

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Exmoor

Date: Thursday 16 January 2025

Time: 7:09pm – 9:21pm

Location: The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe, Wheddon Cross TA24 7DL

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)

Patricia Bainbridge (clerk)

Sarah Buchanan (clerk)

Jan Aldridge

Sally Moran

Cllr Jon Levenson

Cllr Christine Dubery

Cllr Mike Ellicott (Vice Chair)

Cllr Janette Sapsford

Cllr Stephen Kimsey

Cllr Mark Bolland

Cllr Duncan McCannlis

Cllr Philip Beauvais

Cllr Katy Attwater

Cllr Fran A'Brook

Cllr Colin Wilkins

Cllr Tony Howard

PCSO Michelle Haimes

Nikki Bonner

Rev David Weir

Fodo Higginson

Representing

Somerset Council

Brompton Ralph Parish Council

Brompton Regis Parish Council

Brushford Parish Council

Clatworthy Parish Council

Cutcombe Parish Council

Dulverton Town Council

Exford Parish Council

Exton Parish Council

Huishchampflower Parish Council

Luxborough Parish Council

Porlock Parish Council

Skilgate Parish Council

Timberscombe Parish Council

Upton Parish Council

Winsford Parish Council

Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council

Avon and Somerset Police (ASP)

CCS Village Agent (Exmoor)

Exmoor Benefice

SALC Health and Wellbeing

Officer Attendance:

Kevin Bridgwater & Kali Martin (Somerset Council Highways), Sam Murrell (LCN Link Officer), Emily Window (LCN Project Officer) and Becca Brown (Employment & Skills).

Other attendees

Name:

Clare Moody (PCC)
Inspector Jo Hayward – Melen
Sgt Naomi Baker
PCSO Linda Moden

Representing:

ASP Office of the Police Crime Commissioner
ASP Staff Aide
ASP – Local Neighbourhood Team
ASP – Exmoor Neighbourhood Team

Cllr Roger Foxwell
Cllr Nick Thwaites
Cllr Stephen Colson
Lesley Webb (Clerk)

Cutcombe Parish Council
Dulverton Town Council
Porlock Parish Council
Timberscombe Parish Council

Virtual Attendees

Rebecca Tomalin (clerk)
Ruth McArthur
Cllr Geoff Williams
Colin MacDonald
Anne Shilton

Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council
Exmoor National Park Authority
Old Cleeve Parish Council
SC Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler
LCN Link Officer (Dowsborough)

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Item: Summary of key points of discussion and outcome:

1 Apologies and Introductions

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting:

- Clare Moody (Police Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset Police)
- ASP Staff aide – Inspector Joanne Heyward-Melen
- Sgt Naomi Baker and PCSOs Linda Moden and Michelle Haimes

Apologies were received from Cllr Frances Nicholson (Somerset Council), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay PC), Matthew Headley (Brompton Regis PC), Norma Martin (Clatworthy PC) Sally Baker (Brompton Ralph PC), Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC), Dan Barnett (ENPA).

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record by those present.

3 Matters arising (not part of later agenda items)

Matters arising were briefly discussed, with a note to revisit the Boundary Commission review later.

4 Annual update from the Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) – Clare Moody

Clare Moody provided an overview of her role as the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner, highlighting the development of the police and crime plan with five priorities:

- strengthening neighbourhood policing,
- addressing serious violence, (including youth violence and domestic abuse)
- preventing crime,
- supporting victims,
- and maintaining standards in policing.

She emphasized the importance of communication and community engagement, urging collaboration with neighbourhood teams and local councils. The PCC also mentioned the development of the implementation plan, incorporating feedback from consultations and working with partners.

- **County Lines**

In absentia, the chair asked a question on behalf of Cllr Frances Nicholson about the extent of county lines in rural Somerset and the capacity of Avon and Somerset Police to respond. The PCC and police colleagues discussed the importance of community intelligence and the need for public awareness around the signs of County Lines.

Q: What is County Lines?

A: County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes because of this trend.

Exploitation of young and vulnerable people.

A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young and vulnerable people. The dealers will frequently target children and adults - often with mental health or addiction problems - to act as drug runners or move cash so they can stay under the radar of law enforcement.

In some cases, the dealers will take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. This is known as cuckooing.

People exploited in this way will quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked to areas a long way from home as part of the network's drug dealing business.

As is seen in child sexual exploitation, children often don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality. So, it's important that we all play our part to understand county lines and speak out if we have concerns.

The PCC acknowledged that county lines activity had reached Somerset, including the LCN area and neighbouring towns like Minehead. The Police were taking such activity very seriously and were making ongoing efforts to address it, including operations and intelligence gathering.

Police colleagues highlighted the importance of community intelligence in tackling county lines, urging residents to report suspicious activities through various channels, including Crime Stoppers.

It was suggested that the signs of County Lines and more information were circulated in the monthly ASP neighbourhood newsletter to raise awareness. PCSO Linda Moden agreed to follow this up.

- **Reducing Reoffending:** Becki Brown asked about the role of education in reducing reoffending. Claire Moody emphasized the importance of a wrap-around service, including education, housing, and support for drug and alcohol use, to prevent reoffending.
- **Budget Concerns:** Cllr John Levenson (Cutcombe PC) raised concerns about the impact of budget constraints on police resources and recruitment. Claire Moody explained the challenges of funding and the importance of careful budgeting and planning to maintain police services.
 - **Compensation and Grants:** Claire Moody mentioned that compensation for National Insurance increases was provided based on headcount, which was fairer than previous funding methods.
 - **Future Budgeting:** Claire Moody explained the use of the mid-term financial plan to budget for future years, acknowledging potential difficulties and the need for strategic planning.
 - **Resource Allocation:** Claire Moody emphasized the importance of making the case for more funding and resources for policing, particularly in challenging financial times.
- **Rural Policing Funding:** Cllr Duncan MCCannlis (Porlock PC) discussed the allocation of funding for rural policing and the importance of addressing rural crime. Claire Moody highlighted the work of the rural crime team and the need for better communication and reporting of rural crime incidents.
 - **Rural Crime Team:** Claire Moody highlighted the work of the rural crime team in addressing specific crime types, such as farm thefts and hare coursing, which involve serious organized crime.

- **Communication and Reporting:** Claire Moody emphasized the need for better communication and reporting of rural crime incidents to allocate appropriate resources and address community concerns.
- **Resource Allocation:** Claire Moody acknowledged the challenges of resource allocation in rural areas and the need for more police presence to address rural crime effectively.
- **Speed Limits in Rural Areas:** Cllr Philip Beauvais (Skilgate PC) raised concerns about the national speed limit in rural villages and the need for lower speed limits. Claire Moody and Assistant Highways Manager, Kali Martin explained the challenges of setting speed limits and the importance of driving to road conditions.

5 Avon and Somerset Police Update

Since November's meeting there has fortunately been very little crime apart from the theft of a quad bike from Wheddon Cross overnight 6th/7th January. Enquiries are continuing and CCTV is being checked.

There was a further theft about the same time of a vintage tractor and trailer between Minehead and Dunster. Both victims have been visited and offered support.

ASP are currently working with Livewest Housing Association and the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) team to deal with ASB connected to a property in a local village. As offences are currently under investigation, no further details can be divulged at this time.

The police were kept busy with both the storm in November (Bert) and Storm Darragh in December. There was fantastic support from the local community to clear the roads which was very much appreciated.

ASP colleagues ran Op Limit in the lead up to Christmas to educate and deter when possible, drug/drink drivers on Exmoor and surrounding areas.

Proactive patrols were carried out over New Year at hot spots previously used for raves. Fortunately, none took place.

Going forward to the new year, the team are hoping to access funding for trailer marking for our rural community and marker kits to supply to victims.

They will be holding the first Police Posts of 2025 at Clatworthy, Dunster and Porlock to give personal and property crime reductions as per current priorities.

PC Calloway, supported by PCSO's will be carrying out speed checks in Dulverton and other locations in the Exmoor area. If you are concerned about speeding in your village, please speak to the neighbourhood team.

6 Exmoor National Park Update Partnership Plan 2025 Consultation

The National Park Authority prepares a Management Plan for Exmoor to deliver the statutory objectives of the National Park. The Plan is for the National Park as a whole and involves many organisations and people, and so is called a Partnership Plan.

It describes:

- the special qualities of the National Park
- sets out, the opportunities and challenges facing Exmoor,
- a vision, ambitions and objectives, reflecting the Government's vision and priorities for all National Parks, and how Exmoor can help deliver these
- Targets for partnership action

Publication of a draft plan 2025-2030 follows a 2023 [Public Opinion Survey](#) (PDF), evidence gathering, in the National Park's [State of the Park report](#) and consultation with partners and stakeholders

Two surveys that can be completed to provide views on the draft plan:

- [Vision and Objectives](#) The first survey focuses on the overall vision and the objectives set out in the plan.
- [Targets Survey](#) The second survey allows you to consider the detailed targets set under each objective.

The deadline for responses is 10am, 10 March 2025.

To request the plan in an alternative format, a hard copy of the survey forms, or for queries on the consultation please contact consultations@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk.

The Park Authority encourages responses via the online surveys but responses may also be submitted using the email above or in writing to Exmoor House, Dulverton, TA22 9HL.

7 Update on Working Groups

• Moorland Foodbank

Following the plea for help made by the Moorland Foodbank Coordinator, Jenny Barker in the September meeting, the situation had moved at pace. The Foodbank had been relocated to the Riverside Centre, a new board of Trustees had been established and a successful application had been made to the Charity Commission. As such the Moorland Foodbank became a constitutional body on the 4 December 2024, only 5 days after submitting their application.

This meant that it was now able to apply for grant funding and enter into a lease agreement directly with Somerset Council for the Riverside Centre.

Some questions were raised about collection of food items in various places, and these were passed on directly via the designated phone number in the meeting. Nikki Bonner advised that food parcels were being delivered and there had been no discernible difference in the service following the changeover.

The Chair thanked Cllr Frances Nicholson, Dulverton Town Council and Sam Murrell for all their support in revitalising the Foodbank and ensuring its future. He suggested that this was proof positive of how the LCN can draw the community together to work and deliver a project for the benefit of all.

- **Highways**

Storm and Snow Events: Kali and Kevin provided updates on the impact of recent storms and snow events, including the challenges faced in road maintenance and community support. They mentioned that during Storm Darragh, there were 400 fallen trees and 700 reported incidents. The community's efforts in clearing roads were appreciated.

Winter Maintenance: The challenges of winter maintenance were discussed, including resource allocation and the need for better planning and communication.

- Ongoing concerns were expressed by Timberscombe PC, about the problems with surface water in Great House Street, and the lack of a permanent solution creating a hazard for pedestrians . It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next Highways subgroup meeting in February, following further discussions with Wessex Water.
- **Green Routes:** Concerns were raised about the treatment of green routes during winter weather, with suggestions for incorporating them into a permanent treatment program. The green routes were not treated as expected during the snow, leading to hazardous conditions. Kali mentioned that the gritting teams were stretched thin, focusing on precautionary routes.
- **Salt bin/bags:** It was suggested that parishes report low salt stocks and other issues promptly to ensure timely responses.

Communication Issues: Several incidents highlighted the importance of effective communication between the community and highways teams to address road closures and maintenance issues. There was an incident involving aggressive behavior towards highway workers at Wheddon Cross. The workers felt threatened and had to leave the site. This highlighted the need for better communication and respect towards highway workers.

Specific Road Issues: Various specific road issues were discussed, including overhanging branches on Haddon Hill, the collapse of a bank near Portford

Bridge Withypool, and the road closure at Nutcombe Bottom. Kali and Kevin provided updates and mentioned ongoing or planned actions to address these issues.

More detailed discussions will take place at the Highways Working Group meeting scheduled for Friday 21 February 2025.

- **Affordable Housing update**

Colin McDonald provided an update on the ongoing work of the affordable housing subgroup, highlighting the importance of identifying land opportunities and engaging with parish councils.

- The ongoing work on affordable housing is progressing well, with significant contributions from external colleagues such as Becky Winter from the Church of England, Sam Novak from Magna, and Chris Winter, a private sector developer.
- A briefing note and pro formas have been prepared to assist parish councils in considering land opportunities for affordable housing. These documents have been sent to Sam Murrell for circulation. (Attached)
- The Chair advised that he hoped the final report on affordable housing would be ready by May, with recommendations similar to those in the Devon report, which can be adapted for Somerset.
- The Church of England's involvement is particularly noteworthy due to its significant landholdings, which can be leveraged for identifying potential plots for affordable housing.

8 AOB

- **Exmoor Rural Health Hub**

The future of the rural health hub was briefly discussed, with a note to consider its sustainability and potential need for support in the same way as the Moorland Foodbank had received. This would be revisited at a future date.

- **Local Government Boundary Review**

The Somerset Council Constitution and Standards Committee voted to reject the cross-party working group review at the meeting of the 14 January 2025. Minutes of the meeting are available to view on this link: [Agenda for Constitution and Governance Committee on Tuesday, 14th January, 2025, 10.00 am - Modern Council](#)

Cllr Pugsley said it was still possible to contribute to the consultation which closed on the 20 January 2025.

- **Update on SC Transformation Programme**

The staff and union consultation had now closed and Somerset Council was reviewing the feedback. Highways staff thanked the communities for all their help and support during a very difficult time, and their contributions towards the consultation. All staffing changes needed to be implemented before the start of the new financial year, so redundancies and service reductions would be made known soon.

- **Emergency Preparedness**

Colin Wilkins (Winsford PC) raised the issue of needing a generator in the village to provide power following the recent storms. He was signposted to various grant funding bodies and support : [Somerset Prepared – Helping Somerset prepare, respond and recover from emergencies.](#)

- **Local Plan – Local Consultation Events**

Somerset Council are starting to prepare for their Local Plan consultations. They are offering a workshop for those parishes and members who are part of the existing West Somerset Local Plan.

Councillors Early Engagement Workshop:

In person only – West Area:

Monday 24 February 2025, 4-6pm in the JMR Deane House, Taunton

To include Town and Parish Representatives.

A hold the date invitation has been sent. Representatives are requested to register their attendance using the online link or QR code.

The public consultation will take place later in the year.

9 Dates of future meetings

Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Highways Sub-Group Dates – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Thursday 16 January at 7pm	Friday 21 February 10am – 1pm
Thursday 6 March at 7pm	Friday 25 April 10am – 1pm
Thursday 5 June at 7pm (AGM)	

A copy of the Action Log is attached.