

SOMERSET COUNTY PLAN 2011-2013

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Welcome to the Somerset County Plan

Ken Maddock

Ken Maddock
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This County Plan sets out our priorities for the next year and looks back at some achievements and challenges we faced over the past 12 months.

It has been a time of tremendous change. A harsh settlement from the government left us, in effect, £34 million short in our budget. Tough decisions had to be taken to make savings in areas that had previously been protected. We must balance the books.

That meant that some services have been reduced, or in one or two areas, stopped completely. In other areas we are working hard with communities and partners to let local people have more of a say in running services. And, where appropriate, let them take them over completely. We want to make it as easy as possible for local people, with their knowledge and skills, to get involved in shaping what is done and how.



The Ariel Atom. Photo courtesy of The Ariel Motor Company

Welcome to the Somerset County Plan

Our main priorities will remain constant:

- To look after vulnerable people;
- To give Somerset's children the best opportunities possible;
- To boost the local economy, creating jobs and wealth in whatever ways we can.

This County Plan reaffirms those priorities. We have faced up to the toughest budget challenge in generations. We have further difficult choices to make in the year to come. But we are absolutely committed to putting Somerset's residents at the heart of all the Council does; to bear down on the council tax burden, and to fight on a national stage for the best interest of Somerset and its people.



West Buckland Church. Photo courtesy of Stuart Glanville



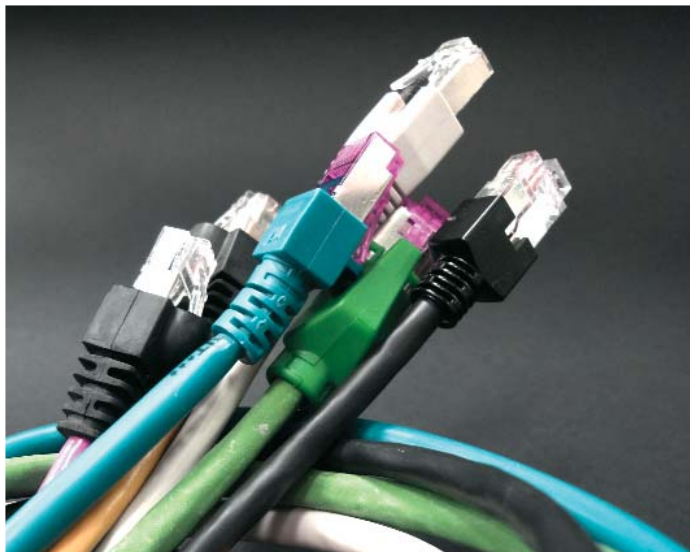
Glastonbury Festival



County Plan 2011 (3)



Somerset Heritage Centre



Prosperity – Investing in our Future

A prosperous Somerset is vital for all of us.

In highly competitive markets, companies are flexible and able to move from one area to another. The Council wants successful home-grown companies to stay in Somerset and to expand.

We want more firms to move to Somerset, to create a greater number of local sustainable jobs which are better paid and highly skilled. We will work with others, and invest to make Somerset a business destination of choice. Our plans for super fast broadband will underpin all the Council's ambitions.

As well as this investment, we know that businesses need the best possible workforce and that starts with our schools and colleges. We will continue to develop and strengthen the Local Authority's relationship with Somerset schools.

Our aim will always be to enable every child and young person to achieve their full potential and to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need for their futures.

"Since April 2010 Into Somerset, has assisted 13 new businesses to relocate to Somerset including two in the low carbon energy sector, two supporting the aerospace industry and a luxury country house hotel to boost the tourism on offer."

Prosperity – Investing in our Future

Three of our achievements

- 👍 One of the coldest winters in a century led to a record 23,000 potholes being repaired, which keeps Somerset's roads safe and among the best in the country.
- 👍 We have opened a new Heritage Centre, and the new Museum of Somerset opens in the summer, helping local people to connect to their history and attracting more tourists to the county.
- 👍 Numbers of young adults not in education, employment or training in Somerset remain among the lowest in the country. This is in spite of a national increase in youth unemployment, due to the economic climate.

Artist's impression of Chilton Trinity
Technology College, Bridgwater



Museum of Somerset

"Hard work from school pupils and school teachers gave a big boost to exam results. Our 2010 GCSE results were up by an impressive five per cent."

Prosperity – Investing in our Future

We will:

- ⇒ Bring high speed broadband to homes and businesses across Somerset by 2015.
- ⇒ Support existing successful companies to stay and expand, creating more jobs for Somerset.
- ⇒ Invest in and improve our infrastructure, such as roads, and protect our unique environment to make Somerset a more attractive and competitive place to do business.
- ⇒ Continue to support even more inward investment opportunities, attracting new businesses into the county.
- ⇒ Ensure Somerset benefits from any proposed new nuclear power station development at Hinkley Point.
- ⇒ Make it easier for people to visit and enjoy Somerset as a tourist destination.
- ⇒ Invest in new schools and improve the condition of school facilities.
- ⇒ Actively support increased educational attainment, achievement and improved outcomes for children and young people.
- ⇒ Improve young people's prospects and skills through the promotion of a range of learning opportunities and apprenticeships.



Third Way bridge, Taunton



"An unannounced inspection by Ofsted of our Children's Services in 2010 gave us excellent results, our fostering service received welcome recognition for the strong service we provide to young people in foster care."

Caring & Protecting – People and Place

Somerset is a success story for the way we care for and protect our communities and the environment.

We are here to support and protect vulnerable people and their carers. The good news is that people are living longer and surviving more health problems. Most people are independent, but some people, often with very complex care needs, will always need the Council's help. This number is growing. It's a challenge in tight financial times, but we are determined to meet it.

We will work hard to safeguard vulnerable or disadvantaged children in Somerset, and to make sure ensure that we look after the children in our care. Somerset's health compares well with the national picture, but there are still some big differences between different neighbourhoods and between those who are best and least well off. We will continue to work with our partners to address these inequalities so that the gap between best and worst is narrowed.

The environment is important to us. Our innovative Somerset Waste Partnership sees all five district councils join us to provide a waste collection and disposal service. This is now copied in other areas of the country. Annual increases in national taxes for the disposal of waste in landfill sites makes our recycling work here even more important. We are committed to reducing our impact on the countryside and the climate and to protecting our communities from flooding and other threats.

Caring & Protecting – People and Place

Three of our achievements

- 👍 We helped 8,000 older people receiving care to remain at home, and during 2010/11 supported the fostering of 550 children.
- 👍 We protected all 41 Children Centres in Somerset by re-organising management and making efficiency savings.
- 👍 We greatly reduced the number of people killed and seriously injured on Somerset's roads.



"We ran community engagement events throughout 2010 to provide communities with advice and support to improve their resilience to flooding."

Caring & Protecting – People and Place

We will:

- ⇒ Protect and care for the most vulnerable in the community and support their carers.
- ⇒ Work to support and recruit more people to adopt and foster children.
- ⇒ Help people to regain their independence after a period of illness or a stay in hospital.
- ⇒ Support older people and those with disabilities to have choice and control over their long-term care.
- ⇒ Improve the prospects of children and young people most at risk of being disadvantaged.
- ⇒ Tackle health inequalities as part of our new Public Health responsibilities.
- ⇒ Reduce waste and help residents recycle by completing the roll-out of 'Sort it Plus' kerbside collections.
- ⇒ Reduce the Council's own carbon footprint.
- ⇒ Promote the green agenda and green energy use including the production of energy from waste.
- ⇒ Work with the National Grid to make sure that the distribution network respects the unique character of the county.
- ⇒ Put in place appropriate flood alleviation schemes and help people be able to help themselves to protect property in at-risk areas.





"We are careful with your money and are open and accountable to the public. Each month we publish details of every item with an expenditure over £500. We have frozen staff pay and our staffing costs have been significantly reduced."

Keeping Costs Down – Fit for Purpose

We want our organisation to be fit for purpose, to offer better value for money and continue to cut costs.

The Government called for councils to reduce back office costs to protect frontline services. We're doing just that. We have cut top management by 15 per cent over the past year, and plan to reduce the size of the Council's workforce further.

The Council needs to be smaller and more agile to respond to rapid change, not least in what our residents expect of us. We will review the range of services we provide directly, and explore alternatives for others to run them where they can deliver them better and more cheaply.

We will give people of all ages more of a say in what we do and how we do it. We will work with community organisations and encourage volunteering. We will make it easier for Councillors to work with their communities to help them achieve what is really needed.

We fully understand the public's need to see how their money is spent, and to make sure we are efficient in all that we do. We will comply with all statutory duties to be open and transparent in our spending – and we will go further whenever we can. Our firm commitment is to help our residents by keeping the council tax burden to a minimum.

Keeping Cost Down – Fit for Purpose

Three of our achievements

- 👍 We have frozen council tax for the second year in a row.
- 👍 We would like to thank local volunteers who delivered nearly 9,000 hours of work on our Rights of Way network and 2,000 hours on countryside projects. Also, the 200 volunteer drivers who take residents to care, health appointments, dialysis centres and mobility clinics, saving the County Council and the Health Service £91,000.
- 👍 We have reduced our use of property in Bridgwater by sharing office space with Sedgemoor District Council.

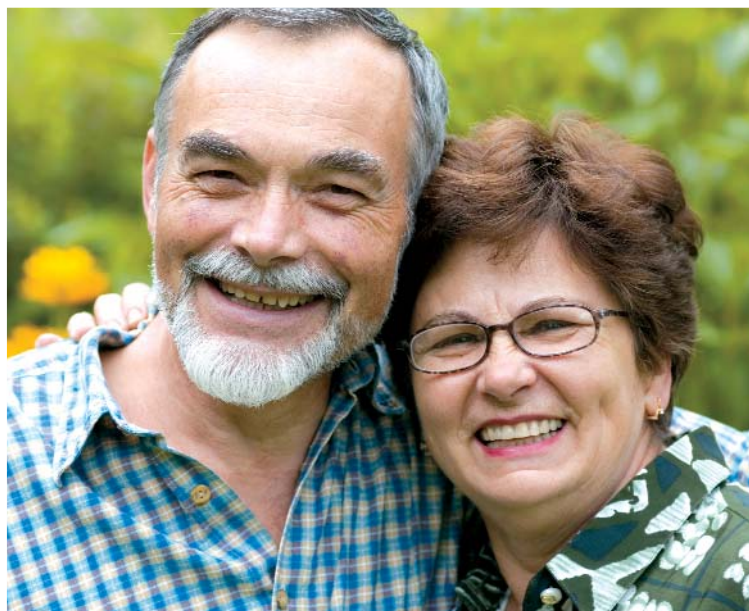


"A group of young volunteers helped to create over a mile of new surfaced footpaths and cycleway and nine new bridges at Longrun Meadows in Taunton, a valuable recreational resource in the town."

Keeping Cost Down – Fit for Purpose

We will:

- ⇒ Freeze council tax increases for a further year – that will be three in a row.
- ⇒ Reduce the size and spend of the Council and make it more fit for purpose.
- ⇒ Let others provide a service where they have the skills to do it better and more cheaply.
- ⇒ Use our property to best effect for frontline services by sharing, transferring or selling them.
- ⇒ Encourage participation, volunteering and community self-help.
- ⇒ Help local councillors to adapt or change the Council's services to suit local needs.
- ⇒ Ask users of our services to rate their quality and help make them more fit for purpose.
- ⇒ Work with our partners to simplify access to our public services.
- ⇒ Be open and transparent and go beyond statutory duties to provide information on costs and decision-making to our residents.
- ⇒ Forge closer links with town and parish councils, community groups and residents.



Contacts

If you have any specific questions or comments on this publication, please contact the Planning and Performance Team on 01823 358281 or email planningandperformance@somerset.gov.uk.



RNID typetalk

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West Somerset Railway