

Exmoor Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Date: Thursday 5 March 2026

Time: Commencing at 7pm

Location: The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe TA24 7DL

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)
Cllr Frances Nicholson

Representing

Somerset Council
Somerset Council

Patricia Bainbridge (Clerk)

Cllr Matthew Headley

Jan Aldridge (Clerk)

Cllr Sally Moran

Cllr Roger Foxwell

Cllr Chris Dubery

Cllr Francis Schott

Janette Sapsford

Mark Bolland

Cllr Jonathan Rollason

Lesley Webb (Clerk)

Cllr Fran A' Brook

Jennifer Yates (Clerk)

Cllr Andrew Bray

Nikki Bonner

Brompton Ralph Parish Council

Brompton Regis Parish Council

Brushford Parish Council

Clatworthy Parish Council

Cutcombe Parish Council

Dulverton Town Council

Exmoor Parish Council

Exton Parish Council

Luxborough Parish Council

Skilgate Parish Meeting

Timberscombe Parish Council

Upton Parish Council

Winsford Parish Council

Wootton Courtenay Parish Council

Thrive (Village Agent)

Other attendees

Name:

Jonathan Rollason

Cllr Roger Foxwell

Norma Martin

Richard Norman

Cllr Margaret Rawle

Fodo Higginson

James Wright

Representing:

Skilgate Parish Meeting

Cutcombe Parish Council

Clatworthy Parish Council

Cutcombe Parish Council

Dulverton Town Council

SALC

Exmoor Resident

Officer Attendance:

Sam Murrell (LCN Link Officer), Kali Martin (Highways Officer), Syed Shah (Public Liaison Officer), Beccy Brown (Employment & Skills), Chris Booth (LCN Link Officer)

Online attendance:

Michelle Brooks (LCN link Officer), Colin McDonald (Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler), Ann Shilton (LCN Link Officer) Nick Thwaites (Dulverton TC), Tony Howard (Withypool & Hawkridge PC), Ali Flind (Luccombe)

1. Introductions

Syed Shah – SC Public Liaison Officer (A39 Traffic Light Upgrade)

Chris Booth – LCN Link Officer (& Exmoor LCN buddy)

Nikki Bonner – Thrive Village Agent (Exmoor Area)

Fodo Higginson – SALC Health & Wellbeing Officer

2. Apologies for absence

Katy Attwater (Timberscombe PC), Mike Ellicott (Exford PC) Mark Shields (Thrive), Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis PC), Jon Levenson (Cutcombe PC), PC Calloway & team, Sally Baker (Brompton Ralph PC), Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC) Ruth McArthur (ENPA) Cllr Philip Beauvais (Skilgate PM), Stephen Kimsey (Huish Champflower Parish Council), Stephen Kimsey (Huishchampflower PC), Colin Wilkins (Winsford PC)

Nick Thwaites joined online (Dulverton Town Council)

3. Chairs Opening Remarks

- **Community Engagement Review**, including discussion on the future direction and structure of LCNs. Cllr Pugsley discussed the ongoing Somerset Council community engagement review, highlighting the importance of maintaining the Local Community Network (LCN) structure, ensuring effective community identity, and addressing the need for improved pathways and authority for the LCN to act, with references to stakeholders such as the council, parishes, and the wider community.
 - **LCN Structure and Community Identity:** Cllr Pugsley emphasised the significance of the Exmoor LCN in Somerset, noting its large population and the need to preserve its community identity. He suggested that the LCN's effectiveness stems from a shared vision among its members and highlighted the importance of addressing common problems collectively.
 - **Tasks for Upcoming Months:** A key task for the coming months is to ensure the LCN remains as intended, even if adjustments or enlargements are necessary, and to consider the interests of all parishes within the divisions.
 - **Community Engagement Review Motivation:** Somerset Council's community engagement review is partly motivated by concerns over council costs and the perception that current engagement efforts are not yielding enthusiastic or effective results, leading to pressure for change.

- **LCN Authority and Pathways:** Cllr Pugsley raised the issue that while there was a promise of a clear route from the LCN to the council and its committees, in practice this process has been ad hoc and lacks a definitive pathway. He was advocating for the LCN to be granted authority to commission work, which would facilitate outcomes across parishes, particularly for issues like drainage and highways.
- **Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs)**
 - *The LCN should note that Somerset Council has issued separate briefing material and is undertaking preparatory work in relation to Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs), including proposals to consolidate existing dog control PSPOs across the county and undertake public consultation during 2026. Public information, background papers, and current PSPOs by area are available on the Somerset Council website:*
<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-food-safety/public-spaces-protection-orders/>
 - Cllr Pugsley provided an update on the public space protection order (PSPO) consultation regarding dogs in public spaces, distributed supporting materials, and invited input from participants, while addressing concerns about enforcement, scope, and implications for working dogs and specific areas.
 - **PSPO Overview and Consultation Process:** Cllr Pugsley summarised the PSPO relating to dogs, explaining that an FAQ leaflet and briefing pack had been circulated to clarify its scope and application. The PSPO is currently in the consultation phase, with input requested from stakeholders before the closing date of 20 March 2026.
 - **Applicability and Enforcement Concerns:** It was noted that the PSPO may not apply to all parishes, especially smaller ones with limited public spaces, but highlighted that enforcement will be a key issue, with questions about which team will be responsible for enforcing the order.
 - **Concerns About Working Dogs:** The Chair relayed concerns from the community regarding the potential impact of the PSPO on working dogs, including those used for farming and shooting. He requested reassurance that the order would not negatively affect these groups and emphasised the need for clarity on whether the PSPO would extend to such activities.
 - **Designated Dog Exclusion Areas:** The PSPO designates certain areas as dog exclusion zones, such as children's play areas, cemeteries, and other specified public spaces, and explained that the wording of the order aims to address these specific locations.

- **Stakeholder Engagement and Next Steps:** LCN participants were encouraged to review the circulated materials and contribute to the consultation.
- **Community Governance Review** – the outcome was referenced, with implications for parish engagement and representation.
The LCN should note that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has undertaken a review of Somerset Council’s electoral arrangements, including changes to councillor numbers and electoral division boundaries, which are intended to come into effect for the May 2027 elections. Public information, reports, and interactive maps are available on the LGBCE website:
<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/somerset>

4. Avon and Somerset Police Update

Apologies and a written report had been submitted in the absence of the neighbourhood team. These are attached.

In brief the headline updates were:-

- The team provided an update on local crime trends, police activities, and community engagement efforts, referencing James Calloway’s report and inviting residents to share concerns or request visits.
 - **Crime Trends and Investigations:** Crime levels remain low across the area, highlighted the successful identification and charging of a suspect in a series of drive-offs at a filling station, and noted ongoing efforts to address incidents of violence and property damage.
 - **Community Engagement Initiatives:** Described plans for the team to visit campsites to discuss vehicle security, encourage responsible dog walking, and provide opportunities for residents to speak directly with the police, with a list of planned visits circulated to accommodate requests.
 - **Crime Prevention Advice:** Residents were encouraged to contact the police with any security concerns or to seek crime prevention advice, with the team emphasising the importance of community input in identifying and addressing local issues.

Flyers advising of police engagement activities were circulated in the meeting and are attached for reference.

5. Speaker: Nikki Bonner (Thrive Village Agent)

The presentation slides are attached to these notes.

A presentation was delivered on:

- The **role of Thrive Village Agents** in supporting residents to live well within their communities.
- Early intervention support, practical help, and signposting to local services.

- How referrals are made (self-referral and professional referral routes).
- The types of support offered and clear boundaries on what the service does not provide (e.g. no personal care, housing allocation, or formal domiciliary care).

Discussion included:

- How Thrive works alongside GP practices, social care, police, and voluntary organisations.
- The importance of community-based solutions and early support to prevent crisis escalation.

The presentation focused on the **Village Agent model**, which provides **practical, community-based support**.

Key points included:

- Village Agents work at **grass-roots level**, embedded in local communities.
- Support is **confidential, practical, and person-centred**, continuing for as long as needed until appropriate solutions are found.
- The service aims to **prevent escalation to crisis** by offering **early intervention**, particularly where social care needs might otherwise arise.

Types of support provided

The presenter outlined a wide range of support, including:

- Advice and guidance for **unpaid carers**.
- Help for people who are **isolated, vulnerable, or struggling at home**.

Support with:

- Benefits and forms,
- Energy and fuel issues,
- Fire safety,
- Accessing local community groups and wellbeing services.

Nikki also highlighted:

- **Hospital agents**, who support people returning home after discharge to reduce the risk of readmission.
- Use of **small grants or crisis funding** (e.g. for short-term food support or practical items such as key safes).

How people access the service

It was explained that:

- Referrals come from a wide range of sources, including:
 - GP practices, Hospitals, Police, Housing teams, Voluntary and community organisations.
 - Individuals can also **self-refer**, either **online or by phone**.
- Village Agents are often **attached to GP surgeries**, providing a clear local point of contact.

Community engagement and drop-ins

The presentation covered several community-facing initiatives:

- Regular **community drop-ins** at local venues.
- **“Talking cafés”** and wellbeing cafés, including:
 - Daytime and evening sessions,
 - Partnerships with food banks and mental health organisations.
- Multi-agency drop-ins, with partners such as housing and mental health services attending on set dates.

What Thrive / CCS does *not* do

Clear boundaries were set out:

- They **do not provide personal care**.
- They **do not allocate housing**.
- They **do not provide domiciliary care services** or formal training provision.

This was emphasised as important to manage expectations and ensure appropriate referrals.

Points raised in discussion

LCN participants raised issues about:

- Service pressures and funding constraints across the wider system.
- Boundary issues where residents are registered with GP practices outside Somerset.

It was clarified that:

- Agents are attached to surgeries, but **support is focused on Somerset residents**, with flexibility where appropriate.

6. Speaker: Fodo Higginson - Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)

The presentation slides are attached to these notes. An update was provided on:

- **SALC Health & Wellbeing Grants**, including:
 - Eligible projects and typical funding ranges.
 - Timescales for spending grant allocations.
 - Support available from SALC in developing applications.

The LCN was encouraged to:

- Promote funding opportunities locally.
- Consider collaborative projects between parishes where appropriate.

Action:

Grant information and links to be included with the circulated notes.

- **Community Health and Wellbeing Grants and Projects:** Fodo discussed the allocation of Community Health & Wellbeing grants, highlighted successful projects such as the Moorland Foodbank, and encouraged further collaboration and applications for remaining funds.
 - **Grant Distribution and Impact:** Fodo reported that 60 grants totalling over £565,000 had been awarded, supporting 169 parishes and a range of projects including community hubs, transport, wellbeing, and youth initiatives.

- **Moorland Foodbank Success:** The Moorland Foodbank was highlighted as a successful project, with significant funding secured from various sources and the development of facilities such as a large kitchen and community space.
- **Ongoing Funding and Collaboration:** Fodo encouraged parishes and organisations to collaborate on projects, apply for remaining funds before the September deadline, and participate in surveys and roadshows to strengthen community engagement.
- **SALC Community Engagement and Survey Initiatives:** Fodo promoted upcoming SALC and SPARK roadshows, detailed the objectives of the Parish, Town & City Council survey, and encouraged broad participation to inform future support and collaboration.
 - **Roadshow Events:** Fodo announced a series of Community Health & Wellbeing Roadshow events aimed at fostering collaboration between councils and the VCFSE sector, with sessions covering engagement, funding, and data insights.
 - **Council Survey Objectives:** The SALC survey seeks to understand council challenges, opportunities, and support needs, covering topics such as council composition, assets, plans, collaboration, and funding, with a submission deadline of 30 April 2026.
- A request was made that publicity for the upcoming SALC & SPARK Community Health & Wellbeing Roadshow be shared with the network?

Join SALC for their Community Health & Wellbeing Roadshow delivered in partnership with SPARK Somerset, designed to strengthen collaborative working between Parish, Town & City Councils and the VCFSE sector in Somerset.

- **Thursday 19th March - Moorland Community Hub, Highbridge - 2pm-5pm**
- **Saturday 11th April - Chilthorne Domer Village Hall - 10am-1pm**
- **Wednesday 15th April - EMN Village Hall, Monksilver - 6pm-9pm**

All sessions will deliver the same content, so please join them at the venue most convenient for you.

- Sessions are open to parish, town and city councillors, clerks, council officers, charities and community groups and organisations in Somerset and places can be booked via the [SALC website](#).

7. Agree the notes/minutes of the previous meeting

The notes from the meeting held on Thursday 15 January 2026 were distributed in the agenda pack.

- Subject to a few minor changes regarding grit bin documentation, the meeting notes were agreed.

8. **Matters arising** (not itemised elsewhere on the agenda)

Matters arising were addressed either:

- Within agenda items already covered, or
- Deferred to relevant working groups (Highways / Housing).

No additional standalone matters were formally raised.

9. **Exmoor National Park (ENPA) Update**

No ENPA officers were present but in their absence the following points were made:-

An update was provided covering:

- Ongoing engagement with parish representatives.
- The importance of consistent messaging between parishes, ENPA members, and officers.
- Planning pressures within the National Park and the balance between conservation and community sustainability.

Participants highlighted:

- Continued concerns around planning complexity, viability, and affordability.
- The need for clear communication with ENPA leadership.

Action:

Parish representatives encouraged to continue raising issues through formal ENPA channels.

10. **Update on Working Groups:**

- **Highways** – (Notes from the subgroup meeting held on Friday 20 February has been circulated in advance of the meeting).
- Verbal updates were provided on current schemes and issues..
 - **Highways and Infrastructure Updates:** Kali Martin provided updates on local highways projects, discussed ongoing works, community concerns about road safety and maintenance, and outlined plans for future improvements and communication.
 - **Project Progress and Challenges:** Syed Shah described the progress of the A39 Traffic light upgrade works, including changes to traffic management, anticipated completion dates, and the challenges posed by weather and logistics.

- **Community Feedback and Safety Concerns:** Community members raised concerns about signage, road safety, and the condition of infrastructure such as railings and salt bins, with actions taken to address these issues and the importance of timely maintenance. It was noted that the Annual Highways Warden meeting had been brought forward to June 11, to ensure timely winter maintenance planning.
- **Future Planning and Communication:** Plans were outlined for ongoing updates, spreadsheet circulation for project tracking, and the need for clear communication with residents regarding project timelines and safety measures.
- **Discussion included:**
 - Scheme progress, delays, and weather impacts.
 - Signage, safety concerns, and community communication.
 - Livestock safety and speed management issues on Exmoor roads
- An update was provided on the works at **Cutcombe Hill**. Cutcombe PC raised concerns regarding incomplete elements of the scheme, including temporary barriers, final safety sign-off, and the height and robustness of replacement railings. Officers advised that the site is subject to design and space constraints and that final inspection and completion are still required. No revised completion date was confirmed.
- The issue was raised during the Highways update / wider highways discussion, in the context of **livestock safety on Exmoor roads**, particularly where speed and visibility are factors.

Key points explicitly discussed

- Participants raised concern about livestock fatalities, including pony deaths, on Exmoor roads. Winsford Hill was specifically referenced as an area where:
 - Vehicle speeds are high, and
 - Livestock are regularly present, increasing the risk of collisions.

It was noted that:

- Warning signage is already in place in some locations to alert drivers to livestock.
- Despite signage, livestock deaths continue to occur, suggesting limited effectiveness.

Discussion on speed limits

- Members queried whether:
 - Lower speed limits could be introduced on roads such as Winsford Hill.

It was explained that:

- Introducing reduced speed limits is not straightforward, as:
 - National policy and guidance apply,
 - Enforcement and driver compliance are key considerations.

- Reference was made to experience elsewhere (e.g. other National Park areas), where:
 - speed limits initially had some impact,
 - BUT over time driver behaviour reverted, reducing effectiveness.

Alternative and complementary measures discussed:

The following ideas were discussed, not agreed or resolved:

- Improved visibility through:
 - Better verge cutting, as livestock can be obscured until vehicles are very close.
 - Livestock visibility aids, such as:
 - Reflective collars or markers on animals (referenced as being used elsewhere).

Recognition that:

Responsibility is shared across highways authorities, landowners, and drivers. Any solution would likely need to be multi-layered, not reliant on signage alone.

- **Housing** – Colin MacDonald (Notes from the subgroup meeting held on Thursday 12 February 2026 were circulated with the agenda pack).

An Update was provided on:

- Progress of the **Exmoor-wide housing survey**, which is currently live.
- Survey responses to date and the intention to use findings to inform the housing report.
- Ongoing challenges around Section 106 agreements, mortgage viability, and development costs.
- **Development in National Park Areas:** Participants highlighted the difficulties of securing planning permission and funding for small-scale developments in rural and National Park areas, noting government policies and the need for flexible approaches.

Actions:

- Members encouraged to **promote the housing survey** locally before it closes.
- Follow-up queries to be sent directly to the Housing Working Group.

Members discussed ongoing challenges in delivering local affordable housing, including the impact of S106 restrictions on mortgage availability, high legal costs, delays in finalising agreements, and the difficulty of reconciling affordability requirements with high rural build costs. It was noted that these issues can make otherwise policy-compliant schemes financially unviable.

- Technical issues limited real-time discussion for online attendees; some questions were deferred to email.

11. Dates of future meetings:

Housing Meeting – Provisional Date – Thursday 14 May at Exmoor House, Garden Room. (Liaison with Ruth McArthur TBC)

Proposed Exmoor LCN Dates The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Highways Sub-Group Dates – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Thursday 5 March at 7pm	Friday 17 April 10am – 1pm
Thursday 11 June time TBC (Highway Winter Maintenance Meeting). <i>Please note revised date and time.</i>	Friday 10 July 10am – 1pm

Meeting Close

The Chair thanked speakers and attendees, noting the significant technical difficulties experienced by online participants and confirmed that:

- The notes would be circulated as soon as possible.
- Follow-up information would be shared where discussion was limited.

Meeting ended at 09:10pm.