

EXMOOR LCN – HOUSING SUB-GROUP
Thursday 2nd November 2023
Exmoor House, Dulverton and online from 5.30pm – 7.00pm

Expected:

Cllr Stephen Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Somerset Council
Will Lock	Exmoor Young Voices
Rev David Weir	Exmoor Benefice
Eric Norman	Top of the Moor Rep
Stephen Kimsey	Brendon Hills Rep
Katy Attwater	Porlock Vale Rep
(Vacant)	<i>South of the Moor Rep</i>
Colin McDonald	Somerset Council (Advisory)
Ruth McArthur	Exmoor National Park Authority
Sam Murrell (LCN Interim Link Officer)	Somerset Council

1. **Apologies**

Dean Kinsella (subs Ruth McArthur), Mike Ellicott, Jeff Brown

2. **Introductions**

Cllr Pugsley – Somerset Councillor and Chair of the Exmoor LCN
Cllr Frances Nicholson – Somerset Councillor
Ruth McArthur is the policy officer for ENPA – Local Plan and housing expert.
Will Lock – Representative of Exmoor Young Voices.
Eric Norman – Publican of the Rest and Be Thankful. (Cutcombe PC)
Stephen Kimsey – Huishchampflower PC
Katy Attwater – Porlock Vale Rep (Timberscombe PC)
Rev David Weir (Online) Serves the Exmoor Benefice
Colin McDonald (Online) Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler
Sam Murrell (Online) Exmoor LCN interim Link Officer and clerk

Somerset Council is the housing authority for the Exmoor Area. (It is not the responsibility of ENPA, although the park is the planning authority). Potentially there is a Housing Revenue Account which has money available to fund (build) and maintain properties. A current building programme is taking place in Minehead (Rainbow Way) but as, yet no council housing is planned for the Exmoor LCN area.

3. **Discussion points: -**

- **ENPA Local Needs Affordable Housing Assessment Final Report.**
To be used as a source of data and information to facilitate the housing discussions. A presentation was made by Ruth McArthur. This covered the main points as outlined in the AHA report. **(Copy Slides to follow).**

Ruth to make some checks on the table (9x multiplier on the income whereas the industry model is usually 3.5 for median properties). The evidence supports the fact that the majority of median properties to buy

are out of the reach of local people. (Local incomes do not meet the required affordability).

Even with discounts applied, there is still a gap between affordability and local families obtaining housing.

ENPA - The planning restrictions will ensure local ties on new build development. S106 – Ensure that new lettings/owners meet the requirements as laid out in the development plan.

ENPA is keen to work with partners including Somerset Council to deliver on the priorities listed in the Housing Needs Report.

The report does not extend to the Brendon Hills or Brushford which are outside the ENPA planning boundary. There is a need to capture this information (although likely to be very reflective of what is contained in the Exmoor report) Low earning to medium house price.

Could evidence be gathered from the former West Somerset Council to validate the argument? Somerset Business Intelligence will have detail down to post code if needed. They just need to know what data to extract. (Income levels and demographics would be useful information). This can also be done by collating existing housing need surveys, business intelligence and electronic real time data collated by Exmoor Young Voices. (*Ruth, Colin, Sam to co-ordinate*).

Housing Needs surveys will quickly go out of date as only present a snapshot of a particular point in time. The ARC report is the best source of local housing information and data to date.

- **What is Somerset Council doing to advance housing initiatives in the Rural Areas (especially Exmoor)?**

Somerset Council colleagues are working on housing related issues across Somerset. Currently working within 4 local teams corresponding to the respective local plans. Colin McDonald is the only dedicated rural housing enabler in the whole of the Council. (Exmoor is well served!)

The Somerset Council Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is in a slightly healthier position than the General Fund because the money for housing provision is ring-fenced. It must be used to fund the housing service and is subsidised from rent income. Borrowing capacity is however limited.

54 housing units are being built in Rainbow Way, Minehead. These will all have a local connection tie to immediate parishes. Right To Buy (RTB) will be applicable on these properties however which could take them out of the rental market.

A private development is out for consultation at Cutcombe. Under the planning requirement, this will have some affordable housing element, which is most likely to be provided by a housing association.

(Advantage is it will remove the RTB element). It is important to maintain the availability of rented/social housing in perpetuity.

Smaller housing developments of 5-10 properties may be more viable on the moor than larger schemes. Can only be achievable with grant and cross subsidy. Homes England grants can be tapped by Housing Associations, but smaller developments can be more expensive to deliver.

- **What is Somerset Council doing to bring empty homes back into use?**

See attached briefing note from Stephen Perry – Empty Homes officer.
How many houses are currently empty and how many are brought back into use? (Winsford PC have been working hard to address this).

Information is difficult to extract from Somerset Council. Parish councils have tried to communicate with the owners etc about bringing the properties back into use. Somerset Council is unlikely to carry out compulsory purchases as the money is not available.

Lendology – promote the grants that are available to homeowners so that derelict properties can be renovated and brought back to a habitable state.

Possibility of increasing the council tax levy on second home ownership?

- **What provisions are being made to facilitate local people accessing housing advice and assistance, especially around Homefinder?**

Colin McDonald provided a series of slides (See attached).
Homefinder only records those people who register for social and council housing to rent. Rural registrations are very low. It is current information however and is constantly updated.

Homefinder is local to Somerset, so any household can bid on rural properties. This is not necessarily confined to the parish unless there is a local connection tie, which was established at the development stage. Most ex-council properties, (Magna HA) are open to the whole of Somerset. They account for 86% of the total vacancies in West Somerset.

Cllr Pugsley highlighted a recent newspaper article published on behalf of the Devon Housing Commission – This was consulting on the increase in short-term letting/rental properties in Devon which were taking long term rentals out of the market. This was also looking into the affect that Airbnb and holiday homes were having on the availability of housing stock. ENPA have been invited to comment and will be formulating a joint response with Dartmoor National Park.

4. **Recommendations to the Panel (SP)**

- Gather additional solid evidence to support the arguments that local housing is beyond the scope of local incomes. (*Colin, Ruth and Sam*)
- Look for direct investment from Somerset Council to support housing initiatives in the Exmoor area. (Self-build sites to be included).
- Provide assistance and advice for self-builders, especially around the supply of utilities.
- Parishes to undertake a survey and identify empty dwellings in their boundary. (Empty House register). Take that information back to Somerset Council so that this can be actioned.

5. **A.O.B. / Dates and Venues for meetings going forward**

Not discussed.

6. **Meeting closed at 7:20pm**

Encl.

Exmoor Affordable Housing Study.

Empty Homes Briefing note

Colin McDonald presentation slides

Newspaper article on Devon Housing Commission.

To Follow

ENPA slide presentation.