



Local Community Network

Dowsborough LCN meeting notes 29th January 2025 at St Mary's Church Centre, Nether Stowey (Postponed from December 2024)

Attendees:

Simon Stretton, Spaxton (Chair) Cllr Mike Caswell (Vice Chair) Cllr Brian Bolt Cllr Hugh Davies Cllr Rosemary Wood Loretta Whetlor, SALC Ian Dyer, Cannington Cllr Lin Hook, Chilton Trinity Cllr Peter Felton, Chilton Trinity Cllr John Vassalli, Durleigh Karen Scott, Holford & Kilve Steve Skinner, Kilve Kevin Ferriday, Nether Stowey Tina Gardener, Otterhampton, & Fiddington	Caro Slaymaker, Nether Stowey John Roberts, Nether Stowey Patrick Tully, Over Stowey Amanda McMurren, Over Stowey John McVerry, Stockland Bristol Cllr Chris Morgan, Stogursey Sue Goss, Stogursey Cllr Bridget Hedeaux, Wembdon Paul King, Wembdon Greg Glendell, member of public Julian Gale, member of public Anne Shilton, LCN Link Officer Sam Murrell, LCN Link Officer Emily Window, LCN Project Officer
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Virtual attendees:

Iain Porter, Quantock Hills National Landscape
Brenda Maitland-Walker, Vice Chair Minehead & Watchet LCN
Debbie Harris, Village Agent, CCS
Kate Hellard, LCN Development and Engagement Manager

Apologies: none

1. Agreement of notes from previous meeting and apologies

Notes were agreed with no matters arising not covered elsewhere, with no apologies received.

2. Somerset Local Plan engagement workshop

AS introduced the Somerset Local Plan discussion, including a 10-minute video presentation by Louise Mansfield and Julia Dorrington from Allies and Morrison Architects, explaining the local plan and its importance.

Local Plan Engagement: the video discussed the importance of early engagement in the local plan process, emphasizing the need for input from local representatives to shape the vision, objectives, and policies.

Local Plan Topics: The key topics of the local plan were outlined including housing, health and well-being, economic sustainability, culture, community, play, transportation, green spaces, and heritage. Guiding questions for each topic were provided to facilitate discussion and gather input from participants.

Five groups in the room plus one online discussed each topic for five to ten minutes and recorded their contribution to the discussions. These findings are given in Appendix A, which should be seen alongside these meeting notes.

3. Health and Well-being Initiatives presentation

Statistics and Demographics

AS presented statistics based mainly on the 2021 census or more recently, highlighting the population growth in Dowsborough, which has increased by 20.3% over the past 20 years. The over-65 age group is noticeably higher in Dowsborough (27%) compared to Bridgwater (16%) and the county average (24.8%). The under-15 age group is consistent with the county average at 15%. 18% of people in the area see themselves as having a disability, which is close to the county average of 19%.

Indices of Deprivation

No parishes within the bottom 20% of the indices of deprivation, and only one in the bottom 40%, indicating fewer levels of deprivation in Dowsborough.

Employment and Housing

Employment statistics showed 14% in retail/wholesale, 8% in professional science and technical, and 8% in manufacturing, as the 3 largest groups. The average house price in the area is around £5000 higher than the Somerset average, with the cost of median homes being 6.6 times more than the median income, posing challenges for younger people to get onto the housing ladder.

Health Issues

The ten highest health concerns for Cannington and Quantock GP surgeries are linked to the higher age group in the area being coronary heart disease, stroke prevention, atrial fibrillation, hypertension, obesity, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, COPD, hearing and sight loss. P King mentioned that dementia should be considered a significant health issue that had not been listed. Action: AS to explore further data, to investigate if this was considered a cause of death or a contributory factor and why it had not been listed.

Health and Well-being Initiatives:

Discussion on the availability of health and well-being project funding from SALC, with some parishes planning to apply for grants. For example, Wembdon plans to survey the parish to identify health and well-being needs.

S Stretton mentioned the need for a warm space in Spaxton village hall with a backup power supply to support residents during power outages and funding for a survey was to be submitted to SALC.

Suggestions and Actions:

A suggestion was made to form a health and well-being working group to explore initiatives like food banks, warm spaces, and transport services. However participants are keen to prioritise other avenues of exploration including transport services.

Action: AS to find out more about potential community transport solutions and request a speaker from the Slinky project for the next meeting.

Key Takeaways:

The area has a higher proportion of older residents, which influences the health and well-being needs. There is a desire to improve local transport in particular. Current funding opportunities from SALC can help implement local and parish council initiatives.

4. Review of the core membership and boundary of LCN

For information there is some discussion in the neighbouring Bridgwater LCN regarding boundaries of the LCN and the chair of Bridgwater LCN may be in touch with some parishes on the eastern edge of this LCN to further discuss possibilities. There was a general consensus in the room that participants are comfortable with existing boundaries and understand it is possible to work collaboratively across boundaries.

5. Cross LCN Active Travel Steering Group

The chair asked for a representative to attend this group but no one came forward. It was felt that Active Travel, using travel methods within power/engine is less viable in rural areas where there are few options to using cars. Action: AS to take back response to group co-ordinator.

6. Update on Highways Working Group

SM provided an update on the Highways Working Group having led the most recent meeting which was well attended, discussed the impact of recent storms and proposed service reductions due to Somerset Council restructuring. Karen Scott was thanked for writing the notes.

Impact of Recent Storms:

The recent storms have significantly impacted the service in the Highways service and demands placed upon them.

The next Highways Working Group meeting is scheduled for 28th February 2025 at Stogursey. Due to limited capacity, people will be asked to indicate their attendance beforehand. Action: AS to circulate agenda etc.

Issues Raised:

Cllr Hugh Davies mentioned the poor state of the A39 road through the woods near Kilve and expressed frustration over the lack of response from the Minehead and Watchet Highways Group. It was clarified that the officers at the Minehead and Watchet Highways Group cover different areas, which is why the issue was not addressed here.

The importance of using the Somerset Council's "report it" online function ([Report a problem on the road](#)) for highway emergencies and defects was emphasized, with a reminder that there is an emergency number for out-of-hours issues; 0300 123 2224.

Key Takeaways:

The Highways Working Group is actively addressing issues and planning future meetings to discuss and resolve highway-related concerns. Anyone wanting to join this group or submit a query was welcome to do so by contacting the Link Officer. The recent storms have prompted a re-evaluation of proposed service reductions in the Highway service, though the outcomes were yet to be confirmed.

Effective communication and reporting of highway issues are crucial for timely resolution.

7. Report from visit to Exmoor LCN

The Chair shared insights from a visit to the Exmoor LCN, highlighting their structured approach, collaboration with local organizations, and the presence of police officers at meetings. It was highlighted and acknowledged that Exmoor LCN has been operational for a year longer than the Dowsborough LCN.

The Exmoor LCN meetings are structured differently, with participants sitting in a circle to ensure no one has their back to anyone, promoting a more inclusive and organized environment.

Key Observations:

The Exmoor LCN is noted for being very organized and structured, possibly due to their longer experience and collaborative approach to issues.

They have access to resources and historical links that may not be available to Dowsborough LCN, such as working with the local tourist association for economic development and commissioning reports that are used by the county.

Collaboration and Resources:

The Exmoor LCN works closely with the Exmoor Park Authority and other local organizations to produce valuable reports and insights for the county.

The presence of a police officer at the Exmoor LCN meetings was highlighted as beneficial, providing updates on local crime and safety issues.

Takeaways:

The Exmoor LCN serves as a model for effective organization and collaboration, with a focus on inclusivity and resource utilization. The Dowsborough LCN aims to reach a similar level of organization and effectiveness over time.

8. Discussion on future meeting themes and/or speakers

Participants discussed the need for more relevant agenda items, bottom-up decision-making, and the importance of addressing local issues such as connectivity and transport.

Future Meetings Discussion Details

There was a strong sentiment among participants that the LCN meetings need to be more effective and relevant to the issues faced by the communities. Several participants expressed disappointment with the current structure and effectiveness of the meetings, suggesting a need for a total revamp or reconsideration of the format.

Key Points Raised:

Cllr M Caswell emphasized the need for the meetings to focus on solving local problems and working together in unity, rather than just being a talking shop.

There was a call for the meetings to be less officer-led and more driven by the needs and inputs of the parish councils and community representatives. Suggestions for agenda items, themes and speakers were always welcomed by the Link Officer but had recently been unforthcoming, hence the perception that the meetings were led by officers rather than locally led.

The importance of having actionable items and tangible outcomes from the meetings was highlighted, with a focus on addressing real issues such as connectivity, transport, and infrastructure. Action points are listed at the end of the meeting notes.

Suggestions for Improvement:

Participants suggested that the agenda should be set based on the input and needs of the community representatives, rather than being dictated by the council officers. The Link Officer welcomed this input and support for agenda items and topics from the LCN participants. Action: agenda items, themes, speakers and/or topics to be sent to link officer, with as much notice as possible.

There was a call for more engagement and input from the community on what topics and speakers they would like to see at future meetings. Action: all.

The need for better communication and follow-up on issues raised during the meetings was emphasized, with a suggestion to revisit important topics like connectivity and transport. Action: Link officer to investigate speakers to address these specific issues.

There was a suggestion to invite the Environment Agency to future meetings to discuss relevant issues. Action: Link Officer to investigate

Conclusion:

The overall goal is to make the LCN meetings more effective, community-driven, and focused on solving real issues faced by the parishes and that they bring them to the table for the agenda in advance.

9. Any other business

Due to a lack of time, AOB was unable to be addressed.

10. Date and Venues of future meetings / Actions

12th March 2025 at Victory Hall in Stogursey at 6.30 pm.

19th June 2025 (AGM) at Wembdon Village Hall at 6.30 pm

11. Future meeting dates proposed

17th September 2025, 10th December 2025, 18th March 2026, 17th June 2026 (AGM).
Venues to be confirmed, offers welcomed.

Date	Action	Completed by
29/01/25	Local Plan feedback: Compile and send the feedback from the meeting to the consultants and planning colleagues before sharing it with the wider group.	07/02/25
	Local Plan clarification: Ask if the new local plan will override existing neighbourhood plans and what the implications will be.	
	Environment Agency invitation: Invite the Environment Agency to attend the next LCN meeting to discuss identifiable relevant issues when issues	EA available for June 2025 meeting if wanted.
	Highways issues reporting: Ensure that the emergency number for reporting highway issues out of hours is circulated with the meeting notes.	Included in meeting notes
	Agenda items submission: Submit agenda items, suggested speakers and topics of interest for LCN meetings to ensure they are relevant and community-driven.	Ongoing - all
	Health statistics. Investigate why dementia not highlighted in health issues for two local GP surgeries	
	Transport. Invite speaker from Slinky project regarding rural transport. <i>[Update since meeting: speaker unable to attend next LCN meeting, however proposed in person meeting on 25th March 2025, 10.00 – 12.00, if free venue can be confirmed. Please book with & contact LCN officer]</i>	09/02/25
	Active Travel cross LCN boundary group. Link officer to take response back to group organiser.	30/01/25
	Connectivity Explore possibility of speaker at future meetings to offer update.	CDS to attend LCN March meeting