

## Somerset Council Report to Croscombe Parish Council meeting Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2023

### Local Community Network (LCN)

LCN Area Shepton (Area 3), of which Croscombe is a member, had its first meeting on Monday 31st July, at 7pm at Shape Council Chamber Shepton Mallet. It was well attended with good representation from town and parish councils. Councillor Kate Egan attended as an observer. It was very much a scoping meeting with full support from Somerset Council officers, revealing a scope which is very encouraging! One nominated member from each town or parish council in the area has a vote, equal to that of each Somerset Councillor present. All town and parish councillors however are encouraged to attend. The next meeting will take place in October 2023, date to be announced.

Please can I very much encourage Croscombe Parish Council to nominate a voting representative to attend these meetings?

### Phosphates

Somerset Council is hoping to secure Government funding to deliver phosphate mitigation measures which will unlock the delivery of 18,000 new homes across the area and provide for longer term nature recovery.

The Council working in partnership with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Plymouth University, Salinity Solutions, and Dorset Council, has submitted a bid for £10.5m to the Government's Nutrient Mitigation Fund.

The funding would be used to expand the Council's existing phosphate credit scheme and deliver both interim and long-term phosphate mitigation measures including the installation of modular units to provide a secondary treatment process at wastewater treatment works in the catchment area.

The new energy efficient water processing technology, developed by Salinity Solutions, has the potential to assist all the nutrient neutrality catchment areas by providing cost effective bridging measures to 2030 – meeting the Governments Technically Achievable Limit (TAL) proposed under the Levelling and Regeneration Bill. It would also work alongside the delivery of nature-based solutions for nutrient neutrality, which take longer to establish.

Salinity Solutions and Wessex Water have delivered a no-cost trial for Somerset Council to demonstrate the efficacy of their modular water treatment units for phosphate mitigation. A unit has been in place at the Fivehead Wastewater Treatment Works near Taunton for two weeks allowing independent water sampling to be undertaken. Early indications show promising results with the first verified laboratory results showing over 98% of phosphates and 88% of nitrates removed.

For further information, visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/trial-brings-hope-for-phosphates-funding/>.

### Housing

More than 2,000 affordable homes have been delivered across Somerset over the past three years, thanks to Somerset Council.

The Housing Enabling team have been working closely with a range of affordable housing delivery partners to provide new, high quality, energy efficient homes that locals can afford.

The Council understands that affordable housing must meet a range of needs and work is taking place to increase the provision for larger homes, fully adapted wheelchair accessible homes and is working in partnership within parishes to satisfy identified housing need.

Development highlights include:

- Cornhill, Wellington – a development of twenty-six homes for rent and sixteen for shared ownership by LiveWest on a brownfield site within the centre of the town. The 42-home development included the repair and conversion of a listed building.
- Rainbow Way, Minehead – works have started to deliver the Council's first scheme of fifty-four net zero carbon affordable homes for rent. It includes a broad range of housing types, including fully adapted wheelchair homes and bungalows.
- Neat Lane, Pilton – a development of twenty affordable high-quality homes has been completed, all for social rent and for local people in the village of Pilton. This second phase rural development is situated next to an existing rural exceptions site on land gifted by Michael Eavis, but now transferred to the housing provider, Guinness Partnership. The scheme consists of 8 x 1 bed flats, 6 x 2 bed houses, 4 x 3 bed houses and 2 x 2 bed bungalows, with the latter designed for older people.

New homes are being built across Somerset and will be available to rent or buy through low-cost homeownership. Details on these affordable homes are available on the Homefinder Somerset website here: [www.homefindersomerset.co.uk/choice/content.aspx?pageid=500](http://www.homefindersomerset.co.uk/choice/content.aspx?pageid=500).

### Homelessness Health

At the NHS Parliamentary Awards held in London to coincide with the NHS 75th birthday, it was announced that Somerset's Homelessness Health in Somerset - the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Nursing Service - was the overall winner in the Health Equalities category.

In Somerset, hundreds of people are affected by homelessness every year, including those sleeping on the streets. They are some of the most vulnerable patients in our county, often with complex health needs.

People who are homeless, or vulnerably housed, face huge barriers to accessing healthcare and experience some of the most severe health inequalities, reporting much poorer health than the general population.

Drug and alcohol difficulties are common amongst the homeless population who are also more likely to struggle with their mental health and have experienced significant trauma in their lives.

Since 2021, the NHS in Somerset, has been working in partnership with colleagues in Somerset Council's Public Health Service, the voluntary sector and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to support the health of those experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable communities such as street workers. By pulling together different funding streams and partners across the whole health system, this collaborative and strategic approach has had a huge positive impact on supporting those most at risk of experiencing health inequalities.

Homelessness Health in Somerset Service, supported by Inclusion Health GPs, is funded by NHS Somerset, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, and Somerset Council. This service recently secured

additional funding from NHS England to add a mental health support service to the existing service to become one of only a few services in the country to provide a joint physical and mental health service to those experiencing homelessness.

### Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

Businesses and organisations in Somerset are being encouraged to find out if they are eligible for capital funding grants aimed at supporting businesses and community infrastructure in rural areas.

The funding is available following Somerset Council's successful £3.4 million submission into Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

This first call for applications is seeking to allocate a total of £850,000 to eligible capital infrastructure projects. These projects must be delivered – and grant funding spent - by the end of March 2024. Grants can be between £5,000 and £100,000 and match-funding contributions are required.

The REPF has very specific criteria set by Government. Therefore, Somerset Council's Economic Development team is urging businesses and organisations to carefully check eligibility on their website <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/funding-and-grants-for-business/>

To discuss a potential project applicants should email REPF@somerset.gov.uk in the first instance. A further £2.5 million call for proposals for capital project activity and expenditure in the 24/25 financial year is expected later in the year.

### Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Somerset Council has been given the lead role in developing a plan to protect and enhance nature and wildlife in Somerset. The Council has been appointed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to lead the preparation of a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Somerset.

Led by the Council and the Somerset Local Nature Partnership, the strategy LNRS will be a new long-term evidence-based strategy to recover, protect and enhance nature and wildlife here in Somerset.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, the Council will establish what is needed to protect and restore Somerset's nature to benefit the biodiversity of habitats and species. It will also look to identify further environmental benefits, such as flood regulation, water quality and access to green space for health and wellbeing.

Working with the Somerset Local Nature Partnership, the Council will:

- Engage with stakeholders across the farming, health, community, development and natural resource management sectors.
- Drive a coordinated action plan.
- Highlight where the most important areas for nature are.
- Identify opportunities to restore, grow and connect wildlife in urban and rural areas.
- Adopt a joined-up approach working with residents, groups, landowners, and organisations to build a mapped framework.

Opportunities for Somerset residents, businesses, farmers, landowners, and communities to have their say and contribute to the strategy will be shared in the coming months.

You can find more information on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the ongoing work to protect Somerset's environment in our climate strategy on the Somerset Council website.

### Homes for Ukraine

More host families are needed in Somerset to help support Ukrainian refugees who have been forced to flee their country.

Since the Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched in March 2022, Somerset has welcomed over 1,500 Ukrainians to date, with host families playing a pivotal role in creating a safe environment for guests to re-settle and rebuild their lives in some way, supporting and helping them navigate a new life in the UK.

Becoming a host (or sponsor) can be hugely rewarding, with the key consideration being the ability to provide a bedroom and a comfortable place to live for a minimum of 6 months.

The next step is to register your interest and Somerset Council can provide more information about how hosts and guests are matched, training and support for both parties, checks and visits that form part of the arrangements, thank you payments to hosts and what to do if the relationship breaks down.

To find out more about the Homes for Ukraine scheme and to register your interest in becoming a host, visit Homes for Ukraine: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/housing-support/homes-for-ukraine/>

There are a number of ways to support refugees and asylum seekers in Somerset, in addition to hosting. If you are able to offer your time, skills or resources to supporting guests, get in touch at [homesforukraine@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:homesforukraine@somerset.gov.uk).

### Transport

Two innovative Somerset Council initiatives boosting public transport and active travel are in the running for prestigious awards.

Bridgwater's growing network of cycling, wheeling and walking paths provides the focus for The Bridgwater Way. Through working with schools, a series of initiatives have been delivered including an annual schools' challenge, bike maintenance training, Dr Bike healthchecks for pupil and parent bikes, led rides, competitions in school classroom activities, including learning how to design streets for more walking and cycling. Increases in walking and cycling of up to 27 per cent have been achieved and reductions in car use of up to 22 per cent.

Somerset Council's Bus It campaign, supported by the passenger group Somerset Bus Partnership, was launched last summer with the aim of increasing bus use in the county, protecting valuable services and raising awareness of Somerset's Bus Service Improvement Plan. As well as using local media including radio and social media to highlight the savings bus users can make and benefits to the environment, the campaign, focuses on key initiatives like the £1 fare for any single journey in the Taunton zone, and new evening bus services linking key towns. Bus It uses a range of unique eye-catching in-house designed materials and messaging, winning plaudits and a request from another authority to purchase the content.

The fare capping and evening bus initiatives, along with the campaign, have so far helped to support a 24 per cent rise in bus use in Taunton and 14 per cent rise across Somerset. Bus It is up for Campaign of the Year Award.

### Parking charges

Somerset Council will be introducing new parking charges across the county following a review which will give consistency and cover inflationary costs.

During August, there will be an overall 10 per cent rise in parking charges across Somerset - though this will vary from car park to car park, in some the increase will be very slightly above or below 10 per cent, as the new fee will be rounded up to the nearest 10p.

Parking season tickets are also being increased by a similar percentage in the measures agreed at the Council's Annual Budget Meeting.

To provide support for residents, on-street parking permits in residential areas are not increasing.

Prior to the Council's review of parking charges there was some inconsistency across the county - in some cases parking charges have not increased for years.

The new charges recognise and allow for inflationary pressures and will ensure the Council can meet its transport objectives without increasing additional demand on its budget.

### E-Newsletters

Somerset Council produces a number of e-newsletters covering many topics including business, the environment, waste and recycling, transport, news and events.

To receive these important updates directly into your email inbox and to choose which emails are most relevant to you, visit: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSC/subscriber/new>.

### Trees

A ten-year plan to enhance and protect Somerset trees and woodland has been adopted by Somerset Council. Amongst its ambitious aims, the strategy sets out a plan for planting 240 hectares of new trees and woodlands each year across the county until 2033, this would increase the county's tree coverage from its current 8% to the national average of 13% and more if possible.

As one of the council's priorities to create a greener, more sustainable Somerset the strategy recognises the Council's role in helping tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss and has been developed in partnership with the Environment Agency, Somerset Local Nature Partnership, Exmoor National Park, Quantock Hills, AONB Partnership, The Forestry Commission and The Woodland Trust.

Built around five themes, the strategy seeks to strengthen the county's bond with its trees, creating a 'wood culture' where the people of Somerset can access and be a part of caring about Somerset's woodland.

Work is already underway with the creation of three new posts, funded through a successful bid to Defra's Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund. With tasks including supporting existing tree groups and encouraging new ones, these roles are expected to be in place by the beginning of the summer.

As climate change brings warmer temperatures and more extreme weather conditions, the strategy also aims to make Somerset's woodlands more resilient and adaptable to these changes by protecting, expanding, managing, and diversifying our existing treescapes.

By coming together to deliver this strategy everyone in Somerset can help prevent further decline of our natural environment and help to reduce the impacts of climate change.

## Roads

Somerset Council's Highways team have started to surface dress some roads as part of the summer maintenance programme. Surface dressing is a nationally recognised maintenance technique for sealing a road, improving skid resistance, and preventing water getting under the surface. This is crucial to help stop potholes forming. It works by coating an existing road with bitumen, covering it with stone chippings and then rolling it.

The work can only be carried out in dry weather, so the Council's surface dressing programme is flexible, and dates can change at short notice.

You can check which roads are being surface dressed here: [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/surface-dressing/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/surface-dressing/)

If you need to report an overgrown verge, pothole or more, you can do so here: [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/).

You can see dates of planned works here: [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/roadworks-and-travel/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/roadworks-and-travel/), and make sure to follow Travel Somerset on Twitter and Facebook.

## Libraries

Children in Somerset can sharpen their mental and physical skills this summer by joining the Summer Reading Challenge at Somerset Council's Libraries.

Youngsters aged 4-11 can visit Somerset Libraries to join a superstar team and their marvellous mascots and get involved in the Challenge themed around the power of play, sport, games, and physical activity.

Through taking part in the Challenge, with free materials from Somerset Libraries and online via the Challenge website, children will be encouraged to keep physically and mentally active over the summer break. The characters – brought to life by children's author and illustrator Loretta Schauer – navigate a fictional summer obstacle course and track their reading as they go, rewarded by free incentives including stickers.

The Summer Reading Challenge aims to keep imaginations moving over the school holiday through activity challenge cards from the Youth Sports Trust, and an exciting, themed book collection.

Visit <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries/our-libraries/> to find out which services are available for families to enjoy.

The Summer Reading Challenge has been running since 1999 and helps to improve children's reading skills and confidence over the summer holidays, making sure they are ready for their return to school. With the help of local libraries, the Summer Reading Challenge is accessible to all and provides a fun, free activity for children. In 2022, the Summer Reading Challenge reached more than 6,500 children in Somerset who read more than 175,000 children's books - a 42% increase on children's book issues from the previous challenge.

Customers who need in-person help or advice from Somerset Council will find support at every Somerset Library from July.

Staff in Somerset's libraries are trained to provide digital support to help customers self-serve when needed. From July, they will also be able to set up virtual, face-to-face meetings on the spot so people can speak directly to a member of the Customer Service team.

If a customer has a complex question or issue, the advisers will be able to pass the enquiry onto the right specialist to help. Customers will also be able to take documents that can be digitally uploaded and sent to the appropriate Somerset Council team.

Customer Access Points were initially set up in seven libraries in April when Somerset Council came into being, replacing Somerset County Council and the four district councils, Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset.

Now, after a successful trial, it is being extended to all Somerset's libraries, providing customers with access to council services and support in a place that is convenient.

The support will be provided during library opening hours, which, in most cases, includes weekends. The virtual meetings will only be available Monday to Friday from 8.30am-4.30pm

## Volunteers

Volunteers are often at the centre of our communities and the last few years have shown us the importance of their work.

That is why the Somerset Prepared partnership launched its Community Resilience Award 2023 at the end of Volunteers Week (1 – 7 June).

These awards recognise people or groups who have gone above and beyond to help their community be better able to deal with emergencies.

Nominations for these awards are now open and close on 7th September 2023. Submissions can be entered [here](#).

The Awards will be a key element of the annual Somerset Prepared Community Day, which will be held at Wincanton Racecourse on Thursday, October 5th. The partners welcome local people to celebrate Somerset's community emergency volunteers, with workshops, presentations, and equipment demonstrations. Places are free and can be booked [here](#).

As well as learning about how to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, this event will give the opportunity to connect with emergency services, community organisations, voluntary groups and other like-minded individuals.

## Public Health

Public Health leaders in Somerset are urging people who suffer from Diabetes to take part in a programme which could radically improve their quality of life.

The county is one of just twenty-one areas of the country offering a free NHS programme to support residents with the life-threatening condition to lose weight and potentially achieve remission. Type 2 diabetes affects more than 30,000 people in Somerset.

The NHS Type 2 Diabetes 'Path to Remission' programme began in Somerset in June last year and so far, 209 residents locally have signed up to take part. The 12-month programme of support from trained coaches aims to help people with the condition to achieve remission, reducing their risk of diabetes complications and the need for medication.

The initial phase involves 3 months of meal replacement with a range of soups, shakes and bars, all of which are provided free of charge to participants. This is followed by reintroduction of healthy meals. On average, participants in Somerset have lost 14% of their starting weight after six months on the programme.

To be eligible for the programme residents must be aged between 18 and 65, have been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in the last 6 years, and have a raised body mass index (BMI).

If you think you might be eligible you should check the programme website and complete a self-assessment questionnaire. If you are still interested, contact your GP practice about a referral. Places are limited, so it is best to do this as soon as possible.

## Recycling

Residents are being urged to help end a surge in dangerous fires caused by poorly sorted recycling and rubbish.

Fire services have joined Somerset Council and its collections contractor SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK in asking for people to take more care or risk sparking dangerous and potentially deadly blazes.

In the last two years more than ten depot and truck fires are thought to have been caused by people putting batteries, gas canisters or still warm disposable barbeques in their waste.

And the risk is on the rise - with three fires sparked in Somerset recycling depots in the last month.

In the last two weeks of May alone, vigilant crews have pulled more than two hundred potentially explosive camping gas canisters out of household recycling. But some inevitably sneak through to the sorting process.

Batteries and gas canisters can ignite when crushed in the back of recycling trucks or as part of the sorting process in the Material Recovery Facilities at the Evercreech and Taunton depots.

Disposable barbeques put into refuse bins without being fully soaked and extinguished can retain heat, smoulder and cause fires in truck and when tipped back at the depot.

Fires cause damage and put lives at risk, and as the weather warms up Somerset Council and SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK are calling on residents to please do the right thing with these potentially dangerous items.

What should you do?

- Small household batteries - can be recycled in weekly kerbside collections but must be put in a clear, tied plastic bag put on the top of the recycling box. They must not be left loose in recycling boxes, put in the Bright Blue Bag or in the rubbish bin.
- Large batteries, such as car batteries, cannot be recycled at the kerbside and should be taken to your local recycling site.
- Small household batteries and electricals can also be taken to recycling sites, always check with team on-site for the correct area to put these.
- Small gas canisters - like those used in camping stoves are not recyclable in kerbside collections and must not be put in the rubbish bin. They must be taken to your local



household recycling site. Always check with team on-site for the correct area to put these.

Disposable barbecues – should be fully immersed in water and left to cool completely before putting into your refuse bin.

### Licensing

Somerset Council must review its Statement of Licensing Policy every five years. The Policy document sets out an approach to the Council's licensing functions in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003.

Following consultation in July, the Council will consider responses and make any appropriate amendments to the Statement of Licensing Policy. The final draft will be considered and agreed at a Full Council meeting.

Martin Lovell

14/08/2023