>17</b></p>
			<p>Percentage of households with no car or van</p> <p><b>8.3%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -5.6% ↓ vs England -15.2% ↓</p>	<p>Percentage of pupils electively home educated</p> <p><b>2.6%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset 0.2% ↑</p>	<p>Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals</p> <p><b>17.9%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -2.5% ↓</p>
				<p>Percentage of pupils with SEND Support</p> <p><b>10.9%</b></p> <p>vs Somerset -1.5% ↓</p>	

## Appendix C – Meeting Dates and Agendas

Browse Levels and Moors LCN minutes and agendas here: <https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=891>

### 19 June 2023 – Inaugural LCN Meeting

- To elect the chair of the Local Community Network
- To appoint the Vice-Chair of the Local Community Network
- To receive any apologies for absence
- Declarations of Interest
- Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
- To determine the priorities and areas of focus for the Local Community Network for the next 12 months
  - What are LCNs and how will we work together
  - Discussion – What is important to residents and businesses in our area?  
(An opportunity to raise any local issues or concerns for LCN to consider)
- To agree the frequency of meetings
- The schedule of meetings for the next 12 month
  - List of Parishes and other partners
  - Core Membership

## 20 September 2023

- To receive any apologies for absence
- Declarations of Interest
- Approve the minutes of the last meeting
- Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
- Highlights of themes discussed at the last meeting
- An introduction to data
- Discussion: to agree initial priorities, actions for each parish and the creation of working groups
- Dates of future meetings

## 13 November 2023

- To receive any apologies for absence
- Declarations of Interest
- Approve the minutes of the last meeting
- Update - Somerset Council's Financial Position
- Public Question Time (not covered on the agenda)
- Presentation and Q&A with Police
- Updates from working groups:
  - Active Travel
  - Health and Wellbeing
- Action and next Steps for:
  - Active Travel
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Discussions re Somerset's Finances
  - Dates of future meetings

## 15 January 2024

- To receive any apologies for absence
- Declarations of Interest
- Approve the minutes of the last meeting
- Discussion on Executive Committee agenda
- Updates from working groups
- Active Travel
- Health and Wellbeing
- Action and next Steps
- Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
- Dates of future meetings

## 25 March 2024

- To receive any apologies for absence
- Declarations of Interest
- Approve the minutes of the last meeting
- Actions from the last meeting
- Public Questions (not covered on the agenda)
- Health and Wellbeing – an opportunity to further explore how we can better understand the needs of our community.
- Agreeing a forward plan for meetings