

Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Exmoor

Date: Thursday, 5 September 2024

Time: 7:40pm – 9:15pm

(Preceded by the Winter Maintenance Meeting which commenced at 6:30pm)

Location: The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe, Wheddon Cross

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Somerset Council
Sarah Buchanan (clerk)	Brompton Regis Parish Council
Frances Takel	Brushford Parish Council
Sally Moran	Clatworthy Parish Council
Cllr Jon Levenson	Cutcombe Parish Council
Cllr Margaret Rawle	Dulverton Town Council
Cllr Mike Ellicott (Vice Chair)	Exford Parish Council
Cllr Francis Schott	Exmoor Parish Council
J Yates (clerk)	Exton Parish Council
Cllr Stephen Kimsey	Huish Champflower Parish Council
Cllr Duncan McCannlis	Porlock Parish Council
Cllr Katy Attwater	Timberscombe Parish Council
Cllr Fran A' Brook	Upton Parish Council
Cllr Colin Wilkins	Winsford Parish Council
Alan Collins	Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council

PCSO Michelle Haines
Emma Thomasson

Avon and Somerset Police
Visit Exmoor

Other attendees

Name:

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Jenny Barker
Jan Aldridge (clerk)
Norma Martin
Cllr Roger Foxwell
Cllr Nick Thwaites
Cllr Jeremy Hickman
Lesley Webb (clerk)
Reverend David Weir
Roger Webber

Representing:

Somerset Council
Dulverton / Moorland Foodbank
Brushford Parish Council
Clatworthy Parish Council
Cutcombe Parish Council
Dulverton Town Council
Exford Parish Council
Timberscombe Parish Council
Exmoor Benefice
Member of the Public

Virtual attendance

Name:

Patricia Bainbridge (Clerk)
Nikki Bonner
Jessica Coles
Julian Soltau
Sally Baker
Loretta Whetlor
Fodo Higginson
Jill Loader
Jan Stapleford
Annie Cole
Henry Harington (Highways only)
Emma Plummer
Anne Shilton

Representing

Brompton Ralph PC
Exmoor Village Agent (CCS)

Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council
Brompton Ralph Parish Council
Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC)
SALC (Health and Wellbeing Fund Coordinator)
Food Resilience (CAB)
Luxborough Parish Council
Magna Housing Association
Luccombe Parish Council
Somerset Council (LCN Interim Lead)
Somerset Council (LCN Link Officer)

Officer Attendance:

All Somerset Council – Sam Murrell (LCN Link Officer), Emily Window (LCN Project Officer), Kevin Bridgwater (Highways Service Manager), Kali Martin (Assistant Highways Service Manager), Colin McDonald (Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler).

Summary of discussion:

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

1 Highways winter maintenance (2024/25)

Grit Bins / Bags Maps

There are currently 689 bag and bin locations on Exmoor, which is considerably more than any other part of Somerset.

Those parishes that had yet to check the location of the grit bins/bags against the provided map in their area, were asked to check them as a matter of urgency and return to the area office. They would be checked by a member of the Highways team and then filled ready for the winter. Somerset Cllrs had done their best to get them out to the parishes, but some had not met over the summer months. (Some maps were handed out at the meeting, with a request to check and return ASAP).

If there are bags/bins needed that are not pinpointed on the maps, can they be referenced with a What3Words location so that these can be amended.

As a cost saving exercise the emptied/redundant salt bags were not collected over the summer. (Cost saving was approximately £15K so worth the inconvenience). If some were still in situ when they were due to be filled, then these would be swapped over. Requests were made for some bag drops to be made in Dulverton and Withypool with local farmers who would monitor the highway conditions.

Winsford PC engage a contractor to clear around the bins during the autumn to improve accessibility. The Highways team agreed that this was valuable work and had no objections to this taking place.

Winter Service 2025/26

At the present time, Somerset Council had not indicated that there would be a reduction in the winter service due to the financial emergency, but this would be made clearer as the budget setting period approached. It would be prudent for parishes to make provision in their precepts just in case.

Gritting routes

There are currently no planned changes to the scheduled Green routes, and the local area office can monitor and override decisions relating to other specific routes if there are safety concerns.

Safety Defects

Keir were slowly making progress to catch up on the outstanding work. When they took over in April 2024, there were approximately 3,500 defects recorded on the portal, with an estimated 300 daily additional reports being made. The number of defects outstanding is now down to 860, and if the good progress continues this will be reduced to a manageable 300-400, weather conditions permitting.

Other parish concerns

- **Stony Street, Luccombe** – The Highways team are pushing hard to get the scheme delivered by the end of September. There has been some emergency reactive work taking place recently which needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- **Tar and Chipping on B3224** – There were some concerns about drains not being covered during the process, which had resulted in them being blocked. Kali Martin thanked the councillor for carrying out the inspection and reporting back. This had speeded up the process of putting right. The drains would be unblocked as soon as possible. The work overall had been done to a satisfactory standard and would result in a good surface for at least the next 8 years.
- **Cattle Grids** – There was a request to clear the cattle grids of muck in Withypool. They are so full, the ponies and sheep can just walk straight across and they do not form a barrier. The grids need to be lifted so that a proper machine can dig them out.
- **Exford** – Cllrs complained that they had no idea when the resurfacing work was going to be carried out despite the roads being marked up in preparation. Residents in the village were complaining and they didn't know what to tell them. Kali advised that if there were any issues they ask the complainant to come direct to them at the Highway office. They were battling several issues affecting delivery including a window with Heidelberg. In the

meantime any reactive repairs would be taken care of so should be reported in the usual manner.

- The Chair advised that the correct place to raise these items was the Highway subgroup, so could parishes ensure that they communicated their concerns to their Highways representative in advance of the meeting.

2 Introductions

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting:
Cllr Theo Butt Philip – Somerset Council Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources and Localities; Jenny Barker from the Dulverton/Moorland Foodbank; Fodo Higginson from SALC (Health and Wellbeing Fund Coordinator), Emma Thomasson from Visit Exmoor, and several online attendees.

3 Apologies for absence

Christine Dubery (Dulverton TC), Janette Sapsford (Exton PC) Mark Bolland (Luxborough PC), Phil Collings (Fire Officer DSFRS), Beccy Brown (Somerset Council), Ruth McArthur (ENPA), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay PC)

4 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

5 Matters arising (not part of later agenda items)

Following Magna's presentation, they had been following up and positively engaging with Timberscombe PC to work through the issues that had been raised. It was hoped that this would have wider repercussions throughout the whole Exmoor LCN area.

6 Avon and Somerset Police Update (This item brought forward from Item 8).

PCSO Michelle Haimes reported as follows:

The summer has been a busy one. Unfortunately there has been some crime:

- 10 motors stolen from boats at Wimbleball Lake;
- A landrover and steam cleaner stolen from a farm near Williton;
- Thefts from vehicles at Dunkery Beacon.

Follow up contact has been made with the victims to offer support and crime reduction.

This is a small amount of the work the neighbourhood police team undertake. In addition, safeguarding work is ongoing, but not something the police can detail at a public meeting. In doing such work however, the support the police team receive from partner agencies is invaluable. Examples include local school staff whilst on summer break helping to safeguard a vulnerable family. The village agent Nikki Bonner and the Moorland Foodbank team providing some much-needed support in isolated communities. There have also been reports of rough sleepers in a number of villages and the rough-sleeper team have been great in signposting and offering ongoing assistance.

The police have tried to increase their engagement this summer by visiting some of the smaller villages for Police Posts such as Brompton Ralph. They have been to Porlock Fayre, Exford Show and have supported the rangers with a cycle event on North Hill.

There is good news for the Autumn with the return of James Calloway and the Rural Affairs team. There is also another experienced officer joining the Minehead, Williton and Exmoor team as a Beat Manager.

The local team will continue with their monthly visits to Cutcombe Market and more Police posts will be planned for the coming months.

The local beat team contact details are:

Linda.Moden@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Michelle.Haimes@avonandsomerset.police.uk

James.Calloway@avonandsomerset.police.uk

7 Cllr Theo Butt Philip – Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources.

Cllr Theo Butt Philip is a member of the Exmoor National Park Authority so is very familiar with Exmoor and its challenges. He also recognised the history and legacy of the Exmoor LCN, and the fact that it provided inspiration and encouragement to other LCNs who were not so established. He was visiting as many LCNs as he could and apologised for not getting to Exmoor sooner.

Theo stated that his reason for visiting was to listen to the current issues and review how to make the LCN work, within the restrictions of the available resources. He was keen to hear what was working, what wasn't

working and how Somerset Council could help to make the Exmoor LCN a more effective mechanism for engagement.

- Cllr Pugsley highlighted the challenge around **devolution of services**. There was no principal town or settlement that could take on the services directly, although Dulverton Town Council had been successful in the past acting as a broker for the Highways pilot. This had been achieved using the goodwill of volunteers but was not sustainable long term. Whilst Dulverton and Porlock had a higher precepting base than the other parishes, they were still considerably smaller than some of their neighbouring towns. The LCN was not a recognised constituted body with a budget that could act collectively on behalf of the smaller parishes, and thus whilst there was will to undertake services, there was no practical mechanism to enable it. It would be helpful if Somerset Council could look to address this issue as it was likely to come up again, especially if there was another round of devolution.

Theo agreed to take this back to the LCN team to see if there was a workable solution, but it was a complicated issue. (LNCs are not recognised as constituted bodies in their own right and there needs to be a recognised auditable body to deal with the finances).

- Porlock PC were particularly keen to address this issue as they had experienced frustration about getting things done in the parish. They had been in discussion with Dulverton Town Council because they recognised the two settlements had similar issues. They were currently reviewing arrangements to do with street sweeping and bin emptying and were trying to collate information but were being blocked as it was deemed “commercially sensitive”. Porlock PC recognised the financial challenges of Somerset Council but suggested assistance with the administration of managing services would be one way the LCN could help. (Although both Dulverton and Porlock had very able clerks, they did not have capacity to take on additional work, and this might be one way Somerset Council could help).
- **Street Sweeping / Idverde Monitoring** – Porlock PC asked if they could have clear information about the bin emptying in the High Street. There was confusion about the workman’s responsibilities and what bins/streets he was meant to do. The work he was currently undertaking did not seem to correspond to the parishes records, and it would be helpful if this could be clarified.
Theo agreed to follow this up with the Parks and Open Spaces team.

- **Enhanced Highways Maintenance Steward:** Details on the revised scheme overseen by Kier had been circulated to parishes in the preceding week. Most of the parishes present felt that the price was beyond their reach and would not find it cost effective to employ a contractor on the quoted rates. It was more likely that if work was required they would look locally at a more cost-effective service as and when required. There was an awareness that this would have to be someone with the correct insurances and suitably approved to undertake work on the Highway.
- **Exmoor National Park** – Frustration was expressed that the ENPA officers were not present, and it was requested that those members who sat on the Park fed this back. ENPA engagement was considered vitally important especially regarding the housing and economic regeneration working groups.

8

Community Resilience – The Moorland Foodbank

Jenny Barker highlighted the challenges faced by the Dulverton Moorland Food Bank, including the need for a new operational model and the search for volunteers and trustees to ensure its sustainability.

- **Volunteer Recruitment:** The meeting addressed the urgent need for recruiting new volunteers and trustees to support the food bank's operations and continue providing services to the community.
- **Community Support:** There was a call for community support and involvement to help drive a new model for the food bank, ensuring that it can continue to serve the needs of southern Exmoor residents.
- Magna Housing Association (Community Fund) and SALC (Health & Wellbeing Fund) have sources of funding available to assist the Foodbank. Details were passed on regarding how this can be accessed.

Action Point 28 – Explore new model options for the Dulverton/Moorland Foodbank to ensure sustainability going forward.

Action Point 29 – Recruit new Foodbank Volunteers. It was suggested that the Foodbank advertises for new volunteers on local social networking sites, parish magazines and other media outlets.

9 Exmoor National Park Update (ENPA)

Disappointment was expressed by those present, that the ENPA had tendered apologies in advance of the meeting.

Ruth McArthur had forwarded the latest publication from ENPA and advised that queries could be emailed to her for a reply.

10 Update on Exmoor LCN Working Groups

Housing (the subgroup notes had been circulated in advance of the meeting).

Comments arising:

- **Housing Delivery Challenges:** Roger Webber highlighted the lengthy process and challenges in delivering housing for local people, stressing the urgency to address these issues to support community sustainability and prevent population decline.
- **Attitude and Approach:** There was a call for a change in attitude and approach towards housing delivery, with an emphasis on speeding up the process and considering the needs of the local population.
- **Community Impact:** The impact of housing challenges on community services, such as schools, was discussed, underlining the importance of housing in maintaining vibrant communities on Exmoor.

Economic Regeneration (the subgroup notes had been circulated in advance of the meeting).

Comments arising:

- **Industry Representation:** Emma Thomasson (Visit Exmoor) expressed the need for more industry representation in LCN meetings to address economic challenges and opportunities, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts for community development.
- **Community Collaboration:** The discussion focused on the significance of community collaboration to address economic regeneration, with an emphasis on involving various stakeholders and industry representatives.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Emma highlighted the potential for economic opportunities in the area and the need for a collective

approach to capitalize on these opportunities for the benefit of the community.

- **Connectivity Survey:** The economic regeneration subgroup recommended that parishes complete a connectivity survey to gather data on mobile and broadband gaps, emphasizing the need for improved infrastructure to support development.
- **Infrastructure Improvement:** The meeting underscored the importance of improving connectivity infrastructure to support community and economic development, with a focus on addressing identified gaps.
- **Data Collection:** Parishes were encouraged to participate in the survey to provide accurate data on connectivity issues, which is essential for planning and advocating for necessary improvements.

Action Point 30 – LCN Link Officer to circulate the survey to all parish councils. **Completed.**

Highways (the subgroup notes had been circulated in advance of the meeting). Winter maintenance had already been covered in depth, but the following points were also made:

- The Chair advised that the **Somerset Council Road Safety Team** (Nick Cowling) and PC Dan Cox (ASP) had attended the most recent subgroup meeting to talk about the recent spate of road traffic incidents. This was in response to residents' concerns about the number of fatalities on the A39, and a request to reduce the speed limit still further. The Road Safety team had advised that although speeding was a contributing factor, it was not the **ONLY** cause of incidents, which was largely attributed to driver behaviour and the "fatal five". The discussion had been informative and statistics and data had been provided.
- Details of the **Enhanced Highway Steward Maintenance Pilot** had been emailed to parishes advising the day rates of using Somerset Council's contractor Keir. This had been launched now to ensure the parishes had plenty of time to factor costs into their precepts, if they wanted to use the service. Information relating to a volunteer training package (to be delivered online) has also been made available.

- It was advised that the free **Volunteer training package** would be delivered online but would not be Chapter 8 training, as this would incur a charge. Volunteers would be trained to undertake low risk activities only, which does not include traffic management.
- **Insurance:** A question was raised by Timberscombe PC on who would be responsible for insuring the volunteers undertaking work on behalf of the parish. After the meeting the following was provided:

Parish councils will need to provide the appropriate level of insurance to cover the low-risk activities defined in the training course, and Somerset Council advise that Parish councils discuss the appropriate levels of insurance required with their insurance providers.

All enquiries and comments should be emailed directly to Somersetehm@keir.co.uk, so that a list of FAQs can be compiled and shared.

11 Road sweeping

There was a discussion for the need for a more effective model for road sweeping and maintenance, acknowledging issues with current practices and the need for better coordination and communication.

Action Point 33 – A member of the Open Spaces Team to attend a Highways subgroup meeting to talk through the current issues and improve communication.

Action Point 31 - If the parishes have any current concerns, can these please be emailed to exmoorlcn@somerset.gov.uk so that they can be recorded and investigated.

12 Dates of future meetings:

Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe	Housing Sub Group – Hybrid (Venue to be confirmed).
Thursday 5 September at 6.30pm	Thursday 3 October at 5:30pm
Thursday 7 November at 7pm	Thursday 5 December at 5:30pm

Thursday 16 January at 7pm	
Thursday 6 March at 7pm	
Thursday 5 June at 7pm (AGM)	

Economic Regeneration – Hybrid (Venue to be confirmed)	Highways Sub-Group Dates – Dulverton Sports Pavilion
Thursday 19 September at 5:30pm	Friday 11 October 10am – 1pm
Tuesday 19 November at 5:30pm	
Tuesday 28 January at 5:30pm	Friday 21 February 10am – 1pm
	Friday 25 April 10am – 1pm

Contact officer for meeting is sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk or email exmoorlc@somerset.gov.uk

A copy of the Action Log is attached.