

**Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup**  
**Held on Friday 22 September 2023,**  
**At Dulverton Sports Pavilion from 10.00am – 1.30pm**

**Present:**

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council (SC)
Cllr Frances Nicholson	SC
Bev Norman	SC
Luke Green	SC
Kate Brown	SC
Kevin Bridgwater	SC
Kali Martin	SC
Patrick Watts Mabbott	Exmoor National Park
Andrew Bray	Wootton Courtenay (Vale Rep)
Christine Dubery / Margaret Rawle	Dulverton Town Council
Sarah Buchanan	Brompton Regis (Brendon Hills)
Roger Foxwell	Cutcombe PC (Top Rep)
Sam Murrell (Project Officer / Clerk)	SC

**1. Apologies**

Mike Ellicott (Exford PC), Andrew Turner (SC), Paul Nation (SC), Craig Gowan (SC). Craig had submitted his highways reports and these would be picked up in his absence by Kevin Bridgwater and Kali Martin.

**2. To review the Minutes and Action Points of the previous meeting on Friday 23 June 2023.**

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

- **Shearwell / Luckwell Bridge (RF)** – Collapsed and blocked drains. Roger Foxwell expressed dissatisfaction that despite repeated reminders, the drains at these locations remained blocked/broken and no solution had been found in the interim.

Kali Martin responded that following the last sub-group meeting he had attended a site visit with Roger at Shearwell. It was explained at the time that the topography of the road led to a “flattening” out of the drain run between the gratings. This would mean that even with repeated clearing, there would be a build-up of silt/debris and stones at this point. The drains had been addressed, on several occasions but unfortunately it was likely to be a recurring problem.

Luckwell Bridge – following a site visit Kali had reason to believe that the blockage was caused by a displaced pipe. Investigations were ongoing. Once again, this was not a simple fix.

- **Visibility of signs on the Highway (RF)** – At what distance should signs on the highway be visible to the road using public? Roger was unhappy that this question had not been answered in previous meetings. Kate Brown agreed to report back on the current legislation.

*The following information taken from the Traffic Signs Manual on the GOV.Uk Website.*

*Chapter 1, Paragraph 5.2.9. It is essential that road users have an unobstructed view of traffic signs. The distance which should be kept clear of obstructions to the sight line is known as the clear visibility distance. The higher the prevailing traffic speed, the greater this distance. It is important, therefore, that sight lines are maintained so that vegetation (including seasonal growth), subsequent building development and other features such as shop signs and awnings do not obscure traffic signs. It is equally important to ensure that signs are not placed where they will obstruct the view of other signs and it is essential to ensure that they, themselves, do not obstruct sight lines, e.g. for vehicles emerging from a side road or access.*

A copy of the manual is attached.

- **Cutcombe (RF)** – Resurfacing: When was this going to happen? The road was not maintained to a Highways standard. It was pointed out that this question would be answered in a later agenda item. (Resurfacing Schemes).
- **Wootton Courtenay – hedge-cutting.** Andrew Bray asked if there was any progress on the wider cut to verges in Wootton Courtenay? He considered this was essential for safety reasons and should not be classed as discretionary works. Andrew outlined an incident where he had been involved in a road accident whilst on his push-bike. He was forced into the centre of the road due to brambles and vegetation and had been hit by an oncoming car's wing mirror. The incident was reported to the police at the time. Kevin Bridgwater asked him to forward this information as evidence as to why a larger cut was considered essential for safety reasons.
- **Self-build homes (BN/LG).** Bev Norman was currently looking into this. There was more information needed to help self-builders come up with less expensive options when employing utility companies and other approved contractors. This was especially true about Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO). Luke advised that there was very little flexibility from utility companies, but the team were doing what they could to come up with workable solutions.

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

In Craig's absence updates were provided by Kevin Bridgwater and Kali Martin.

- **Drainage Schemes**
  - Sanctuary Lane – Investigations into the proposed works are still ongoing.

- Brushford – This originally had two gangs working on it to expedite the work as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, due to the recent flooding in Withycombe, one gang had been diverted to conduct remedial repairs there. The priority was still to get this work done as quickly as possible to minimise disruption to the local communities.
  - 2024/25 – next years scheme for asbestos piping. The lessons learned during this period of delivery, would be taken forward especially as a new contractor would likely be undertaking the work.
- Cutcombe – Diversions need to account for market days!
- Beulah Chapel – Clearance work onsite is ongoing. The team are looking to refine the diversion routes. Most of the work will be conducted on restricted hours to ensure school buses and businesses are able to operate.

It was agreed that it was good intelligence to have sight of these proposals.

- **Resurfacing Schemes**

- “Truckers Moor to Hawtree Moor” should read Tuckers.
- B3224 Dunkery Road, Cutcombe – This was on the proposed scheme of works. Roger Foxwell had highlighted this as an area for concern at the beginning of the meeting.
- Liscombe to Tarr Steps – A general discussion took place advising that it may be prudent to inform ENPA and Tarr Steps businesses to close for the duration of the works. It was requested that the works be undertaken outside of the main tourist season and the road closures commence at Hawkridge, to provide plenty of notice to motorists. The sub-group was advised that it was still early days, and the work schedule was dependent on the resource availability.

- **Public Utility Works (LG)**

Luke Green advised of the following schemes that were coming forward: -

- A396 Bridgetown – some privately owned trees were being removed due to disease on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. This would not adversely affect Dulverton, and signs would relay that information.
- Dulverton A396 – Due to a drop in water pressure there had been a road closure requested. This to coincide with work already scheduled by Openreach on the 16 October. This would be a restricted closure operating between 9-3pm to allow for commuter and school buses to operate.
  - Disappointment was expressed about the signs for the current scheme being left out by Wessex Water Authority (WWA) overnight and creating confusion in the town. Luke Green agreed that this was not satisfactory, and he would be feeding that back to the contractor.

- Luke was also disappointed that the access to emergency vehicle arrangements that had been agreed had not been implemented. A number of the road closures were not complying with agreed discussions. He is going to escalate this with WWA.
- Frustration was also expressed about the interim material used to make good after the works. It was agreed that if a full road closure was in place, it was more cost effective to repair the road to the full Highways Standard, rather than do an interim repair that would necessitate a repeat visit within 6 months. This had happened in both Carhampton and Porlock.
- BT Prosecution – Openreach had been successfully prosecuted and been ordered to pay a £17K fine for conducting street works without permission. Somerset Council is very progressive in this respect and is now advising neighbouring authorities on how to proceed with prosecutions. [A full press release on this story can be found here.](#)

- **Traffic Management Schemes (KB)**

Kate reported back on various ongoing issues that are progressing: -

- Porlock Parish Council had requested that the “no waiting” tick marks that were refreshed on the High Street were removed. This would require consultation to establish why they had been installed initially. (Despite protestations to the contrary they had been present as far back as 2008, as they appeared on Google mapping). There were concerns around the lack of disabled parking in the village and whether the lack of apparent lines in the recent past had caused any issues with High Street businesses?
- Kate Brown met with Cllr Margaret Rawle representing Dulverton Town Council and Emma Wallace owner of the Anchor Herd of Exmoor Ponies on Winsford Hill. It was suggested that rumble strips and signage were implemented to reduce speed across the moor. The findings were forwarded to Exmoor National Park Authority and Kate is awaiting their response.
- Exford Speed Limit Changes – there is a concern that one of the posts needs to be sited on land not owned by the Highways Authority. Permission is being sought from the landowner. Once this is resolved then the TRO can be advertised.
- Cutcombe – It was requested that the traffic information collected by the box at Cutcombe be shared with the parish. It was advised that speed was not being monitored, but the weight and size of vehicles via the length of the axles. The team would assess what data was available to the parish once the information was gathered.

- **Other wicked issues!**

Not to lose sight of the current ongoing issues with the Hawkridge drains, Yellowcombe Leat and Long Lane, Winsford. These are all outstanding and officers would be following up outside of the meeting.

#### 4. **Update on the B3224 Exford Road Slippage**

The briefing notes and Q&A document had been circulated prior to the meeting and parishes had been able to comment on this at the Exmoor LCN meeting. It was agreed that it was vitally important that the communication remained open, and communities were informed on how the works were progressing.

The timeline had slipped, but the road closure order for the October dates remained to allow Openreach to undertake their work, and for the vegetation clearance to take place. There was a very narrow window of opportunity to do this, so the team were working to the original timetable as much as possible.

At the time of the meeting, the contract was still out to tender, and the contractor had yet to be appointed. It was noted that it would be helpful if a local contractor were employed so that logistically, the works would be completed more quickly and would reduce travel times to site. A recommendation was made for the LCN to feedback these comments to Somerset Council, and not just to base scoring and evaluation of tenders on cost alone. It was highlighted that other factors should come into play including reducing the disruption to local communities whilst the work was being conducted, travel times to site and using local suppliers.

It was reiterated that once the contractor has been appointed, a public meeting would take place to inform communities on how the work would be delivered. In the meantime, if anyone has any questions, please can these be directed to Paul Nation [bridges@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:bridges@somerset.gov.uk).

#### 5. **Exmoor Pilot Update**

- **Highway Steward (HS)**

Although work requests had slowed the Highway Steward was still being employed across the LCN area. Repeat tasks had now been added to a cyclical schedule and were being picked up periodically.

Parishes, such as Winsford had added requests to clear around gullies and gratings in anticipation of the jetting works being processed. He was also attending to minor drain clearance himself. In the main, the parishes were pleased with this service and having their own operative to call on.

Dulverton/Brompton Regis said it would be helpful if they could view his work schedule and check the progress of ongoing requests, although Sam Murrell explained that the spreadsheet was not available to external organisations. The current work schedule was an experimental

document which was employed for the purposes of the pilot. Moving forward it would be necessary to expand the platform and tweak it. It would be useful if external partners could access this information, and not just Somerset Council users.

There was a bit of uncertainty expressed as he was employed by Milestone, and the parishes understand Milestone are currently in the de-mobilisation stage of the contract. A new contractor would be employed from April 1, 2024. Kevin Bridgwater stated that the existing workforce would be picked up under TUPE, and transferred across to the new contractor, so hopefully the knowledge and experience gained by the current Highway Steward would not be lost.

The importance of a Somerset Council operative, who was employed and trained to work specifically on the Highway was essential.

### **Devolved Funding – Jetting requests (Revenue)**

Dulverton Town Council (Christine Dubery) had been collaborating with a sub-contractor on inspecting and progressing the jetting requests received up until the 30 June. Despite setting the deadline, later requests had still been received.

Christine had tasked a contractor to look through the schedule and provide costings and feedback on the work. He had provided this based on site visits around the district. (Copy attached). She was concerned that whilst on-site he had been asked to undertake additional work that was not listed which would push up the costs.

It was agreed that he would concentrate only on the jetting works, which were listed in the schedule. As well as the immediate costs associated with the work, there was also the disposal of waste fee which was an unknown quantity. Preliminary clearance work could be carried out in anticipation of his visit, and in some instances, it looked like the Highway Steward had been doing this in the Winsford area. It was also stressed that in certain situations there was a responsibility for landowners to clear drainage ditches and outfalls so that the water could flow freely. This would involve machinery and was outside the scope of a single operative.

It was agreed that the contractor would tackle the quick wins and concentrate on the schedule. It was important that the parishes supplied contact details so that the contractor had a liaison point for his visit.

Christine was thanked once again for all her hard work. It was stressed that the devolved funding would not be available in the next financial year, so it was vitally important that this work was delivered swiftly and in budget.

### **Small Works (Capital)**

A proportion of the Capital budget had been spent on the supply of Grit Bins. There was money remaining which could be used to fund identified projects that had been submitted in the previous year.

Dulverton – (High Street outside Acorn Antiques). Priority Give Way traffic management installation. (Previously a bollard was requested but existing street scene could not accommodate this). Kate Brown is now progressing and awaiting costs.

Cutcombe – Speed Indicator Device. Cutcombe are awaiting costs but have already paid deposit and part funded. It was agreed that some match-funding could be made from the devolved funding budget once costs are known. Kate Brown asked to forward the costs as soon as possible.

- **Parish Online**

The free subscription period was ending, and a discussion ensued regarding the value of renewing the subscription for another year. The parishes in the room said they had not seen much value in the system, as they were small and did not own many assets. (It was recognised that some of the bigger towns/parishes in the county may find it of value). There was also not enough time for clerks to acquaint themselves with the various aspects of the system in the limited time available to them.

As a free service it was useful, but not enough to justify paying for in the future. Christine Dubery (Dulverton) said that she was the only person from the town council who used it and attended the training. Dulverton had been given a free subscription via their insurance company but did not feel the need to continue as it was not offering value for money.

## **6. Winter Maintenance**

- **Hedge Cutting / verge maintenance**

Various discussion took place around the current programme of hedge cutting and questions were asked regarding whether a larger flail could be employed in the coastal areas? The climate was milder here and thus the growth flourished in the growing season and needed a more extensive cut.

There was some confusion around terminology – some parishes referred to a “2<sup>nd</sup> cut” but in fact meant a larger swathe being taken at a single time. This was to capture the growth at height in the sunken roads. Maps were submitted and passed on from Wootton Courtenay and Selworthy, in anticipation of the next cutting season.

Clatworthy PC had also mentioned that they needed a wider cut at the September LCN meeting. It was queried whether this had been reported to the Highways team and the locations mapped? Cllr Nicholson agreed to follow up with the Clatworthy clerk.

It was agreed that the hedgerow management standard letter would be circulated to parishes to use or reference, when contacting local landowners about their boundary responsibilities and hedge management. Sam Murrell to follow up with the Highways team and circulate the letter to parish clerks.

- **Liaison between parishes and Highways Salt Bin operative.**  
The parishes were very grateful that the Salt Bin operative would be taking responsibility for the auditing and filling of the various salt bins. He would need to liaise with the Exmoor parishes prior to visiting to ensure he captured all the new bins and their locations. The new bins had yet to be sited and his Somerset Council map would require updating. (Sam has contact information and can pass this on)

#### 7. **Recommendations to the Exmoor LCN (SP)**

**Highway Steward** – To inform Somerset Council that the services of a Highway Steward continue beyond the period of the current contract which is due to end March 31, 2024. This is essential to build on the already established relationships and networks which have resulted from the Exmoor Highways pilot.

**Devolved Funding** – Dulverton Town Council to progress with the jetting/gully sucking operations as listed in the Schedule and received up until the 30 June 2023. They will function as broker for the purposes of the work and will draw down devolved funding from the revenue budget up to the agreed limit. The Highways sub-group agreed their choice of sub-contractor for the jetting work.

Regarding the capital funding, it was agreed that 2 capital schemes that had been earmarked from the previous year be progressed before March 31, 2024, to ensure the money was spent. These schemes are the Traffic Regulation Order in Dulverton High Street, (to give priority to oncoming traffic), and the Traffic Regulation Order and Speed Indicator Device at Cutcombe. Costings are awaited from the Traffic Management Team, but it expected that these works will come in under the remaining Capital Funding available.

**Parish Online** – Only to continue the subscription if it were offered for free to participating parishes or could be purchased via funding or a grant. Otherwise, this should be allowed to lapse, as offering limited value.

**Feedback to Somerset Council** – It was vitally important that the work of the Exmoor LCN was fed back to Somerset Council so that it influenced the decision-making process. This would ensure that communities were not adversely economically disadvantaged by the activities of the Council and



could inform on how local works could be undertaken to minimise disruption. An example quoted was that during the recent utilities work undertaken in Dulverton when the roads were closed or diverted, there had been a 30% reduction in takings for High Street businesses. Over a continued period, this was unsustainable.

**8. A.O.B.**

Patrick Watts Mabbott – **Fingerpost update:** Work has been taking place to reconstitute and repair the existing finger post signs. This is cheaper than a complete replacement. Patrick was incredibly grateful for all the parts which had been collected from the Minehead depot and put to good use. Kate Brown advised that replacement parts were also being stored at the Milverton depot.

**Volunteer Training** – Patrick asked if the training and insurance supplied by Somerset County Council had continued with Somerset Council. There were questions raised about volunteers undertaking Somerset Council work being covered by the council’s public liability insurance. Bev Norman said she would check this out.

**Training Delivery** – Patrick asked if the training could be carried out remotely/online to speed up the process and be more accessible. There was currently a shortage of courses, but several volunteers who wanted to get started! Bev Norman to follow up and investigate delivery providers and methods.

**9. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward**

<b>Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe</b>	<b>Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date – Dulverton Sports Pavilion</b>
Thursday 9 November 2023 at 7pm	Friday 24 November 2023, at 10am
Thursday 11 January 2024 at 7pm	Friday 23 February 2024, at 10am
Thursday 7 March 2024 at 7pm	Friday 19 April 2024, at 10am.
Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7pm	

It was agreed that Cllr Pugsley would liaise with Sam Murrell about future meeting dates. It was decided to continue with bi-monthly face-to-face meetings at intervals between the Exmoor LCN meetings. Christine Dubery confirmed that the Dulverton Sports Pavilion, is available for use on Friday mornings. (Sam to schedule time with Cllr Pugsley to map future meeting times).

## 10. A.O.B

There was also a requirement to hold an inaugural meeting of the Housing and Economic Development sub-groups. It was agreed to have this discussion offline, when confirming the dates for the Highways sub-group meetings.

*Post meeting note:*

***Economic Regeneration Sub-group Meeting***

Thursday 26 October, online via Teams at 5.30pm

***Housing Sub-group Meeting***

Thursday 2 November at 5.30pm – venue to be confirmed.

## 11. Meeting closed at 1:20pm

***Attachments***

***Traffic signs manual (2018)***

***Exmoor Programme of Works (2023/24)***

***Exmoor Proposed programme (2024/25)***