

Minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel Meeting

Held on Thursday 9 June 2022,

At the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

Present:

Patricia Bainbridge (Brompton Ralph) Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis) Sally Moran and Norma Martin (Clatworthy), Roger Foxwell and Vivian White (Cutcombe), Margaret Rawle & Christine Dubery (Dulverton), Mike Ellicott (Exford), Mark Bolland (Luxborough) Scilla Barney (Selworthy & Minehead Without), Fran A' Brook & Innes Davis (Upton), Peter Pilkington (Timberscombe), Tony Howard (Withypool & Hawkridge), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay), Roger Webber (Cutcombe resident)

Also Present:

SCC Cllr Frances Nicholson

SWT/SCC Cllr Steven Pugsley, SWT Cllr Nick Thwaites

Officers:

Andrew Turner, (SCC)

Sam Murrell (SWT)

Christine Boland (Magna Housing Association)

PCSOs Michelle Haines & Bryan Stevens (ASP)

(The meeting commenced at 7.05pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from John Elliott (Brompton Ralph PC) Matthew Headley (Brompton Regis PC) Max Lawrence (Selworthy and Minehead Without) Andy Milne (SWT) Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC) Craig Gowan (SCC)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting the Exmoor Area Panel 10th March 2022, and matters arising.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 10th March 2022 were circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 10th March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters arising: -

Update on B3224 Landslip Update – Paul Nation (SCC Structures)

The Structures Office are running with the scheme now and the first action has been to start the commissioning process with the County's consultant, WSP.

This will enable consideration of options to ensure the correct solution(s) is(are) progressed to design stage.

The initial Brief was sent to WSP on 19 May 2022, and Paul is currently waiting for them to respond to this. He did speak to them on 29 May about the brief and is looking forward to receiving it soon.

Comment was made at this point that the landowners - Mr and Mrs Tucker had not been contacted by SCC Highways regarding the landslip or advised of what was happening. Andrew Turner took the contact details and stated that up until this point, SCC had not been able to determine ownership. He would follow up the information. Mike Ellicott asked that once a way forward has been decided that Exford, Winsford and Cutcombe Parish Councils are all consulted about prospective works and possible diversions.

On a positive note – The Upton Road slippage has now been successfully concluded.

3. Exmoor Local Community Network (LCN) Pilot – Andrew Turner
To adopt the recommendations as laid out in Point 6 to the Exmoor Area Panel – Draft Minutes of the Exmoor Highways Subgroup Panel meeting were circulated prior to the meeting.

6.1 Andrew Turner to revise the Devolved Funding Paper to be more representative of the Exmoor parishes so that this can then be approved by the Exmoor Area Panel. This includes but is not limited to the Capital budget options listed in the table at Point 2.0.

- The devolved budget is 20K set aside for Revenue Works and 10K for Capital Projects. The chart identifies what type of works fall under each category but allowing for the fact this is a Somerset wide chart, not specific to Exmoor. Some items may not necessarily be relevant to this pilot.
- Andrew Turner reminded the parishes that this was a learning process, and the benefits that were identified would be progressed across Somerset as a whole.
- All Capital and Revenue Schemes should be submitted as Service Requests using the form, and these would be passed to the Sub-group for assessment. The group would assess the need for the scheme, as well as identifying who would benefit as a whole. If match funding can be met by the parish, then this can be added to the budget.
- The Service Request will be evaluated and costed by the Sub-group panel. This will formulate whether the scheme is put forward for consideration or not. This will ensure that all highway works meet the required quality standard and are delivered consistently.
- It was also pointed out that some of the works could be delivered jointly if parishes wanted to match fund on projects or deliver them using local contractors and thus price very competitively.

- The parishes would be strongly encouraged to use local contractors to deliver the works cheaper, quicker and by using local supply chains and businesses support the Exmoor economy.
- The devolved budget is specifically for discretionary expenditure, and not items that have already been identified as SCC responsibility.
- It was asked whether SCC Highways maintained a “recognised supplier” list of contractors which could be made available to the parishes. Andrew Turner advised that SCC no longer did this, but the best course of action would be to seek reviews/references from peers on who was able to deliver on works. It was important that all insurances such as public liability, Health and Safety checks etc were up to date before awarding work contracts.

6.2 Formally endorse the appointment of the Highway Steward role, including Terms of Reference and line management responsibilities.

- The Highways Steward, Richard Gay would formally start his appointment on 27th June after a period of annual leave. He will have access to his own vehicle and can be contacted directly via his mobile phone.
- SCC Contractor, Milestone is employing the Highway Steward. A comment made about fitting a dash cam to his vehicle will be passed back to them for consideration.
- The Highways Steward will undertake small tasks only and these can be relayed to him directly. It is important that if he considers a task is too large, feedback should be given on how the project can be delivered in an alternative way.
- Communication needs to be kept open and an important starting point would be to invite the Highways Steward to meet the parishes either at their own meeting, or a future Exmoor Area Panel meeting.

6.3 Ensure that each parish within the Exmoor Area Panel has appointed a Highways Warden as a point of contact with the Highway Steward. Contact details for same to be provided as soon as possible and forwarded to Kate Brown (SCC) KMBrown@somerset.gov.uk.

- The Highways Warden will be direct liaison point with the Highways Steward.
- Some of the parishes have been visited by Kate Brown in recent weeks and are awaiting a response on when recognised defects are going to be delivered?

6.4 Endorse the adoption of Parish Online for the Exmoor Area Panel. This to be for a trial period of one year at a cost of £800 paid for by the Local Government Association.

- Andrew Turner asked that those parishes who had already subscribed to Parish Online, contact him directly to discuss their options. ASTurner@somerset.gov.uk.

4. SCC Highways Update – Andrew Turner

Other highway matters: -

- Luke Green from SCC will be working with Andrew Bray from Wootton Courtenay PC on the “Polygon Plotter”, to see if it is suitable to roll out across Exmoor. When diversions and highway works are added to the one.network map, a “ping” is sent to mobile phones alerting them of the proposals. Andrew said it was still in the early stages of development and he was not fully versed in the software to be able to endorse it to the panel at this stage.
- Cutcombe Drains – Outside Shearwells entrance. Cllr Roger Foxwell advised that following works undertaken by sub-contractors the drains were now blocked with tarmac. Andrew Turner will send a Highways team out to investigate, and thanked Cllr Foxwell for the information.

5. Magna Housing Report – Christine Boland

An update on Magna Housing was circulated prior to the meeting.

Christine was welcomed to the meeting and advised that there had been no Magna update since 2019.

Comments were made as follows:-

- Housing stock is limited, and the population is sparse. The Exmoor population is in decline and likely to reduce further if families cannot be housed within their village. Villages will die, schools will close, and the economy will suffer. The Exmoor Housing Policy needs to be reviewed.
- Concern was raised around allocations via Homefinder Plus. The view was that local families with strong connections to the parishes were being overlooked in favour of candidates from outside the area.
 - These families invariably brought problems into the locality as they were not accustomed to living in such rural communities. Some were very isolated with no means of transport, and no access to public services. They also couldn't access support such as mental health or social services. Even getting children to school was a concern with no means to transport them there. This often led to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and neighbour disputes because the new family felt displaced and not accepted.
 - If local people are not getting housed via Homefinder can the reasons be made clear, and how can they improve their chances? Would letters of support from a parish council help?
 - The police commented that a high proportion of the ASB they had to deal with usually resulted from these “fish out of water” tenants. They do not have the cultural support or services nearby that look after them. Housing policy should be supportive of local lettings.
 - Rural communities do not cater for vulnerabilities and mental health issues in the same way that can be accessed in urban centres. These people need to be near their support networks.

- Homefinder is looking at its letting policies and is also trying to make the application process easier. It is aware that young people are not applying because they can't or won't engage with the system. A user group regularly reviews the process, to try and simplify and or improve the online forms.
- It was stressed that it is important for people to register with Homefinder so that housing need can be determined. Analytics are often carried out using the data from Homefinder to assess whether there is a need for housing in certain parishes, and what type of accommodation is required.
- The criteria for how Homefinder determines its housing allocations is done collaboratively via the four Somerset District Councils. Registered Social Landlords such as Magna do have an influence, but ultimately the responsibility is with Somerset West and Taunton in this area.
- Orchard Way Timberscombe – Various issues of concern were raised following storms Dudley/Eunice and the fact that many elderly residents were without power for 72 hours. Western Power Distribution did their best, but there wasn't a Magna response. These residents were simply forgotten – what happened?
 - Christine apologised and said that Magna was dealing with many sites over that time period in what was an exceptional civic emergency. A collaborative approach is needed to ensure that this doesn't happen in the future.
 - Ensure that Magna is informed of the situation as early as possible so that support can be given.
 - Ensure that Disaster Recovery Response plans are in place and are regularly monitored. The parish council should have emergency plans – can these contact details please be passed to Magna so they have these on file? In the event of an emergency a local contact point has been established.

Christine was thanked for attending and left the meeting.

6. Avon and Somerset Police Report – PCSO 8913 Michelle Haines and 7317 Bryan Stevens

The crime statistics for the last quarter were read out at the meeting. There had been a few unofficial “breakdown scam” reports but no victims of crime had come forward.

The main areas of crime centred on neighbour disputes, domestic violence and safeguarding. This backed up the comments made earlier in the meeting around misplaced and socially isolated housing tenants.

The police had been more visible on Exmoor engaging in a variety of activities. This included bike-marking at various locations, a presence at Cutcombe Market, the Talking Café in Dulverton and a ladies session at Exmoor Hill Farming Network. They had also been widely publicising on social media about various thefts, unattended vehicles, and damage.

Bryan also highlighted a recent arrest which had resulted in the removal of a drug dealer. Social use of Class A drugs on Exmoor was highly prevalent, although

largely hidden. This was due to the fact users did not have to resort to crime to fund their habits, and there was no obvious anti-social behaviour such as begging being reported. Bryan did highlight the importance of reporting concerns however and said that intelligence was needed to ensure that the police could act.

Cllrs Mike Ellicott and Roger Foxwell asked if there had been any progress in contacting a member of the Road Safety Team, Dan Cox and inviting him to a future meeting. PCSO Michelle passed on his contact details to Sam Murrell, in order that this could be followed up.

It was highlighted that it would be good to have more Neighbourhood Speed Watch initiatives on Exmoor. These were easy to establish and would be a good way of encouraging drivers to slow down.

The police also advised that in order to recover stolen property it is important that it can be identified and reported as stolen in the first place! In some instances of theft, it is very difficult to determine what has been taken, because items are not catalogued or can't be identified by the owner. The Selecta DNA marking kits are a useful tool for tagging items and have a very good recovery rate.

PCSO Bryan is due to retire in 2 months from ASP. The Chair and the rest of the Exmoor Area Panel wished him well on his retirement. PCSO Michelle who has recently moved to the area, will be serving the Exmoor Neighbourhood Policing Team going forward.

7. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Issues (DSFRS)

No representative in attendance.

8. Exmoor National Park Authority Issues (ENP)

No representative was available but a question was raised about upkeep of ENP finger posts. Cllr Pugsley signposted the Exmoor Historic Signpost Project under Shirley Blaylock. Although the project had come to an end it might be possible to ring-fence some funding towards upkeep of these heritage assets.

sjblaylock@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk.

The Exmoor National Park Annual General Meeting was due to take place on Tuesday 14th June.

9. Parish Lengthsman Scheme

All money has been collected and Scheme is up to date.

Would be a good idea for the Lengthsman (Sean) to co-ordinate with the Highway Steward (Richard) in the future to co-ordinate their work and not duplicate.

10. Items brought forward by parishes

- **Attendance by PC Dan Cox – ASP Speed Awareness**

PC Dan Cox has been contacted and will be making a presentation on Speed Awareness at the September Area Panel meeting.

- **Exmoor Platinum Jubilee Celebrations**

It was put on record, that all the Exmoor parishes turned out to celebrate the Jubilee with various activities. This included lighting of beacons, picnics, village green parties and games. Congratulations to HM the Queen on her 70th Jubilee celebrations, and to the Exmoor villages for commemorating this occasion. It was agreed that it was wonderful to be taking part in community events once again.

11. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward.

Exmoor Panel Date	Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date
1 September 2022	15 July 2022
24 November 2022	14 October 2022
12 January 2023	9 December 2022
16 March 2023	10 February 2023

(The Meeting ended at 9.20pm)