

Wells and Rural Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Date: 10th October 2024

Location: Coxley Memorial Hall

Time: 7pm

Attendance:

Name:

Representing

Tony Robbins	LCN Chair, Somerset Council
Kathy Bisset	North Wootton Parish Council
Jim Reeves	St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council
Lisa Pool	St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council
Narih Gouis	St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council
Denise Denis	Wells City Council
Siobahn Goodwin	The Bishops Palace
Bill Smart	Wedmore Parish Council
Edric Hobbs	Somerset Council
Heather Shearer	Somerset Council
Ros Wyke	Somerset Council
Tessa Munt	Somerset Council
Bel Deering	Somerset River's Authority
David Mitchell	Somerset Rivers Authority

Fodo Higginson

SALC

Tom Shopland

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

Virtual Attendance:

Paul Elliston

Somerset Rivers Authority

Richard Evans

Godney Parish Council

Jacky Farley

Wedmore Parish Council

Tony Hathway

St Cuthbert (Out Parish Council)

Jon Abbott

Binegar Parish Council

Emmeline Kay

LCN team

Officer Attendance:

Nataliya Wills

LCN team

Kate Hellard

LCN team

Michael Hardwick-Ford

LCN team

Apologies: Megan Harnedy

Summary of discussion:

1) **Election of Vice- Chair**

Jim Reeves from St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council was elected as Vice Chair of the LCN.

Action: Jim to visit parish councils within he LCN to increase engagement

2) **Update from working groups**

The active travel working group had to be rearranged due to sickness and venue problems. Details of new date will be shared.

The highways working group met on the 1st of October, with Street Works and traffic colleagues present. It was discussed that suggestions from the working group, including creating local networks of chapter 8 trained volunteers and creating two-way communication streams with highways colleagues should be carried forward and presented to highways colleagues.

Please email wellsandrurallcn@somerset.gov.uk for a copy of the notes from this meeting.

Action: chair to write to portfolio older and head of service or highways

Action: re-arrange active travel working group

3) **Flooding:**

Bel Deering and David Mitchell from the SRA started the discussion with a presentation, explaining the role and work of the SRA.

The SRA is a partnership of risk management authorities, including the Environment Agency, Somerset Council, Wessex Water, Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England, and regional flood representatives. They mostly fund projects to be delivered by their partner organisations, the SRA itself has no powers to carry out works but is about enabling extra works above the responsibilities and activities of its partners, with consideration of local issues and priorities.

The complexities surrounding responsibilities, duties, and powers that sit with the different risk authorities were discussed. For example, the Environment Agency have powers to act where there is a significant flood risk rather than the duty to maintain certain stretches of river. The owner of the waterway has a responsibility to maintain water courses, the other agencies have powers to act when deemed necessary.

Understanding that there is often no responsibility for the risk authorities to carry out work can be an opportunity to consider what could be done on the ground, at a community level.

A map was shown (available in the slides) of current activities funded by the SRA, this can vary from paying for gully jetting to work with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group on upstream mitigation.

Community Resilience

Bel Dering emphasised the importance of community resilience and thinking about the immediate situation in a flood event, the current water system context, and the future of the waterways.

Communities having emergency plans, response volunteers, and places of safety are the first steps to ensuring immediate resilience to a flood event.

Mapping the details of the water system at a very local level can aid this process and help establish responsibilities and owners. Landowners are often not aware of their role in maintaining the watercourse and the SRA can deliver workshops on how to share the information as well as how community action through volunteer days etc. can aid those living by water to maintain the system and reduce flood risk.

Mapping which authorities have oversight of certain stretches of water courses is also important, be it the environment agency on main rivers, internal drainage broad, or others, it is the authority with oversight that can provide consent for works.

Working within catchments, despite other boundaries, will be important. Thinking about your impact up and down stream is necessary when working with water. This could include county boundaries.

Funding

The SRA is funded by the taxpayer, around £3,000,000 per year, to deliver for Somerset residents.

Small amounts of SRA funding can increase the likelihood of one of the risk authorities carrying out works. These authorities such as Wessex water also have their own community funding sources to invest locally beyond their day-to-day business.

There are opportunities for match funding through organisations like the Rotary Club.

The upcoming Community Flood Action Fund was introduced, which will allow groups to fund smaller projects to reduce flood risk locally. This will be launched in December.

Responsibilities

It was expressed that the group would like to have a clearer understanding of which agency or landowner is specifically responsible for each stretch of water and piece of infrastructure. It is possible to provide data on what is a main river, and ordinary water course, an IDB drain etc.

Riparian Responsibilities: Despite having a 'responsibility' for certain areas, these agencies do not have a duty or responsibility to maintain them, they have the power to act when flood risk is deemed to be significant. Bell highlighted the importance of riparian responsibilities and the need for landowners to understand and maintain watercourses on their property. She encouraged communities to support landowners and work together to address flood risks.

The boundaries and divisions between the main authorities was raised as an issue, specifically that there is no one committee of all relevant parties that can determine responsibility.

Action: engage the flood working group to convene and set an agenda for a meeting with key agencies

Action: collate list of questions for EA

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

Tom Shopland, natural flood management advisor from the Farming Wildlife Advisory Group, introduced himself. He highlighted the need for a joined-up approach between those affected by flooding and those upstream from them. His role includes supporting communities with detailed water maps and education about the water cycle with the goal of working with the land upstream.

The challenges in doing this kind of upstream natural management include finding the right locations and amenable landowners. Bottlenecks happen when the community asks an agency to do something, and they can't do it because they don't have the local relationships. So, it is important for local people to document flow paths in heavy rain and then prioritising those source flows based on local knowledge of the impact. This can start by sending letters to upstream landowners to share advice and funding sources that could aid some of the issues experienced downstream. Working well with landowners is key to identifying project areas.

Tom can be contacted at Tom.Shopland@fwagsw.org.uk

Action: identify hotspots to conduct walk-about with all key agencies

Catchments

It was raised that not all flooding comes from rivers and that run-off from the Mendips is significant and that input should come from their team.

The LCN sits across 11 flood catchment areas, while this is too many sub-groups to run, we could group by common themes across the catchments. The ultimate aim is to reduce the shedding of the water off the hills. Having discussions with the Mendip Hills team will make a difference down the line for everybody and will stop the water becoming surface water, which can also be ground rising water.

Action: involve MHNL in flood working group

4) SALC: Community Health and Wellbeing

Fodo introduced SALC's community health and wellbeing programme, where support and varying levels of funding is available to parish councils wishing to provide more proactive health and wellbeing projects in their area. These are administered at a parish level but could be used by clusters of parishes within an LCN to work on priorities identified by this group.

The group discussed how broad the topic of health and well-being is, including flooding which can affect housing, people's mental health, and finance.

Beyond the seed funding, match funding would be expected to show commitment to projects and allow sustainability. The grant would be held by one council but could be used in agreement with other parishes or through partnering with community groups to deliver projects. The programme is about facilitating a step change for parishes to plan for the future in terms of health and wellbeing.

The LCN can help us dig deeper and uncover the issues affecting our communities, this could include a funded scoping exercise before any projects take place.

To apply for funds or find out more, contact Fodo: HWBSupport@somerset-alc.org.uk

5) Next meeting: 14th January 2025

6) **Actions**

Action	Responsibility	Timeline
Write to the portfolio holder and service director for highways with recommendations from the highways working group	LCN chair and highways working group	Before next LCN meeting
Convene an interim meeting of the flood working group to establish agenda for a larger in-person flood meet with key agencies	LCN link officer and LCN chair	ASAP
Coordinate a large meeting with key agencies	LCN link officer and LCN chair	Before next LCN meeting
Identify a few sites to conduct a walk through with key agencies	LCN link officer and LCN chair	Before next LCN meeting
Involve Mendip Hill National Landscape team in flooding talks	LCN link officer and LCN chair	Before next LCN meeting
Collate list of questions for EA, including more info on sluice gate operation	LCN link officer and LCN chair	Before next LCN meeting
Re-arrange active travel working group	Active Travel working group chair	Before next LCN meeting
New vice-chair to visit parishes in the LCN to increase involvement	LCN vice-chair Jim Reeves	ongoing