Councillor Reports March 2026

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Hayward Burt

Local Government Boundary Commission.

The Final report came out this week, the result will be to split the current Blackmoor Vale as shown below

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.

For further information please use the link below

somerset_final_recommendations_full_report.pdf

Council Budget & Council Tax

Full Council met on Wednesday and decided its budget for the coming year. The Council Tax Rise was decided at 4.99%.

Government to Clear Majority of Somerset SEND Deficit: The Government has confirmed it will pay off up to 90% of Somerset Council's £116 million special educational needs and disabilities deficit, subject to the Council agreeing a plan to bring future spending under control. Around £104.4 million of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit is expected to be cleared by the Department for Education, with approximately £11.6 million remaining under the current statutory override arrangements until 2028. The agreement requires the Council to set out measures to manage demand and expenditure, with progress to be monitored by the Department for Education

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

Warm Homes: Local Grant

Somerset Council has secured funds from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's 'Warm Homes: Local Grant' scheme to help homeowners and private rental residents across Somerset to save money on energy bills by retrofitting their homes.

Retrofitting refers to any improvement work on an existing building to improve its energy efficiency, making them easier to heat, able to retain that heat for longer, and replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy.

Somerset Council has secured an additional £1million in funding to support the retrofitting initiative. This funding supplements the approximately £6million already allocated for distribution by the council over a three-year period, from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028.

Types of measures that can be installed using the grant are:

- Floor insulation
- Wall insulation

- Loft insulation
- Door and window replacements
- Ventilation
- Solar panels
- Air Source Heat Pumps
- Storage Heaters

The grants are means-tested, and residents can check if they are eligible and apply by searching ‘retrofit and energy efficiency’ on the council's website.

Devolution and Wessex Spatial Strategy Update:

The Government issued two Written Ministerial Statements on 12 February 2026 setting out its next steps on devolution and regional planning. The first outlines proposals to create Foundation Strategic Authorities as a new tier of devolved governance for areas without a mayor, with powers over transport, skills, housing, economic development, environment, health and public safety, alongside devolved funding and potential powers such as an Overnight Visitor Levy. The second launches a non statutory consultation on proposed Spatial Development Strategy geographies, including a Wessex area covering Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. These strategies would provide high level frameworks for housing growth and infrastructure, with local plans required to be in general conformity. The Government has invited expressions of interest from areas seeking Foundation Strategic Authority status, and Wessex leaders have signalled their intention to explore this route, with further governance arrangements and regulations expected following the consultation period.

Consultation on Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework: The Government is still running it’s consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, seeking views on a revised approach to national planning policy in England. A draft version of the Framework has been published alongside the consultation and sets out the proposed policy wording, subject to feedback. The consultation runs from 16 December 2025 until 10 March 2026, and parish and town councils are encouraged to review the proposals and submit responses through the Government’s Citizen Space portal here: https://consult.communities.gov.uk/planning/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-f/

Somerset Adult Social Care Strategy (2026-2029) - Somerset Council - Citizen Space

- Residents are encouraged to share, their recent experiences accessing care and support in Somerset
- Any barriers faced, and ideas for overcoming them
- What good care and support looks like to them or in their service
- The priorities they believe should be the focus over the next three years

The closing date for residents to share their views is 27 March 2026

Somerset Health & Wellbeing Survey opens on Monday 2 March and runs until Monday 27 April, designed to gather resident insight that will help shape future public health priorities across the county.

Overview

We have launched a new Health & Wellbeing Survey to understand what really matters to residents and ensure their experiences guide how we design and deliver services. The survey invites residents from across Somerset to share their priorities, concerns, and experiences, helping us build a clear, community driven picture of health and wellbeing needs.

The survey was created with the input of people who live or grew up in Somerset, making sure local insight is embedded throughout.

What the Survey Covers

The survey includes a wide range of topics, each taking around two minutes to complete:

- Physical activity
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Smoking and vaping
- Alcohol and substance use
- Gambling
- Oral health
- NHS Health Checks
- How people access health information

Residents are not asked for any personal details, and all responses are stored securely in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Survey link: Somerset Health & Wellbeing Survey

Somerset Health & Wellbeing Survey: Your Perspective Matters - Somerset Council - Citizen Space

Sarah Webb

Bus Back Better

The Department for Transport (DfT) have announced that Somerset Council will receive £13.1m of additional funding to support both bus Services and network infrastructure in Somerset . The additional funding is to be rolled out between 2026 and 2029, would help local travel become more reliable.
The three-year funding commitment is designed to give councils the certainty to create longer-term plans around bus travel, rather than running on a year-by-year basis.
The current Timetable for the 58 route from Wincanton to Yeovil via Templecombe operated by First Bus (Buses of Somerset) can be found at https://www.firstbus.co.uk/somerset/plan-journey/timetables.
Since January 2026, Somerset bus fares will largely be capped at a maximum of £3 for single journeys under the national fare cap scheme, with First Bus implementing £2.40 for short hops (under 3 miles) and offering Tap On Tap Off for best value, while child fares are half price, all part of a simplified zone system (Taunton, Yeovil, Bridgwater, Network).
Key Fare Details from January 2026:

- **National £3 Fare Cap**: A government-backed scheme keeps most single bus journeys in England, including Somerset, at a maximum of £3 extended in most areas until March 2027
- **First Bus Somerset Changes**:
  - **Short Hops**: Journeys under 3 miles cost £2.40.
  - **Longer Journeys**: Max out at £3, aligning with the national cap.
  - **Child Fares**: Half the adult single fare.
- **Tap On Tap Off**: Using contactless, you automatically get the best fare, with daily and weekly caps ensuring you never pay more than the zone limit.
- **Fare Zones**: Simplified into Taunton, Yeovil, Bridgwater, and Network zones for easier understanding.

How to Check Fares:

- Use the **First Bus app** or website to plan journeys and see specific prices.
- Check the Think Travel website for general updates and participating operators.

Planning Report – Significant Updates.

There have been a number of occasions when the Somerset Planning Portal does not appear to be available and a complaint has been made:
New
None
Pending
Reserved Matters approval for the appearance, landscaping, layout and scale in respect of 140 no. dwellings in accordance with Conditions 1 and 2 of the Outline Planning Permission 22/03560/OUT
Land OS 6975 South Of Bowden Road Templecombe Somerset
Ref. No: 25/02759/REM Received: Fri 14 Nov 2025 Validated: Mon 19 Jan 2026 Status: Awaiting decision
Comments have now closed. The Parish Council has made a submission objecting to the application in a number of areas.

24/01732/REM Reserved Matters application for the approval of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale of 49 dwellings following outline approval 19/01604/OUT; Outline application with all matters reserved save for access for residential development for up to 49 dwellings including landscaping, drainage and new vehicle access from West Street .
Most recent update: 19 Jan 2026 Amended plans and documents submitted to provide a comprehensive response to matters raised by consultees to the Reserved Matters submission.
The initial Reserved Matters application proposed 22 open market units and 27 affordable housing units. Magna Housing now intend to bring forward all the units as affordable housing with 35% (17) as the s106 requirement and the remaining 65% (32) as additionality housing i.e. delivered with Homes England funding. Of the 17 s106 affordable units, 8 are for social rent and 9 shared ownership. Of the remaining 32 additional units, 21 will be for social rent and 11 shared ownership. In total the site will secure 29 social rent units and 20 shared ownership units.
21/02436/FUL Demolition of the existing buildings and the erection of 18 detached bungalows with associated parking and access. Knights Templar Court Nursing Home Throop Road Templecombe Somerset BA8 0HR.
No further update:
20 May 2024 Appeal decided and allowed subject to conditions.

Slades Hill / Knights Meadow Update

1. Section 73 Planning Application
Residents have been advised that Tilia intends to submit a Section 73 application. Government Planning Practice Guidance states Section 73 can only be used for "minor material amendments" to an existing permission. Any fundamental or substantial changes require a new planning application.
If granted, a Section 73 approval becomes a new standalone planning permission, while the original permission remains valid. Confirmation of what Tilia considers "minor amendments" has not yet been provided.
A letter outlining current concerns has been sent to Sarah Dyke MP.
2. Landscaping and Works Promised for January 2026
Tilia notified residents in late December that the following work would begin in January:
- Turfing the frontage on the right-hand side of the main entrance and paths near the pedestrian link
- Installing:
  - a lifebuoy post at the attenuation pond
  - a bollard near Plot 21
  - close-board fencing at both ends of the maintenance corridors ("3m offsets")
- Stone picking and seeding public open spaces
- Completing the school playing field extension within 4–6 weeks by importing and spreading topsoil

However, no update was given regarding:
- LEAP opening
- Traffic calming completion
- Public open space maintenance
- Completion of the planting scheme

Current Position
- Only limited turfing has taken place.

- The lifebuoy post is installed but no lifebuoy is in place.

- Additional wooden posts around the attenuation pond appear to further restrict vehicle access, which conflicts with the maintenance access requirements.

- Close-board fencing installed in February blocked all access to the 3m offsets, including emergency access needed for oil-spill response and gabion wall maintenance.

- Two gates were later added, but they do not provide full access and are not properly secured.

- Boundary fences built within the 3m offset remain unresolved and continue to compromise emergency access and structural protection.

- Significant levelling and soil importation continue at the school field, which remains incomplete.

3. Breach of Planning Conditions & Section 106 Non-Compliance

The Parish Council was informed by Neil Waddleton, Senior Enforcement Specialist, that following a site visit on 14 October 2025, Tilia was given two weeks to engage specialist contractors and produce a programme of works. No programme has been received.

Many residents have been contacted directly by Tilia about potential planning submissions. The Parish Council has received no further formal updates.

Key Areas of Non-Compliance

A. 3m Offset

- Fences erected inside the 3m buffer zone around Blackmore Vale Close and The Hamlet.

- No appropriate emergency access gate.

B. Section 106 Failures

LEAP (Local Equipped Area for Play)

- Construction began only in April 2025—after 50% occupation, contrary to the agreement.

- Built on a steep mound, raising safety concerns.

- Sited away from approved location, affecting resident privacy.

Travel Plan Compliance

- No Travel Plan Advisor appointed.

- Missing:
  - Travel information board

  - Signage

  - Green travel vouchers are not proactively offered

  - Cycle/motorcycle parking

  - Required sockets for EVs not installed in garages.

C. Drainage & Landscaping Issues

- Excess soil against the gabion wall may affect stability.

- Attenuation pond slopes appear to exceed 1:3, posing safety and maintenance risks.

- LEMP-compliant tree planting is incomplete and poorly maintained.

D. Unfulfilled Commitments

- School expansion and burial ground land transfer outstanding.
- The footpath link to Church Hill remains incomplete.

The Parish Council is still awaiting responses on:

- Review of S106 triggers
- Highways comment on Travel Plan non-compliance

4. Current Status of the Development

The site has been fully occupied since early October, and Tilia has vacated the site.
Reserved Matters Approval (9 July 2021) required full compliance with all conditions, or the site may be subject to enforcement action. **Outstanding Planning Conditions**
The following conditions should have been complied with by late 2025 or early 2026:

- All Ecology Strategy features before occupation of the final (70th) dwelling
- Full landscaping by the first dormant season and **before occupation of final dwelling**
- All boundary treatments within 3 months of substantial completion
- Footpath link to Church Hill within 3 months of substantial completion

None of these conditions have been met.
Additional Failures

- No block paving installed at designated junctions.
- Required traffic calming has not been delivered.
- SUDS elements (e.g., raingarden at Blackmore Vale Close) have not been implemented.
- LEAP remains fenced off.
- School playing field contains significant rubble and has not been completed
- Many POS areas remain closed or unseeded.
- Bat/bird boxes and hedgehog passes are outstanding, despite being required before final occupation.
- LEMP planting (including community orchard) remains incomplete.
- Trees require urgent maintenance to ties and supports.
- Pavement hazards exist, including drainage covers over tactile paving.
- Footpath to Church Hill remains incomplete and now obstructed by secure fencing.

5. Burial Ground Extension (S106)

The Parish Council is actively pursuing Somerset Council on the Section 106 obligation relating to the burial ground extension, which remains incomplete.

Peter Coombes

Trees and Open Spaces

Reports are pretty simple this month

All tree work previously mentioned over past year is now done or in hand
to be done by electric board or for the 2026 planting season.

Remembrance 2026 hopefully you receive the email Saturday

Ed Crowther

Website and Social Media

I attended 2 webinars
The first was concerning web accessibility and as I have reported previously we are for the most part compliant with the regulations, but we do need to put a policy in place and I have circulated a proposed policy for approval at our March meeting.

The second was on the use of AI on public documents and although this was aimed more at Clerks and paid staff it does affect councillors that prepare documents for publication in any form.

The short take away is that AI can give false answers and you should be aware of the dangers,

It was suggested that a policy should be put in place .
Looking at model policies' they tend to be over complicated (Rather like the IT policy we looked at recently) and not much use on our scale and in any case much is covered by policy's already adopted ie GDPR , Councillor Standing orders etc.
I think It is enough to remind Councillors that they are responsible for the veracity of anything they may put in the public domain, and in this we should be reminded that includes just about everything.

Once again can I remind you if you see anything you think our parishioners should know please send it to me.

Allan Kerry

1. Recreation Ground Project:

We are now in a position to place the order for the installation of the path. The target is to begin the work on April 7th and the path will take approximately 5 weeks to complete.
The cost of the installation will be just less than £60,000 compared with an initial estimate of £54,000 - the major differences are caused by our scope increases to include a 10m strengthened

path from the Car park to join the main path path, an additional ‘stoned path’ from the ‘kissing gate’ to the main path and include some work to flatten the removed spoil.
I propose that we formally approve this cost at this meeting.

2. Highways Report

a. As a result of the visit of the LCN Co-ordinator last month work has been programmed to improve the condition of the road between the Railway Bridge and Vine Street starting next week with work on Church hill.
b. At the recent LCN meeting which was attended by a much larger representation of parishes, the Highways East Manage and two senior representatives from Somerset Council (by phone) it was clear that all parishes have similar issues to our own and also that more funding will be made available to help in this area.
i. Please keep reporting the issues using the Somerset Website - if they have been marked up they are known to Highways. Each report is confirmed back to the reporter with a number which can be used to track the status.
ii. There is a review on gullies and drains and it appears that roads like ours will get more frequent attention in the new scheme - watch this space - but again keep reporting.
iii. A monthly report by area is now made available to all Parishes which itemises every repair done in the area - the Blackmore Vale area (BV) shows 74 repairs for this month - how many of the PC have checked this?
All in all this group is beginning to be more effective than previously.
Other Issues:-
We are still pushing to get some involvement from Somerset Council/Highways/Planning regarding the congestion we have in the Vine Street, Westcombe, West Street and Bowden Road area of the village. We
have highlighted that the proposed 200 houses in this area will make matters worse.
Up to now our Council Representatives have been unable to get anyone senior from Somerset Council here to ‘walk’ the area to see for themselves. I think we should consider engaging with our MP on this matter.
Is this something we want to do as part of the Planning discussions wrt Bowden Road and West Street application?
SID
Time and availability of help means we have not progressed any further with this - my own empirical view is that traffic is moving faster than it was - especially HGV’s. We need to get it back in place.

Stephen Hood

Community Lunch and Parish Lunch.

Both lunches we provided by Templecombe Together, both well attended.

Food for our Community Lunch was prepared by Colin Law, who cooked chilli con carne.

Food for our Parish Lunch was prepared by members of St. Mary’s Church.

Soup Mondays.

During March Templecombe Together is providing soup each Monday hosted by Templecombe United Reform Church. My wife is the Soup Chef creating a different soup for each Monday(so far….3 more to go). Members of TT and URC have been helping. The event has proved very popular again.

We continue to look for ways that we can help bring our Community closer Together and are open to ideas and suggestions.

Social Club

Unfortunately David and myself were unable to attend the Social Club Committee Meeting on Wednesday.

However I have received a brief report such I Have attached.

‘ The Clubs finances are in good order, but it is important that regular activities to generate income are planned for each month.

The planned Darts tournament had to be cancelled due to lack of interest.

it was agreed that there must be better advertising and consideration to event costings.

The weekly Line Dancing has proved to be very popular with over 30 taking part.

There are no issues with the building.’