

Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup
Held on Friday 23 February 2024,
At Dulverton Sports Pavilion from 10.00am – 1.30pm

Present:

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council (SC)
Cllr Frances Nicholson	SC
Mike Ellicott	Exford PC (Vice Chair LCN)
Luke Green	SC
Craig Gowan	SC
Kevin Bridgwater	SC
Kali Martin	SC
Patrick Watts Mabbott	Exmoor National Park
Christine Dubery / Margaret Rawle	Dulverton Town Council
Roger Foxwell	Cutcombe PC (Top Rep)
Sam Murrell (Interim LCN officer)	SC
Brenda Maitland Walker	WSFG (Guest)

1. **Introduction**

Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker was welcomed to the meeting. Brenda is the vice chair of the Minehead and Watchet LCN, and chair of the West Somerset Flood Group (WSFG). The Minehead and Watchet LCN is keen to progress with a Highway working sub-group and is considering sharing the cost of a Highway Steward with Exmoor.

2. **Apologies**

Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC) Andrew Turner (SC), Paul Nation (SC), Andrew Bray (Vale Rep), Bev Norman (SC), Kate Brown (SC), Ross Matthews (SC), Pip Hughes (SC), Sarah Buchanan (Brendon Hills Rep).

3. **To review the Minutes and Action Points of the previous meeting on Friday 24 November 2023.**

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

Matters arising: -

- **Finger Post Spare Parts** – Luke Green had brought these with him and would hand them over to Patrick Watts-Mabbott following the meeting.
- **Exford Bridge** – Concern was expressed about the river undercutting the highway on the approach to the bridge. The Environment Agency had been contacted but had not progressed this. Brenda Maitland Walker advised that the WSFG could assist parishes in how to contact the relevant agencies, but it was really important that ongoing evidence (photographs) were provided to support the claim.
- **Tarr Steps Netting** – Nobody had progressed this since the last meeting so it was requested that enquiries were made at SC and ENPA as to who was responsible for repairing the netting. (If it could be set lower into the river it had more chance of catching the debris and protecting the stones).

4. **Exmoor LCN Highway priorities relating to the Financial Emergency**

- The filling of grit bins / supply of salt bags:
- Clearing of drains/gullies;
- Verge maintenance (grass cutting etc).

Somerset Council had set a balanced budget for 2024/25 without removing these services. It appeared that they were safe for at least a further 12 months. Cllr Pugsley advised that it was very likely that these would be revisited in the next financial year, so it would be prudent for parishes to start to prepare. Once the new contractors started in earnest on the highway maintenance, Somerset Council would be in a better position to provide accurate costings.

5. **Exmoor Ravine Update - B3224 Roundwater, Exford**

Another public meeting had been booked for the Moorland Hall on Wednesday 13 March 2024. Doors would open at 7pm and the meeting would commence at 7.30pm, chaired by Cllr Pugsley. The purpose of the public meeting would be to showcase the work that had already taken place and ask questions of the contractor and bridges team.

The parish representatives said they were pleased with the progress of the scheme and the professionalism shown by Walters. Site visits had taken place, and fortnightly updates were being circulated. Despite a machine breakdown, Walters had worked over a weekend to get the project back on schedule.

Winsford PC had raised some concerns and these were being addressed. Kali Martin had been in dialogue with Cllr Ian Brooks. The Highway subgroup discussed how to alleviate some of the problems arising on minor roads because of the increased traffic. Luke Green agreed to investigate this prior to the public meeting. (TRO, SIDs and reducing rat-running). There were also some issues around verge maintenance and drainage because of the excess water run-off.

Larcombe Bend – some parish representatives had suggested reducing the “pinch point” on the bend and undertaking the necessary works whilst the road was closed. This would assist with traffic flow, as large vehicles had difficulty passing each other at this point. It was pointed out that prior to the Roundwater scheme being progressed, a full highway impact survey had been carried out which included traffic speed. The bend provided a natural traffic calming measure that had been built into the scheme. (If the road was widened, traffic speed would increase and would put pressure on the new carriageway structure at Roundwaters). It was agreed to look into a “fix” that did not involve engineering. (Possible signage warning “Oncoming traffic in the middle of the road”).

6. **Exmoor Pilot Update**

- **Highway Steward Update** – Parishes were not prepared to sign up to the HS scheme until an established form of costing was established.

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 with Minehead and Watchet as the neighbouring LCN. The smaller parishes were concerned about the costs and did not think it was affordable.

Christine Dubery said that it was unlikely that Dulverton Town Council would buy into the HS scheme as they were no longer continuing with managing the Parish Lengthsman. They would continue to employ the workman but would be running this independently.

Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker would feed these observations into the inaugural Minehead and Watchet LCN meeting which was due to take place on Friday 22 March at West Somerset House.

- **Existing Terms of Reference (TOR) and proposed amendments from March 31, 2024.**

As the Highways pilot TOR were tried and tested, it was agreed to refresh them for the purposes of the sub-group going forward. (Would need re-branding to Somerset Council etc). The proposed working group TOR that had been brought forward from the LCN team, were rejected. (Main reasons given were that it was not possible to provide a “free venue space with wifi” for each meeting. Parish clerks worked limited hours and would not be available for note taking).

- **Training of Volunteers**

Patrick Watts Mabbott asked if there had been any progress on the idea to train volunteers working on the network via an online portal. (This was mainly specific to Chapter 8 training). This would speed up the training process and reduce the bureaucracy. Luke Green agreed to follow this up.

Post meeting note: Luke advised that in discussions with Bev Norman, a suitable model has been identified which is currently used by Devon County Council. It is hoped to replicate this and roll it out across Somerset. (No timelines at present).

- **Devolved Funding – Progress to Date**

A breakdown of the funding allocation had been circulated prior to the meeting.

CAPITAL

- **Dulverton** – (High Street outside Acorn Antiques). Priority Give Way traffic management installation. Kate Brown is now progressing and awaiting costs. Some of the work (white lining has already been completed). It is hoped that this can be

finished before the 31 March to ensure payment in this financial year.

- **Cutcombe** – Traffic Regulation Order. This scheme has now been completed and the remainder of the costs have been paid from the Capital Devolved Funding budget. (Cutcombe PC had already paid a £900 deposit in advance of the works). The LCN had received a letter of thanks from Cutcombe PC acknowledging the grant.

REVENUE

Dulverton Town Council via the services of the sub-contractor Ian Woollacott had undertaken all but one of the parishes jetting requests. The project had worked to budget and there was a small amount left to cover the final clearance at Porlock Parish. Chris Dubery advised that a tough approach had been taken to ensure that all the service requests from the schedule were honoured. It had been hoped to serve subsequent requests if there was money remaining, but it looked unlikely that this would happen.

Christine and Dulverton TC were thanked for all their hard work in progressing the schedule. The management of the jetting project would not have taken place if Dulverton Town Council had not acted as the principal broker for the works, and accepted responsibility for the payment and handling of the finances. It was considered a “win” for the LCN way of working.

7. Winter Maintenance

Kevin and Kali said that thankfully conditions had been mild, and Exmoor had not had to deal with ice and snow to the extent of previous winters. Additional gritters had now been purchased and would hopefully be available for next winter. The main concern on the Somerset network was excess water, which had closed roads in other parts of the county.

8. Scheme Promotion / Review and Update

- The planned maintenance schedules had been provided in advance of the meeting. Craig advised that any outstanding work from the 2023/24 schedule would now be deferred until the new financial year but would have a delayed start date of June 2024. This was to allow completion of the Roundwaters Scheme.
- **Public Utility Works (LG)**
Luke Green advised that in light of the large capital scheme taking place on the B3224 at Roundwater, other utility schemes had been delayed minimising disruption on the network. These projects were currently backing up and would need to be rolled out in a timely way once the scheme was completed. Luke would bring a list of the projected works to the next sub-group meeting in April.

- **Traffic Management Schemes (KB)**

Kate was absent from the meeting but had submitted a written update on various projects coming forward in the new financial year: -

Brompton Regis

- Better signage for Wimbleball Lake (to be funded by SWLT)

Dulverton

- Awaiting kerb blip amendments and priority give way sign to be installed hope these will be delivered before end of March
- Kemps Way refresh lining old district council are looking at this

Dulverton/Winsford

- Horse warning signs in three different locations as per site visit with Margaret and Emma Wallace

Exford

- Implement signs and lines following change in speed limit and refresh other lining in village

Porlock

- Parking amendments in the main street to be advertised in March – plan will be sent to the Parish and County Councillors prior to advertising.
- Parking sign to go back up following accident and post being removed.
- Parsons Street parking issue in narrow part of the road to be investigated.

Upton

- SID post and some sign and line improvements

Withypool & Hawkridge

- Better signage to deter vehicles from heading to Tarr Steps from Hawkridge direction

9. **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. To update the existing pilot TOR and use as a model for the new Highway subgroup going forward.

- 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.

10. **Any other Business**

The LCN meeting of the 9 May had been reinstated in the diary but would sit outside the normal cycle of LCN meetings. The main theme of this meeting would be to wind-up the Highways pilot and report on the success/lessons learnt. It was agreed that it would be an “in-person” meeting only and would not need the technical support usually provided.

The Exmoor LCN annual report needs to be drafted, which will be presented at the AGM. The date for this has been set for Thursday 6 June.

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

A public meeting to update communities on the B3224 Roundwater Scheme to be held at the Moorland Hall on Wednesday 13 March. 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 7 March 2024 at 7pm	Friday 19 April 2024, at 10am.
Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7pm – special meeting. (Not hybrid)	
AGM – Thursday 6 June 2024 at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed	

12. **Meeting closed at 1:00pm**