

Local Community Network

Avalon and Poldens LCN

AGM Notes

Date: Wednesday, 9th July 2025

Location: Keinton Mandeville Village Hall

Attendees:

Stephen Page (Unitary Councillor- A and P LCN Vice Chair)
Chris Bennett (Meare PC- A and P LCN Vice Chair)
Simon Carswell (Unitary Councillor and Street Parish Council)
Lily Keely-Watts (SALC)
Fodo Higginson (SALC)
Jenny Lawrence (Aschott PC)
Sue Greaves (Bawdrip PC)
James Hall (Catcott PC)
Julie Welch (Edington PC)
Chris Calcutt (Keinton Mandeville PC)
John Gould (Moorlinch PC)
Graham Croucher (Shapwick PC)
Philip Jay (Stawell PC)
Steph Lawrence (Stawell PC)
Natalie Watson (Avalon Marshes Centre)
John Dodson (Street Neighbourhood Watch Association)
David Rowley (Member of the Public)
Nataliya Wills (LCN Link Officer)
Alex Mountain (LCN Link Officer)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The meeting opened with greetings and apologies from those unable to attend.

Attendees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet and collaborate, especially with those they hadn't met before.

There was recognition of the importance of building engagement and attendance at main meetings, with a call for feedback on how to improve this going forward.

2. Chair Reflections

The Chair reflected on the past year's activities, highlighting collaboration with neighbouring LCNs (e.g., Burnham) and cross-working with health and wellbeing groups, especially around projects such as the Strawberry Line.

The Chair emphasized the tangible achievements made when working alongside internal and external stakeholders, notably the Step, Ride, Thrive project.

There was acknowledgment of fluctuating attendance and the need to improve engagement and communications in the next 12 months.

3. Review of the LCN Year

Highways Working Group - Presented by Graham Croucher

Graham spoke about the Highways Working Group, and some of the topics discussed in this setting.

The group worked closely with neighbouring LCNs and shared meetings to maximise officer attendance and efficiency.

Attendance was generally good, but most attendees came from specific parishes with lower participation from others. Main challenges identified:

- Making meetings more attractive to underrepresented parishes (content, location, venue).
- Disappointment with the Enhanced Highways Maintenance Programme, citing more failures than successes and legal/practical issues around parish empowerment.
- Issues with poor quality quotes and high prices from contractors.
- A paper is expected in July outlining a training programme for parishes.

Actions:

- Continue efforts to empower parishes and improve local highways outcomes.
- Expand the “who does what” directory and make useful links available on the Polden’s LCN page.
- Streamline reporting of problems (e.g., dedicated email addresses for parishes).
- Share new mapping tools showing current and planned highways projects.

Step, Ride, Thrive - Health and Wellbeing Working Group - Presented by Natalie Watson and Nataliya Wills

The group met regularly, focusing on the Step, Ride, Thrive active travel project, funded by a health and wellbeing grant. Project strands:

- **Buses:** Trial of an extra stop on the 668 bus service to improve access to Avalon Marshes Centre. Usage is low but steady; feedback is positive, especially from those without cars.

Actions: Increase promotion, collect feedback, explore weekend service options.

- **Bikes:** Partnership with “On Your Bike” charity to deliver free “Dr Bike” sessions and school maintenance courses.

Actions: Book remaining sessions, encourage parishes and schools to participate, trial affordable bike hire.

- **Walking:** Develop updated walking guides and organise accessible guided walks for various groups (e.g., wheelchair users, visually impaired).

Actions: Plan a walking festival as a project legacy, collaborate with local organisations.

The group seeks more volunteers for the steering team and help with marketing and flyer distribution.

4. Local Government Commission Boundary- Feedback

The Local Government Boundary Commission has proposed changes for Somerset, reducing councillors from 113 to 96 and moving to single-member divisions.

Feedback is encouraged from parishes and individuals, especially if they support the proposals, as changes can have knock-on effects.

Deadline for feedback is 11th August. Parishes were invited to review proposals for your parish/town and submit feedback (positive or negative) before the deadline.

5. Priorities for the year ahead

The group discussed continuing priorities: highways and wellbeing.

Other suggested areas: sustainability, climate change, housing needs (especially affordable housing), local business support, facilities for young people, flood resilience, and adult social care.

Actions:

- Form small working groups to set priorities for the next year.
- Encourage cross-parish collaboration, especially on flood resilience and transport.
- Consider inviting external speakers to meetings for added value.

6. Elect the Chair of the Local Community Network

The election of a new Chair was postponed due to insufficient attendance for a formal vote (not meeting the 25% core membership threshold).

Actions:

- Proposal to allow voting with 25% of parish membership (rather than all core membership) to be taken forward for future meetings.
- Encourage nominations for Chair and Vice Chair roles.

7. Appoint the Vice Chair of the Local Community Network

Vice Chairs agreed to continue temporarily.

The group will revisit the election at the next meeting, aiming for broader attendance and possible changes to voting rules.

Actions:

- Confirm Vice Chair appointments at the next meeting.
- Review and possibly revise terms of reference for elections.

There was discussion on the TORs and what the criteria to vote is. There is a link to read further here: [Terms of reference for Local community Networks](#)

Chris Bennett and Stephen Page will continue to be Vice Chairs and chair future meetings until there is a Chair elected.

After a discussion about TORs and being quorate, the group agreed to a proposal.

“The Avalon and Poldens LCN would like to be able to conduct a vote at an LCN meeting with 25% of parish membership and in a hybrid setting.”

POST MINUTE NOTE: This is being raised in the ongoing review of Community Engagement in Somerset Council.

8. Meet and Greet

The meeting finished with networking.

Summary of Key Actions

- **Improve meeting attendance and engagement** (feedback, marketing, varied timing/venues).
- **Empower parishes** through training, directories, and streamlined reporting.
- **Promote and support Step, Ride, Thrive project** (bus, bike, walking initiatives).
- **Set clear priorities for the coming year** via working groups.
- **Prepare for Chair and Vice Chair elections** (review voting rules, encourage nominations).