

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Exmoor

Date: Thursday, 9 November 2023

Time: 7:06pm – 9:21pm

Location: The Moorland Hall - Cutcombe, Wheddon Cross TA24 7DL

Chaired by: Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

Name:	Representing
Mike Ellicott, (Vice-Chair)	Exford Parish Council
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Somerset Council
Sally Baker	Brompton Ralph Parish Council
Jan Aldridge (Clerk)	Brushford Parish Council
Sally Moran,	Clatworthy Parish Council
Jon Levenson	Cutcombe Parish Council
Francis Schott	Exmoor (also called Simonsbath)
Stephen Kimsey	Huish Champflower Parish Council
Mark Bolland	Luxborough Parish Council
Duncan McCanlis	Porlock Parish Council
Scilla Barney	Selworthy & Minehead without PC
Dan Barber	Skilgate Parish Council
Katy Attwater	Timberscombe Parish Council
Colin Wilkins	Winsford Parish Council

Tony Howard

Andrew Bray

Will Lock,

Wayne Stokes

Paul Matcham

Withypool & Hawkridge PC

Wootton Courtenay PC

Exmoor Young Voices

CCS Village Agent

Connect Somerset / Minehead Eye

Officer attendance:

Name:

Jeff Brown

Sam Murrell

Tom Parkinson

Kevin Bridgwater

Kali Martin

Beccy Brown

Representing

Interim LCN Lead Officer

Interim Link Officer

ICT Specialist

SC Highways Area Manager

SC Highways Area West

SC Employment and Skills

Other attendees:

Name:

Patricia Bainbridge (Clerk)

Norma Martin (Clerk)

Roger Foxwell / Eric Norman

Anne Sparling

Stephen Colson

Lesley Webb (Clerk)

Rebecca Tomlin (Clerk)

Mel Hammond

Representing

Brompton Ralph PC

Clatworthy PC

Cutcombe PC

Luxborough PC

Porlock PC

Timberscombe PC

Withypool & Hawkridge PC

CCS Village Agent

Virtual attendees:

Name:	Representing
Kate Hellard	SC LCN Development Manager
Colin McDonald	SC Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Summary of key points of discussion and outcome: Action by: item:

Item 27: **Apologies for Absence**

Clare Pound (Homestart), Christine Dubery, Margaret Rawle & Nick Thwaites (Dulverton TC), Fran A'Brook (Upton PC), Julian Soltau (Withypool PC) PCSOs Katherine Williams, Linda Moden & Michelle Haimes, Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis) Janette Webber (Exton PC), Ruth McArthur (ENPA).

Item 28: **Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

Item 29: **An Update on Somerset Council's current financial position.**

Somerset Council's LCN Development Lead, Kate Hellard brought forward an urgent item following the circulation of a letter to parishes from the Leader, Bill Revans. Due to the requirement for parishes to set their precepts and consider all budget pressures the letter had been sent as a matter of urgency. The letter had been distributed to all clerks, but some parishes within the Exmoor LCN had yet to see it.

It was requested that the letter was re-circulated to the parish clerks and Chairs within the Exmoor LCN once again. (Sam Murrell sent this on Friday 10 November). A copy of the letter can be viewed on this [link](#).

The general consensus of the Exmoor LCN was one of disappointment, with the parishes considering that Somerset Council was using this as a "dumping opportunity to offload

assets". Questions were also asked about how the financial shortfall had arisen so quickly into the first year of Somerset Council's tenure, and that the whole unitary exercise had been a waste of time!

Jon Levenson – (Cutcombe PC) – This was very disappointing as most parishes were prudent when setting their precepts. They tried to build up small reserves as a contingency, but devolution would quickly divest them of those reserves and then hit the council taxpayers. Some parishes were very small and had a very limited tax base. What happened to the services in those areas?

Katy Attwater (Timberscombe PC) – Most of the smaller parishes did not have the staff, skills or expertise to handle devolution of assets and services. More information was needed so that the parishes could make an informed choice.

The Chair highlighted that amongst the list of devolved services to parishes was the Highway Steward scheme and taking on responsibility for a variety of Highway services. Although Exmoor had pioneered the Highways pilot, which had been very successful it was never envisioned that this service would be completely devolved down and hit the Parish precepts. The pilot had involved the parishes feeding in their work to the Highway Steward who was a paid operative of Somerset Council's contractor.

The model suggested in the letter seemed to lean more towards the parish lengthsman scheme, which had been trialled in the past and which some parishes still subscribed to. (This was currently managed by Dulverton TC). When the scheme was first launched the district and county councils both paid a contribution alongside the parishes. Over time however, this stopped leaving the parishes to pick up the financial burden. Only a few of the parishes now used the service of the lengthsman.

The Chair agreed that a special LCN meeting may need to be called as the financial picture emerged. Those parishes who wish to know more about devolution should address their queries to devolution@somerset.gov.uk. This is a dedicated email address.

Item 30: **Public Question Time**

There were no public statements or questions presented in advance of the meeting.

Item 31: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record and unanimously agreed.

Item 32: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

There were no matters arising. All updates and actions would be covered under later agenda items.

Item 33: **Avon and Somerset Police Update**

The Police had tendered apologies but a written statement was submitted in advance and read out by the clerk.

Over the past 3 months the Exmoor beat team have been busy with the general day to day work and have also been heavily committed with a few individual people/families which has taken a lot of resources and time.

Mini Police

PCSO's Michelle and Linda have been working closely with 15 Year 4 pupils from 3 schools (Cutcombe, Exford, and Timberscombe) on a 9-week Mini Police programme.

The sessions have been lovely to get the children involved. Their work has included a social action project and the children chose Farm Watch as a focus. The group were lucky enough to visit a local farm in Exford where the children conducted a Farm safety check and registered the Farm for the Farm watch scheme. They also marked items with the unique Selecta DNA.

They also were taken to the ASP Wilfred Fuller Training site where the children had an interaction with the Police dogs, Road safety, The mounted section, and Drones.

The children and adults thoroughly enjoyed the visit, and it was a great way to peek behind the scenes and show how the different Police units work.

Crime Figures for the past 3 Months

ASP have had 93 Reported crimes overall for the whole of the Exmoor area.

There have been some rural crimes where rural vehicles have been stolen. This is currently under investigation by PC James Calloway. The team will visit victims of crime and try to gather intelligence where possible to help colleagues with any investigations moving forward.

PCSOs Michelle and Linda will be attending Dunster by Candlelight on Saturday 2nd December and Dulverton by Starlight on Sunday 3rd December. The beat team will be patrolling the events with Community engagement.

The team are always looking at signing up new farms and small holdings to the ASP Farm and Horse watch so please spread the word. It's a completely free scheme and literally takes a couple of minutes to fill out the form. Once completed it will be sent off and then participants will receive notifications concerning any farm rural related crime. Farm Watch members are also provided with free gate signage and this can be replaced if needed in the future. ASP have a range of signs including signs to warn dog walkers to put their dogs on leads. (This is of course especially important around livestock).

The beat team can be contacted on
Linda.Moden@avonandsomerset.police.uk
Michelle.Haimes@avonandsomeset.police.uk
James.Calloway@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Please can ASP remind you to report any crimes and incidents via 101 or on the online reporting portal on the website. It is important not to leave reports on individual officer's answer phones as this can lead to delays in contact and recording. The team will happily get back to you upon return for rest days or commitments but unfortunately their phones are not 24/7.

The police would like to remind everyone that they still have a wanted person in the Minehead area.

Richard Scatchard (also known as Richard Dunlop) is a 70-year-old male: Approximately 5ft 11ins of average build with short grey hair, normally clean shaven (however this may have changed since last seen). He has a Scottish accent. It's believed Scatchard could be using a distinctive electric bicycle-Grey Gepida Albion Curve which has a pink front tyre rim, flowers on the rim of the rear tyre and green and yellow electrical tape around the handlebars. He is wanted on recall to prison and considered a risk to the public especially women he forms relationships with. If there is a potential sighting please do not approach, but phone 999.

Cllr Nicholson stated that it would be good to have some more strategic oversight of the pressing issues, rather than the very localised crime figures.

Cllr Pugsley reminded the meeting that the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC), Mark Shelford is due to attend the January meeting, to provide his annual update.

Following the LCN meeting, PCSO Linda Brooks sent out the [ASP Exmoor Neighbourhood Beat team newsletter](#). This has been circulated to the parishes.

Item 34: **Connect Somerset / Minehead Eye**

Paul Matcham provided an update on the work he undertakes in respect of the [Minehead Eye](#) and Connect Somerset.

Minehead Eye is a community centre with a particular emphasis on youth engagement work. It is not a publicly funded facility but instead relies on grants and fund raising to operate. Paul explained that Somerset Council contributes very little to the Minehead Eye, and the majority of council money comes from the parish councils. The Eye operates 7 youth clubs in outreach locations of West Somerset and holds afterschool clubs. It also provides a meeting point for home-schooled children and facilitates a counselling service. The Minehead Eye also hosts other organisations including Homestart, the health visitors and some social prescribing groups.

Connect Somerset is a partnership between various organisations which aims to link and offer early help assistance to residents and their families. There are 12 Connect Somerset Champions working across Somerset. Paul identified that working with LCNs and the Primary Care Networks (PCNs) would be essential going forward. Connect Somerset primarily centred on the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, and was looking at how their roles could be developed and provide examples of good practice.

Paul had prepared a presentation, and it was requested that the slide pack was shared for attendees to view at their leisure. The presentation slides can be viewed [here](#).

There were no questions or comments arising, and Paul was thanked for his time. He subsequently left the meeting.

Item 35: **Highways Subgroup Update**

B3224 Repairs at Roundwater, Exford – The vegetation clearance to prepare the site prior to the main works taking place had been successfully completed. This had been carried out under a full road closure for a period of two weeks, in association with Openreach who were also doing work in this area. Devon Streetworks had had a road closure in operation just over the border and this had run concurrently with the work at Roundwater. It was agreed that this was not an ideal situation but there was a very narrow window of opportunity to get these ecological works completed.

A public meeting is due to be held on [Wednesday 29 November](#) at the Moorland Hall, to provide more information on the scheme. This will commence at 7.30pm but doors will open at 7pm. Most of the parishes agreed to hold their questions until this event, rather than occupy time at the LCN meeting.

Reactive Works – Due to recent bad weather events and the need for the Highways Team to respond to emergency repairs and patching, the planned maintenance programme had been pushed behind schedule. This included the resurfacing works that were due to take place at Dunkery. Reactive safety works would always take priority, and the team would tackle the

planned works once the conditions were favourable and the resources were available.

Timberscombe PC – There had been recent vandalism on highways road signs within the parish. (Signs had been pulled up, defaced or twisted to face the wrong way). These had been attended to and reported to the Police. The Police could not record it and issue a crime number as the property was not the responsibility of the parish council. (The Highways Team asked that Timberscombe pass on the details to them, so that they could report it). It was queried whether other parishes had experienced the same issues, but none had recently.

Winsford PC – There was a query regarding lack of access to Emergency Vehicles during a recent road closure. This can be alleviated via liaison with the appropriate contractor. It was agreed that this would be explored more fully during the public meeting on the 29 November.

Cutcombe PC – Cllr Jon Levenson praised the volunteer Jeremy Davies, who worked on the Exmoor Fingerpost project. Jeremy coordinated the volunteer response and took responsibility for painting and maintaining some of the fingerposts himself. It was requested that a formal thank you was sent to Jeremy from the LCN to thank him for his good work. This was endorsed by the Chair, Cllr Steven Pugsley.

Luxborough PC – Cllr Mark Bolland asked for an update on a recent report to the Bridges Team. It was explained that emergency works often took precedent over items that were deemed less urgent. Kali Martin agreed to follow this up outside the meeting and report back.

Exford PC – Concerns were raised about recent building works in Exford which resulted in scaffolding providing a partial obstruction on the Highway. The Highways Team stated that all reputable licenced scaffolding companies would be aware of the correct procedures and H&S regulations that needed to be complied with. If there were any future concerns then they should be reported to the Highways Team as a matter of urgency. If the scaffolding was not compliant, then enforcement action would be taken to remove the obstruction and the

contractor could be fined. All scaffolding companies should undertake the correct survey prior to the work commencing to ensure highway safety.

Withypool Drainage – It was asked if any further progress had been made on the drainage issues in the parish? It was reported that the Flood Risk Team (Civil Contingencies) were now taking enforcement action. A legal notice would be served which would escalate matters and the respondent would need to act accordingly.

Winsford PC – Were aware that the bin audit had taken place, but were concerned about who would take responsibility for placing the new bins and clearing around the existing which were covered in foliage? The winter maintenance team would liaise with the Highway warden in each parish and get the bins sited and filled. It was suggested that if any of the parishes needed undergrowth around the bins cleared, they used the Highway Steward.

Winter Maintenance – It was essential that the green routes were adequately gritted to ensure that key routes which served the school buses, commuters and business traffic were safe for highway users. It was also important that the red routes were prioritised to ensure that smaller communities were not isolated during cold spells.

Devolved Funding – Dulverton Town Council had utilised the services of a sub- contractor and had undertaken a survey of the jetting requests. Following on from the submission of his findings, a purchase order has been raised to facilitate the jetting and gully clearing up to an agreed amount. This also includes the disposal of all waste material. It is important that this work is delivered and paid for in this financial year from the devolved **revenue** account. Given Somerset Council's financial position there would be no further funding of this kind allocated.

Capital – Money in the Capital pot was earmarked to assist with a Traffic Management scheme in Dulverton High Street, and the installation of a 20mph speed limit in Cutcombe. (Not for a Speed Indicator Device as previously reported). These requests had been made during 2022 and were taking time to deliver due

to the required consultation period.

Item 36: **Economic Regeneration Subgroup Update**

The LCN accepted the recommendations made by the Economic Regeneration subgroup.

Comments arising included:-

- The need for parishes to undertake a survey of their respective areas to determine who had connectivity and who didn't? This could then be used to challenge providers who did not have evidence of the existing gaps in rural areas. Cllr Andrew Bray, (Wootton Courtenay PC) had already provided a form for this purpose in his parish and agreed to share this with the wider group. It was agreed that it made sense for all the parishes to have a working model that would ensure consistency with the mapping exercise.
- The need for regular early years childcare to be a priority, thus assisting working parents to return to work. (This had been done in the past via Beccy Brown, Employment and Skills and it was envisioned that this could be developed further).
- ENPA was praised for the work highlighting the need for a rural economic regeneration worker, who could link businesses to funding opportunities and provide support.
- Cllr Andrew Bray also highlighted that there would be a business network event at the Moorland Hall on 23 November 2023. This is a ticketed event hosted by ENPA. [More information can be found on this link.](#)

Future meetings would be diarised shortly.

Item 37: **Affordable Housing Subgroup Update**

Colin McDonald thanked the ENPA for hosting the inaugural Housing Subgroup meeting at Exmoor House, Dulverton, and for explaining the work of the Arc Report. The slides can be viewed [here](#).

The LCN approved the recommendations that were listed in the report but with amendment as follows:-

- The recommendation for parishes to identify empty dwellings in their area to be changed to identify “suitable empty sites for development” in their parish. (This would be new work, as opposed to duplicating work already carried out by the Council Tax register). It was recognised that this was taking place in some areas, but the work to be expanded and include prospective self-build sites.

Other discussion items included:-

- The Arc report was detailed but only included those parishes within the ENP. Brompton Ralph, Huishchampfflower and Clatworthy fell outside this boundary so statistics would need to be included for those villages.
- There was a meeting of the Exmoor Rural Housing Network on Wednesday 13 December at Exmoor House.
- Most of the vacancies on Exmoor for social housing are provided by Magna Housing Association (86%). It was suggested that lobbying Magna to give reasonable preference to families with a local connection to the parish would be a good idea. This would ensure sustainability of local communities including school attendance and rural businesses.
- Cllr Pugsley explained that he had been lobbying the Council for ring-fencing the Council Tax collected on second homes to be earmarked as a reserve for spending specifically in the areas where it was collected. This would provide much needed funding to some of the more rural areas that had a high proportion of second home ownership.

Future meetings had yet to be diarised.

Item 38: **Exmoor National Park Authority**

In the absence of an ENPA officer Cllr Pugsley provided a verbal update on the latest position of the National Park.

Due to Financial pressures the ENPA was planning on reducing the number of Committee meetings to 4 in a municipal year.

They were also going to reduce the size of the planning committee to 12 members and reduce the number of planning

meetings. It is likely the Scheme of Delegation will be changed to accommodate these amendments.

Due to lack of staff capacity the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum scheduled for the Thursday 23 November has been cancelled.

Item 39: **Dates of future meetings**

It has been requested that the proposed Exmoor LCN meeting of the 9 May 2024, is postponed to a later date. Details of the revised meeting dates will be made available as soon as they are available.

Information on the Public meeting to provide an update on the B3224 Highways repair at Roundwater, can be viewed [here](#).

Contact officer for meeting: Sam Murrell sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk.