

Exmoor Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Annual Winter Maintenance Meeting

Date: Thursday 11 June 2026

Time: 6.30pm and 7.30pm

Location: The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:

Cllr Steven Pugsley
Cllr Frances Nicholson

Representing

Somerset Council (Chair)
Somerset Council

Cllr Charles Mowatt
Cllr Matthew Headley
Jan Aldridge (Clerk)
Cllr Eric Norman
Cllr Nick Thwaites
Cllr Mike Ellicott
Cllr Francis Schott
Cllr Stephen Kimsey
Cllr Julian Dascombe
Cllr Mark Bolland
Cllr Duncan McCanlis
Cllr Philip Beauvais
Cllr Fran A'Brook
Cllr Colin Wilkins
Cllr Tim Lloyd
Cllr Andrew Bray
Robyn Gummer
Fodo Higginson

Brompton Ralph Parish Council
Brompton Regis Parish Council
Brushford Parish Council
Cutcombe Parish Council
Dulverton Town Council
Exford Parish Council (Vice Chair)
Exmoor Parish Council
Huishchampflower Parish Council
Luccombe Parish Council
Luxborough Parish Council
Porlock Parish Council
Skilgate Parish Meeting
Upton Parish Council
Winsford Parish Council
Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Wootton Courtenay Parish Council
Exmoor Young Voices (Chair)
SALC (Health and Wellbeing)

Other attendees

Name:

Patricia Bainbridge (Clerk)
Cllr Roger Foxwell
Roger Webber
Cllr Margaret Rawle
Cllr Jeremy Hickman
Cllr Mike Harding
Cllr Jan Stapleford
Cllr David Powell
Cllr Ann Sparling
Cllr Stephen Colson
Dan Barber
Cllr Alan Collins
Megan Hunt

Representing:

Brompton Ralph Parish Council
Cutcombe Parish Council
Cutcombe Resident
Dulverton Town Council
Exford Parish Council
Luccombe Parish Council
Luccombe Parish Council
Luxborough Parish Council
Luxborough Parish Council
Porlock Parish Council
Skilgate Parish Meeting
Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Exmoor Young Voices (Coordinator)

Virtual Attendance:

Name:

Cllr Tony Howard
Ali Sanderson
Rebecca Tomalinson (Clerk)

Representing:

Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Spark Somerset
Withypool & Hawkridge PC

Officer Attendance:

Sue Applegate (Senior Rights of Way & Access Officer, ENPA), Kali Martin (Somerset Council Highways), Beccy Brown (Somerset Council, Employment & Skills), Sam Murrell & Chris Booth (Somerset Council, LCN Link Officers), Laura Smedley (Somerset Council, Partnerships Officer).

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Summary of key points of discussion and outcome:

Item:

1. Winter Highways Maintenance and Pothole Recovery:

Kali Martin provided an update on the ongoing recovery from winter-related pothole damage, insurance claims processing, and the administrative challenges faced due to increased defects and staff absences, with input from Sam and other colleagues regarding process improvements and communication with parishes.

- **Pothole Impact and Insurance Claims:** Kali described the significant increase in potholes following the winter, leading to a backlog of repairs and a rise in insurance claims from vehicle owners. The process for handling these claims involves cross-referencing repair actions, compiling reports, and communicating with the insurance section, with each claim taking an average of 18 minutes to process.
- **Administrative Burden and Staff Absence:** Due to a colleague's medical absence, Kali took on additional workload, particularly in managing insurance claims and correspondence, which led to delays in responding to queries and a backlog in administrative tasks dating back to March.
- **Coordination with Parishes and Data Collection:** Kali outlined the process for collecting and updating information on grit bins and salt bags, including the use of Excel spreadsheets and hard copies with coordinates. Parishes are asked to provide updates using a specific email format with hashtags to track submissions and ensure the most current data is available for winter preparations.
- **Communication and Process Improvements:** To streamline administration, Kali requested that parishes use a standardised email subject format and maintain clear records of updates. The aim is to ensure accurate information is available for both local and county-level planning, with feedback loops established for continuous improvement.
- **Green Routes and Secondary Gritting Policy:** Kali and other participants discussed ongoing frustrations with the treatment of secondary gritting routes, the evolution of policy documents, and the need for evidence-based reporting from parishes to support risk-based prioritisation of winter maintenance.
 - **Policy Changes and Resource Constraints:** Kali explained that policy documents have shifted from specifying secondary routes for gritting to a more resource-dependent approach, where additional routes are only treated when resources permit. This has led to inconsistencies in service delivery, particularly affecting smaller and more isolated communities.
 - **Community Impact and Advocacy:** Participants highlighted the impact of untreated green routes on rural communities, especially in areas with higher snowfall and colder conditions. Kali noted the

importance of pushing these concerns up the chain to influence future policy revisions.

- **Evidence-Based Reporting and Risk Assessment:** Parishes were encouraged to report on locations where water regularly pools or where untreated routes pose safety risks. This information is used to categorise and assess sites on a risk basis, supporting more targeted interventions.
- **Budget and Contractor Challenges:** Kali described the shift from routine maintenance to a more reactive, risk-based approach due to budget constraints and contractor risk aversion, particularly regarding road closures for grip cutting and drainage work.
- **Drainage, Flooding, and Reporting Mechanisms:** Kali led a discussion on drainage issues, the importance of timely reporting via the council's online system, and the process for prioritising and addressing structural and routine drainage problems.
 - **Drainage Maintenance and Structural Issues:** Kali detailed the process for identifying and addressing drainage problems, including routine cleaning, jetting, and escalation to structural repairs when necessary. Superintendents have limited budgets for spot repairs, and larger projects require bidding for additional funds.
 - **Reporting and Data-Driven Decision Making:** Attendees were advised to use the council's online reporting system to log drainage and flooding issues, as this generates reference numbers and ensures problems are captured in the data used to allocate maintenance funding.
 - **Budget Allocation and Prioritisation:** Sam explained that additional highways funding is allocated based on reported data, making it crucial for parishes and residents to report issues promptly to influence where resources are directed.
 - **Landowner Responsibilities and Communication:** The meeting addressed the division of responsibilities between the council and private landowners for drainage outfalls, with Kali noting the need for ongoing communication and, where necessary, enforcement to ensure maintenance is carried out.

2. Introductions

Robyn Gummer and Megan Hunt (Exmoor Young Voices)
Sue Applegate (Exmoor National Park Authority)

Chris Booth (LCN Link Officer), Laura Smedley (Partnerships Officer)

Apologies

Lorraine Warren (Kier), Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis), Sally Moran and Norma Martin (Clatworthy PC), Colin McDonald (Somerset Council), ASP PCC Clare Moody, ASP PCSO Michelle Haines and Linda Moden, Cllr Chris Dubery (Dulverton Town Council), Janette Sapsford (Exton Parish Council), Jennifer Yates (Winsford & Exton, Clerk), Nikki Bonner (Village Agent, Thrive).

3. Notes/minutes of the previous meeting

The notes from the meeting held on Thursday 5 March 2026 were agreed as a true record. Matters arising would be addressed at the relevant point on the agenda.

4. Public Speaker: Roger Webber

Roger Webber opened with a personal account of navigating the ENPA planning system, highlighting prolonged delays, repeated consultation requirements and a lack of timely decisions.

- He described how these issues are creating uncertainty and rising costs for applicants, affecting the viability of schemes and discouraging local development.
- A central theme was that, despite clear local evidence of need, housing schemes for local people are not progressing efficiently through the system.
- He stressed that the current process is not adequately supporting younger people and local families, who are increasingly unable to remain in their communities.
- Roger called for a more responsive and proportionate planning system and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the emerging Exmoor Local Plan reflects lived experience and reduces barriers to delivery.

Overall message:

Planning delays and system complexity are a major constraint on delivering housing for local people, requiring both process improvements and policy change.

5. Avon and Somerset Police Update – (Neighbourhood Team).

The team sent apologies and a written statement. This is attached to the minutes.

- Report highlighted ongoing work on antisocial behaviour, rural crime and safeguarding, including incidents under investigation.
- Preventative activity noted, including trailer marking and community engagement events.
- Potential attendance of the Police and Crime Commissioner at the September meeting confirmed.

6. Speaker: Exmoor Young Voices (Robyn Gummer – Chair)

Megan and Robyn from Exmoor Young Voices presented on the challenges facing young people in securing affordable housing, the group's initiatives to support self-build projects and community engagement, and the need for policy changes to better address local housing needs.

- **Exmoor Young Voices Initiatives:** Megan and Robyn described the charity's work supporting young people through advocacy, research, and practical projects such as the self-build group, which helps individuals navigate the process of building their own homes and shares knowledge about overcoming barriers.
- **Community Engagement and Events:** The group has organised events like open house tours and is planning a family fun day to raise awareness and foster connections among young people, families, and local organisations.
- **Policy Advocacy and Housing Needs:** Exmoor Young Voices has engaged with housing associations, the National Park Authority, and other stakeholders to advocate for more accessible and locally prioritised housing, highlighting the need for changes in allocation policies and greater support for young residents.
- **Collaboration and Funding Opportunities:** Discussions included potential collaboration with parish councils and access to small grants for community projects, with Fodo (SALC) and other attendees

offering support and outlining the application process for available funding.

7. **Speaker: Fodo Higginson (Somerset Association of Local Councils, SALC)** in place of Paul Matcham.

- Fodo Higginson from SALC's **Community Health and Wellbeing Programme** outlined the availability of small grant funding, typically £1,000–£1,500, to support local community initiatives.
- It was confirmed that funding applications must be submitted via Parish or Town Councils, although projects can be delivered in collaboration with community groups.
- Members were encouraged to consider projects that promote community wellbeing, engagement and local activities, including events and small capital items.
- The importance of early engagement and discussion with the programme team was emphasised to support applications.
- It was noted that remaining funding must be committed and spent by the end of September, with limited opportunity beyond this point.

Examples referenced included **community events, volunteer-led projects and collaborative parish initiatives**.

Outcome:

Parish councils were encouraged to bring forward eligible projects urgently and work with local groups to access remaining SALC-administered funding before the September deadline.

8. **Speaker: Exmoor National Park – (Sue Applegate)**

Sue, the National Park's Rights of Way Officer, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the management, maintenance, and recent improvements to public rights of way, including volunteer involvement, digital reporting, and accessibility enhancements, followed by a Q&A session.

- **Network Overview and Legal Framework:** Sue explained the extent of the rights of way network, the legal basis for public access, and the historical role of parish councils in mapping and maintaining these routes.

- **Maintenance, Volunteers, and Reporting:** The maintenance programme includes regular surveys, a dedicated field services team, and significant volunteer involvement. Issues can be reported via the Somerset Rome online portal, which streamlines communication and response.
- **Accessibility and Recent Projects:** Recent projects have focused on improving accessibility, such as installing new bridges, upgrading paths for mobility users, and securing external funding for barrier removal. Sue highlighted the use of digital resources and social media to promote accessible routes.
- **Landowner Relations and Path Closures:** Questions were raised about the closure of permissive paths by the National Trust due to ash dieback, with Sue clarifying the limitations of council authority over non-public rights of way and ongoing efforts to encourage reopening where feasible.
- A commitment was made to **ongoing engagement with the LCN**, including future attendance by ranger staff.

Overall message:

The rights of way network is actively managed and well-supported, but constrained by funding, landowner control in some cases, and the need for continued public reporting and partnership working.

The presentation slides are attached to these minutes.

9. Update on Working Groups:

- **Highways** – (Notes from the subgroup meeting held on the 17 April 2026 were circulated with the agenda).
 - **Highways Projects, Road Closures, and Maintenance Scheduling:** Kali updated the group on current and upcoming highways projects, including road closures for utility works, the scheduling of verge cutting and surface dressing, and the challenges posed by contractor changes and financial constraints.
 - **Utility Works and Road Closures:** Kali reported on the B3190 road closure for utility trenching, the communication with contractors, and the efforts to minimise disruption by coordinating with the Streetworks inspector and providing updates to affected residents.

- **Verge Cutting and Surface Dressing:** The annual schedule for verge cutting and surface dressing was discussed, with Kali noting the prioritisation of A and B roads and the publication of schedules online for public reference.
 - **Financial and Contractor Challenges:** Budget limitations and the withdrawal of some contractors have led to a reduction in the number of maintenance schemes for the current financial year, with a focus on completing legacy projects and addressing the most critical defects.
 - **Defect Backlog and Recovery Efforts:** Kali shared data on the current backlog of pothole and defect repairs, the use of new technologies like spray patching machines.
 - **Tree Maintenance and Landowner Responsibilities:** Kali addressed questions about tree maintenance along highways, clarifying the distinction between council and private landowner responsibilities, and the process for issuing notices to landowners when action is required.
 - **Boundary and Responsibility Clarification:** Kali explained that while the council is responsible for highway trees, adjacent landowners are responsible for trees on their property that overhang the highway, with notices issued as needed to ensure safety.
- **Housing** – Notes from the subgroup meeting held on 14 May 2026 were circulated with the agenda. Colin McDonald had tendered apologies but a written update is attached to these minutes.
 - The ongoing work of the Housing Working Group was linked to wider concerns raised during the meeting regarding housing delivery, affordability and planning processes on Exmoor.
 - Roger Webber's opening address highlighted significant delays within the ENPA planning system, including extended timescales, repeated consultations and procedural complexity, which were reported to be affecting the viability and progress of locally supported schemes.
 - It was noted that these delays are creating financial pressure and uncertainty for applicants, and are restricting the ability to translate identified local housing need into deliverable developments.

- Members reiterated that the current system is not consistently enabling housing for local people, particularly younger households seeking to remain in their communities.
- Further discussion reinforced concerns regarding Section 106 affordability thresholds and local lettings approaches, with questions raised about whether current criteria remain appropriate for local income levels.
- The importance of influencing the emerging Exmoor Local Plan review was stressed, with a focus on ensuring that policies better reflect local circumstances and support delivery.

10. Any other Business:

Request made for **contributions to the Exmoor LCN annual report**. Sam asked that parishes/towns and voluntary groups provide a short paragraph/testimonial on the value of the Exmoor LCN and how this has supported the work taking place across the area. Please submit to Sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk by the end of July. The Annual Report will be presented at the September LCN meeting.

11. Provisional Dates of future meetings:

Exmoor LCN Dates Venues to be confirmed	Highways Sub-Group Date Venues to be confirmed
	Friday 10 July 10am – 1pm – Dulverton Sport
Thursday 10 September 2026 at 7pm (AGM)	Friday 16 October 2026 10am – 1pm
Thursday 5 November 2026 at 7pm	Friday 27 November 2026 10am – 1pm
Thursday 14 January 2027 at 7pm	Friday 19 February 2027 10am – 1pm
Thursday 4 March 2027 at 7pm	Friday 17 April 2027 10am – 1pm

Thursday 10 June 2027 at 7.30pm (Winter Maintenance Meeting)	Friday 10 July 2027 10am – 1pm
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