

Somerset Council

August 2023

Affordable housing success in Somerset

More than 2,000 affordable homes have been delivered across Somerset over the past three years, thanks to Somerset Council. The Housing Enabling team have been working closely with affordable housing delivery partners to provide new, high quality, energy efficient homes that locals can afford.

Affordable housing must meet a range of needs, so we are working to increase provision of larger homes, fully adapted wheelchair-accessible homes. We are work with parishes to meet identified housing needs.

Development highlights include:

- * Cornhill, Wellington –26 homes for rent and 16 for shared ownership by LiveWest on a brownfield site in the centre of the town, including repair and conversion of a listed building.
- * Rainbow Way, Minehead – our first scheme of 54 net zero carbon affordable homes for rent has begun: a broad mix of housing types, and fully adapted wheelchair homes and bungalows.
- * Neat Lane, Pilton – 20 affordable high-quality homes have been completed, all for social rent and for local people in the village of Pilton. This second phase rural development is situated next to an existing rural exceptions site on land gifted by Michael Eavis, but now transferred to the housing provider, Guinness Partnership. The scheme consists of 8 x 1 bed flats, 6 x 2 bed houses, 4 x 3 bed houses and 2 x 2 bed bungalows, with the latter designed for older people.

New homes are being built across Somerset and will be available to rent or buy through low-cost homeownership. Details on these affordable homes are available on the Homefinder Somerset website here:

www.homefindersomerset.co.uk/choice/content.aspx?pageid=500

Homelessness Health in Somerset wins Award - the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Nursing Service wins prestigious NHS Parliamentary Award as NHS celebrates its 75th birthday

At the NHS Parliamentary Awards held in London to coincide with the NHS 75th birthday, Somerset's Homeless and Rough Sleeper Nursing Service was the overall winner in the Health Equalities category.

In Somerset, hundreds of people are affected by homelessness every year, including those sleeping on the streets. They are some of the most vulnerable patients in our county, often with complex health needs. People who are homeless, or vulnerably housed, face huge barriers to accessing healthcare and experience some of the most severe health inequalities, reporting much poorer health than the general population.

Drug and alcohol difficulties are common amongst the homeless population who are also more likely to struggle with their mental health and have experienced significant trauma in their lives.

Since 2021, the NHS in Somerset, has been working in partnership with colleagues in Somerset Council's Public Health Service, the voluntary sector and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to support the health of the homeless, & other vulnerable communities such as street workers. By pulling together different funding streams and partners across the whole health system, this collaborative and strategic approach has had a huge positive impact on supporting those most at risk of experiencing health inequalities.

Homelessness Health in Somerset Service, supported by Inclusion Health GPs, is funded by NHS Somerset, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, and Somerset Council. The service recently secured extra funding from NHS England to add a mental health support service, to make this one of only a few services in the country to provide a joint physical and mental health service to those experiencing homelessness.

Rural England Prosperity Fund now open for applications

Businesses and organisations in Somerset are being encouraged to find out if they are eligible for capital funding grants aimed at supporting businesses and community infrastructure in rural areas, following our successful £3.4 million submission to the government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

This first call for applications is seeking to allocate a total of £850,000 to eligible capital infrastructure projects. These projects must be delivered – and grant funding spent - by the end of March 2024. Grants can be between £5,000 and £100,000 and match-funding contributions are required.

The REPF has very specific criteria set by Government. Therefore, Somerset Council's Economic Development team is urging businesses and organisations to carefully check eligibility on their website <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/funding-and-grants-for-business/> To discuss a potential project applicants should email REPF@somerset.gov.uk. A further £2.5 million call for proposals for capital projects in the 24/25 financial year is expected later in the year.

Government funding for Somerset's road to nature recovery

Somerset Council has been given the lead role in developing a plan to protect and enhance nature and wildlife in Somerset: it has been appointed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to prepare of a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Somerset.

Led by the Council and the Somerset Local Nature Partnership, the LNRS strategy will be a new long-term evidence-based strategy to recover, protect and enhance nature and wildlife here in Somerset.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, the Council will establish what is needed to protect and restore Somerset's nature to benefit the biodiversity of habitats and species. It will also look to identify further environmental benefits, such as flood regulation, water quality and access to green space for health and wellbeing.

Working with the Somerset Local Nature Partnership, the Council will:

- * Engage with stakeholders across the farming, health, community, development and natural resource management sectors.
- * Drive a coordinated action plan.
- * Highlight where the most important areas for nature are.
- * Identify opportunities to restore, grow and connect wildlife in urban and rural areas.
- * Adopt a joined-up approach working with residents, groups, landowners, and organisations to build a mapped framework

Opportunities for Somerset residents, businesses, farmers, landowners, and communities to have their say and contribute to the strategy will be shared in the coming months.

You can find more information on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the ongoing work to protect Somerset's environment in our climate strategy on the Somerset Council website.

Ten Somerset parks and green spaces receive prestigious Green Flag awards

This international award, now in its fourth decade, is a sign to the public that a space shows the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained, and has excellent visitor facilities. Two of our ten parks have also retained their Heritage status.

The parks and greenspaces awarded Green Flag status are:

- * Ham Hill Country Park near Yeovil
- * Chard Reservoir Local Nature Reserve
- * Yeovil Country Park
- * Apex Park and Marine Cove in Burnham on Sea.
- * Swains Lane Nature Reserve near Wellington
- * Vivary Park in Taunton
- * Blenheim Gardens in Minehead

Congratulations also go to Somerset Council's grounds management team, who look after Victoria Park, French Weir, and Comeytrowe Park for Taunton Town Council, who also receive Green Flag Awards.

As well as having Green Flag status, both Ham Hill Country Park and Wellington Gardens retain their Green Heritage Site Accreditation, supported by Historic England, for the management of their historic features. Ham Hill is an ancient Iron Age hillfort and Wellington Gardens a grade II listed former Edwardian Park established in 1927.

A full list of Green Flag Award-winning parks and green spaces is available here: <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/resources/Winners%20List%20Green%20Flag%202023%20%281%29.pdf>

Somerset households invited to offer Homes for Ukraine

More host families are needed in Somerset to help support Ukrainian refugees who have been forced to flee their country. Since Homes for Ukraine was launched in March 2022, Somerset has welcomed over 1,500 Ukrainians to date, with host families playing a pivotal role in creating a safe environment for guests to re-settle and rebuild their lives in some way, supporting and helping them navigate a new life in the UK.

Becoming a host (or sponsor) can be hugely rewarding, with the key consideration being the ability to provide a bedroom and a comfortable place to live for a minimum of 6 months.

The next step is to register your interest and Somerset Council can provide more information about how hosts and guests are matched, training and support for both

parties, checks and visits that form part of the arrangements, thank you payments to hosts and what to do if the relationship breaks down.

To find out more about the Homes for Ukraine scheme and to register your interest in becoming a host, visit Homes for Ukraine:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/housing-support/homes-for-ukraine/>

There are a number of ways to support refugees and asylum seekers in Somerset, in addition to hosting. If you are able to offer your time, skills or resources to supporting guests, get in touch at homesforukraine@somerset.gov.uk

Council transport schemes gearing up for national awards

Two innovative Somerset Council initiatives boosting public transport and active travel are in the running for prestigious awards.

Bridgwater's growing network of cycling, wheeling and walking paths provides the focus for The Bridgwater Way. Working with schools, a series of initiatives has been delivered including an annual schools' challenge, bike maintenance training, Dr Bike healthchecks for pupil and parent bikes, led rides, competitions in school classroom activities, & learning how to design streets for more walking and cycling. Increases in walking and cycling of up to 27% have been achieved & reductions in car use up to 22 per cent.

Somerset Council's Bus It campaign, supported by the passenger group Somerset Bus Partnership, was launched last summer with the aim of increasing bus use in the county, protecting valuable services and raising awareness of Somerset's Bus Service Improvement Plan. As well as using local media including radio and social media to highlight the savings bus users can make and benefits to the environment, the campaign, focuses on key initiatives like the £1 fare for any single journey in the Taunton zone, and new evening bus services linking key towns. Bus It uses a range of unique eye-catching in-house designed materials and messaging, winning plaudits and a request from another authority to purchase the content.

The fare capping and evening bus initiatives, along with the campaign, have so far helped to support a 24 per cent rise in bus use in Taunton and 14 per cent rise across Somerset. Bus It is up for Campaign of the Year Award.

Council review of parking charges comes into effect in August

Somerset Council will be introducing new parking charges across the county following a review which will give consistency and cover inflationary costs.

During August, there will be an overall 10 per cent rise in parking charges across Somerset - though this will vary from car park to car park; in some the increase

will be very slightly above or below 10 per cent, as the new fee will be rounded up to the nearest 10p. Parking season tickets are also being increased by a similar percentage.

To provide support for residents, on-street parking permits in residential areas are not increasing.

Before this review of parking charges there was inconsistency across the county: some parking charges haven't increased for years. The new charges recognise and allow for inflationary pressures and will ensure the Council can meet its transport objectives without increasing demand on its budget.

E-Newsletters – how to sign up

Somerset Council produces a number of e-newsletters covering many topics including business, the environment, waste and recycling, transport, news and events.

To receive these important updates directly into your email inbox and to choose which emails are most relevant to you, visit:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSC/subscriber/new>