

Hayward Burt – Annual Report 2025 – 2026

I have sent in monthly reports to draw attention to issues raised by residents, and highlight work going on in Somerset Council and with other relevant bodies, such as the Railways and Avon and Somerset Police.

The most prominent issues are around, Planning, planning enforcement, council finance and Highways.

I have included various parts of previous reports relating to proposed changes to local planning being proposed by the Government.

The Timetable for the next local plan (key to future planning) was agreed in April and I will share information relating to that as I receive it)

I have done my best to support the Parish council and residents over issues relating to Sutton Farm.

The issue of Dorset Council charging for recycling centres was also raised as an issue , I have attached my most recent update on this, still unresolved issue.

Charging for car parking, this issue was rejected by the Climate and Place Scrutiny committee (of which I am a member) rejected this, but a further review has restarted.

The boundary of the division will change for next years elections so I have included below how they are changing.

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.

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.

Local Government Boundary Commission.

A New division called Milborne Port, which includes Milborne Port, Henstridge and Charlton Horethorne Parishes

A New Blackmoor Vale division , which includes Abbas & Templecombe, Horsington, North Vale, Blackford and Compton Pauncefoot, South Cadbury with the addition of other parishes Sparkford, Queen Camel, West Camel, Marston Magna, Rimpton.

Potholes

This is the subject which now fills my in box more than any other, from a recent briefing note please see some interesting information. Keep sending them my way if they require urgent attention.

Since the start of the year, Somerset Council has received 16,332 reports about defects on the roads, compared to 4,417 for the same period last year. In response the Council has more than doubled the number of teams dealing with the damage, deploying extra equipment and using alternative materials to try to speed up the process. As of 20 February 4,577 potholes have been fixed by 35 teams dedicated to this work.

If you spot a problem on the road, please help us by visiting www.somerset.gov.uk and searching report a problem on the road. It takes a few minutes and goes straight to the team who will visit and assess the defect. Depending on severity, it will be fixed on a timescale of two hours, 24 hours, seven days or 28 days for non-emergency repairs

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

The LEVI programme is a national initiative funded by the UK Government to support the rollout of public electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, especially in communities where residents lack off-street parking and cannot install private chargepoints.

Somerset Council has been awarded £3.78 million in capital funding to deliver this programme locally.

What This Means for Somerset • A minimum of 1,606 low-powered public EV charging sockets will be installed at onstreet and car park locations. • The rollout will ensure rural communities are not left behind, with 75% of installations in higher demand locations and 25% in lower demand locations.

Local Policing

Some of you may be aware that our local PCSO was Amanda Ware but she hasn't been here of late because of being seconded to Yeovil. I found out at the end of July that she will be staying at Yeovil permanently. Until a new person is allocated to the beat area. Should you have any need to contact the local neighbourhood team please can you please contact the Neighbourhood PCSO Supervisor Melanie Cherrington- Firkins and their email contact is

Melanie.Cherrington-Firkins@avonandsomerset.police.uk

