

Hayward April Report 2026

### **Somerset Residents Use of Dorset Recycling Update**

The below is the response received from Cabinet member Richard Wilkins, since Dorset have brought in their booking and charging system

“Historically, Somerset and Dorset residents have used whichever household recycling site was most convenient, as neither authority operated access controls across the Somerset/Dorset border and naturally there has been flows cross boundary flows and has been a practical arrangement based on open access.

Dorset’s decision to introduce both a booking system and new charging arrangements now changes that position, and we are in active discussions with them about how this will work for Somerset residents who routinely use Dorset sites. These conversations are constructive, but there are some practical challenges we need to work through.

A key issue is that Dorset’s new model assumes neighbouring authorities also operate a booking system. Somerset does not currently have a booking system, which creates administrative and verification difficulties around cross border use. Officers are working directly with Dorset to ensure Somerset residents are not disadvantaged while we navigate this change.

Linked to this, Somerset is currently assessing the potential benefits of booking systems, for example fairness, traffic management, operational efficiency and customer experience and whether such an approach would be viable for Somerset’s own service. Dorset’s move forms part of that assessment, but no decisions have been taken.

It’s also worth noting that Somerset provides a comprehensive, high performing network of recycling sites across the county, meaning most residents are already well served locally. For those communities close to the Dorset border, we recognise the importance of ensuring any new arrangements remain practical.

Once our discussions with Dorset progress and our own internal assessments for a Somerset booking system progress further and we have clarity on how access will operate under their new system, we will provide a full member update.”

### **Car Parking Review Starts again**

A review of car parking charges across Somerset has started.

It includes proposals, for a new tiered pricing structure for both on-street and off-street parking. This would see car parks placed within a sliding scale of fees depending on location.

The new charging structure would apply seven days a week, but if adopted would still include periods of free parking for some car parks. Any introduction of fees to existing free car parks would be evidence-based following discussions with local businesses, council members, town, city and parish councils and other stakeholders.

Following this week's decision there will now be comprehensive survey and information gathering exercise across all of Somerset's 200 Council-run car parks, as well as on-street parking locations.

A report will be brought back to Executive later in the year on the suggested pricing for various tiers before a locally-based consultation process can begin with communities. This will be ahead of any decision on which tier will be allocated to each car park and will include any necessary measures such as double yellow lines to protect residential areas from any potential parking displacement.

The draft five tiers show indicative charges which would be applicable seven days a week and would be finalised after the review. They have been developed by an external specialist and they are based on a combination of existing charges around the four legacy council areas alongside benchmarking against neighbouring authorities.

Once the survey is complete Executive will consider a more detailed system later in the year with car parks placed in their relative tiers with a view to approving the proposed charging structure pending engagement with communities.

The review will also look at a consistent approach to concessions and season ticket charges as well as rationalising pay and display infrastructure and transition to cashless systems where feasible.

Any proposals signed off by the Council will need to go through the statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) consultation process where formal to record consider objections and comments will be considered.

**Somerset Council Officer Response to NPPF Consultation**: Somerset Council has submitted an officer response to the Government's consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework. The response supports elements such as a clearer plan-led system, increased housing delivery and the introduction of spatial development strategies, while also identifying a number of areas where amendments are sought. These include concerns about the deliverability of the proposed 30-month timetable for local plans, the capacity required to produce supporting evidence, and the application of national policies in large rural areas. The submission also raises points relating to housing delivery, climate and flood risk policy, and the role of local decision-making within the planning system

#### NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) Consultation

Below is the response from the CCN (County Councils Network) on the Government changes to NPPF

Our response highlights that the proposals would shift planning decisions away from local authorities and communities – towards a nationally-set framework from government. This is because the new NPPF moves towards a ‘one size fits all’ set of decision-making policies, set by government. Many of these will override local policies, making it harder for councils to challenge development in all but exceptional circumstances.

Measures planned by government that weaken local communities’ voice in the planning system include:

- New national decision-making policies which centralise much of planning policy, effectively overriding councils’ local policies and decisions. It means councils will have to approve developments that adhere to these ‘one size fits all’ policies.
- Consequently, councils ‘should approve’ development near any train station with four or more trains an hour, putting many rural stations open to speculative and damaging development – and with no consideration of infrastructure capacity.
- Councils will also be told to approve development on the outskirts of towns and villages where there is ‘unmet need’, which could lead to increased piecemeal and speculative development, regardless of infrastructure capacity.
- This is because the continued requirement to demonstrate a five year housing land supply will mean county unitary councils have to show evidence they have a supply of deliverable sites to provide a minimum of five years’ worth of housing against their housing targets. Local authorities say this sets up councils to fail: developers could build out their planning permissions slowly – or not in full – ensuring that councils cannot meet their land supply targets. This means developers could use this ‘unmet need’ policy to secure approval for unpopular development in unsuitable locations.
- Previous announcements in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill seek to ‘streamline’ development, only allowing councils’ planning committees to debate major developments and presuming approval for smaller proposals. This is a significant concern in rural areas where even a few dozen homes can dramatically alter a village.

Under the government’s mandatory housing targets, introduced last year, on average county areas will see a 56% increase in the number of homes they have to deliver – 64,000 per year or an extra 1,245 houses per week. This is over seven times the increase for councils in England’s major cities. In a previous survey ran by the CCN, seven in ten councils said they supported the principle of nationally-set targets, but over nine in ten respondents believed their target was too high, whilst others raised concerns over a lack of infrastructure to support development.

Because of these high housing targets and increasing pressure to deliver, CCN argues that the proposed measures could lead to a ‘developer free for all’ in county areas whereby councils’ ability to debate and challenge unsuitable proposals is severely weakened, and believe that these changes risk undermining the plan-led planning system, where councils set out a long-term vision for housing and growth

through their Local Plans, identifying appropriate sites for development and ensuring infrastructure can support it.

We know that CCN members support a plan-led system and believe the reforms proposed will undermine this. To better support the local delivery of housing in suitable and sustainable locations, we are calling for the proposed decision-making policies in the NPPF to be a starting point, with authorities able to deviate from these where this is justified and based on evidence. We are also calling for the government to scrap the requirement to maintain a five-year land supply where an authority has an up-to-date local plan or at least publish stronger guidance to prevent the rule from being manipulated by developers.

Whilst the government has announced a raft of planning changes since it took power in summer 2024, it has made few pledges to boost infrastructure – at a time when housing targets are dramatically increasing for many county areas. We are therefore also urging the government to ensure infrastructure is forward funded and provided before housing is occupied.

**Somerset Rivers Authority Agrees Work Plans for 2026/27:** Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) has approved its enhanced programme of works for 2026/27, backed by several million pounds of investment in flood prevention and resilience measures across the county. This includes £775,000 for River Parrett dredging and maintenance, £425,000 for natural flood management through the Hills to Levels programme, and £350,000 for enhanced gully clearing, alongside £150,000 for drain jetting.

**Somerset Council Amalgamates Housing Models:** Somerset Council has approved plans to bring its two housing management models into a single system, transferring all landlord functions into its arm's length company, Homes in Somerset. The change will see around 9,700 council homes managed under one structure, with the council retaining ownership of the housing stock and responsibility for the Housing Revenue Account. The move is intended to reduce duplication, improve consistency for tenants and deliver financial efficiencies, with early estimates suggesting potential savings of around £3.5 million per year over time.

**Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** Somerset Council has approved the publication of its Local Nature Recovery Strategy, fulfilling its statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021. The strategy sets out priorities for habitat and species recovery, alongside mapping areas where action will deliver the greatest environmental benefit. It is intended to provide a strategic framework to guide planning, Biodiversity Net Gain, land management and investment decisions across the county. The strategy has been developed with input from partners including statutory agencies, landowners and community groups, and will support coordinated delivery of nature recovery, climate resilience and environmental improvement.

**New phonenumber for residents struggling to afford the increasing cost of oil:** Somerset Council has launched a dedicated phonenumber to support residents struggling with the rising cost of heating oil, delivered in partnership with Citizens Advice Somerset. The service allows residents in need of financial assistance to call a freephone number, 0808 278 7842, and request support from the Household

Support team. The initiative is funded through the Household Support Fund as part of the Help Through Winter programme, with additional support also available through the council's Help4All scheme and community hubs network.

**Crisis and Resilience Fund**: Somerset Council has approved plans to deliver the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund, a three-year programme running from April 2026 to March 2029 aimed at supporting households facing financial hardship. The council will receive £21.5 million over the period, with £7.2 million allocated in each of the first two years and £7.1 million in the final year. The fund will provide immediate financial support for essentials such as food, energy and housing costs, alongside longer-term measures including debt advice, benefit checks and employment support. Delivery will be carried out in partnership with voluntary and community organisations, with a focus on both crisis response and building long-term financial resilience.

**Somerset Health & Wellbeing Survey: Somerset Council's Public Health team has launched a new survey to gather residents' views on health and wellbeing priorities across the county.** The survey aims to inform future service planning, building on previous feedback which has shaped areas such as smoking cessation and healthy eating support. You can take part in the consultation by 27th April here : <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/public-health/somerset-health-wellbeing-survey/>

## **Transport Delivery Plan**

Somerset's four-year Local Transport Delivery Plan, focusing on active travel and accessibility, has been endorsed.

The Council must submit its spending plans to the Government for the first of the four years by 20 March setting out where money will be spent in 2026-2027, including road maintenance, bus services and active travel.

The plan focuses on active travel, accessibility and local transport and has been developed with input from a range of organisations and interest groups including Somerset Bus Advisory Board, the Local Community Networks' Active Travel Group and bus passenger groups.

Accessibility plays a key role in the plan to make sure that everyone can use local transport easily and safely, from buses, cycleways and pavements to street lighting, bus stops and rail stations.

The plan includes preparation for the Government's Project Coral providing a back-office system for multi-operator tickets and real-time information at key transport interchanges.

It covers proposed spending on:

Active travel

- Bus service enhancement

- Traffic signals renewal and refurbishment
- Bus shelters
- Transport hubs
- Bus priority scheme
- Road safety
- Better integration with rail services
- Highways maintenance

### **New investment aims to boost gully clearance and spruce up signs, lines and footpaths**

The green light has been given to a £5m enhanced maintenance programme featuring a huge gully clearance push and work to tackle faded road markings, broken signs and overgrown pathways.

The first £2 million for 2026/27 was agreed last week (April 1) to get the programme running during this month.

Current road maintenance programmes prioritise safety critical works which can mean lower-level issues like faded road markings, broken signs and overgrown hedges are left unresolved, often for many years.

The new spending proposals will deliver a range of visible improvements like clearing more drains and gullies, fixing and cleaning road signs, repainting faded road markings, collecting litter, and clearing overgrown vegetation, particularly on walking and cycling routes.

Improvements will also be made to the council's public reporting system, to make it even easier for residents to highlight any issues on the roads.

The work will be carried out by one of the Council's current highways contractors, Kier, which will deal with signing, lining and gully clearance, as well as the Council's own Open Spaces Team, which will tackle overgrown vegetation and other tidying work alongside collecting litter.

The enhanced gully emptying will see an intensive one-year intensive clearance in areas vulnerable to a 1 in 100-year flood events – adding up to about 65,000 extra gullies during the current year.

The £5 million maintenance programme will run for 3 years – 2026/27 to 2028/29 with the aim of making a big visible difference to communities from the start and during year one.

While focusing mainly on vegetation clearance, the extra open spaces operatives will also be able to pick up other tasks while they are out and about such as graffiti removal and picking up litter.

If you spot a problem of the road visit [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk) and search report a problem on the road