

February 2026 Update to Norton St Philip Parish Council from Adam Boyden, Somerset Councillor, Frome North

Shock and sadness at sudden passing of popular Somerset Councillor:

Flags at Somerset Council buildings flew at half-mast today (9th Feb) as a mark of respect to Somerset Councillor Tony Robbins, who sadly passed away unexpectedly last weekend. Tony was a Liberal Democrat member for Mendip Hills division since 2022, and contributed to a wide range of committees, bringing diligence, balance, and integrity to his responsibilities. His commitment extended into community life. He was also elected to Wells City Council in 2007, holding many roles, and served as Mayor of Wells in 2010-2011. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him. Please see [Shock and sadness at sudden passing of popular Somerset Councillor](#).

Somerset Council Tax:

With Somerset Council's Council Tax levels lower than the national average for similar authorities, Council Leader Bill Revans has been in discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to highlight the challenges and request Exceptional Financial Support (permission for councils to raise Council Tax above the national cap of 4.99% without a referendum and/or a Capitalisation Direction (a form of one-off assistance which allows councils to pay for day-to-day spending over a number of years funded by additional borrowing or selling assets)).

The Government has now announced the Final Local Government Settlement (see [Communities set to benefit from fairer funding - GOV.UK](#)). This confirms Somerset Council will not be allowed to raise Council Tax by more than the national cap of 4.99%. Confirmation on whether the Government will allow a further Capitalisation Direction will follow in due course. Like all higher tier councils, Somerset has also had 90% of the historic SEND-related Dedicated Schools Grant deficits up to 2025-26 written off by the Government. See here for more - [Somerset Council Tax 2026/27](#).

Somerset Council has made savings of at least £50m since becoming a unitary council in 2023. However, Somerset's financial situation remains fragile with a budget gap of around £33m for 2026/27 due to ongoing exceptional cost pressures in social care, children's services and homelessness. This was reduced down from £101m at the last budget in March 2025, but the remaining gap cannot be balanced without EFS. The position is made worse by Government's decision not to financially recognise authorities which have a large geographical area to cover and whose population is rural.

Somerset Council will now consider carefully the implications, and councillors will meet to set a budget and Council Tax for 2026-27 at Full Council on Wednesday 4th March – see [Browse meetings - Full Council - Modern Council](#) (the agenda will be published a week in advance).

Planning applications and enforcement:

In relation to the query about a Planning Enforcement case 'ENF/2022/WS56590, land south of Farleigh Road', please can you check the number as Planning Enforcement cannot find it on their system, and all cases now have a date and a 4-figure number, as the one below.

In relation to the planning enforcement case at **Farleigh House** concerning weddings and other events held since summer 2023 (Somerset Council Planning Enforcement ref. **ENF/2025/0160**), Bath Rugby wrote to residents on 19th January to state that they "have chosen to no longer be actively promoting or taking bookings for future weddings with effect from 1st October 2026" but "will continue to deliver corporate hospitality events" and "will occasionally facilitate weddings for individuals with a relationship to the club and ownership". However, I have had confirmation that Bath Rugby still intend to submit an application for a lawful development certificate (for weddings and non-rugby corporate events) to Somerset Council as previously agreed.

The 19th January letter also set out their proposals to vary the current planning conditions and vary the approved timings of rugby training on the three pitches (Front, Lower and 3G) to “enable flexibility in their training activities, and to respond to the needs of professional rugby”. Three planning applications were submitted and registered in January (ref. **2026/0081/VRC, 2026/0082/VRC and 2026/0083/VRC**), accompanied by a Noise Assessment.

The 19th January letter also states “It is not envisaged that there would be any intensification of the use of any of the pitches, but rather, more flexibility in the time that they are used for training purposes.” The Noise Assessment assumes the pitches are only used by Bath Rugby. However, the pitches appear to be being advertised for use for rugby training by other community clubs - see [Train Like a Pro at Bath Rugby - Thrive Sports Co.](#) so I have asked Farleigh House for clarification.

Somerset Local Plan update:

Councillors have been informed that the next Somerset Local Plan will adhere to the Government’s 30 month plan-making timetable, starting with the Scoping consultation (which will set out what the Local Plan will include) in Summer 2026. This will now not have generic development management policies, as these will be provided in the Government’s National Development Management Policy.

The Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (of over 1,600 submitted sites with potential for housing and economic development) should be issued this Spring. The HELAA will be followed by more detailed work on sites that warrant further consideration.

Somerset will also need to form a Strategic Planning Board with councils in Dorset and Wiltshire, to prepare a cross-boundary Spatial Development Strategy.

The full timetable for the Local Plan will be published and approved at the Planning and Transportation Sub-Committee, whose next meeting in 8th April – see [Browse meetings - Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee - Modern Council](#). See also [Somerset Local Plan 2045](#). People can also sign up to the *Plan-it Somerset Newsletter*– see [Plan-it Somerset Newsletter Sign-up](#).

Flooding in Somerset:

Somerset Council dealing with a declared Major Incident in central low lying parts of the county after Storm Chandra as exceptionally heavy rain fell on already saturated ground, causing rapid rises in river and moorland water levels and localised flooding. At the time of writing (Monday 9th Feb) the Major Incident remains in place (with some properties being evacuated due to flood risks) following heavy rain over the weekend – see [Major incident and flood response update: 9 February 2026](#).

With climate change making this more likely, some voices are raising the prospect that, without investment, some settlements may become hard to protect long term (see [‘Homes may have to be abandoned’: how climate crisis has reshaped Britain’s flood risk | Flooding | The Guardian](#)).

Schools reorganisation consultation:

At the end of February, Somerset Council will be carrying out an informal consultation into whether to change the schooling system in and around Frome. An article appeared in the Frome Times last week (see [Somerset Council to consult on Frome school structure - Frome Times](#)) and councillors have been informed. The consultation will seek views on whether the community would support a move from a three-tier structure (which most schools operate within) to a two-tier system for the 18 schools in the area, including Rode, Norton St Philip, Berkley, Beckington, Mells, Nunney, Leigh-on-Mendip and Frome.

Conversations with schools first began in 2023 and have been ongoing. A presentation on the concept was also given at the Frome LCN meeting in October 2023. The key driver of this exercise is to improve the educational experience for all pupils. If there is sufficient support to proceed, a detailed proposal will be developed for formal consultation in the summer, and a key decision after

that. Any changes are unlikely to come into effect until the 2028/29 academic year. Details of the proposals, and potential benefits, will be circulated when the consultation begins on **23rd February**.

Residents to shape Somerset's adult social care future:

Somerset Council has launched a consultation until **27th March 2026** to refresh its Adult Social Care strategy for 2026–2029 and is inviting residents, unpaid carers and organisations to contribute. This will combine face-to-face engagement with an online survey to gather views on recent experiences of care, the barriers faced, what good care looks like and priorities for the next three years.

Responses will inform the revised strategy and a continuous improvement plan. Please see [Residents invited to shape the future of social care in Somerset](#).

Somerset recognised for road conditions:

The article [Cost of Storm Chandra clear-up highlights broken funding system](#) also highlights the financial impact on Somerset from Storm Chandra as the clear-up continues.

Just last month, the Government announced Somerset was in the top 26 out of 153 authorities in the country for road maintenance, with the overall condition of its roads in various categories scoring Green under the Department for Transport's new grading system (see [Government rates Somerset's road conditions among best in the country](#)). The Council also scored green for its maintenance programme, based on the percentage of work which is preventative, aimed at stopping defects such as potholes from forming in the first place.

Potholes:

However, unprecedented levels of rain and flooding across roads during January have created a significant challenge in terms of damage to the network and the cost of repairing it. More than 850 road defects - potholes, blocked drains and other highways issues - were reported over the January 31/1 February weekend, and highways teams are working to repair more than 3,500 recent defects across the county. This is two thirds more than last year. In November there were 15 gangs out fixing roads, now we have nearly twice as many. Meanwhile, the Government has removed the 'remoteness' factor from its funding formula for highways, despite the fact that rural councils like Somerset have more roads to maintain. The Frome Times also covers the issue here [Safety concerns raised over Frome's 'pothole epidemic' - Frome Times](#).

To report a problem with potholes or other highways matters please go to <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/report-a-problem-on-the-road/>.

Highways safety defects completed:

Each month now councillors receive a report (list) showing the number of safety defects completed by Somerset Council's highways team within our patch for the previous month. Those within this parish in December and January were:

- December: 22 defects including:
 - Carriageway Pothole B3110/120 TOWN END / HIGH STREET - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Carriageway Pothole U2864/40 CHEVERS LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Flooding in Carriageway A366/150 WELLS ROAD - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Damaged Sign Fixings A366/150 WELLS ROAD - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Damaged Sign Post A366/150 WELLS ROAD - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Multiple Safety Defects B3110/130 BATH ROAD - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Tree Down on Highway T2863/20 WELLOW LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Carriageway Pothole U2855/10 TELLISFORD LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP
- January: 38 defects including:
 - Carriageway Pothole T2863/20 WELLOW LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP
 - Edge Loss U2864/40 CHEVERS LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP

- Multiple Safety Defects T2863/20 WELLOW LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP
- Damaged Sign Post A366/150 WELLS ROAD - NORTON ST PHILIP
- Flooding in Carriageway T2838/20 MACKLEY LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP
- Step in Level U2864/40 CHEVERS LANE - NORTON ST PHILIP

Bus service improvements proposed:

Somerset Council is considering how to spend a government Bus Service Fund award (around £11.4m capital to 2029/30 and £13.1m revenue to 2028/29) to boost bus services, better integrate with rail, expand Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT), improve links to employment and health, develop transport hubs, and prepare for Project Coral multi-operator ticketing. Decisions on measures and costings will be taken by the Council's Executive in early March. Please see [Bus service improvements proposed](#) and <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/buses/>.

Somerset Council opens new council houses:

Somerset Council and Homes in Somerset have completed and officially opened 54 zero-carbon council homes on Seaward Way/Rainbow Way in Minehead - 33 flats and 21 houses - all let to local people with strong connections to the area. The development is the first council housing scheme in West Somerset for a generation. Council leaders describe the scheme as a milestone for Somerset, delivering energy-efficient, affordable homes that support local jobs and wellbeing and were allocated under the council's local lettings policy. See [Minehead eco-homes mark housing milestone](#).

Also, in Frome, planning permission has just been granted for 18 low cost low carbon homes (nine 2-bedroom houses, and nine 1-bed flats), all for social rent, on part of the **North Parade car park**, near the town centre, which was originally initiated by Mendip District Council – see [New affordable homes proposed at North Parade car park | Councillor Adam Boyden](#).

[A Guardian opinion piece](#) (by Frome-based journalist John Harris) [frames the Minehead project](#) as part of a wider revival in publicly led council housebuilding, arguing developments like this carry national significance for housing policy and politics.

Cancer treatment centre opens in Frome:

A new Systemic Anti-Cancer Treatment (SACT) Centre opened at Frome Medical Centre on 22nd January, to help patients undergoing treatment at the RUH in Bath who live within the Frome catchment area receive vital treatments closer to home - see [Cancer treatment centre opens in Frome - Frome Times](#).

Potential closure of Bradford-on-Avon Fire Station:

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority will on 10th February consider whether to launch a public consultation on the closure of 8 fire stations across Dorset & Wiltshire, including the fire station at Bradford on Avon, which also serves emergencies in and around Rode, Beckington, Norton St Philip and Frome. The statement from the DWFR Service is at [Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Service | Statement re proposed fire station closures](#), with details in the reports at Appendix 8 at [Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Service | Fire and Rescue Authority](#). Any closure of fire stations could result in an increase in response times to emergencies, and fewer firefighters and fewer fire engines mean less capacity to respond when multiple emergencies happen at once. The Fire Brigades Union's campaign petition is <https://www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/cuts-kill-save-dorset-and-wiltshire-fire-and-rescue-service>.

Vale of Frome Local Community Network update:

The last *Vale of Frome Local Community Network* meeting in January was postponed due to weather/flooding related- apologies from speakers, and will be rearranged shortly. The agendas of future LCN meetings are TBC (so please let me know any suggestions) and may cover flooding / winter / emergency preparedness. How the 18 LCNs in Somerset work is also now being reviewed. Please see here for more - [Vale of Frome Local Community Network update](#).

The next meeting of the LCN Highways Working Group on **Tuesday 24th February** in Frome. The agenda includes Areas to focus/ what we want to see, and Somerset Highways Annual Works Map. Each parish/Town council is invited to send a rep.

Improved recycling collections for people in flats:

Somerset Council will roll out expanded communal recycling collections from the end of March for about 13,000 households in flats and other communal properties. New collections will include plastic bottles, pots/tubs/trays, tins/cans/foil/aerosols, glass bottles and jars, cartons, food waste, and plastic bags/wrappers. A leaflet with start dates will be posted to affected residents. Please see [Changes to recycling collections for people in flats](#).

Frome walking safety app:

Frome Town Council has agreed to underwrite town-wide membership costs so that a free walking safety app – WalkSafe – can be introduced in Frome, as part of efforts to improve safety for residents walking at night. WalkSafe app will allow users to plan routes using well-lit streets, report poor lighting or unsafe areas, and share their live location with trusted contacts. The app will be available for free. This forms part of the town council's White Ribbon pledge to tackle violence against women and girls – please see [Frome to introduce town-wide membership of walking safety app - Frome Times](#) and item 5 of the meeting on 14th January - [Council - Frome Town Council](#).

Somerset joins national Holocaust Memorial Day:

Somerset took part in the national Holocaust Memorial Day “80 candles for 80 years” initiative in January, hosting the memorial candle at Taunton Library. The display, chosen as one of 80 across the UK to mark the 80th anniversary of Auschwitz-Birkenau's liberation and the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, became a countywide community project - see [Holocaust Memorial Candle arrives at Taunton Library for Somerset's journey of remembrance](#).

Cost-of-Living Support for Somerset Residents This Winter:

Somerset Council and community partners are offering support like food banks, mental health advice, council tax relief, housing payments, and heating assistance. People needing help can visit [somerset.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support) to check eligibility and apply, or call 0300 123 2224 and ask for 'cost of living crisis support'. See <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/cost-of-living-support-available-for-somerset-residents-this-winter/>.

Other news from Somerset Council:

see <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/newsroom/>

Open consultations: see: [Find activities - Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#):

- Somerset Adult Social Care Strategy (2026-2029)

Also open is the consultation: [Do you know a good location for an electric vehicle charge point?](#)

Report a problem to Somerset Council:

For handy links to report problems such as potholes, broken street lights or empty litter bins, to Somerset Council please see <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/2025/05/16/reporting-a-problem/#page-content> or call **0300 123 2224**.

Best wishes,

Adam Boyden

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Web: see the latest news at <https://adamboyden.mycouncillor.org.uk/>