

Minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel Meeting

Held on Tuesday 25 April 2023,

At the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

The meeting commenced at 7:04pm.

Present:, Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis), Jan Aldridge (Brushford) John Levenson & Roger Foxwell (Cutcombe), Margaret Rawle, Christine Dubery & Nick Thwaites (Dulverton TC), Mike Ellicott & Jeremy Hickman (Exford), Francis Schott & Jill Wright (Exmoor) Mary Abel (Huish Champflower), Anne Sparling (Luxborough) Duncan McCanlis (Porlock), Katy Attwater & Lesley Webb (Timberscombe), Ian Brooks & Colin Wilkins (Winsford), Tony Howard, Polly & Julian Soltau (Withypool & Hawkridge) Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay).

SC Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair), SC Cllr Frances Nicholson, SC Cllr Val Keitch

Officers:

Alyn Jones (SC) Sarah Skirton (SC) Andrew Turner (SC) Sam Murrell (SC) Kevin Bridgwater (SC) Kali Martin (SC), Ally Laing (SC), Tom Parkinson (SC) Mark Shields & Diane Weston (CCS Village Agents), Dan Barnett (Exmoor National Park)

Guests:

Christine Boland – Magna Housing Association
Matt Barrow – Connecting Devon and Somerset

Also Present:

Tony Brooks (Crowcombe PC).

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Sally Baker & Patricia Bainbridge (Brompton Ralph PC), Paul Matcham, PCSO Michelle Haines (ASP), Fran A'Brook (Upton), Janette Webber, Stephen Kimsey, John Bray, Matthew Headley (Brompton Regis), Sally Moran (Clatworthy), and Sally Payne.

The Chair announced the recent passing of former Cutcombe Councillor Vivian White who had previously been an active member of the Exmoor Panel. Vivian had worked on the BBC programme Panorama and brought with him a great deal of knowledge on current affairs and a keen interest in community matters. The Chair asked that it be put on record that the Exmoor Panel thanked him for his participation and expressed gratitude for his work. Condolences were extended to his family. The funeral took place on Wednesday 26 April, at Cutcombe Church.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel held on 16 March 2023, and matters arising.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 16 March 2023 were circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 16 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Introduction to Somerset Council Executive Cllr Val Keitch – Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Prosperity.

Cllr Val Keitch made the following points in her address to the Exmoor Panel: -

- Local Community Networks (LCN) will begin meeting formally from June – and Exmoor Area Panel looks like it will be the first. Congratulations!
- Rural, urban. Countryside and coast. Each LCN area will be different and will have different priorities.
- Meetings will be supported by the LCN team, and colleagues from Somerset Council's Democratic Services and IT. They will be taking place in community centres and parish halls across the county – just like this one. *(On that point – if you could flag up any suitable venues, then please let Cllr Val Keitch, Alyn Jones or the LCN team know).* LCN@somerset.gov.uk.
- I can see from a quick glance around the room there's such engagement, enthusiasm, and community spirit here. We've learnt so much from the Exmoor approach that we will be looking to share with other areas. The Exmoor Area Panel has helped lay the foundations for how LCNs will work - and we anticipate great things going forward.
- You truly are trailblazers. We thank you for all your hard work and commitment in making this pilot work, and for your warm welcome this evening.

The Chair thanked Cllr Keitch and her team for attending. At the last meeting, the communications team from Somerset Council had filmed the work of the Exmoor Area Panel as part of a promotional video on Local Community Networks. This video was now available to watch on YouTube and can be viewed via this link. <https://youtu.be/H4RYAogSJAE>.

4. Magna Housing Update – Christine Boland, Head of Customer and Community Support – *written report to follow*

Magna has a Community Development Fund, which can be used to improve local communities through funding, donations or sponsorship. This funding is designed to benefit Magna customers, either directly or indirectly and can be used for a variety of local events, projects, groups, organisations, charities and services. More information can be found on the [Magna website here](#).

A question was raised around sheltered housing in Timberscombe and what level of support Magna offered its tenants? There was confusion regarding where the involvement of the Village agents began, and the service provided by Magna ended. Mark Shields was at the meeting and was able to confirm that the Village Agents were in discussion with Magna about identified vulnerable households. All tenants signing up to Sheltered Housing signed a service level agreement and

were made aware of the service Magna provided. This could be extended further if the tenant wished to utilise the services of a village agent, but this would not be subsidised in their rent. Any household regardless of whether they were a Magna tenant or otherwise could use the Village Agent service, but it would come from other budgets such as Somerset Supporting People, or adult social care.

Mike Ellicott concluded by saying that it was a sad fact that Exmoor was an aging population due to the high house prices, beyond the reach of young working families. A local business who paid good wages for the area was having problems with recruitment due to the lack of affordable housing. Most of its employees commuted into work from outside Exmoor, which meant that they were not paying back into the local area and were spending their earnings outside the rural economy. It was vitally important that housing lettings policies and Homefinder address this problem, to assist with revitalising Exmoor communities.

It was agreed that it was beyond the scope of Magna Housing to solely address this issue, but it would be good to invite the Somerset Council Executive Holder for Communities, (which includes housing) to a future meeting.

5. Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) – Matt Barrow

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) is a local government-led partnership which helps to deliver next generation broadband infrastructure to areas where the market has failed to invest.

Investment through the CDS programme is helping to connect some of the hardest to reach communities in England, where the commercial market will not provide the infrastructure without public subsidy.

The Government set a national target to deliver 100% broadband coverage by 2015 with a minimum of 85% superfast broadband. The Government anticipated that 80% of the network would be built commercially. In reality, less than a third of connections have been built commercially, leaving CDS and other similar programmes nationally having to provide coverage to many more properties.

Information on the technical aspects of installing fibre broadband can be found on the website. A progress report on Openreach providing full fibre connectivity in the Dulverton area can be found [here](#).

The Mobile Boost Voucher scheme is currently closed. The final call for applications finished on the 28 February.

Parishes can sign up to receive newsletters and email updates on the [website](#).

Frustration was expressed from Dulverton Town Council as some properties did not qualify for fibre, as they were listed on maps showing Airband connectivity. Nevertheless, the signal was weak and they were looking into alternatives. It was suggested that Dulverton TC specifically identify those properties where the signal was marginal or weak, and they could then be removed from the maps. This would enable them to look into alternative providers for broadband.

If this was a problem in the more rural villages, they could form a collective to look at a more affordable way of installing fibre broadband. Exmoor and Exford agreed that this may be a possibility for their parishes.

CDS is entirely separate from the mobile network, and thus has no influence on radio mast connectivity. The Chair expressed a wish to write to the mobile providers who have sited masts on Exmoor but have not activated the signal. It was agreed that if the chair corresponded with Matt Barrow, he would pass on the information to relevant colleagues in the industry.

6. Avon and Somerset Police Report

PCSO Michelle Haines had tendered apologies due to workload. In her absence a statement was read out by the clerk.

Since the last meeting on 16th March, there have been 3 incidents involving thefts from /attempted theft from diggers. A Landrover was stolen at the same time (believed to be connected – later recovered). Enquiries are continuing.

There is an ongoing ASB issue in Dunster, which the Neighbourhood team is working with other agencies to resolve.

PC Dan Cox attended Cutcombe Market in March to advise on trailer safety. Farmers engaged well and it was an incredibly positive session. This was part of OP Landlike, the joint road safety operation with Devon and Cornwall. As part of this, the Banner Van encouraging report of drink/drug driving concerns has been parked in various spots across Exmoor in the last few weeks. The operation will continue for the next year and there has been positive feedback from the community.

PCSO's will be visiting hotels, campsites, and visitor accommodation with information to remind visitors not to leave property on show in their vehicles when parking and visiting beauty spots.

In the first 4 months of this year ASP have signed up approximately 25 new members to farm watch. This exceeds the 16 from 2022.

Should there be any questions, please email them to Michelle.Haines@avonandsomerset.police.uk and she will reply.

Cllr Nicholson said that at future meetings of the LCN, a more strategic report would be required, with an emphasis on how the LCN could contribute to planning and allocation of resources. This will be fed back to the LCN team.

7. SCC Highways Update – K Bridgwater, K Martin & Andrew Turner

Andrew Turner advised that resource issues for the contractor had resulted in a drop in the service level of winter maintenance. Milestone was currently operating on 2/3 of the workforce that it had previously employed, and this was being addressed.

Andrew is currently working on the business case, to establish how the Highways Steward Scheme can be rolled out across the wider Somerset district.

Highway Steward Update

Please [click here](#) to access the Exmoor LCN – Highway Steward Job Request.

All cyclical work which was programmed for last year, will need to be re-input for the new financial year. Please log each task separately with frequency of return needed (i.e., weekly, fortnightly, monthly or quarterly).

It is important that work requests are reported as separate items so that jobs do not get missed on the worksheet. Please use one request per parish area, and remember he is a single operative so will be unable to undertake works of a technical nature or that require traffic management. The team are also looking into how the work request form can be enhanced by allowing maps and photographs to be uploaded into the work planner.

Urgent works such as blocked drains should be reported via the defects portal to ensure a swift response. General repairs such as potholes, road damage and other problems outside of your parish boundary should continue to be reported via the SCC online portal. www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/.

The Highway Steward will be active around the district in his truck which is a Milestone vehicle.

Exmoor Pilot – Satisfaction Surveys

Can parishes please complete the following satisfaction surveys, so that the team can determine what is working and what needs to be done? Thank you to those who have already done this.

- [Highway Steward Satisfaction survey](#)
- [Parish Online usage survey](#)

This is especially important for Qtr4 as Andrew Turner is writing a report to be presented to the LCN team on the effectiveness of the pilot. This will form an important part of the business case to roll out the Highway Steward scheme across Somerset.

Exford Landslip

It was agreed that this would be the main item of discussion at the next Highways sub-group meeting scheduled for Friday 19 May. This will be held at the Dulverton Sports Pavilion. Paul Nation from the Somerset Council, Bridges and Structures Team will be in attendance, to discuss the complexities of the scheme and the progress to date following ecology, BT and Health and Safety site surveys.

May was the month that was most practicable to undertake the work, but the window of opportunity for May 2023 was now passed. Frustration was expressed

again about the length of time taken to expedite the works, and that costs were escalating.

It was agreed that the communications around the scheme needed to be transparent so that all parties knew what was happening, allowing businesses and residents to plan accordingly.

Exebridge/Dulverton drainage scheme

Kali Martin advised that he had been in conversation with businesses in Exebridge about proposed works that were scheduled to take place over the summer. This would mean diversions in place on the Devon side of Dulverton. Christine Dubery asked that Dulverton Town Council was consulted as a matter of urgency. There was likely to be uproar from the Dulverton traders who had already been adversely affected due to the disruption of ongoing roadworks over the previous summer. Some were still struggling due to the aftermath of COVID19, and needed a season of uninterrupted trade if they were to remain viable. It was agreed to follow this up in the Highway Subgroup Meeting.

Questions from the floor

- Winsford Parish Council asked for progress on the work to stabilise the wall at the Mill Leat, Yellowcombe Lane. *Enquiries are still ongoing with the Somerset Council Legal team into who owns the asset. Once the relevant advice is received the team will be in a better position to determine the next steps and act on the legal advice accordingly.*
- Selworthy Parish Council thanked the officers for the communications around the recent A39 resurfacing works, and the collaborative work undertaken to minimise disruption to the communities.
- Exmoor asked if there were any updates on the Small Improvement Scheme (SIS) as they had been waiting to hear for some time about their application.
- Roger Foxwell advised that some drainage issues that he had previously reported at Luckwell Bridge remained unresolved. Sam Murrell agreed to follow this up with him outside the meeting.

8. Exmoor National Park Authority Issues (ENPA)

An update was provided by Dan Barnett.

- **Public Rights of Way (PROW).** ENPA had retained management of the rights of way but is facing severe resource issues due to cuts in government grants and subsidy. As a result, there had been a 40% reduction in staffing and the team are looking at alternative methods of delivery. There will be a review of the vegetation cutting programme for this coming summer and beyond. This will need to reduce but ENPA will increase their support for volunteers and the local community to get more involved in supporting this work. More information on volunteering can be found on the [website](#).

ENPA will be reviewing the provision of gates and stiles for stock control on the PROW network. The legal duty of the highway authority is to provide farmers with a 25 per cent contribution for the costs of replacement stock control furniture, and ENPA are no longer able to provide full materials and

installation costs in all cases. This approach will be developed over the next 12 months working closely with farmers, land managers and other affected parties.

- **Income Generating Measures.** ENPA will introduce fees and charges to the changes/diversions to the path network which are undertaken on behalf of landowners. ENPA has also recently introduced a new annual car parking permit for users of ENPA car parks. These cost £60 and can be obtained from the visitor centres.
- **May Elections for Parish Representatives.** Mike Ellicott reminded the Exmoor Panel that elections would soon be taking place for parish representation on the ENPA committee. There are 5 parish member seats available. It was a busy role but very rewarding. Hustings would be taking place at the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe on 31 May.

Questions from the floor concerning:-

Closure of a permitted footpath by the National Trust. Could ENPA influence this being reopened? – *No. It is outside the ENPA authority being a permitted footpath and not a PROW. It falls to the landowner to permit users or not. In this case the National Trust is the landowner and has exercised their right to close the path.*

When will the bridge at Tarr Steps have its stones replaced? *This is actually a Somerset Highways issue and not the ENPA. The stones are likely to be replaced at some point in June/July once Natural England have granted permission for the Highways Team to do work in the river.*

9. Parish Lengthsman Scheme

There are currently no updates.

10. Items to be brought forward by Parishes

Step Up Somerset – Business Skilling.

Somerset Council is looking for the new generation of outstanding start-up's seeking to create new businesses in Somerset.

Whatever industry or experience, motivation, idea or expectations people may have, 'Somerset Launch Pad' will prepare and guide them through the start-up process.

Ten places are available on this new fully funded start-up programme delivered by professionals, entrepreneurs and experts from industry, over 10 weeks from 10 May to 30 September 2023.

The programme includes workshops and masterclasses on core business fundamentals - covering business plans, marketing, social media, finances, legal, operational systems, networking and more. Plus, weekly personal business mentor support and peer-to-peer networking.

Applications close on 3 May with interviews on 4 and 5 May 2023

Further information and applications can be found here: [Self Employment \(stepupsomerset.org.uk\)](http://stepupsomerset.org.uk)

Please share with anyone who may be interested. (Pre-start or start-up small businesses in the Somerset Council catchment area can apply.)

11. Dates for Exmoor Pilot meetings going forward.

Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Tuesday 25 April	Friday 19 May To include a discussion on the Exmoor Ravine with Paul Nation, (Senior Bridge Engineer from the Somerset Council Bridges and Structures Team)
Thursday 8 June	Friday 23 June
Thursday 7 September	Friday 22 September

(The Meeting ended at 9.26pm)

Attachments

Draft Exmoor LCN Forward Plan for 2023/34