

## **Somerset Council Report**

### **Stoke Sub Hamdon Parish Council 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

#### **1 Somerset News**

##### **1.1 - Start a new career in child and family social work**

The Step Up To Social Work programme in Somerset Council opened for recruitment this week (17 February 2025) for aspiring social workers to apply for a place on the intensive but highly rewarding training programme.

Step Up To Social Work is 14-month, full-time training programme for talented graduates and career changers to become the next generation of child and family social workers supporting vulnerable children, young people and families. It is designed for people who want to become a social worker but do not have a degree in social work. Successful applicants train through a combination of academic study and hands on social work experience in a local authority.

Applicants eligible for the programme, which includes financial support alongside training, will be individuals with experience of working with vulnerable children, young people, families or adults, and who can demonstrate emotional resilience and potential for success.

Step Up To Social Work aims to attract applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds and aims to have a workforce that represents the society that we serve.

The Step Up programme is backed by the Department for Education to support 700 individuals to enter the social work profession in local authorities across England in 2026. This funding will support individuals with training costs and a bursary of £21,995 over the duration of the programme to support them whilst in training.

This will be the ninth cohort of Step Up since 2010, the programme has successfully supported over 2,900 social workers to enter the profession across England.

More information about applying to Step Up to Social Work can be found here: [Home | Step Up to Social Work \(pocketrecruiter.com\)](https://www.pocketrecruiter.com) The Step Up programme runs every two years. Applications will open from 17 February to 25 March 2025 (subject to regional demand), followed by regional assessment centres for candidates successful at the initial application stage. Students can expect to start the programme in January 2026, completing their training in March 2027.

##### **1.2 - Hypertension campaign reaches target of 3,000 health checks**

Somerset Council and NHS Somerset's 'Take the Pressure Off' campaign has hit a major milestone this month, reaching 3,000 blood pressure checks carried out across Somerset over the last 12 months.

The ambitious target was set in March 2024 to be reached by March 2025 in a bid to detect high blood pressure in residents across the county to help prevent more serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes.

Testing events have been held far and wide across Somerset in workplaces, community settings, sporting venues, local events and schools.

The 3,000th check was delivered during a testing event at Cutcombe School, part of the Moorland Federation of schools.

Naomi Philp, Executive Head Teacher at the Moorland Federation said: "The Moorland Federation of schools was so pleased to be able to host the free blood pressure testing for staff at all eight of our schools.

"The health and wellbeing of our staff is of the utmost importance especially as our staff go above and beyond, often putting caring for themselves second. We are hugely thankful to the scheme for allowing this opportunity for our team."

Many people will have no symptoms of high blood pressure, often termed the 'silent killer'. But it can lead to serious health issues like heart disease, stroke, and kidney problems if left unchecked.

The "Take the Pressure Off" campaign is designed to encourage residents, particularly those aged 40+, to regularly check their blood pressure and take necessary steps towards managing their health.

Cllr Graham Oakes, Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment, said: "I am thrilled that through the work of this important campaign, we have been able to reach our target of 3,000 blood pressure checks ahead of schedule.

"There are many ways that Somerset residents can get their blood pressure checked. One way is to visit your local library where you can borrow a free blood pressure monitor to test your blood pressure in the comfort of your own home. "Alternatively, people can visit their local pharmacy for a quick and easy check. So don't delay – get tested now – it could save your life."

### **1.3 - Uncovering Ham Hill's Past for Its Future: A New Chapter Begins**

A new visitor centre and other improvements are on the way for an iconic Somerset landmark as a major project at Somerset Council's Ham Hill Country Park starts soon.

The 'Uncovering Ham Hill's past for its future' project has been made possible thanks to a £2.153M grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and further financial support totalling £111,200 from the Wolfson Foundation, Leonardo, and with the support of the Friends of Ham Hill, Garfield Weston, Bernard Sunley Foundation and the Bannister Trust.

The first works on site are expected to start next month, connecting water and power to the site of a brand-new purpose-built visitor centre next to the Lime Kiln Car Park. The aim is to start the visitor centre build itself at the end of March, with the goal to complete this autumn – though as with any construction project the schedule can be affected by unforeseen factors, such as the weather.

The new visitor centre will feature a café and changing places facilities and host permanent exhibitions and interactive displays, to make Ham Hill's stories accessible to all. The project also aims to support local schools and community groups with educational resources.

Thanks to the generous Heritage Fund grant, Somerset Council has welcomed two new members to our team to help deliver the project: An Assistant Ranger and Engagement Ranger have joined our two permanent rangers Paul and James and our incredible group of volunteers. Together, their work will help conserve and celebrate the rich heritage and nature of Ham Hill including:

- Heritage Conservation: Protecting and showcasing the wealth of archaeology at Ham Hill, including its status as one of Europe's largest Iron Age hillforts.
- Biodiversity Enhancement: Improving habitat management to support a diverse range of species and ecosystems.
- Community Engagement: Offering educational programmes and interactive exhibits to engage visitors with the history, geology, wildlife and natural beauty of Ham Hill.
- Visitor Experience: Developing new ways to help people explore Ham Hill with an accessible visitor centre, a café and permanent and temporary themed exhibitions.

Councillor Grahame Oakes, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Public Health, Environment and Climate Change said:

"This is an exciting time for the Ham Hill community. We can't wait for visitors to see and experience the positive impact of these efforts. We are committed to making Ham Hill an accessible place where people can connect with nature and history in meaningful ways, ensuring this much-loved historical beauty spot is preserved for future generations and continues to be a wildlife haven for nature to thrive. This project will also serve as a model for heritage and conservation efforts across Somerset, inspiring similar initiatives throughout the county. As part of the council's plan for a greener, more sustainable Somerset, we aim to promote environmental stewardship and sustainable tourism. We are extremely grateful to the Heritage Fund and other generous benefactors for their amazing support—without them, this project would have just been a dream."

If you would like to get involved at Ham Hill through volunteering or find out more about the activities on offer for your group or organisation, please contact [countryside@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:countryside@somerset.gov.uk) or visit [Ham Hill Country Park](#) to also keep up to date with the project's progress, by following Ham Hill on social media or check out the [Visit South Somerset website](#).

### **Additionally – Great News as ground breaks Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March**

As this long awaited project is about to break ground and start the necessary works of implementing the services that begin today (Monday 3<sup>rd</sup>) and the construction of the centre, we hope that any inconveniences are as minimal as possible and that the works go smoothly and to schedule finishing in the autumn. Updates on the Facebook page for the Ham Hill Country Park who will be posting updates. Please contact us should there be any disruptions that cause concern to Stoke residents. We all hope it goes smoothly.

### **1.4 - Government announces Exceptional Financial Support for Somerset Council**

Somerset Council's share of Council Tax could rise by 7.5% - this includes 2.5% above the national cap of 5% - following an announcement from Government. Somerset Council had been seeking Exceptional Financial Support from Government as part of its budget setting for 2025/26.

Since its creation in April 2023, the council has been taking emergency action to reduce costs and plans to save a further £47m next year, including £34m by reducing the number of staff and managers employed by April 2025.

However, cost pressures in Children's and Adults Social Care continue to soar nationally and Somerset Council is facing a gap of around £66m for 2025/26. *(This gap may have changed by this report dependent on other savings and/or available financial streams as agreed by the Government)*

Somerset Council's budget will be discussed and finalised either at Full Council 5<sup>th</sup> March or at any subsequent emergency meeting in the next few weeks should that be necessary.

Agendas and papers will be published in advance with the public encouraged to attend the meetings, either in person or online.

## **2.0 - Local Issues**

**2.1 - Roadside trees at East Stoke** – Included in the next contract out for tender now.

## **2.2 - Traffic and Road Safety Meeting**

A walk round has been arranged with SC staff to look at issues at 1000- 27/1/2025. Postponed. This meeting took place on 25/2/25 and was well attended. SC officers from Traffic Management and Highways discussed matters brought forward, (Clerk has received a confirmation response from Traffic Management), and the how the road repair reporting system, inspection and work orders works. It was recommended that all defects to be directly reported using the "[report a problem on the road](#)" on the Somerset Council preferably including photographs as that can help with assessing more urgently should it be a notable safety issue. It may be that the council would consider a task and finish group for some of the proposals discussed as a way to bring about the changes that could make Stoke safer, as they would need community support.

## **2.3 - Overhanging vegetation and surface green creep – Reconciling responsibility between SC and NH**

This is the hardest challenge. The slip road foliage and surface green creep being removed due to the no existing or historic agreement remains to be rectified legally. Sadly, we have now passed 1<sup>st</sup> March which is the no cut back period due to nesting birds. Given the growing safety issues this may possibly be considered outside of that timetable. Neither can either party close the road as neither has that authorisation. This will be discussed with continued urgency between SC, NH and legal depts therein. Will keep the council updated with any positive progress or outcomes.

As you are aware, this slip is not the only one along this stretch of the A303 that is in need of specific guarantees and agreements.

## **2.4 - A356 Crewkerne Road Signage**

The large sign on the A356 southbound Crewkerne road, prior to West Street is in need of a clean which would be beyond safe for volunteers to undertake and has lost reflection due to moss making it satisfactorily legible at night, this has been highlighted and was added to the teams cleaning schedule.

**2.5 - Bonnies Lane** – Length to be jetted in 2025-26

**Regards**

**John and Emily**