

Minutes of the Exmoor Public Meeting on the B3224 Roundwater Scheme, Cutcombe

Held on Thursday 29 November 2023,

At the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

The doors opened at 7pm so that attendees could view plans and details of the scheme. Somerset Council officers, the WSP design team and Walters, the contractor, were available to answer questions and talk through any issues. Handouts, briefing sheets and a slide pack of the presentation were available to take away.

The meeting started at 7.33pm.

Present from Somerset Council

Cllr Steven Pugsley – Chair of the Exmoor LCN

Cllr Frances Nicholson – Exmoor Division representative

Paul Tucker – Bridges and Structures' Service Manager

Paul Nation – Bridges and Structures' Team Leader (Lead Scheme Officer – Design and Office) and SC presenter.

Ross Matthews - Bridges and Structures' Team Leader (Lead Site Officer – Site Works and Construction)

Luke Green – Principal Street Works Officer

Sam Murrell – Specialist Town & Parish Liaison / Interim LCN Link Officer

Present from WSP – Design Team (Consultant)

Rob Benson – Geotechnical / Structures Design Lead and WSP presenter

Chris Uzzell – Highways / Drainage Design Lead

Present from Walters Group Construction Team (Contractor)

Jim Webb – Regional Director and joint Walters presenter

Richard Scammell – Contracts Manager and joint Walters presenter

Dan Harrison – Project Manager and joint Walters presenter

Joe Sullivan – Site Agent and joint Walters presenter

Also Present were 44 other attendees including:

Ian Liddell Grainger (MP), Jon & Angie Levenson, Andy Forward and Roger Foxwell (Cutcombe PC), Alison Blackmore (Cutcombe School), Nicola Stenner (Exford First School), Oliver Edwards, Mike Ellicott & Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC), Colin Wilkins & Ian Brooks (Winsford PC), Roger Webber, Martyn Atkins, Susan Atkins, Chris Richards, Eric Norman, David Butt, Ernie Toop, John Anson, Lloyd Parry, Miranda Taylor, Wendy Schofield, Ian Whybow, Katherine Daniel, Diane Stevens, Adrian Branfield, Alex Stevens, Steve Green, Peter Gibson, Maddy Harrison-Hall, Robert Martin, Adrian Branfield, Sarah Buchanan, Carrie Golledge, Peter Huntley (Exmoor Farmers Livestock Auctions), SC Griffin, Jeremy Andrews, John & Kathryn Tucker, Mr and Mrs Colwill, Bryan Stevens and Serena Colwill.

1. Presentation on the Scheme

The team delivered a presentation on the specifics of the scheme and how it was going to be delivered. [The presentation slides are available to view here.](#)

During the presentation, Luke Green advised that the map on the diversion route had become slightly skewed on the handout and place names had shifted. The route remained unchanged however and this was available to view on the website.

Once the presentation had concluded, questions were directed to the project team via the Chair.

2. Questions from the Floor

Q. Concern was expressed from the Chair, Cllr Pugsley about the length of time the road would be closed. (19 weeks in total). Was there any room to reduce this, to lessen the impact on local businesses and members of the public? Was there a possibility of evening and weekend working for example?

A. It was important that this work was conducted sequentially, as most of the operational duties could not be overlapped. The heavy machinery was booked via Ivor King who are a specialist in silent piling technology (Giken Supercrush), and there are only a few rigs of this type in the country. All parties were keen to make an early start but there were a variety of environmental and health and safety considerations to take into account. There may be a possibility of weekend working, but it would be dependent on suppliers and sub-contractors' availability as well as the prevailing weather conditions; if possible it would be most likely that weekend working would revolve around tasks that Walters were able to undertake with their own in-house teams directly and it was noted that weekend working is not as productive as weekday working. Working at night was not considered viable due to the severity of the terrain, operating the specialist equipment as well as the ecological reasons highlighted in the presentation.

Cllr Pugsley stressed that weekend working would be viewed favourably by local communities, to reduce the length of time of the closure. If there was any possibility of starting on site earlier too, (once Openreach had completed their work on re-siting their telephone masts), that would be a tremendous benefit. Walters stated that this would be something they would undertake but would require sufficient advance warning to enable the works to be reprogrammed. (Post meeting note – Open Reach are unable to provide any guidance as to when they might complete their activities and hence Walters will be unable to programme in an earlier start).

Q. Peter Huntley (Exmoor Farmers Livestock Auctions) – Was concerned about the lack of consultation with local businesses, especially the Cutcombe Market traders. There will be 16 sale days during the road closure which would result in lengthy delays in getting stock to market. The busiest sheep market of the year

was on May 5, whilst the road was still scheduled to be closed. Oliver Edwards (Exford PC), said this part of the B3224 was one of the busiest on the moor, and the closure would affect all parts of the community. It would impact the two primary schools who shared a school meals service, the school buses, waste and winter maintenance services and emergency vehicles. Many farm vehicles used this road at various times of the day, and it was an essential link to the county border.

A. The road needed to be fixed as it was an essential route across Exmoor. The design had been drawn up and the capital funding granted. It was important that this work was progressed as quickly as possible before the integrity of the road deteriorated further, which might result in an unplanned and unmanaged emergency closure. Future events could cause the road to collapse further. Although the road closure was going to adversely affect the communities for a few months, if it didn't happen then the long-term result could be catastrophic.

School bus service – all pupils would still be collected although they might have a longer diversion. Luke Green would contact the Senior Schools Transport Officer at County Hall to advise on a way forward.

Waste Services – Recycling and waste should still be collected on the usual collection day, but there may be a delay in collection times as the vehicles navigated the diversion. There are, however, no properties within the physical road closure length.

School Meals Service – There are two official diversion routes with one specifically designed to accommodate large HGVs and one for smaller vehicles. Traffic usage of the lanes would be closely monitored to ensure there was no rat-running. If the Streetworks team, acquired evidence of anti-social driving they would consider implementing traffic regulation orders (TRO) and partial road closures in these areas.

Winter Maintenance – It was important that the roads being used for diverted traffic were adequately gritted and safe to travel. This included the alternative access onto the moor from Porlock to Exford.

Local Businesses – The diversion signage would advise that local businesses were open as usual in general but not refer to specific businesses, whilst complying with the regulations and legislation. It was important that the signs did not clutter the pavement and were clear and concise in their wording. Luke Green said he would work with local businesses to ensure this was effectively managed.

General Publicity – The LCN had been consulted and scheme updates circulated. The purpose of the evening meeting was to inform the community of the works and their effects.

Q. Jon Levenson (Cutcombe PC) was concerned about slippage times. The road closure was operating for long enough, but what happened if there were delays in the operating schedule such as machinery breakdown?

A. Walters stated that they had undertaken similar schemes in the past and had faced various issues and challenges that such a scheme presents. This ranged from adverse weather (ice and snow), machinery breakdown, supply chain difficulties and reduced workforce on site. They had confidence in Ivor King who supplied the specialist piling equipment, that spare parts and machinery could be made available in the event of a breakdown since Ivor King, could not afford their plant to be standing and not working on this or other sites. This should enable them to remain on schedule. If the weather was favourable and supplies could be sourced there was the possibility to extend into the weekend, to regain any lost time. Contingencies had been built into the operational programme.

Once the piling is completed on site, Walters will have a better idea of the remaining time needed. The Bridges team will be kept constantly updated and the timeline could be reviewed if gains were made or losses occurred.

Q. Ian Brooks (Winsford PC) had submitted a question prior to the meeting about monitoring traffic coming through Winsford village as this was on the diversion route.

A. Luke Green advised that speed monitoring cameras were going to be placed at strategic locations in the village to monitor the traffic flow, There would also be a TRO on Upcott Lane, Winsford to reduce the speed of vehicles coming through the village.

Q. Roger Webber/Oliver Edwards (Cutcombe residents) asked if the Highways team were going to conduct any work on Longrun Corner whilst the road closure was in operation. This was just up from the ravine area and caused a pinch-point on the highway. Large vehicles had difficulty passing here and it seemed an optimum time to do the work.

A. There was nobody from the Highways team present to address this question, but Luke Green advised that he would take it back to the area office. It was also stressed that due to Somerset Council's financial pressures there was unlikely to be money in the revenue budget to fund any additional highways work unless it was deemed to be a road safety issue.

Q. Adrian Brandworth (Hawkridge resident) advised that he knew of a secure compound where spoil and supplies could be stored by Walters if they wished to use it?

A. Dan Harrison agreed to follow up with him directly after the meeting.

Q. Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC) – Devon CC are also undertaking roadworks over the border at this time which will have an impact on the Somerset Highway. Their diversions normally take them along the B3224 and incorporate where our

road closure is operating. There is likely to be confusion and conflicting signage. How do we mitigate for this?

A. Devon CC will be changing their diversion routes to avoid the B3224. All signage must comply with UK standards so cannot be colour coded or changed to differentiate between the routes. Where there is a clash, it has been agreed that some symbols will be added to the standard signs so that road users can understand what route to follow as was normal practice.

Q. The presentation seemed to imply that there was a pedestrian barrier and pavement being installed at the site. Why did the specification make provision for this when there wasn't one there previously?

A. There is no footpath being installed. There is a pedestrian barrier being built along the edge of the piled wall behind the vehicle restraint system. This is required for future safe inspection and routine maintenance of the new retaining structures i.e. by SC inspection staff and/or their delegated representatives. Design standards require this barrier to prevent potential falls from height.

Q. Mike Ellicott (Exford PC) asked if the Bridges Team had been consulting with the landowners (Tuckers), as they were not aware of current developments?

A. The Tuckers have been kept up to date with the schemes progress and development. A site meeting had taken place that afternoon (29th Nov), between all parties, to discuss a specific matter recently raised unique to their farms. The Tuckers were also present at the meeting. Following that meeting a proposal was being developed.

Q. Please improve communications! Residents were not being kept informed about what was happening. How can we receive regular updates and know what is happening and when?

A. Provide Sam Murrell with your email address. Notes such as the minutes of this meeting, will be sent to you and made available online. There will continue to be regular updates via the Exmoor Local Community Network (LCN) meeting and the Highways subgroup. Somerset Councillors and the parishes will be kept informed as work progresses. Once the project is underway, a further public meeting may be considered.

The final comment of the evening was made about ongoing Highway Maintenance. It was stressed that if there had been adequate grip clearance further up the road, then the water would not have eroded the soil around the base of the tree causing it to topple and placing the Highway at risk.

The notes of the meeting would be circulated as soon as possible. Any further questions or comments should be directed to bridges@somerset.gov.uk.

Press and media queries should be emailed to pressoffice@somerset.gov.uk.