

Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup
Held on Friday 19 May 2023,
At Dulverton Sports Pavilion from 10.00am – 1.30pm

Present:

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council (SC)
Cllr Frances Nicholson	SC
Andrew Turner	SC
Paul Nation	SC
Luke Green	SC
Ryan Chamberlain	SC
Kate Brown	SC
Craig Gowan	SC
Kevin Bridgwater	SC
Kali Martin	SC
Mike Ellicott	Exford (Top Rep)
Christine Dubery	Dulverton Town Council
Roger Foxwell	Cutcombe PC
Sam Murrell (Project Officer / Clerk)	SC

1. Apologies

Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis), Bev Norman (SC), Andrew Bray (Vale Rep), Jeremy Hickman (Top Rep).

The Chair advised that now the Exmoor LCN had been formally recognised and the pilot would transition to the next phase, it would be a good idea to revisit the terms of reference for the sub-group and review the local representatives. This was agreed by those present.

2. To review the Minutes and Action Points of the previous meeting on Friday 10 February at Withypool Village Hall.

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

- **Exford Bridge Silting**

Unfortunately, despite a very productive site meeting last summer with the Environment Agency (EA) and the Bridges team, the EA had not granted permission for work to be undertaken in the river. This meant that the silting problem and the undercutting of the riverbank was ongoing. This also included cutting back of the vegetation on the silt banks. Christine Dubery stated she would raise the issue at the West Somerset Flood Group meeting which was due to take place next week.

- **Winter Maintenance Issues**

The Highways warden meeting is usually held in September, but the Chair advised it would be better to meet at an earlier time to prepare for the winter. Andrew Turner advised that a policy review was underway which would include:-

- The Highways Superintendents taking responsibility for the inspection and filling of highways grit bins in the future. It would

be the responsibility of the respective parishes to ensure that the location of the grit bins was clearly identified/marked prior to inspection. (Using parish online if this was possible).

- Convening a highway warden meeting in June/July to prepare for the winter programme and plan accordingly
- Check with recipients who took delivery of the bins that they could retain them until the autumn, when they can be sited and filled.
- **Tarr Steps** remedial works are due to take place next week (w/commencing 22 May).

- **Shearwells / Luckwell Bridge (RF)** – Collapsed and blocked drains. Shearwells drains have been cleared of tarmac but may need jetting as now flood in heavy rain. Luckwell Bridge has a collapsed drain. Kali Martin agreed to follow up these queries outside the meeting.

3. Update on the B3224 Exford Road Slippage – Paul Nation, Senior Bridge Engineer, Bridges and Structures Team Leader.

A copy of the options report and general meeting notes had been circulated prior to the meeting. (*attached*).

Matters arising:-

- Contact has been made with the Tuckers who are the only identified landowners. If there are others – please can their contact details be passed to the Bridges Team. Bridges@somerset.gov.uk.
- Communications generally – once the timescales and procedures are known these will be communicated to all stakeholders and communities. Dates and diversions will be conveyed as soon as possible.
- Current challenges to the timeline are around work that Openreach is planning to undertake and the market dates. The Openreach diversion is currently being worked through and will be expedited once the work is ready to go. (Not confirmed at present but imminent).
- Tender designs are expected to be finalised around mid-July, but then procurement will be 6-8 weeks minimum. WSP (the specialist consultant) has drawn up the specification.
- September/October may be a better time to deliver the work from an ecological and local economy perspective, but SC will still have to work with the markets on minimising disruption. There is likely to be a 4-6 week road closure in operation and diversions would incorporate the turning circle at the Rest and Be Thankful Inn for larger vehicles.
- It was agreed that communications needed to remain open for all parties but especially between the market operators and Somerset Council officers and technical experts.
- Management and maintenance of nearby grips was raised again. It was asked that these grips were clearly identified to the Highways Team, so that the necessary maintenance could be undertaken. It was also requested that all vegetation on the diversionary routes was properly cut back to ensure sight lines for traffic were clear. Roger Foxwell said he had a particular concern at junctions on the moor. He was asked to

report this via the defects portal so that the necessary remedial work could be followed up.

The Chair thanked Paul Nation for attending and providing the update. It looked more positive than previously, especially as the team were working towards delivering the work in the current financial year. It was requested that any communications were forwarded to Sam Murrell so that she could keep the subgroup and stakeholders updated.

4. Scheme Promotion / Review and Update

- **Drainage Schemes (CG)**

Riphay Corner will be carried out in two phases to minimise disruption to the home-owner and the local community.

Phase 1 Planned for June

Phase 2 Planned for w/commencing 11 September

This scheme was previously in the schedules but had been deferred. CG advised that going forward schemes that were completed or deferred would still appear in the schedule but would be at the end of the planned works. This should keep them on the radar and prevent any surprises if they were moved up the work programme.

Beulah Chapel (CG)

Survey and repair work needs to be done to determine the cause of flooding and blocked drains in this location on the B3224. It is likely that this work will take place after Christmas, but the diversions (which are long) and road closures will need to be carefully managed.

Completed – A39 Porlock (CG)

All this work had been successfully completed. Thanks were extended to the team for their clear communications and work to minimise disruption to the local communities. The parishes were very grateful.

- **Resurfacing Schemes (CG)**

Wootton Courtenay - This work scheduled for the 5/6 July but there is some flexibility around this. (2-day window has been allocated for use of the plant).

- **Grass and Verge Cutting (CG)**

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.

Sam Murrell/Andrew Turner would revisit parish online to see if those parishes had mapped the relevant hedgerows that required a longer cut.

It was agreed that the hedgerow management standard letter would be uploaded to the website for parishes to use or reference, when

contacting local landowners about their boundary responsibilities and hedge management.

- **Traffic Management Schemes (KB)**

A spreadsheet of the current schemes is attached. Kate Brown is working with the various parishes to progress.

Matters arising:-

Concern was expressed about drivers negotiating the ford at Tarr Steps/Hawkridge due to following their sat-nav despite the number of warning signs advising against it. Unfortunately, there did not appear to be a way to get Google or IT developers to remove this from their route guidance. It was suggested that putting a gate across the road would be one way to deter drivers. This has been done in other areas via a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). Andrew Turner/ Kate Brown agreed to look into the legalities on whether this was possible for Ashford Lane and report back.

- **Public Utility Works (LG)**

Luke introduced Ryan Chamberlain to the meeting. Ryan would be moving into Luke's role as Streetworks Coordinator for Somerset West as Luke took on a more strategic county role.

Liaison was ongoing to hold a meeting between school transport providers and utilities to minimise disruption for school children. It was hoped that communications about this would be circulated via school websites and newsletters as well as the usual channels.

Luke advised that in the last financial year there had been 64 road closures in the Dulverton area, which on a positive note had resulted in 97% of the work being completed. This was testament to the hard work of all parties working collaboratively, to get this important work delivered.

Luke had carried out some inspections on the Openreach work in Dulverton, and unfortunately in some places this did not meet the required highways standard. The contractor would be required to return and put it right. Although this cost would not fall on Somerset Council, it was very frustrating for the affected businesses, and frustration and annoyance was expressed by all parties in the room!

The point was once again made that if parishes are concerned about sub-standard work from utility companies they should report it as a matter of urgency to the highways team, as it is guaranteed for a period of 18 months. Unfortunately, Somerset Council does not employ enough inspectors to check every site, so is relying on the public and communities to be their eyes and ears.

The Chair formally thanked Luke for all his hard work since the sub-group was formed and his ongoing communications with the parishes. It has been very much appreciated.

5. Exmoor Pilot Update

- **Highway Steward (HS)**

It was discouraging to note that there were very few work requests coming in for the Highway Steward to undertake. Some of the cyclical work from the previous year has been re-programmed into the schedule but it looked as if the HS workload was rather light. The HS had been logging “Find and Fix” himself, but the information was scant and did not allow for analysis. It is important that work is identified and allocated to the correct parish. Work requests should come from the parish councils or their nominated representatives such as the highways warden.

It was agreed that Andrew and Kali would meet Ryan from Milestone to discuss how this situation could be improved. (HS supervisor).

Currently Andrew Turner is drawing up a business case to see how the HS model can be rolled out across the county. It is therefore vitally important that any issues are addressed before that model is adopted.

- **Devolved Funding – Jetting requests**

The work on this has stalled due to resource issues and the inability to secure a contractor to undertake the work. The devolved budget was still available and there was enough money to undertake this work if a method could be found to successfully deliver it.

Brompton Regis, Dulverton, Withypool and Hawkridge parishes have all put in requests for jetting of drains. Dulverton had packaged and mapped the drains very comprehensively., clearly identifying the locations of the gullies in the town centre.

Sam Murrell had progressed it to the point of trying to appoint a jetting contractor but was unable to find a suitable operative in the first quarter of the year. Others had also tried with no success.

In the past, Exford Parish Council had employed their own contractor to undertake the work and it had been carried out in a day. It was suggested that it might be better for the parishes to procure this work themselves working as a group, and to draw down the funding to pay the jetting operative.

Andrew Turner was asked to put together an options appraisal paper, detailing how this work could be delivered. It was requested that this was brought back to the next sub-group meeting which is scheduled for Friday 23 June.

- **Parish Online**

It was unclear whether parishes were able to map their own assets and enter highways information like the location of drains and gullies. If this is not allowed, how can this be facilitated? (FN)

6. Recommendations to the Exmoor LCN (SP)

None at the present time.

7. A.O.B. / Dates and Venues for meetings going forward

Kali Martin asked that all dates were diarised via meeting invites through Outlook so that calendars would be updated automatically. – (Done).

It was suggested that Mike Rigby, Executive Portfolio Holder (currently) for Highways and Infrastructure was invited to a future meeting of the sub-group or the LCN. It was agreed that following the Council AGM an invitation could be extended.

8.

Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Thursday 8 June	Friday 23 June
Thursday 7 September	Friday 22 September

9. Meeting closed at 1:29pm

Post minute notes:-

Andrew Bray forwarded a service request regarding drainage in Wootton Courtenay. This has been reported by the Parish Council through the defects portal, but there has been no follow-up or action taken. Kali Martin has agreed to investigate and report back to the clerk.

A further meeting to discuss the Exford slippage took place on the 22 May 2023. A preliminary timeline and associated notes are attached.

Attachments

Desk Study and Options Report REV1 – Sept 22

General notes on the Exford Bridge Report

Further notes following Bridges meeting 22 May 2023

Exford Proposed Speed Limit Extensions

Programmed Highway Works for 23/24

Traffic Management Schemes.