

Minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel Meeting

Held on Thursday 24 November 2022,

At the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

The meeting commenced at 7:06pm

Present: Patricia Bainbridge (Brompton Ralph PC), Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis) Jan Aldridge (Brushford) Sally Moran & Norma Martin (Clatworthy), Roger Foxwell (Cutcombe), Margaret Rawle & Christine Dubery (Dulverton), Mike Ellicott Exford), Janette Sapsford (Exton) Jan Stapleford & Julian Dascombe (Luccombe) Ann Sparling (Luxborough), Max Lawrence (Selworthy & Minehead Without), K. Attwater (Timberscombe) Val Thompstone (Upton) Bryany Neal (Winsford) Tim Lloyd, Polly & Julian Soltau & Tony Howard (Withypool & Hawkridge).

Also Present:

SWT/SCC Cllr Steven Pugsley, SWT Cllr Nick Thwaites, SWT Cllr Andy Milne, SCC Cllr Frances Nicholson

Officers:

Kevin Bridgwater (SCC)

Sam Murrell (SWT)

PCSOs Michelle Haines & Linda Brooks (ASP)

Colin McDonald – Rural Housing Enabler (SWT)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from John Elliott (Brompton Ralph PC), Matthew Headley (Brompton Regis), Jeremy Hickman (Exford) Fran A' Brook (Upton), Colin Wilkins (Winsford) Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay), Penny & Roger Webber (Selworthy) Ruth McArthur (ENP), Andrew Turner (SCC) Jane Lillis (CCS)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting the Exmoor Area Panel 1 September 2022, and matters arising.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 1 September 2022 were circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 1 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters arising: -

- The Chair advised that meetings had so far only been scheduled until the end of March, due to the administration being a district council responsibility. After April 1, SWT will no longer exist and the Exmoor Area Panel would need to make alternative arrangements for meetings. It was

generally agreed that the Panel fulfils a valuable role and needs to continue. Therefore, it would be necessary for the new Somerset Council to put support in place. The Chair asked parishes to write to SCC and ask for ongoing administration.

- It was also suggested that it would be prudent to invite SCC Executive Member for Local Government Reorganisation, Cllr Val Keitch to a future meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel. *Prop: Cllr Christine Dubery / Sec Cllr Nick Thwaites*. Unanimous support. (**ACTION POINT** – Sam Murrell issued email invitation from the Chair 28/11/22).
- Currently meetings always took place on a Thursday evening due to the availability of the clerk and were held at the Moorland Hall because of low cost and ease of accessibility. It was suggested that in future, other parishes may wish to host, so could they please provide prices and availability for consideration. It was important that venues could accommodate approximately 40 people, were economical, preferably central and could provide adequate parking. Wifi and other facilities would also be useful.

6. Avon and Somerset Police Report – PCSO 8913 Michelle Haines and Linda Brooks.

A request has been made by Avon and Somerset Police to have their item brought forward due to bad weather. Excessive amounts of rain had fallen over the previous 24 hours and parts of Somerset Levels were already underwater. The highways teams had already implemented the emergency flood gates and the police were on standby to assist.

The following incidents have occurred since September: -

- Vehicles in Dulverton and Timberscombe had been targeted for catalytic converter thefts.
- Police are carrying out targeted patrols at various beauty spots due to a spate of vehicles thefts that have happened recently. The advice is to lock valuables out of site and ensure vehicles are secure.
- An outbuilding in Selworthy has been broken into and items taken.
- Wheddon Cross garage was targeted and broken into. Despite CCTV being operable in the area, no clear images have been provided to assist police with their enquiries.
- Crime reduction advice was offered in all instances. Enquiries are still ongoing.
- The Ford at Bury Hill, Dulverton has been attracting anti-social drivers. The Police are working with the parish council and traffic management to find a workable solution. An issue has also been highlighted regarding a width restriction on vehicles at this location.

In addition, the following community events have been happening: -

- Various bike marking events around the district. These will be advertised in the ASP newsletter and on social media. Bikes will be marked for free and registered on the national computer database.
- Funded trailer marking at Cutcombe market was a success.
- Promotion of Farm Watch and Horse Watch to rural communities.

- Presence at Dunster by Candlelight and Dulverton by Starlight.

Questions were raised on the following issues:-

- **SIDS – How can parishes apply to Avon and Somerset Police for funding?**

Information on the Road Safety Fund can be found at: -

[Road Safety Fund | Avon and Somerset Police](#)

- **What happens with fly-tipping? Should it be reported to the Police if it constantly happens?**

The clearing of fly-tipping rests with the local authority – currently SWT. It can be reported via the online form. More information about this can be found on the SWT website.

[Fly-tipping \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](http://somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk). If it has only happened once, then it is an isolated incident and will be cleared. If more reports happen at the same location, then the Police will liaise with the Council about the possibility of setting up monitoring equipment etc.

Post Minute Notes supplied by PCSO Michelle Haines

- Query from Exford PC chair, Mike Ellicott, about lack of response to SID funding request. Michelle followed this up with the Damien Devanney from the Road Safety Department and they have been in touch with him. Michelle has arranged to go to Exford PC meeting in January.
- Porlock burglary. Linda has updated them directly.

3. SCC Highways Update – Kevin Bridgwater Winter Maintenance Programme

Kevin advised that all machinery had been serviced, was now in place and ready to go when required. The first gritting run of the winter season had taken place on Friday 18 November due to a drop in temperatures.

Salt bins/bags

Parishes that had placed their salt orders were now having these filled. If there were problems with the locations of the grit bags (dropped in the wrong place!) can this please be reported to the Highway office as a matter of urgency at <https://services.somerset.gov.uk/contact-somerset-highways>. Some parishes had requested replacement salt bins as part of the devolved funding request and these would be ordered shortly. Bins would be a minimum 220L capacity and would be fastened via a hasp and staple. They needed to be sited 450mm from the edge of the road and SCC highways would need to approve the location of any new bins. Parishes needed to let SCC know when their salt stocks needed replenishing.

Blocked drains/gullies

Where water was coming off the highway and there was a threat to life and or property it needed to be reported as a matter of urgency. Less urgent drainage issues should be reported via the defects portal so that the highways

maintenance team could respond accordingly. Once the Highways Steward was back in post, these issues could be directed there.

Streetworks, Dulverton

Road works by Openreach in Dulverton had temporarily ceased in the lead up to Christmas so that there was no disruption to the businesses over the prime retail period. If there were any issues with third party contractors can this be reported to the SCC Councillors so they can take appropriate action as soon as possible.

Exford Landslip

Roger Foxwell asked why the grips at the ravine had not been cleared. These were contributing to the problem of excess water and further eroding the embankment. Kevin advised that the team responsible had looked at the site and deemed that it would potentially make the situation worse if work was undertaken at the site in its current state. It was also considered unsafe to operate the required specialist equipment at the site. Geodrilling will take place at the ravine before Christmas, and it is hoped that an update will be provided at the Highway sub-group meeting in December.

4. Exmoor Local Community Network (LCN) Pilot – Sam Murrell LCN Public Consultation

The LCN Consultation had now ended. Due to the high number of responses, the final report has been postponed until the SCC Executive meeting in January 2023. This is when the outcomes and boundaries will be made known. The LCN team was gratified with the good level of engagement from parishes, but there was no clear winner with regard to the suggested boundary plans. More time is needed to evaluate the results. Further information about Local Community Networks can be found on the [New Somerset Council website](#).

4.1 Devolved Funding

The devolved budget is specifically for discretionary expenditure, and not items that have already been identified as SCC responsibility.

A list of schemes and proposals put forward by parishes before the 1 November had been circulated with the agenda pack. These schemes had been individually assessed and given the following RAG status.

Key:

RED - Likely to require further work, cannot be delivered before the 31 March and or potentially fall into specific Highways responsibility areas (BAU), and therefore have been earmarked for further discussion.

AMBER – Some aspects of the scheme are deliverable but may not be achieved in the remainder of the financial year OR further evaluation is required before approval can be given/denied

GREEN – These works can be delivered quickly, within budget and will provide maximum benefit to the road using public. These projects do not sit within the existing BAU operations of SCC.

WHITE – These are jetting requests and will be taken collectively.

The following recommendations were put to the Exmoor Area Panel and were unanimously approved.

1. Projects marked Green are delivered as quickly as possible to ensure that the relevant parishes are winter-ready.
2. The jetting requests to be taken collectively, as part of the devolved funding revenue budget, and a local contractor is employed to carry out this work. Agreed that prior to the work being commissioned, Highways team are consulted to ensure that any potential challenges are identified.
3. The Highways Sub-group is given delegated responsibility to follow up on amber schemes, to ensure that the devolved funding budget is spent by the end of the financial year,

It was also suggested that parishes continue to submit requests as and when required and the spreadsheet would be constantly updated. If a budget is found for the 2022/23 financial year these projects could be considered.

4.2 Highway Steward Update

Richard Gay, the Highway Steward has tendered his resignation and will be leaving Milestone on Friday 2nd December. He is currently on annual leave before taking up employment with the SCC Highways Team.

Interviews for his replacement will be taking place during the week commencing 28 November 2022, and it is hoped that the new employee will be able to start work early in the New Year. It has been requested that Sam Murrell is part of the interview panel, to represent the parishes and provide local input.

During this interim period, the parishes are requested to continue to report non-urgent work via the job request form, as these will be picked up by the new steward. There is no need to re-log any cyclical or repeat work requests, as these will automatically carry forward.

Please [click here](#) to access the Exmoor LCN – Highway Steward Job Request.

Urgent works such as blocked drains should be reported via the defects portal to ensure a swift response. General repairs such as potholes, road damage and other problems outside of your parish boundary should continue to be reported via the SCC online portal. www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/

4.3 Asset Information – Parish Online

Most of the Exmoor parishes had now subscribed to parish online, which was free for the duration of the trial. The following parishes had yet to subscribe

and would be invited to participate again: Huish Champflower, Selworthy and Minehead Without, Skilgate, Treborough, Upton and Wootton Courtenay. In order to sign up please use the following link:-

1. Go to www.parish-online.co.uk/signup
2. Type your parish name into the box, select your parish as the search box find it.
3. Click Next
4. Click the Subscribe Now option
5. Enter the discount code “**sccgroup**” and click Apply
6. Follow the rest of the steps in the sign-up form.

This will then send you details for how to log in.

The Parish Online User Group runs a free banter session by Zoom every Friday afternoon at 3pm - a group of parish councillors and clerks - all experts in the use of Parish Online - volunteer their time for an hour, for anyone to drop in and ask a question on anything; answers are usually provided online in an instant! This is facilitated by Graham Stoddart-Stones who is himself a parish councillor from Somerset.

Parishes may find this helpful, as well as being a source of humour and friendliness. It can be booked [here](#), (last item in the list), and users will be very welcome.

Tristram Carey from Geosphere has also set up a hedgerow layer so that parishes can add information about cutting and maintenance requirements. Tristram has offered to help parishes with the mapping requirements with this.

He did suggest a one-off training session, and Sam has received some expressions of interest but it may be difficult to find a time to suit everyone. He can be contacted via Tristram.cary@geosphere.com.

5. Colin McDonald – SWT Rural Housing Enabler Specialist

Colin presented a slideshow on his role. He is currently employed by SWT as the Rural Housing Enabler Specialist. He has over 30 years' experience in housing both at a front line and strategic level.

He has been in post since August but only does 15 hours of work a week. He has been visiting the Exmoor parishes and attending events. The biggest challenges for rural housing are Planning, Finance and lack of land.

It is important that local families register their housing need on Homefinder Somerset, even if there is no available housing in their preferred areas of choice. Housing providers use Homefinder as a data source when assessing housing requirements. If there are no households expressing an interest in certain parishes, then the need will remain hidden! This is the biggest challenge that Colin faces in his work and he spends a lot of time promoting Homefinder to households in housing need.

Colin's work focuses on housing enabling which means working with parishes to facilitate housing delivery. This could be via Community Land Trusts, Registered social landlords and or private developers. He does not deal with bringing empty homes back into use, as this is the role of the SWT Empty Homes Officer. He does work closely with colleagues in other areas of the housing section to address local issues.

Although this role is currently employed by SWT, it will transfer into the new Council in April 2023, and become part of a bigger housing authority serving Somerset.

Colin has facilitated and attended some housing events on Exmoor which have been a good way of meeting and hearing about local issues.

The Chair thanked Colin for attending and providing an informative and interesting presentation.

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

No representative in attendance.

8. Exmoor National Park Authority Issues (ENPA)

No representative in attendance but the following updates given: -

- Bye Wood project – Tree planting would be taking place on 26 November and 3 December 2022.
- The National Park Conference had been hosted by Exmoor National Park and representative from all around the UK had attended. They were impressed with various aspects of ENPA work, but especially with regard to community engagement. This was considered something for the other national park authorities to try and emulate.
- Exmoor Young Voices was also unique to Exmoor and considered a very good model for engaging with young people, especially around affordable housing.
- There was widespread publicity about the Cost-of-Living crisis and the detrimental effect that this would have on ENPA budgets in the coming year. It was inevitable that there would have to be financial cuts.

9. Parish Lengthsman Scheme

Those parishes wishing to partake in the Parish Lengthsman Scheme need to register their interest with the Dulverton Town clerk by the beginning of December.

10. Items brought forward by parishes

An email had been submitted from Jane Lillis notifying the Exmoor Area Panel of her impending retirement on Friday 2 December. The Chair asked that a formal letter of thanks was sent to her on behalf of the committee. (**ACTION POINT** – Email correspondence sent on 28/11/22).

11. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward.

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

It is hoped that the Police Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford will be attending the January meeting. A representative from Somerset Prepared has also indicated that they will be present.

(The Meeting ended at 9.00pm)

DRAFT