

Exmoor Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Date: Thursday 4 September at 7.30pm
Preceded by the Annual Highways Warden meeting at 6.30pm

Time: Main meeting started at 7.30pm

Location: The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe TA24 7DL

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Somerset Council
Sarah Buchanan (Clerk)	Brompton Regis Parish Council
Jan Aldridge (Clerk)	Brushford Parish Council
Cllr Sally Moran	Clatworthy Parish Council
Cllr Eric Norman	Cutcombe Parish Council
Cllr Margaret Rawle	Dulverton Town Council
Cllr Mike Ellicott (Vice Chair)	Exford Parish Council
Cllr Francis Schott	Exmoor Parish Council
Cllr Janette Sapsford	Exton Parish Council
Cllr Stephen Kimsey	Huishchampflower Parish Council
Cllr Jan Stapleford	Luccombe Parish Council
Cllr Duncan McCannlis	Porlock Parish Council
Cllr Jonathan Rollason (Subs)	Skilgate Parish Meeting
Cllr Fran A' Brook	Upton Parish Council (Left at 7:30pm)
Cllr Colin Wilkins	Winsford Parish Council
Cllr Tony Howard	Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council
Cllr Peter Stenner (Subs)	Wootton Courtenay Parish Council
Nikki Bonner (Village Agent)	Thrive (Formerly CCS)
Emma Thomasson	Visit Exmoor

Officer Attendance:

Sam Murrell (LCN Link Officer), Kali Martin (Highways Maintenance), Nicola Dawson (Community Resilience Manager), Anne Shilton (LCN Link Officer)

Other attendees

Name:

Norma Martin (Clerk)
Cllr Jon Levenson
Cllr Nick Thwaites
Cllr Jeremy Hickman
Cllr Steve Rowe
Jennifer Yates (Clerk)
Cllr Alan Collins
Rebecca Tomalin (Clerk)
Lydia Hodder (Village agent)
Cllr Kevin Sully
Cllr Carol Ell
Cllr Alan Vicary

Representing:

Clatworthy Parish Council
Cutcombe Parish Council
Dulverton Town Council
Exford Parish Council
Exton Parish Council
Winsford Parish Council
Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Thrive (formerly CCS)
Dunster PC
Dunster PC
Dunster PC

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Item Summary of key points of discussion and outcome:

1. Highways winter maintenance

Winter Maintenance Programme Updates: Kali provided a comprehensive update on the winter maintenance programme, confirming that the programme remains unchanged for the coming year, with continued focus on salt bag and grit bin management, and outlined the communication process with parishes and the use of updated mapping and spreadsheets for resource allocation.

- **Parish Communication Process:** Kali explained that all parishes have been contacted directly regarding winter maintenance, which is a change from previous years, and highlighted the importance of providing parishes with documentation to ensure clarity on salt bag and grit bin locations.
- **Resource and Map Management:** Kali described efforts to obtain and share an updated Excel spreadsheet, created by Superintendent George, which includes a detailed audit of grit bin placements using 'what3words' for precise location referencing, aiming to distribute this information to parishes for verification and planning.
- **Programme Continuity and Security:** Kali reassured the meeting that, despite previous threats of withdrawal, the winter maintenance programme is secure and unchanged for the current year, ensuring continuity of service for all stakeholders.
- **Weather Data and Planning:** Kali mentioned the introduction of more weather stations to improve the accuracy of weather data for winter planning, noting the challenges of marginal weather conditions and the need for precise local information.

Salt Bag and Grit Bin Allocation: The allocation and replenishment of salt bags and grit bins was discussed, addressing concerns about map accuracy, resource distribution, and the process for parishes to verify their allocations using updated documentation.

- **Audit and Documentation:** Last year, Superintendent George conducted an audit of grit bin placements, recording locations with 'what3words' and compiling the data into a spreadsheet, which Kali intends to share with parishes to facilitate verification and ensure all bins are accounted for.
- **Replenishment Programme:** Kali outlined the process for the salt bag replenishment programme, indicating that parishes will be able to check their allocations against the new documentation and request adjustments as needed.

F2 Route Gritting and Criteria: The Chair raised questions about the gritting of F2 routes, particularly regarding the criteria for inclusion and the challenges faced by smaller or more isolated communities, with Kali providing detailed explanations of the established criteria and the operational constraints affecting route selection.

- **Criteria for Gritting:** Kali explained that the county established set criteria for gritting routes based on road status and community size, with larger communities more likely to be included, but acknowledged that some smaller, isolated communities remain at risk of being cut off during severe weather.
- **Operational Constraints:** Kali discussed the limitations imposed by contractor resources, noting a reduction in available operatives and the challenges of maintaining both primary (F1) and secondary (F2) networks, which has led to some routes being de-prioritised.
- **Advocacy for Common Sense:** The Chair advocated for the application of common sense in route selection, suggesting that some smaller communities should receive consideration for gritting due to their vulnerability, even if they do not meet the strict numerical criteria.

Contractor Resource Challenges: Kali detailed the ongoing challenges with contractor resources, including reduced workforce availability, reliance on zero-hour contracts, and the impact on the ability to deliver both routine and winter-specific maintenance tasks.

- **Workforce Reductions:** Kali described a significant reduction in the number of operatives available for winter maintenance, with fewer staff able to transition from daytime roles to winter duties, resulting in gaps in service delivery.
- **Zero-Hour Contracts:** The team has attempted to supplement the workforce with individuals on zero-hour contracts, but this approach has

not fully addressed the shortfall, leading to ongoing operational difficulties.

- **Impact on Service Delivery:** The resource constraints have affected the ability to maintain both the primary and secondary gritting networks, as well as other routine maintenance tasks, causing frustration among the team and stakeholders.

2. **Introductions**

Representatives from Dunster Parish Council were welcomed to the meeting.

3. **Apologies for absence**

Annie Cole (Magna HA), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay PC), Colin McDonald (SC Housing), Mark Bolland (Luxborough PC), Sally Baker & Patricia Bainbridge (Brompton Ralph PC), Matthew Headley (Brompton Regis PC), Cllr Christine Dubery (Dulverton TC), Philip Beauvais (Skilgate PM), Fran A' Brook (Upton PC), Rev David Weir (Exmoor Benefice), ASP PCSO Katherine Williams.

4. **Avon and Somerset Police Update**

The Police were not present at the meeting, but a written report was received in the following week, together with belated apologies.

The Exmoor Neighbourhood Policing Team has remained active and engaged across the community since the last Local Community Network meeting. The team have had a busy summer period. Below is a summary of their recent work and ongoing initiatives:

Community Engagement

- **Farmers Market Attendance:** Officers attended the local Farmers Market, taking the opportunity to engage with residents, listen to concerns, and provide crime prevention advice.
- **Local Events:** The team had a strong presence at several community events, including:
 - Dunster Fair
 - Exford Show
 - Cutcombe Fete

At these events, the team offered bike marking services, which were well received and helped promote crime prevention awareness. They were supported at these events by the Road Safety Partnership and the Roads Safety Team.

Crime and Incident Updates

- **Theft from Motor Vehicles:** Over the past week, the team have responded to a small spate of thefts from motor vehicles in the Dunkery area. The police are increasing patrols and visibility in affected locations.

- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB): There have been reports of isolated ASB incidents in Dulverton. The team are actively working with partner agencies to problem-solve and implement long-term solutions.

Upcoming Initiatives

- **Fraud Awareness Talk:** The police are planning a Fraud Prevention Talk at the Dulverton Breakfast Club, aimed at raising awareness among residents, particularly the elderly, about common scams and how to stay safe. If you are part of any group that would benefit from a Fraud and Scam awareness presentation please let the team know and a visit can be arranged.
- **Pop-Up Village Visits:** The team will be continuing their Pop-Up Village Visits, and will advertise these on their webpages. Upcoming visits are planned at Cutcombe Market, allowing residents to speak with officers in an informal setting and offering Crime prevention advice and support.

Community Thanks

Finally, the Exmoor team would like to express their heartfelt thanks to the community for the overwhelming support shown following the tragic coach crash. Your kindness and solidarity have been deeply appreciated by the entire team.

5. **Speaker: Nicola Dawson (Somerset Council)**

Community Resilience and Emergency Planning

Nicola Dawson from Somerset Council presented on community-level emergency planning, covering available support, grants, and findings from a resilience survey. She emphasised the importance of being prepared for emergencies before emergency services arrive and highlighted resources like templates, workshops, and a small grant scheme for resilience equipment.

- The council runs an annual conference, offers a quarterly newsletter, and provides benchmarking surveys to assess community preparedness. Early survey results showed power outages, strong winds, and road access issues as top concerns, with flooding ranked lower than expected. Average self-assessed preparedness was about 36%.
- Nicola discussed grant opportunities, including National Grid's community grant and Somerset Prepared's grant (up to £5,000 for resilience equipment), and encouraged communities to consider alternative power solutions like solar panels and battery packs.
- She explained the "METHANE" mnemonic used by emergency services to assess and communicate major incidents, suggesting communities familiarise themselves with it for effective reporting.

Community Concerns and Requests

- Lesley Webb (Timberscombe Clerk) and others raised the need for tailored emergency planning workshops for Exmoor parishes, focusing on local risks like power cuts, traffic accidents, and fires, rather than just flooding. Nicola agreed to organise a workshop before Christmas, informed by local needs.

- The discussion included the importance of up-to-date registers for schools, basic supplies (tea, coffee, water, paper, pens), and first aid training and equipment, including “heavy bleed” kits.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of power cuts on water supply (especially for those on boreholes), loss of communication when both mobile and landlines fail, and the need for Openreach to address backup solutions as copper lines are phased out.

Major Incident and Infrastructure Risks

- Questions were raised about emergency planning for nuclear incidents (Hinkley Point), dam failures (Wimbleball and Clatworthy), and the need for clear alerting processes for communities at risk. Nicola committed to follow up with relevant operators and share information on alerting and planning.
- The upcoming national emergency alert test was mentioned as a relevant tool for mass notification.

Cutcombe Parish Emergency Response

Cllr Eric Norman, Chair of Cutcombe parish, described the parish’s response to the recent A396 coach crash:

- The Moorland Hall was opened immediately for use as a rest center, and local volunteers, teachers, and emergency services coordinated to support those affected. The importance of having a landline for communication was stressed, as mobile signals were unreliable.
- Eric highlighted the value of local initiative and volunteers, noting that every emergency is different and flexibility is essential.

Next Steps

- Nicola and Sam will coordinate, to schedule a workshop for Exmoor parishes on emergency planning, focusing on local risks and practical steps. This aiming to take place locally during the autumn.
- Communities were encouraged to engage with Somerset Prepared resources, apply for grants, and participate in upcoming events and workshops. The next event will be the Somerset Prepared Conference which will take place on Wednesday 15 October 2025, at Taunton Racecourse. Tickets can be obtained on this Eventbrite link.

[Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day 2025 Tickets, Wed 15 Oct 2025 at 09:15 | Eventbrite](#)

Speaker: Emma Thomasson (Visit Exmoor)

Role and Activities

- Emma Thomasson, Chief Executive of Visit Exmoor, explained that Visit Exmoor is the official, not-for-profit body representing the visitor economy for Exmoor, working with around 300 paid members and various stakeholders including local authorities and Exmoor National Park.

- The organisation promotes Exmoor through its website (about half a million page views annually), social media (37,000+ engaged audience), and a widely used events calendar open to all parishes and community groups.
- Visit Exmoor supports businesses with tools like accommodation availability, business support hub, and campaigns (e.g., Eat Exmoor, Countryfile, Pride in Place) to encourage year-round tourism and economic resilience.
- They invest in data collection to inform strategy and demonstrate the economic impact of tourism (e.g., £680 million annual activity in the greater Exmoor area).
- The organisation is part of strategic partnerships with Somerset and Devon for visitor economy planning and accreditation.

Main Request to Parishes

- Emma asked parishes to engage with Visit Exmoor, act as ambassadors, and encourage local businesses to become paid members to strengthen the visitor economy and ensure effective promotion and support.
- Parishes were encouraged to use the Visit Exmoor events calendar for community events and to communicate local priorities and feedback to help Visit Exmoor tailor its support.
- Emma emphasised that increased engagement and communication from parishes and businesses would help Visit Exmoor better represent local needs and maximize benefits for the area.
- Emma invited anyone with young people interested in hospitality or working in kitchens to enter the Young Chef or Aspiring Chef competitions, encouraging parishes to help identify and refer potential participants for these awards.

6. Agree the notes/minutes of the previous meeting

The meeting notes will be formally agreed at the next meeting.

7. Matters arising (not itemised elsewhere on the agenda)

Not applicable on this occasion.

8. Exmoor National Park Update

There were no officers from Exmoor National Park present at the meeting.

9. Update on Working Groups:

Highways – Notes from the Highways meeting on the 11 July 2025, were distributed with the agenda pack.

- **Highway Drainage and Gully Maintenance:**

- A participant from Dunster Parish questioned the lack of gully and grip cleaning, prompting Kali to explain the historical and current funding challenges that have led to a reduction in routine drainage maintenance and a shift towards reactive interventions.

- **Reduction in Revenue Funding:** Kali explained that significant reductions in revenue funding over the past decade have led to a decrease in routine gully and grip cleaning, with available funds now prioritised for urgent or reactive maintenance.
 - **Capital vs Revenue Funding:** Kali described how the team previously used capital funding to support revenue maintenance activities, such as gully clearance, but changes in funding rules have curtailed this practice, further limiting available resources.
 - **Current Maintenance Approach:** The current approach focuses on targeted, reactive interventions using available machinery when specific problems are reported, rather than regular, proactive maintenance.
- **Outstanding Maintenance Issues and Communication:**
 - **Delayed Responses and Follow-Up:** Kali noted that several maintenance issues remain unresolved due to delayed responses from contractors and other stakeholders and promised to escalate these matters and provide updates to the group as soon as information becomes available.
- **Highways and Infrastructure Issues:**

Participants discussed a range of highways and infrastructure matters, including road markings, bridge repairs, traffic management, damage from large vehicles, and ongoing maintenance challenges, with updates on specific sites and plans for future improvements.

 - **Road Markings and Signage:** Concerns were raised about deteriorating road markings, missing or unclear signage at key junctions, and the need for regular maintenance. Kali explained the process for reporting and refreshing markings, noting weather constraints and ongoing efforts to address these issues.
 - **Traffic Light Functionality and Complaints:** Participants reported frequent malfunctions of temporary traffic lights, long wait times, and driver non-compliance. Kali advised prompt reporting of faults and explained the technical reasons for delays, including safety requirements and the impact of heavy vehicles.
 - **Damage from Large Vehicles and Contractors:** Issues with damage to verges and road edges caused by large vehicles, particularly during timber extraction and other contractor activities, were discussed. The difficulty of enforcing restrictions and recovering repair costs was acknowledged, with suggestions for improved monitoring and communication with contractors.
 - **Volunteer Schemes:** The group briefly discussed enhanced maintenance schemes and the potential for volunteer training, noting that some aspects may be subject to change and would be revisited in future meetings.

- **Upcoming Road Safety Events:**
 - A road safety event is planned for the West part of the county taking place at County Hall on Wednesday 22nd October. The emphasis is on education and raising awareness of driver behaviour and community mitigations including Speed Indicator Devices. The event will be facilitated by the Road Safety Team and PC Dan Cox. This will be limited to 2 representatives per parish.
 - A road safety workshop will also be part of the Somerset Prepared Conference on the 15 October. [Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day 2025 Tickets, Wed 15 Oct 2025 at 09:15 | Eventbrite.](#)

Housing – Colin McDonald

Colin is currently working on a draft report arising from the work undertaken by the Exmoor LCN Housing working group. Once this has been sufficiently “fleshed out”, the plan will be to convene another meeting to discuss the document.

Once the report is in ‘good enough’ shape to discuss the findings and draft recommendations, together with any proposed amendments it will be compiled into a final draft report. This will be presented to the Exmoor LCN, and following approval shared with other organisations and partners.

11. Dates of future meetings:

Proposed Exmoor LCN Dates The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Highways Sub-Group Dates – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Thursday 4 September at 6.30pm including Annual Highways Meeting (Winter Operations)	Friday 17 October 10am – 1pm
Thursday 6 November at 7pm	Friday 28 November 10am – 1pm
Thursday 15 January at 7pm	Friday 20 February 10am – 1pm
Thursday 5 March at 7pm	Friday 17 April 10am – 1pm
Thursday 4 June at 7pm (AGM)	Friday 10 July 10am – 1pm