

**Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup**  
**Held on Friday 10 February 2023,**  
**At Withypool Village Hall from 10.00am – 1.30pm**

**Present:**

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	SCC/SWT
Andrew Turner	SCC
Luke Green	SCC
Bev Norman	SCC
Kate Brown	SCC
Craig Gowan	SCC
Steve Marsh	SCC
Mike Ellicott	Vice Chairman Exmoor Panel
Christine Dubery	Dulverton Town Council
Sarah Buchanan	Brompton Regis (Brendon Rep)
Andrew Bray	(Vale Rep)
Roger Webber	(Moor Rep)
Roger Foxwell	Cutcombe PC
Patrick Watts-Mabbott	Exmoor National Park (ENP)
Sam Murrell (Project Officer)	SCC/SWT

**1 Apologies**

Margaret Rawle (Dulverton), Cllr Frances Nicholson, Jeremy Hickman (Exford), No representatives from Milestone were in attendance.

The Chair introduced Patrick Watts-Mabbott to the group and said that he was attending to observe and offer insight in how the volunteers he oversees may be able to help with the Highways Project. Patrick has responsibility for the maintenance and management of the Exmoor Fingerpost project on Exmoor.

**2 To review the Minutes and Action Points of the previous meeting on Friday 9 December 2022.**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record. Matters arising: -

- **Exford Bridge Silting**

Unfortunately, a lot of the vegetation which is causing the problem was unable to be cut due to the height of the river. It is hoped that the team will return now that the water is lower. The silt can only be removed in the summer, and budgets are very tight, but the Bridges Team are undertaking all preparatory work in case funding can be found. The work within the river is the responsibility of the Environment Agency and Exford Parish Council are finding them to be uncooperative in their response to the problem.

The tree that was blocking one of the arches because of the recent highwater event, was removed by Exford villagers. SCC Bridges team have been out and removed logjams from all the bridges where trees were reported following the recent flooding. Can any further incidents

please be reported to the [Bridges@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Bridges@somerset.gov.uk) team, to ensure a swift response.

- **Update on the Exford Road Slippage aka The Ravine**

The Bridges Team are leading on this, and the contractor has carried out and completed the exploratory bore hole drilling, to determine the core of the ravine. This work has been contracted out to WSP who are specialist technical engineers and they have been carrying out site surveys to determine the scope of the works.

Once the bore hole information is assessed and the programme of works is determined, parishes will be consulted on the best time to undertake the reparations. Following on from this, it was agreed that a public meeting would be held to let residents know what would be happening. It is hoped that the work to be undertaken which is likely to be embankment reconstruction and sheet piling would be quick to complete, but a full road closure would be necessary. It was hoped that this would happen in May to take advantage of the longer day light hours.

It was queried that the adjacent landowners to the highway still had concerns that nobody had contacted them to discuss what was happening. One of the landowners also has a private water supply nearby and was worried that any works would affect the water to their property. **Action Point** – Andrew Turner to follow up.

### **3. Scheme Promotion / Review and Update**

#### **3.1 Drainage Schemes – Craig Gowan**

The drainage work scheduled to be undertaken on the B3188 was unlikely to be delivered in the current financial year. This was being re-booked for the 2023/34 budget.

#### **Shearwells – Highway Maintenance (RF)**

Roger Foxwell reported that the Highways Maintenance team had now successfully cleared the drains at Shearwells, Cutcombe of tarmac. Sam Murrell stated that this demonstrated the usefulness of parish online which had allowed her to map the identified drains, so that the team could go straight to site and clear them.

#### **Luckwell Bridge – Collapsed Drain (RF)**

Roger Foxwell reported that the roadside drain at Luckwell Bridge had been jetted, but then unfortunately collapsed. (This is in the ditch beside the highway). This will need to be reported to the Highways Team for investigation.

#### **B3224 – Silt traps at Long Lane (RF)**

These are blocked and need addressing. They do not appear to be on the Highways Maintenance work sheet, so will need to be added if the responsibility of SCC.

### **3.2 Resurfacing / Surface Dressing – Craig Gowan**

#### **A39 Tivington – Road Closure**

The road closure would take place between the hours of 9.00am – 3.30pm to allow school buses passage through the work. The Coaster bus service would be affected but the service operator is already aware of the fact and would likely deviate the service.

All hauliers, transport operators, businesses and shop owners will be informed about the works at least a fortnight before the resurfacing is due to take place. Porlock Parish Council will also have advance notice.

It is envisioned that the preparatory works will take place under signals during the day, and the resurfacing will happen at night. Signage with diversions via Exford will be sited early enough for drivers to take the appropriate routes.

Signage – It is very important that the signs make it clear where the road closure comes into effect. This is especially important regarding the A39 Porlock Hill / Redway drainage scheme so as not to “close off Porlock”. In the past this has happened as traffic has bypassed the village. It is important that the businesses are not adversely affected. It was agreed that the yellow diversion signs need to contain more information.

### **3.3 Grass and Hedge Cutting**

#### **3.3.1 Selworthy / Wootton Courtenay – chase about additional cut**

The cutting schedules have now been drawn up and will commence during the first week of May. All cutting will be undertaken by a local contractor. Selworthy and Wootton Courtenay parishes, requested a 6ft cut in certain areas and were going to submit a map identifying those roads. Parish Online would be a good tool for this.

Parishes were reminded that if additional cuts were required the devolved funding could be used to pay for this. Highways would meet their statutory obligation from a safety point of view, but if additional cuts were required for aesthetic reasons, then this would need to be funded separately.

Private landowners are responsible for maintaining hedges on their own properties, but some are reluctant to undertake the work. The parish representatives present stated they did not like to confront the landowners in their community because it sometimes led to bad feeling with their neighbours. It was suggested that SCC could undertake the work and then invoice the landowner if they did not address the issue and where safety on the highway was compromised. Andrew Turner said this could be done, but it was a final solution only, when all persuasion had failed.

In the new Somerset Council, the street sweeping contract will be combined into the programme and this will make it easier to liaise on general maintenance issues.

### **3.4 Traffic Management Schemes – Kate Brown**

#### **3.4.1 Cutcombe - Extension of 20mph reduction in speed (TRO)**

The publishing of the proposal to implement the speed limit has received some opposition and a FOI request. The detailed plans have been sent to the parish council, and the formal consultation is now taking place. If no objections are received then the implementation will be sometime around June/July. It is a lengthy process, but this is due to the statutory requirements.

#### **3.4.2 Exford Speed Indicator Devices (SID)**

The new post for the SID has been put in place and the SID is working well. The white lining road markings did not get completed at Combe Lane due to parked cars blocking access. It was requested that if SCC could give 24 hours' notice to the parish then steps would be taken to ask the owners to remove their vehicles. There was also some lining missed on the road alongside the Village Hall. The tweaking of the 20mph speed limit and proposed extensions are being worked on. Kate Brown will need to visit the site again and agree extents and where posts can be sited and then the TRO will be advertised. (This will take a few months).

#### **3.4.3 A39 Tivington / Selworthy**

Reduction in the speed limit to 50mph at the request of Luccombe and Selworthy PCs. There were no objections to the proposal and work is due to go ahead at the same time as the road re-surfacing to minimise disruption.

#### **3.4.4 Brompton Regis / Signage at the Ford**

Traffic Management are looking to implement some better signage for tourists to divert traffic away from the Ford. This should provide earlier advance warning, so that visitors can take a detour around it. The works order will be submitted in April. A depth gauge has also been suggested but there is no historical information to support the fact that there has been one on site previously.

#### **3.4.5 Dulverton – Various**

- White Lining that was missed.
- **Bollard outside Acorn Antiques** – This request has been denied due to the pavement being too narrow. An alternative traffic solution needs to be found.
- **Jury Road** – The Town Council is currently communicating with residents in the hope that they can deter high sided vehicles from parking and blocking sight lines. “Nobody wants to resort to Yellow Lines!”
- **Amory Road** – is an extension of double yellow lines which will be advertised on the next amendment order in the spring/summer and if no objections then lines will be put down. The other location is Lady Street which was around cars parking in a narrow section and the fire

engine struggling to get through. There is a reluctance to prohibit parked cars as this will be detrimental to the residents and holiday cottages. The lining audit will address these issues.

### **3.5 Public Utilities (Luke Green)**

**3.5.1** The location of diversion signs has now been addressed and put on the one.network. Statutory Undertakers must refer to this when carrying out their duties.

**3.5.2 Openreach** would be undertaking some work on the highway at **Exford** either side of the “ravine” which would necessitate a 2-3hour road closure for heavy vehicles. This was to erect 2 telegraph poles and was essential work. It would be carried out over 2 days between the hours of 10:30am-1.30pm to avoid school and commuter traffic. It was asked that all communications were sent out early so residents could plan accordingly!

**3.5.3 Wessex Water** would be carrying out sewer relining in **Porlock**, which would necessitate a road closure. More information would be communicated once known.

**3.5.4 Jury Road, Dulverton** – Christine Dubery expressed concern about the work due to take place at Jury Road, which required a road closure as this was the service road for the local GP, dentist and school. It would have to be planned sensibly so that access to those businesses was not prevented.

**3.5.5 Cutcombe** – The works that had been carried out by Wessex Water Authority 18 months ago were now finally being corrected by the Highways Team. They were bringing the surface back to a Highways Standard, but it had taken a long time to correct.

#### **Question from Mike Ellicott**

What inspections are carried out to determine whether completed utility works have been returned to a highway’s standard?

This provoked a general discussion on the importance of reporting sub-standard work. Once the contractor has completed their operations, it is guaranteed for a period of 18 months. It is therefore important that any concerns are reported back to Highways as early as possible to get them to return and make good. Unfortunately, there are not enough inspectors throughout Somerset to check every single utilities task, so parishes being vigilant will assist the Highways Team in their work. Once the 18 months has lapsed the responsibility to make good, then falls on the Highway Authority.

There are other methods being trialled in the event of the work not meeting the required standard, such as payments being with-held, and penalties being imposed.

SCC Highways are also currently reviewing their departmental structure and ways of working, to bolster the inspection and client side of the business.

#### **4. Winter Maintenance**

##### **Update on the current situation – Andrew Turner**

There have been various issues brought to light over preceding weeks concerning the gritting of red and green routes. It was clear that the contractor was not meeting the minimum obligation as laid out in the winter programme of works. The contractor has been unable to resource the green routes, and this was unacceptable. The contractor has been put on notice that the level of service is below the recognised standard and expectation. The main reason for the lack of salting/gritting appears to be a reduction in manpower. (The contractor currently employs 61 operatives whereas previously they had 82).

Green routes are not being gritted and this is impacting on communities and is causing reputational damage to SCC. There had also been occasions when even red (essential) routes had not been gritted and roads had been summarily closed forcing cars on to even less safe highways!

Contractors are measured on output, not on the method so it is not just about the use and operation of gritter lorries. Other methods of distribution may need to be employed.

The contractor is being instructed to meet the requirements of the contract as there is possibly still another 6 weeks of bad weather still to come. Liaison is ongoing to ensure the incremental process of monitoring is being applied, which could ultimately lead to a breach of contract if improvement is not made.

All concerns about gritting (or the lack thereof) need to be reported to the [countyroads-westsom@somersetgov.uk](mailto:countyroads-westsom@somersetgov.uk) soon as possible.

##### **Rights of Way Maintenance in ENP**

ENP is currently provided with a budget from SCC to contribute towards the Exmoor National Park Rights of Way. If the money is not forthcoming in the new financial year, then ENP will most likely hand the responsibility back to the new Somerset Council.

#### **5. Devolved Funding**

##### **5.1 An update on the current position.**

Green schemes were progressing: -

**5.1** Bev Norman and Sam had a conversation about payment of the Brompton Regis Traffic Management survey. This should have been processed internally and the money transferred without the need to send a separate invoice.

**5.2 Jetting** – A list of schemes has now been compiled. A comprehensive map of the drains in Dulverton had been supplied by Margaret Rawle, and this would be used as a “test case” to determine value for money, before opening further. Sam Murrell

requested the names of local jetting operatives who could be approached to price for the work. Kevin Bridgwater had also supplied a specification on the required standard of work.

**5.3 Grit bins** – These had now been delivered to the depot and would be distributed by the Highways Steward in the coming weeks. Sam would be arranging with the clerks about a suitable liaison and dropping off point. It would also be a good way for Tim Williams to get to know the Exmoor communities. Once on site, the parishes would need to arrange for the grit bins to be filled. Brompton Regis (Sarah Buchanan and Cllr Frances Nicholson) had undertaken an audit of the grit bins because some had gone missing! There was also difficulty in getting the bins filled, especially if they weren't completely empty.

Once the bins have been delivered the parishes would need to email [countyroads-westsom@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:countyroads-westsom@somerset.gov.uk) to arrange for filling.

**5.4 Budget for 2023/24** – Andrew Turner explained that he was hoping to earmark some of next years budget to fund the continuation of the highways project. There were concerns however about the 38million predicted budget deficit and the resulting cuts that may need to be implemented.

One suggestion within the budget was to remove the provision of filling Grit Bins and ask the parishes to resource this themselves. Concern was expressed that parishes had already set their precepts and had made no account for this, and it would impact on the safety of communities on Exmoor. The Subgroup felt very strongly on the detrimental impact this would have on the parishes, the highways pilot and ultimately the Local Community Network. There had been little or no consultation, and most were unaware that this was implied. It was suggested that it might be prudent for parishes to write to Cllr Mike Rigby (Executive Councillor for Transportation at SCC) to lobby their concern. The budget would be agreed by SCC for the new Somerset Council on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, so time was relatively short to respond.

## **6. Highway Steward (Andrew Turner)**

### **6.1 Update on Highway Steward Scheme**

Tim Williams was now in post and was catching up on the work that was outstanding from December and January. There was a slight delay due to the original applicant deciding to turn down the job just as he was about to begin. Following on from induction and training, Tim was now familiarising himself with the district and the cyclical tasks on the worksheet.

### **6.2 Update on Programme**

It was agreed that it would be useful for him to meet Sean – the parish lengthsman. Sam has scheduled this into his work planner to liaise with the Dulverton Clerk (Mandy Rose), so that he can work it into routine works whilst in the area.

It is also planned to have more liaison between the Highway Steward and the SCC Highways Superintendents in the future. This will identify the gaps where the Highways Steward encounters problems which he can't tackle, and his concerns can be passed on more quickly. Sam Murrell now has access to the work planner and has more oversight to enable this. It may also mean that some works are referred to the parish clerk who will need to log the issue on the defects portal. (This would happen if the work required is deemed too technical for a single operative, or some additional traffic management is needed).

It was agreed to remind parishes that the Highway Steward is available and what works he is equipped to undertake. It is also important that work request forms clearly log where the issues are so that time isn't wasted trying to find specific locations. It would be useful to log drains and such using What3Words or provide a map. (parish online).

## **7. Parish Online**

Sam Murrell queried when the free trial period would end, because some parishes were now starting to query whether they would have to meet the cost if they wished to keep it. Andrew Turner agreed to follow this up and come back with an answer.

Christine Dubery asked about training and the parish online user group takes place every Friday afternoon. It is free to participate, and users can drop in and out of the session as required. Please [click here](#) to go to the timetable and book your place.

## **8. Recommendations to the Exmoor Area Panel**

None at the present time.

## **9 A.O.B**

- **ENP Finger post volunteers** - Patrick Watts-Mabbott introduced himself and explained that his volunteer operatives were Chapter 8 trained to allow them to work on the Highway. They could be called upon to assist with projects although they may need help with sourcing the relevant equipment.
- **Adoption of the Exmoor LCN** – The Exmoor Pilot area has been formally adopted and recognised by the Local Government Reorganisation Team. This means that the current valuable work of the Highways Pilot can continue. Cllr Pugsley is also keen that the Area Panel model morphs into the work and terms of reference of the LCN governance arrangements. As such the March meeting will be the last of the Exmoor Area Panel, and the first of the Exmoor Local Community Network Committee.
- **Venues and timings of future meetings**  
Sam has contacted all the clerks in the current Exmoor Division asking what facilities are available in their parishes to enable meetings to take place. The venues must be accessible, available and affordable. A good response has been received. Once a budget has been identified, Sam will be diarising meetings for the forthcoming municipal year.
- **Satisfaction surveys and feedback**



These have been circulated. Understandably there was rather a luke-warm response at the end of Qtr3 to the services of the Highway Steward, due to no service being provided in December. Overall, with one anomaly the service seems to be well received by parishes. It was decided to remove the anonymity from the forms, so that dissatisfaction and negative comments can be followed up. It will also prevent duplication.

- An invitation has been extended to Val Keitch to attend the last official Exmoor Area Panel meeting. Frances Gully and other members of the LCN consultation team are also planning on attending, as is Nicola Dawson from Somerset Prepared.
- Andrew Turner and Steve Marsh are producing a report about the Exmoor Pilot which will go before the Local Government Reorganisation Committee. It will cover such themes as “what works and what doesn’t?”, officer capacity and lessons learnt. It will shape how the other LCNs will develop, and how the Highways pilot will be rolled out across Somerset.

#### **10. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward**

<b>Exmoor Panel Date</b>	<b>Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date</b>
16 March 2023	10 February 2023

**Meeting closed at 13:40**