Somerset Council
County Hall, Taunton
Somerset, TA1 4DY

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Minehead and Watchet LCN AGM

Date: Wednesday 16 July 2025

Time: 6:30 – 8:30pm

Location: Minehead Community Centre, Alexandra Road, Minehead, Somerset TA24 5DW

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Mandy Chilcott	Somerset Council
Cllr Andy Hadley	Somerset Council
Cllr Rosemary Woods	Somerset Council
Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker	Carhampton Parish Council
Cllr Tony Brooks	Crowcombe Parish Council
Cllr Craig Palmer	Minehead Town Council
Cllr Ian Timmins	Monksilver Parish Council
Cllr Judith Stabb	Old Cleeve Parish Council
Cllr Julian Russell	Sampford Brett Parish Council
Cllr John Irven	Watchet Town Council
Cllr Mark Philipson	West Quantoxhead Parish Council
PCSO Katherine Williams	Avon and Somerset Police

Officer Attendance:

John Buttivant, Coastal Engineer, (Environment Agency)
James Divall, Head of Service, Climate and Environment
Mike O Dowd Jones – Transport and Infrastructure
Sunita Mills – Head of Transportation
Chris Phillips – Head of Strategic Partnerships
Sam Murrell – LCN Link Officer
Anne Shilton – LCN Link Officer

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Other attendees

Name:	Representing:
Ben Parker (clerk)	Minehead Town Council
Ali Sanderson	Spark Somerset
Sue Smith	West Somerset Flood Group
Paul Matcham	Minehead Eye / Connect Somerset
Zara Aitken	Minehead Coastal Development Trust
Wayne Stokes	Thrive (formerly CCS) Village Agent
Heather & Rod Scotney	Friends of Minehead Harbour
Wendy Philipson	Resident
Fodo Higginson	SALC Health & Wellbeing

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Items: **Summary of key points of discussion and outcome:**

1 Introductions

Sam opened the meeting and introduced the guest speakers, and the other Somerset Council officers in the room. She expressed appreciation for their attendance and advised that the meeting would be for two hours duration. There would be the option of continuing conversations after the meeting, where attendees could also enjoy refreshments, and use the time as a networking opportunity.

Apologies for absence

Maya Clayden (MCDT), Ray Tew (MCDT) – sent substitute Zara Aitken, Bel Deering (SRA), Citizens Advice WS, Cllrs Christine Lawrence and Andy Sully (SC), Loretta Whetlor (SALC), John Richards (WACET),

2 Election of Chairperson

Cllr Andy Hadley proposed Cllr Mandy Chilcott to the position of Chair. This was seconded by Cllr Craig Palmer who also proposed Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker to the position of Vice Chair.

As there were no other nominations, and everyone agreed, the proposal was carried and both Cllrs Mandy Chilcott and Brenda Maitland Walker were returned to their positions as Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

Mandy thanked everyone for their endorsement and looked forward to building on the emerging work going into the new year.

She went on to present gifts and cards to Kali Martin (Highways), PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams (Avon and Somerset Police), Sam Murrell

(LCN Link Officer) and Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker to acknowledge their support and hard work of the LCN over the last year.

3 Election of Vice Chairperson

Covered in Point 2.

4 To consider the Local Community Network Annual Report for 2024-25

The Chair brought this item forward and asked that the LCN acknowledge the report without any debate, but recognising the good work that had taken place over the previous year.

She suggested that a more detailed overview of LCN's work was presented later in the year, when time was not so pressing. This was agreed by all attendees.

5 Update from Avon and Somerset Police

PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams provided an update on police activities, including targeting antisocial driving, improving town watch schemes, and focusing on underage sales and shoplifting. She also mentioned ongoing engagement with schools and community groups.

- **Antisocial Driving:** Katherine detailed the police's proactive operations targeting antisocial driving, including stopping multiple vehicles, issuing fines, and seizing vehicles without insurance. The ongoing reporting of vehicles that are causing concern was encouraged to maintain road safety.
- **Town Watch Schemes:** Katherine discussed efforts to improve town watch schemes, including updating the outdated town watch scheme and linking it with the national Speed Board speed link to enable safe sharing among shops, pubs, businesses, and police. Cllr Andy Hadley advised that a visit to Lidl supermarket would be welcomed.
- **Underage Sales:** Katherine highlighted the focus on underage sales, including conducting licensing checks and ensuring compliance with age-restricted item sales. High visibility patrols were carried out in hotspot areas for shoplifting.
- **Community Engagement:** Katherine mentioned ongoing engagement with schools, community groups, and local shops, including fraud awareness talks and participation in community events. The police also worked with the community Speed Watch team to address speeding vehicles.
- **Safeguarding and Welfare**: Significant time spent on safeguarding vulnerable individuals, including a recent multi-agency intervention to support a community member at risk, highlighting the importance of joint agency work.

- **Reporting and Communication**: Encouragement to use 101 or online reporting for incidents, and regular updates provided on police web pages.

6 Guest Speaker: John Buttivant, Coastal Engineer (Environment Agency)

John is the Chair of the Severn Estuary Coastal Group, and a coastal flood risk management specialist.

John presented a series of slides which are attached to these notes.

- **Flooding and Coastal Erosion Risks:** John discussed the risks of flooding and coastal erosion in the area, highlighting the impact of climate change and the need for long-term solutions.
    - **Flooding Risks:** John explained the significant risks of flooding in the area, particularly during high spring tides combined with storms. He mentioned the vulnerability of properties in Minehead, Bridgwater, and Weston Super Mare.
    - **Climate Change Impact:** John highlighted the impact of climate change on increasing the number of properties at risk of flooding and coastal erosion. He noted that the number of properties at risk could double over the next 100 years.
    - **Long-term Solutions:** John emphasised the need for long-term solutions to manage the risks of flooding and coastal erosion, including maintaining existing defences and considering new strategies to address future challenges.
- **Coastal Erosion at Watchet:** John explained the coastal erosion issues at Watchet, including the closure of the coast road and the impact on the mobile home park. He mentioned the need for long-term solutions to address the erosion.
    - **Coast Road Closure:** John discussed the closure of the coast road at Watchet due to coastal erosion, highlighting the movement detected in the Cliff face and the deformation of the road surface.
    - **Mobile Home Park Impact:** John explained the impact of coastal erosion on the mobile home park, including the loss of gardens and the relocation of homes. He noted the challenges and costs associated with addressing the erosion.
    - **Long-term Solutions:** John emphasised the need for long-term solutions to address the coastal erosion at Watchet, considering the complexities and costs involved in protecting the area.

- **Blue Anchor Coastal Protection:** John discussed the coastal protection measures at Blue Anchor, including the installation of rock armour and the challenges of maintaining the road and protecting properties from erosion.
    - **Rock Armour Installation:** John described the installation of rock armour at Blue Anchor to protect the coastline and prevent erosion. He mentioned the historical reinforcement of the highway and the ongoing challenges of maintaining the road.
    - **Property Protection:** John highlighted the challenges of protecting properties from coastal erosion at Blue Anchor, including the impact of large waves and the need for ongoing maintenance and reinforcement of defences.
    - **Hotel Erosion:** John discussed the erosion affecting the hotel at Blue Anchor, including the gradual slumping of the face of the cliff and the emergency works carried out to stabilise the area.

- **Minehead Flooding and Coastal Defences:** John provided an overview of the flooding and coastal defences at Minehead, including the success of the 1990s scheme and the need for ongoing maintenance and long-term solutions.
    - **1990s Scheme Success:** John highlighted the success of the 1990s coastal defence scheme at Minehead, which has effectively protected the area from significant flooding and damage.
    - **Ongoing Maintenance:** John emphasised the importance of ongoing maintenance of the coastal defences at Minehead, including the regular monitoring and replacement of non-return flat valves on outfalls to prevent seawater ingress.
    - **Long-term Solutions:** John discussed the need for long-term solutions to address the risks of flooding and coastal erosion at Minehead, considering the impact of climate change and the potential for future breaches.

- **Future Coastal Management Options:** John presented potential future coastal management options for Minehead, including reinforcing existing defences or setting back defences. He emphasised the need for a partnership approach with the council and other stakeholders.

7 Guest Speaker: James Divall, Head of Service: Climate & Natural Environment (Somerset Council)

James oversees various functions related to climate strategy, flood and water management, resilience and adaptation, green estates, ecology, national landscapes, and nature recovery/wellbeing.

James presented a series of slides which are attached to these notes.

- **Somerset Council's Climate and Environment Service:** James Divall introduced the new Climate and Environment Service at Somerset Council, outlining the various services and strategic work being undertaken, including the local nature recovery strategy and flood risk management.

    - The flood and coastal team is currently under-resourced, operating at about half the required staffing level due to retirements and departures following the council merger. Recruitment for additional officers, including engineers, is ongoing.
    - The recent merger of five councils into one has created significant culture change and challenges in identifying who is responsible for various functions, impacting efficiency and collaboration.

- **Community Engagement and Collaboration:** James emphasised the importance of community engagement and collaboration with various agencies and organisations to address flooding and coastal erosion issues. He highlighted the need for better intelligence and informed decision-making.

    - **Complex Governance and Responsibilities**: Water governance is complex, with overlapping duties among agencies, making it difficult to clarify responsibilities and coordinate actions, especially in flood and coastal management.
    - **Lack of Coastal Focus**: There has been a lack of focus on coastal issues within the flood and coastal team, with most attention previously on inland flooding. The need to re-engage with coastal communities and partners is recognised.
    - **Data and Intelligence Gaps**: The council struggles to consolidate and utilise environmental data effectively, making informed decision-making and policy development more difficult. There is a need for a better record centre for the environment, flooding, and climate data.
    - **Statutory Duties and Prioritisation**: The team must strengthen delivery of statutory functions (e.g., as coastal erosion and flood risk management authorities) and prioritise these over "nice to have" projects.
- **Funding and Resilience Measures:** James discussed the need for seeking funding and implementing resilience measures to support communities in dealing with flooding and coastal erosion. He mentioned the importance of emergency planning and asset management.

- A major asset review is underway, but maintenance of key infrastructure (e.g., drainage ditches, trees) is hampered by limited resources and programming challenges.
- **Community Engagement**: There is a recognized need to improve engagement with communities, towns, and parishes, as local knowledge is critical for effective environmental management.
- **Funding and Long-Term Vision**: Securing funding for long-term coastal resilience and adaptation projects is challenging, and developing a clear, shared vision for the coastline that balances risk, conservation, and economic development is still in progress.

Questions from the Floor in response to the presentations.

- A question was raised about improving drainage along the split-level promenade in Minehead, as ground-based flooding occurs after heavy rain and the current drainage system is ineffective. The issue of responsibility between the Environment Agency and the Council was discussed, with a need for a more lasting solution.

- There was a discussion about the maintenance of rhynes (drainage ditches) in Minehead, with concerns that lack of maintenance reduces their flood attenuation capacity. The need for regular clearance and the use of local contractors was mentioned.

- The impact of coastal erosion on the road at Watchet was discussed, including the closure of the coast road and the need for stakeholder involvement to address the problem.

8 Approve the minutes of the previous meeting

These were agreed by those present as a true record of the meeting.

9 Matters arising (not part of later agenda items)

Community Health and Well-being Grants: Fodo announced the availability of community health and well-being grants, encouraging participant town and parishes to apply for funding to support local projects. Applications need to be submitted by the 22nd September.

Somerset Council Boundary Review Update:
The draft recommendations are now open to the next stage of public consultation. and parishes can see the proposals at Somerset | LGBCE.

At the present time there were no proposed changes to the LCN boundary or core membership although this may flex over time.

10 Update on the Highways Working Group

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 June at Beckett House had been circulated with the agenda pack. There were a number of questions and matters arising.

- The issue of tree maintenance along highways was brought up, noting that many roadside trees have not been managed for years, causing difficulties for residents. The need for a management program and cooperation between Minehead Town Council and Somerset Council was highlighted.

- A question was asked about the process for reporting potholes and other highway issues, with confirmation that the council's online reporting system is effective and that photos help expedite repairs. There is a move away from the “Fix my Street” website, which belongs to a third party, and is not monitored by Somerset Council.

11 To determine the priorities and areas of focus for the LCN in the next 12 months:-

- **Highways Working Group Continuation:** The participants agreed to continue the Highways Working Group for Minehead and Watchet with quarterly meetings scheduled for the coming year.

- **Coastal Protection Working Group:** Attendees supported the establishment of a Coastal Protection Working Group to address the issues of coastal erosion and flooding in the area. This would be a multi-agency group including the Environment Agency and Somerset Council, and other key stakeholders to be identified.

- **Public Transport and Active Travel:** The participants agreed to focus on public transport and active travel, with a split agenda to cover both topics in future meetings. There was particular interest in looking into a bus route from Minehead to Bridgwater and perhaps linking it with the Dowsborough LCN to explore this further.

- **Tree Maintenance Programme:** Collaborate with Minehead Town Council to implement a tree maintenance programme and ensure replacement of avenue trees.

- **Community Resilience:** Ensure all parishes complete the Community Resilience Survey by September 19th. Work towards

community resilience would be ongoing, and the LCN would advise when roadshows and workshops were taking place. Continue to recognise the ongoing good work of the West Somerset Flood Group and support and signpost when necessary.

12 Dates of future LCN meetings

Proposed Minehead and Watchet **LCN Dates** **Venues to be confirmed**	**Highways Sub-Group Dates** **Dunster Meeting Room** **West Somerset House**
	Friday 12 September 10am – 1pm
Thursday 16 October 2025 at 6.30pm	Friday 14 November 10am – 1pm
Thursday 8 January 2026 at 6.30pm	Wednesday 4 February 10am – 1pm
Thursday 9 April 2026 at 7pm	Wednesday 13 May 10am – 1pm
Thursday 16 July 2026 at 7pm (AGM)	

The meeting closed at 8:30pm but attendees took advantage of the networking opportunity.

With gratitude to Minehead Town Council for hosting, and Minehead Football Club for providing refreshments at the bar.