

Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup
Held on Friday 24 November 2023,
At Dulverton Sports Pavilion from 10.00am – 1.30pm

Present:

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council (SC)
Cllr Frances Nicholson	SC
Luke Green / Ryan Chamberlain	SC
Kate Brown	SC
Kevin Bridgwater	SC
Kali Martin	SC
Patrick Watts Mabbott	Exmoor National Park
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), Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC) Andrew Turner (SC), Paul Nation (SC), Craig Gowan (SC), Andrew Bray (Vale Rep), Bev Norman. 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 22 September 2023.

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

- **Luckwell Bridge** – A site visit had been undertaken and the problem of a displaced pipe was noted. Unfortunately, due to lack of revenue funds and other work taking priority, this would not be considered as urgent.
- **Visibility of signs on the Highway** – Kate Brown was thanked for forwarding on the schedule which demonstrated good practice.
- **Beulah Chapel vegetation clearance** – Sarah Buchanan said that the visibility at this junction was much improved.

3. Somerset Council's Financial Position – what does this mean for the Highways Pilot?

A letter from Bill Revans had been sent out to the parishes prior to the Exmoor LCN meeting. This had listed some services which could be devolved to parishes including the work currently undertaken by the Highway Steward. The letter can be viewed [here](#).

The Exmoor Highways pilot would be officially stood down on the 31 March 2024. A new model of operating the Highway Steward would go forward from the 1 April 2024, which the parishes could subscribe to. It was stressed that parishes would not be taking on any additional work or subscribing to the scheme until the proper costs were known. It was a difficult time because they were already precepting and had no idea of how

the scheme would be managed going forward. The letter raised a lot of additional questions about service level agreements, and what was already being delivered as a statutory minimum. (Hinted at double precepting!?)

It was agreed that although the Highway Steward scheme would need to be evaluated by the parishes, there was a genuine will to continue with the Highways sub-group. This had proven to be an effective method of communicating with Somerset Council and the Highways officers present said they found it of value.

The subscription to parish online had ceased at the end of October. It was for the individual parishes to determine whether they wished to continue using the service.

The devolved funding money would not continue in the new financial year. It was important that all committed expenditure was spent, to ensure delivery of outstanding schemes. The next major project was the jetting and gully cleaning which was being progressed by Dulverton Town Council.

4. Scheme Promotion / Review and Update

In Craig's absence updates were provided by Kevin Bridgwater and Kali Martin. The schedules had been provided in advance of the meeting.

- **Drainage Schemes**

Matters arising – severe weather could push back the schedules, and the work taking place at Roundwater would result in long delays. The team would work closely with local communities to minimise the impact.

- **Resurfacing Schemes**

The team were working with Winsford PC to ensure that emergency vehicle access was retained during the resurfacing work at Edbrooke Road.

Work on the Dunkery Hill Road at Cutcombe has been deferred until the Roundwater scheme is completed.

- **Completed Scheme at Exebridge to Allers Down Lane**

Deemed a success. 100m of Wessex Water pipeline was replaced and snagging work was completed. Despite Devon CC also carrying out Highways work on their network at the same time just over the border, the team worked hard to ensure that school buses could get through and the network kept moving. The carriageway will need resurfacing at some point, but not a priority now.

- **Public Utility Works (LG)**

Luke Green advised that in light of the large capital scheme taking place on the B3224 at Roundwater, there were no other utility schemes being scheduled at present, and some were being delayed minimising disruption on the network.

- **Timberscombe** – The WWA pipeline replacement on the A396 will take place under lights. The contractor will do the main village first and then do the main road. Cllr Nicholson stressed that access to Timberscombe school needed to be maintained. Luke was in the process of coordinating a meeting with all stakeholders.
 - **Dulverton** - A vulnerable person living just outside Dulverton had a contaminated water supply (due to an oil spillage) and this would result in a 3-day road closure. Cllr Christine Dubery wanted to know more details as this could have a direct impact on Dulverton Starlight.
 - **Hopcott Road, Minehead to Porlock** – Would be operating under traffic lights due to the laying of a gas main for a new housing development.
 - **Watersmeet, Devon** – This was over the border, but when works were undertaken would involve a significant diversion into Somerset including Carhampton.
 - **Carhampton** – Commencing March 24, patching works to take place to reinstate the Highway.
 - **Simonsbath** – During the meeting, the Highways team were made aware that there was a problem with a retaining wall at Simonsbath. The wall was being inspected and emergency works had started.
- **Traffic Management Schemes (KB)**
Kate reported back on various ongoing issues that are progressing: -
 - **Cutcombe** – The lining for the 20mph had been completed. Signs when they were erected should be above head height if mounted on the pavement.
 - **Exford** – The TRO was in place. All traffic regulation orders were now on hold until the new financial year.
 - **Porlock** Parish Council had requested that the “no waiting” tick marks that were refreshed on the High Street were removed. Also TRO on disabled bay in the village. This needs to be advertised as part of the legal process. Kate Brown was asked to liaise with Stephen Colson to ensure collaboration with the parish council. Other work in Porlock included KEEP CLEAR markings outside the allotments and refreshing the white line to prevent cars parking in Parson Street.
 - Following a site visit on **Winsford** Hill with ENPA concerning the ponies, it was suggested that rumble strips and signage were implemented to reduce speed across the moor. Cllr Margaret Rawle asked if there would be any capital devolved funding available to finance this scheme? It was made clear that there was not.

Kate also advised that the Traffic Management team had undertaken some statistical work on road safety accidents across each LCN area. It was

agreed that this would be interesting and was asked to share the information.

Bridges and Structures – Patrick Watts Mabbott advised that he thought the bridge protection netting at Tarr Steps was set too high and did not prevent logs and debris from hitting the bridge. If it could be set lower, it might prevent the stones becoming displaced.

5. Update on the B3224 Exford Road Slippage

The public meeting had been booked for the Moorland Hall on the 29 November. Doors would open at 7pm and the meeting would commence at 7.30pm, chaired by Cllr Pugsley. It would take the form of a presentation about the project, followed by a Q&A session. It was going to be attended by the Somerset Council Bridges & Structures team, the design consultant (WSP) and the civil engineering contractor (Walters).

Cllr Pugsley asked for an invitation to the pre-meet which was taking place online via teams on the 28 November. Luke Green forwarded him the invitation.

The Chair asked that members of the Highways sub-group attended to show their support for the scheme and assist on the evening. He was concerned that any adverse publicity or local opposition would result in the funding being diverted elsewhere and the B3224 would not be fixed.

He also asked Sam Murrell to arrange for a known senior Highways operative such as Andrew Turner (or Alyn Jones) to be present. He hoped this would provide some gravitas to the meeting, and support officers. He was aware that the majority of the officers attending on the night were not known to the parishes, and this could cause some unrest.

Sam advised that the meeting date had been circulated in local parish magazines, on the Council's website and in the press. Individual stakeholders, businesses, landowners and parishes had been emailed to ensure they were aware of the venue, date and time.

6. Exmoor Pilot Update

- **Highway Steward (HS)**

It was agreed that the Highway Steward pilot had worked well but was now changing to a different way of operating more akin to the parish lengthsman scheme. Dulverton Town Council already contracted a lengthsman and co-ordinated work on behalf of some of the neighbouring parishes. There was uncertainty about whether the revised working would be something the Exmoor LCN would want to adopt.

It was considered essential that the Highway Steward had good local knowledge and was adequately trained to operate on the Highway. Questions were raised about how his work would be scheduled and who would supervise and oversee the work programme.

The “best fit” for sharing the costs of a Highway Steward was Area 13 (Minehead & Watchet LCN), and Cllr Pugsley said he would contact the Chair/Vice Chair of the LCN to establish how they could collaborate.

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

Dulverton Town Council (Christine Dubery) had been working with a sub-contractor on inspecting and progressing the jetting requests received up until the 30 June.

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. This had subsequently been checked with the Area Highways office who had given the go-ahead for the listed works to proceed.

She was concerned that whilst on-site the contractor would be asked to undertake additional work that was not listed which would push up the costs. It was very important that each parish had an available contact that could meet the contractor and pin-point the problem areas so that his valuable time was not wasted. It was agreed that the parishes would be emailed prior to the work commencing asking for these details.

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.

Dulverton Town Council had been paid £300 to cover the inspection fees and costs already incurred. A purchase order had been raised to pay Dulverton Town Council to proceed with the jetting requests. Christine stated she was waiting for the money to be deposited before proceeding with the work, bearing in mind the Council’s current financial situation.

- **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. There would be no funding available after March 31, 2024.

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 – Traffic Regulation Order. Extension of 20mph speed limit. 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.

7. **Winter Maintenance**

The Highway Steward had been proactively clearing the vegetation from grit bins in various parishes, in anticipation of them being filled.

Cllr Pugsley advised that as filling of the grit bins was not a statutory service of Somerset Council but was a priority on the Exmoor Highways network this might be one area that parishes should consider precepting for.

8. **Recommendations to the Exmoor LCN (SP)**

- To continue with the Highways sub-group meetings beyond the life of the pilot scheme which is due to end on the 31 March 2024. This to be supported by the area parish representatives and the relevant Highways officers from Somerset Council.
- The Exmoor LCN considers working with the neighbouring LCN area of Minehead and Watchet to share the services of a Highway Steward. This to be evaluated once costs are known and the operational procedures are finalised.

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.

9. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward

The public meeting to inform communities on the B3224 Roundwater Scheme to be held at the Moorland Hall on 29 November. Doors open at 7pm for a start at 7.30pm.

Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
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	

10. Meeting closed at 1:20pm