



Hestercombe

Local Community Network

Annual report 2025/26



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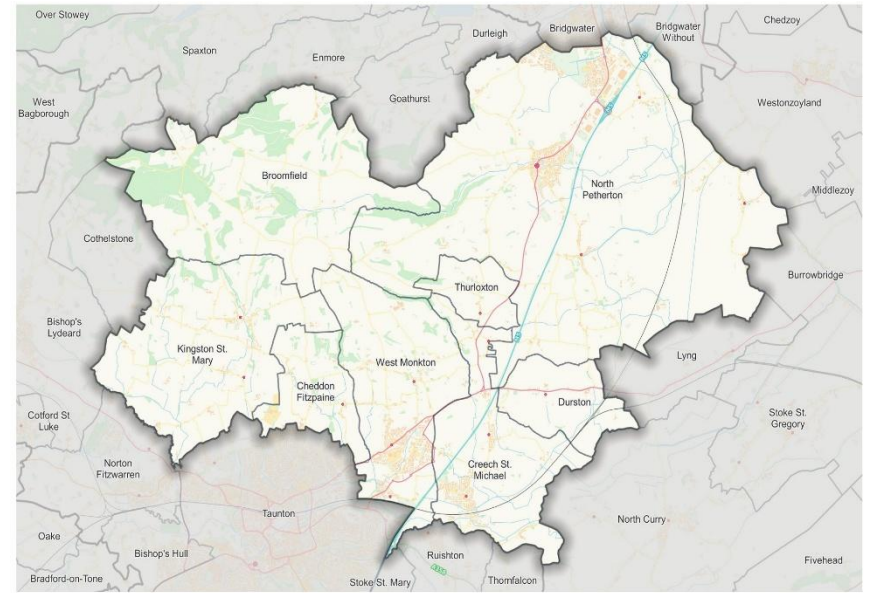
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Hestercombe Local Community Network

The Hestercombe LCN area lies between Somerset's county town of Taunton to the south and Bridgwater to the north. It comprises 8 parishes and has a population of approximately 20,900 (as at 2001), steadily increasing as new developments are finished, mostly near Bridgwater to date.

The landscape edges the Quantock National Landscape the west and borders on to the Levels and Moors to the east. These are very different areas and appeal to visitors in different ways.

An economically and culturally vibrant area, well known as for it's strong connections with the Carnival traditions which come alive and attract large crowds every autumn. North Petherton is the only town in this LCN, with a range of smaller communities in the parishes of Broomfield, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Creech St Michael, Durston, Kingston St Mary, Thurloxton and West Monkton.



Transport is considered to be good especially with the M5 motorway running north/south to the east of the LCN and the main A38 running roughly parallel to the west of the motorway.

The area is named after Hestercombe House, with 50 acres of formal and informal gardens and woodlands, which are open to the public and afford lovely views across Taunton itself.

Visit: www.somerset.gov.uk/local-community-networks/lcn-areas/Hestercombe/

Introduction and reflection



Cllr Phillip Spencer, Chair,
Hestercombe LCN & North
Petherton Town Council



Cllr Norman Cavill, Vice Chair,
Hestercombe LCN &
Somerset Council

Introduction from Cllr Phillip Spencer, Chair, Hestercombe Local Community Network:

“This year, the network has supported a wide range of activity, from strengthening opportunities for children and young people through Hestercombe Young People Evolving (HYPE) to improving dialogue on highways and traffic issues, to responding to the impact of flooding and supporting conversations around community safety. The regular involvement of partners, including policing colleagues and council officers, has helped ensure that local voices are heard and that important issues can be raised directly with those able to influence change.

Over the past year, Hestercombe Local Community Network has continued to bring together parish and town councils, local partners and residents to focus on the issues that matter most to our communities. What stands out most is the strength of local collaboration and the willingness of people to share concerns, ideas and practical solutions for the benefit of the wider area.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the work of Hestercombe LCN over the last year — councillors, partners, volunteers, officers and residents alike. Your time, commitment and local knowledge continue to shape the network and help it remain grounded in the needs of our communities. While challenges remain, this year has shown the value of working together, listening carefully and building strong local connections that can support positive change across the Hestercombe area”

Areas of focus

The Hestercombe LCN identified a variety of themes and priorities to explore activity at a local level. It is acceptable for these to change and alter over the year as priorities change adjusting to local and national circumstances.

Somerset Council (SC) is coming towards the conclusion of the Community Working Review and recommendations to improve this aspect of work are likely to become available, ready for implementation, from the autumn of 2026.

Children and Young People

Supporting them within their own villages

Highways and Traffic

Better communication and influencing decision making

Transport

Improved services and input into transport services

In addition, throughout the year we have discussed a range of other emerging topics which include:

- Policing and anti-social behaviour with local PSCOs and the Police and Crime Commissioner who gave a presentation in early 2026.
- Flooding, following a series of storms in early 2026, causing water ingress to some residential and business properties with many more under threat.
- Hinkley Point C workforce uplift proposals from the current ~12,000 to 15,000 - the LCN has provided feedback on the local and social impact of this change to EDF.

HYPE – ‘Hestercombe Young People Evolving’ working group

“A grant from Somerset Association of Local Councils enabled the HYPE project to research the needs and requirements of young people across the LCN area and approach youth provision in a collaborative way for the benefit of all young people, based on their expressed needs. This has proven to be a model for other LCNs of how councils within an LCN can work together to tackle common issues. For the young people of Hestercombe LCN, it has left a legacy of youth provision which we fully expect to continue into the future. There was support from all the parish and town councils, both financially and practically, encouraging confidence and trust in the project.

The activities delivered through three youth clubs have included art & crafts, dance, spoken word (Rap) and sports, and in addition sessions are being arranged with *On Your Bike* and *Quantock National Landscape*. To fund the ongoing provision all eight parishes are continuing to fund the activity at the same or increased levels for 2026/27. We are delighted to report HYPE has also recently been successful in attracting some funding from the Hinkley Point C Fund and from Awards for All, which will enable the sessions to continue in 2026/27.

For the young people of the LCN, the project has:

- Drawn more young people into social situations
- Given young people the chance to express their views on their local environment and needs
- Provided the channel for those views to be escalated to their local councils and delivered greater diversity of activities at their youth clubs
- Provided environments for the activities Young People requested to be tested in practice to form an ongoing sustainable offering
- Contributed to improving facilities at Creech St Michael Pavilion for the Youth Club, based on members’ wishes.
- Been inclusive of all young people across the LCN, including refugees.”



Report from Chair of the HYPE working group, David Stripp

Highways & Traffic Working Group (with Taunton)

The aim of this joint working group is to enhance communication and collaboration between town and parish councils, local partners and the highways and traffic teams in Somerset Council. It is a joint meeting with the Taunton LCN, meeting every two months or so to discuss local priorities related to highways issues particularly affecting the two areas. Meetings are attended by relevant Somerset Council highways and traffic officers, whose input and support are much appreciated. Their attendance helps LCN members better understand current pressures, planned works and the processes used to prioritise highways issues.

During early 2026, highways teams came under significant pressure following a series of severe storms across Somerset, particularly Storm Chandra. Flooding across the county, including parts of the Hestercombe LCN area, contributed to an increase in highways defects such as potholes.

The highways teams' updates helped LCN members understand the scale of any highways concerns or issues within their area, the current position and how repair work would be prioritised. This improved clarity and helped members explain the situation more effectively within their local communities.

The Highways Working Group has supported communities in understanding Council processes and facilitating Local action and activity and informing SC priorities. They have discussed priorities including:

- Streetlights and electrical assets (such as traffic lights)
- Highways and infrastructure planning
- Highways volunteer training, to help with cleaning road signs where safe to do so
- Enhanced Highways Maintenance Scheme for the parish/town councils
- Streetworks
- Gully clearance and drainage works
- Signposting, white lining and highways care over the winter including salt bins.



Increased traffic report.

Hestercombe House & Gardens.

A report on the **impact of the increase in traffic in residential developments** was produced and presented by North Petherton Town Council focusing along the main A38. It is expected that over 1000 homes will be built along this main road in the coming years, making an impact on traffic if it's assumed that each house will have at least one car. Planning applications are sent to the pertinent parish council but the impact may be wider. After a full LCN discussion, it was agreed that if any of the parish and town councils receives planning information for 50 to 60 homes or more, they would informally share it with the remainder of the LCN via the Link Officer to give others an opportunity for response. Over the last year parishes have been pro active at considering implications of planning applications across the wider geographic area giving more opportunity to respond as to how those plans might affect a wider area. This collaboration empowers the parish and town to share information, collaboration and to respond to plans for their local environment. The report has also been shared with neighbouring LCN areas.

Hestercombe House and Gardens estate sits fairly centrally within the area but unfortunately the estate has recently experienced operational and financial difficulties. It is a very popular and beautiful place of calm and to enjoy nature, for local people and tourists. The Link Officer is now in regular contact with the estate for a continued mutually beneficial working relationship with a view to work in collaboration to sustain and develop the site, particularly with nature recovery in mind.



Hinkley Point C Workforce Uplift

Towards the end of 2025, the Link Officer assisted with facilitating a series of engagement sessions to collate the views on the proposed Hinkley Point C workforce uplift, working closely with Economic Development colleagues from Somerset Council. Five LCN areas - Hestercombe LCN, Dowsborough LCN, Minehead and Watchet LCN, Bridgwater LCN and Burnham LCN - are directly and immediately impacted by the establishment of the largest building site in Europe and a large temporary workforce. The impact on local residents include changes in housing and accommodation availability, traffic and vehicle movement and impact on access to local services and facilities.

All affected LCNs' members were consulted on the possibility of a temporary workforce uplift. This resulted in a feedback meeting attended by EDF (who own Hinkley Point C) and Somerset Council. The LCN members expressed their concerns, including the further impact on increased vehicle traffic and on local services such as health care, car parking, increased demand for rental accommodation and environmental impacts. It was also recognised that the area had benefited by, for example, receiving funding for numerous community projects. The feedback from local residents was noted clearly and collectively.

Exercises such as these enable the local community to feel included and part of the major building project and that their local knowledge is valued by EDF. They assist EDF to find out the wider impact of their work. Through discussions and consultation, greater collaboration can be achieved for both parties, leading to greater understanding and an ability to maintain an effective working relationship.



Flooding & Storm Chandra

In early January 2026, Storm Chandra resulted in and prolonged heavy rainfall on already saturated ground, leading to flooding across parts of Somerset. Significant impacts were experienced across the Somerset Levels, including within parishes in the North Petherton area, which form part of the Hestercombe LCN. They were particularly affected due to their location and vulnerability to floods.

Flooding was also reported in other parts of the LCN, including areas within Kingston St Mary and locations around Taunton, such as Bathpool. A number of residential properties were flooded, and additional households reported being at risk of flooding. Community infrastructure was also affected, including highways, as well as businesses such as Taunton Rugby Club.

The flooding event is subject to a formal Section 19 (Flood and Water Management Act 2010) investigation, which will review the causes of the flooding and identify any actions or recommendations for relevant risk management authorities.

Following the floods, a multi-agency drop-in session was held at Brittons Ash Community Hub in March 2026. This provided residents with an opportunity to meet representatives from organisations including the Environment Agency and the Somerset Rivers Authority, and to provide feedback to help inform future planning and response activity.

Between May and July 2026, a series of 'flood cafés' were held for affected communities to provide ongoing support and information for residents. These sessions were attended by the LCN Link Officer, Village Agents, the Environment Agency and partner organisations.

Many parish and town councils have established Emergency Plans to support a local response to incidents such as flooding, power outages and other emergencies. These plans provide key information on local contacts, available resources and community facilities. The LCN will continue to support communities in alleviating the impacts of flooding, identifying mitigations, providing training and support in the development, maintenance and sharing of up-to-date Emergency Plans.



Post-flooding drop-in at
Brittons Ash Community Hub,
March 2026



Flooding across The Levels

Police liaison with LCN

A frequent request from LCN members was for more regular input from the police, to have more direct contact and develop a working relationship with them. The Link Officer made contact with the local policing team and as a direct response, a PCSO regularly attends main meetings.

During the past year, Hestercombe LCN has invited the PCSO to come along for 30 minutes prior to a meeting, for an informal chat with people and then take the initial ten minutes or so of the agenda for a regular update. They are welcome to stay or leave as they wish. This has resulted in a closer working relationship between the LCN members and police, gaining trust and collaboration.

PCSO Lora Bray, based in Bridgwater, has seen a benefit in coming along to the LCN and meeting up with a variety of people in one venue. Lora said, *"Attendance and participation in the LCN enable local policing teams to engage and collaborate with partners and community groups, providing meaningful insight into local concerns and community issues, and ensuring policing priorities and demand are informed by lived experience."*



In March 2026, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Clare Moody gave a presentation about her role, wider policing issues and what can be achieved locally. The PCSOs who regularly attend the LCN meetings, contributed towards an interesting and lively conversation about fighting and preventing crime. People were reminded that crime needs to be reported at all times. This has helped narrow down any particular hot spots or individuals that may be active in undesirable behavior but without reporting that locally, the police are unable to use that intelligence to gain a complete picture. Without that reporting, the police are unable to address issues. The LCN will continue to offer their support to the police and other emergency services.

Hestercombe LCN Meetings and Venues (June 2025 – June 2026)

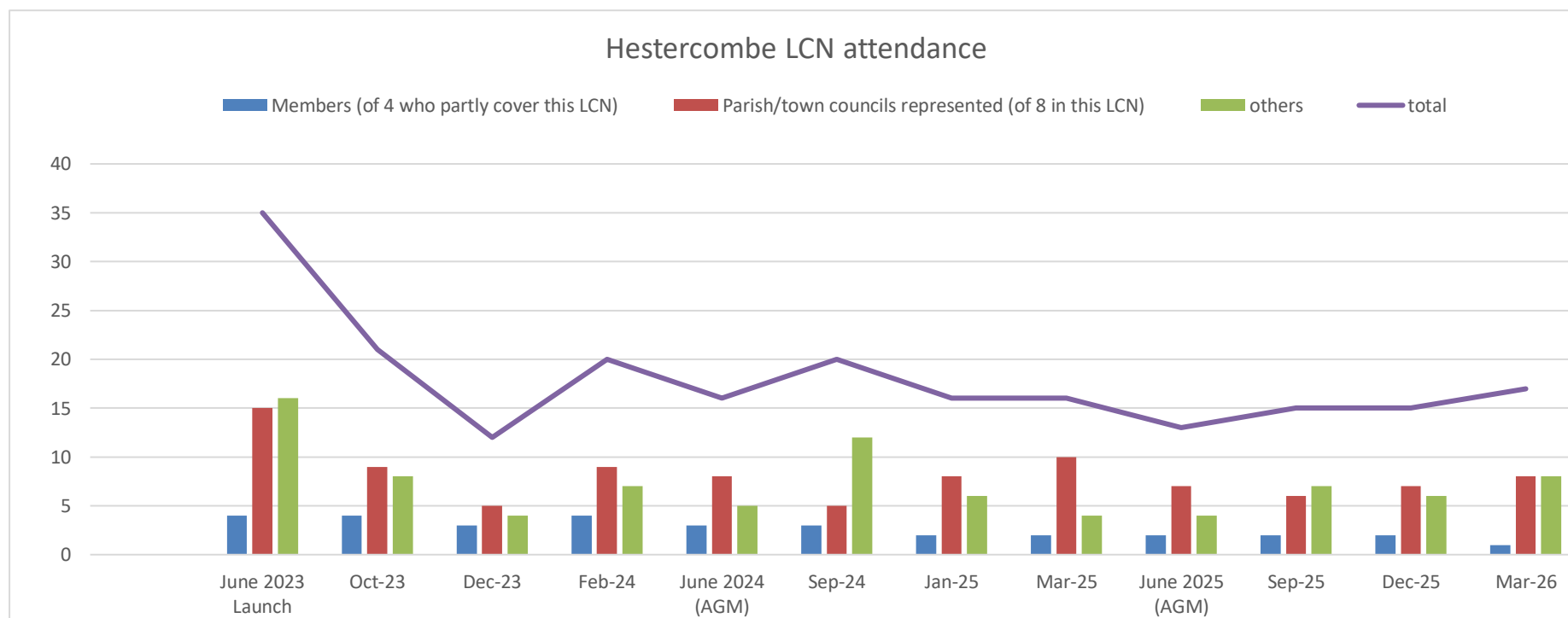
12th June 2025 (AGM) at North Petherton Rugby Club

24th September 2025 at North Newton village hall

11th December 2025 at West Monkton village hall

4th March 2026 at North Petherton Rugby Club

24th June 2026 (AGM) at Kingston St Mary village hall



Looking forward - the year ahead

The Hestercombe LCN has made progress in fostering collaboration among local organisations particularly local councils. However, we recognised that challenges related to engagement and funding remain. The more we know about these challenges, the more they can be recognised and possibly addressed, either individually or collectively.

In the coming year we will see the recommendations of the recent Community Engagement review of how Somerset Council works with its communities. We need to ensure that we are using our resources appropriately and effectively, which will no doubt impact on the workings of LCNs, recognising successes and achieves and looking at improving other aspects. Until then, we will continue as at present.

- Continuing to build on this year's progress. We will aim to grow our engagement with communities and invite a wider attendance.
- Continue with the joint Hestercombe and Taunton LCNs highways groups, with direct input from highways officers, gaining direct responses and taking the opportunity to feed back to them.
- Continue to support and build on the success gained by HYPE.
- Working with services across Somerset Council to increase and plan for engagement opportunities to inform policy and decision making.
- Continue to respond to requests to be the voice of the LCN attendees and membership and offer grass roots, honest responses
- Providing more opportunities to learn about Somerset Council's services and ways of working.
- To be a part of the Local Transport Plan engagement.

For more information on any of the activities detailed in this report, please contact the LCN Link Officer, Anne Shilton at hestercombelcn@somerset.gov.uk or more general enquiries from lcns@somerset.gov.uk.