

## Exmoor Local Community Network Meeting Notes

**Date:** Thursday 6 November 2025

**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

Cllr Matthew Headley  
Jan Aldridge (Clerk)  
Cllr Sally Moran  
Cllr Roger Foxwell  
Cllr Nick Thwaites  
Cllr Mike Ellicott (Vice Chair)  
Cllr Francis Schott  
Jennifer Yates (Clerk)  
Cllr Stephen Kimsey  
Cllr Philip Beauvais  
Cllr Katy Attwater  
Cllr Colin Wilkins  
Cllr Tony Howard  
Cllr Andrew Bray  
Ruth McArthur

Brompton Regis Parish Council  
Brushford Parish Council  
Clatworthy Parish Council  
Cutcombe Parish Council  
Dulverton Town Council  
Exford Parish Council  
Exmoor Parish Council  
Exton Parish Council  
Huish Champflower Parish Council  
Skilgate Parish Meeting  
Timberscombe Parish Council  
Winsford Parish Council  
Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council  
Wootton Courtenay Parish Council  
Exmoor National Park Authority

### Other attendees

**Name:**

David Northey  
John Preston

**Representing:**

Somerset Bus Partnership  
The Moorland Foodbank Trustees

Norma Martin (Clerk)  
Cllr Daniel Barber  
Cllr J Daniel  
Rebecca Tomalin (Clerk)

Clatworthy Parish Council  
Skilgate Parish Meeting  
Timberscombe Parish Council  
Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council

## **Officer Attendance:**

Sam Murrell (Exmoor LCN Link Officer), Ann Shilton (LCN Link Officer), Kali Martin (Highways Officer), Callum Davey (ICT Specialist)

## **Summary of discussion:**

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

#### **1. Introductions:**

David Northey and John Preston were welcomed as guest speakers to the meeting.

David is a member of the Somerset Bus Partnership, which provides a platform for bus users to make their views heard about the services they need. The Somerset Bus Partnership was established in April 2021 by bus passengers, councillors, transport campaigners, transport enthusiasts, bus user groups and individuals living in the Somerset Council area.

John Preston was attending in his role as Chair of the Moorland Foodbank Trustees, to give an update on the progress of the Foodbank in its first year.

#### **Apologies:**

Patricia Bainbridge (Clerk, Brompton Ralph PC), Sarah Buchanan (Clerk, Brompton Regis PC), Cllr Eric Norman, (Cutcombe PC), Cllrs Christine Dubery & Margaret Rawle (Dulverton TC), Cllr Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC), Colin McDonald (SC), Janette Sapsford (Exton PC), Cllr Duncan McCannlis (Porlock PC), Lesley Webb (clerk, Timberscombe PC), Fran A Brook (Upton), Avon and Somerset Neighbourhood Beat Team, Nikki Bonner (Thrive formerly CCS, Village Agent), Emma Thomasson (Visit Exmoor) Ali Sanderson (Spark), Alison Blackmore (Cutcombe School), Beccy Brown (SC)

#### **2. Avon and Somerset Police Update**

The police were not present at the meeting but a written statement was read out in their absence. (Attached).

The main points summarised as follows:-

- The Link Officer shared the Avon and Somerset Police's written report, noting low crime rates, ongoing antisocial behaviour issues, farm security initiatives, and recent community engagement activities, with input from James Calloway, Michelle Haines, and Linda Moden, and additional concerns raised by members regarding specific incidents.

- **Crime and Antisocial Behaviour:** The police report indicated that overall crime remains low, but antisocial behaviour (ASB) continues to be a focus, including noise nuisance, vandalism, and public disorder. The team works with other agencies to address these issues, though processes can be lengthy.
- **Farm Security and Farm Watch:** Farm owners are encouraged to review security and participate in Farm Watch. The police offer security surveys and signage for livestock fields, responding to incidents such as livestock worrying and theft.
- **Community Engagement:** Police officers attended local events, such as the Dulverton Men's Breakfast Club, to discuss fraud prevention. They invite further opportunities to engage with the community and encourage reporting of illegal off-roading and other concerns.
- **Specific Incidents and Member Feedback:** The Chair and Cllr Thwaites raised recent incidents, including a daylight robbery at Liscombe Farm and a fatal dog-walking accident, requesting police follow-up and emphasising the importance of public awareness regarding safety around livestock.

### 3. Speaker: David Northey, (Somerset Bus Partnership) Public Transport Challenges and Opportunities in Exmoor

David Northey from the Somerset Bus Partnership, alongside other members, discussed the significant challenges facing public transport in Exmoor, including limited connectivity, road closures, funding issues, and the impact on tourism, education, and healthcare, while exploring potential solutions such as service integration, improved communication, and collaboration with local authorities and businesses.

- **Connectivity Issues:** David Northey highlighted the lack of reliable public transport links in Exmoor, noting that poor connectivity affects not only tourism but also local businesses, education, and healthcare access. He described how infrequent bus services and long gaps between connections hinder residents and visitors, especially during road closures, which disproportionately impact vulnerable groups.
- **Impact of Road Closures:** David Northey discussed how road closures, such as those affecting the 198 bus route, can leave communities without service for hours, particularly affecting concessionary households and students. The group emphasised the need for better planning and communication between bus operators and highways authorities to mitigate these disruptions.
- **Service Integration Proposals:** Participants considered merging independent bus operators and routes (e.g., 198, 398, and 26) to create more

seamless journeys and improve overall service reliability. The idea of making Dulverton a hub for rural transport was proposed, with suggestions to work with Somerset Council and other partners to enhance connectivity.

- **Tourism and Business Collaboration:** The meeting addressed the impact of tourism on local bus services, particularly during peak times when visitors can crowd out residents. Suggestions included working with businesses like Butlins to coordinate transport during busy periods and engaging with the National Trust to promote sustainable travel options for visitors.
- **Funding and Tendering Challenges:** Andrew Bray and others raised questions about the relationship between private bus companies and county funding, exploring how tenders and contracts influence timetables and service provision. Historical examples were shared, such as the emergency contract for the Dulverton-Minehead route, illustrating the high costs and limited competition in rural transport.
- **Vegetation Management and Highway Maintenance:** Participants discussed the challenges of managing overhanging trees and vegetation affecting bus routes, the responsibilities of landowners versus the highway authority, and the historical practice of bus companies conducting reactive clearance, with suggestions for improved collaboration between parishes, councils, and operators.
  - **Landowner Responsibilities:** Kali Martin explained that trees overhanging highways are typically the responsibility of adjacent landowners, not the highway authority. Notices can be served under the Highways Act to compel action, but compliance varies, and some landowners are difficult to engage.
  - **Historical Clearance Practices:** Members recalled that bus companies previously conducted their own reactive clearance of overhanging vegetation using open-top buses and chainsaw teams, which was effective but is no longer practiced. The loss of this system has led to increased disruption for bus users.
  - **Parish Council Involvement:** Some parish councils have taken proactive steps, such as drafting letters to landowners and escalating unresolved cases to the council for enforcement. This local action has had some success in encouraging vegetation management.
  - **Impact on Transport and Community:** The group emphasised that unmanaged vegetation could cause significant disruption to bus services, affecting students, vulnerable residents, and overall connectivity. There was consensus on the need for better coordination between bus operators, councils, and parishes to address these issues.

#### 4. **Speaker: John Preston, (Moorland Foodbank)**

**Development and Expansion of the Moorland Food Bank:** John Preston, Chair of the Food Bank trustees, provided an update on the Moorland Food Bank's rapid development over the past year, detailing its relocation, infrastructure improvements, expanded services, fundraising efforts, and ongoing challenges in volunteer recruitment and grant management, with support from the Link Officer and other members.

- **Establishment and Relocation:** John Preston described the founding of the Moorland Food Bank by Jenny Barker, its initial location in the church, subsequent move to the Old Junior School, and eventual relocation to a former youth club building, which required significant refurbishment.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** The food bank replaced condemned gas heaters with electronic heating, installed a dehumidifier, and built a purpose-built storage area. Plans are underway to add a kitchen and raised beds for growing food, supported by recent fundraising.
- **Expanded Services and Community Engagement:** Beyond food distribution, the food bank now hosts a monthly Talking Cafe and aims to provide cooking skills training. It covers the southern part of Exmoor and collaborates with schools, police, and village agents to identify and support those in need.
- **Volunteer and Grant Management Challenges:** John Preston highlighted difficulties in recruiting a centre manager and grant application specialist, despite offering paid roles. The food bank relies on volunteers and is actively seeking additional help for both operational and fundraising tasks.
- **Support and Future Plans:** Members acknowledged the LCN's role in facilitating the food bank's transition and establishment. Somerset Council is in the process of transferring ownership of the building, which will become a community hub offering a wider range of services, including potential CAB involvement.

#### 5. **Agree the notes/minutes of previous meetings**

The notes from the AGM on Thursday 5 June 2025; and Thursday 4 September 2025 were accepted as true records of the respective meetings.

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

Most items would be discussed at later points on the agenda, so there were no matters arising.

## 7. Exmoor National Park Authority

**Housing Needs Parish Survey and Community Engagement:** Ruth McArthur led a discussion on the upcoming Housing Needs parish survey, focusing on encouraging broad participation, especially from young people and households, and clarifying expectations for response rates and follow-up actions.

- The housing needs survey for Exmoor parishes, will be led by Somerset Council's housing team, aiming to collect comprehensive data via an online and paper survey to inform future affordable housing provision, with input and support from local councils.
- **Survey Planning and Execution:** The housing needs survey will be conducted online in early 2026, with paper versions available for those without internet access. Every household will receive a letter, and responses from non-residents with ties to Exmoor will be included in the analysis.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Local councils are encouraged to promote the survey through posters and parish magazines to maximise participation. The survey may serve as a pilot for other parts of Somerset, and results will support ongoing housing policy development.
- **Survey Participation Targets:** A participant questioned what level of response would be considered successful for the parish survey, referencing previous surveys with varying return rates and suggesting that a 40-50% return was high but had dropped in some areas; they emphasised the importance of setting clear targets and possibly following up with specific households.
- **Inclusivity of Survey Respondents:** The need to include all household members was highlighted, particularly teenagers and young people, to ensure their voices are heard, as they may have future housing needs.
- **Support for Young Entrepreneurs:** Members stressed the importance of supporting young people who are starting businesses in the area, noting that the survey should capture their experiences and challenges.

### Exmoor National Park Funding Discussion

There was a focus on ensuring that funding, particularly from the Exmoor Pioneer Project and Heritage Lottery Fund, is distributed more widely across the park, not just concentrated in specific areas like the Exmoor Forest. Concerns were raised about the historical focus of funding and the need for broader benefit.

- **The Exmoor Pioneer Project\*** was described as a significant investment (noted as £1,000,000, with £500,000 mentioned specifically), and

participants were encouraged to review spending over £500 on the National Park website to see how funds are allocated.

### **\*Exmoor Pioneer Project Funding Usage**

- Funding is primarily focused on the Exmoor Forest area, as this was the basis of the original application and Heritage Lottery Fund support.
- The central facility has hosted successful events, such as the launch of the Exmoor Farm Network, and is intended to be used more by community groups.
- There is ongoing encouragement to ensure the funding benefits younger people, especially those under 25, and to spread the impact across the park rather than concentrating it in one area.
- It was highlighted that some of the funding has been used for community infrastructure, such as over £3,000 on chairs and £1,700 on tables for a central facility, which is now better equipped to host community events.
- **There was a suggestion to invite Rob Wilson North, who is responsible for the Exmoor Pioneer Project, to a future meeting for further discussion and clarification on funding allocation and project focus. – Action point**
- The importance of spreading available funding (including "federal money") across all parishes and encouraging bids from farmers and other local stakeholders was emphasised.

### **8. Update on Working Groups:**

- **Highways** – (Notes from the subgroup meeting held on Friday 17 October 2025 were circulated prior to the meeting).

Participants discussed a range of highways and drainage concerns, including road closures, signage, vegetation management, and specific drainage problems, with updates on actions taken and ongoing investigations.

- **Road Closure Signage and Communication:** Concerns were raised about the placement and duration of road closure signs, noting confusion caused by signs remaining after works are completed and the lack of advance warning, with plans to address these issues at an upcoming network area team meeting.
- **Vegetation and Tree Management:** Participants discussed overhanging trees and hedges affecting road safety, clarifying responsibilities between the council, highways, and landowners, and noting that inspections and enforcement actions are underway.

- **Maintenance Scheduling and Contractor Performance:** Kali Martin explained the maintenance schedule for drains, highlighting that contractors are required to clear drains on a biannual or four-yearly basis, and acknowledged that while most are maintained, some issues persist.

Some of the points mentioned are highlighted below. Other points will be picked up in the Highways subgroup meeting scheduled for the 28 November.

- **Yellowcombe Leat, Winsford:** There was a breach in drainage at Winsford, with water backing up and concerns about property risk. The team discussed prompt investigation and clearing of the drain, with mapping and coordination to resolve the issue.
- **Tarr Steps Repair:** The project for improvement design at Tarr Steps is ongoing, with surveys and information gathering. The repair is scheduled for the new financial year and will require road closure for several weeks. Alternative routes and timing to avoid winter river conditions were discussed.
- **Skilgate Gullies:** The maintenance and clearing of gullies at Skilgate was mentioned, with contractors following a running programme for regular cleaning, though sometimes delays occur. Kali agreed to follow up with the Works Superintendent who had recently visited the area.

- **Housing**

The Chair provided an update on the forthcoming housing report, outlined key focus areas for local housing needs, and relayed information from Colin McDonald regarding the new Renters' Rights Act and its implications for tenants and landlords.

- **Delay and Focus of Housing Report:** The housing report would be postponed until the new year to ensure robustness, with a focus on meeting local needs and advocating for investment in rural housing development.
- **Renters' Rights Act Overview:** Colin McDonald (in absentia), summarised the key provisions of the new Renters' Rights Act, including the abolition of section 21 evictions, the shift to periodic tenancies, limits on rent increases, and the introduction of an ombudsman for the private rented sector.
- **Potential Impact on Local Housing:** The Chair noted that the legislative changes may reduce pressure on local housing lists, though

there could be a short-term increase in landlord exits, and emphasised the importance of being aware of these changes.

- **Emergency Planning and Community Resilience**

**There had been a strong response to the upcoming emergency planning workshop**, focusing on power outages and alternative energy sources, with active involvement from parish councils and plans to share best practices and case studies.

- **Workshop Organisation:** The Link Officer described the enthusiastic uptake for the emergency planning workshop scheduled for November 20th at Timberscombe Village Hall, with attendance capped due to high demand and support from local parishes. Thanks were extended to Timberscombe Parish Council for agreeing to host, and indeed to all the parishes that had offered a venue for the session.
- **Workshop Content:** The session will concentrate on power outages, sharing emergency plans, and exploring alternative energy sources. Nicola Dawson from the Somerset Council, Civil Contingencies Team will present case studies, and the importance of landline communication during emergencies will be discussed. Chris Hillier from Oake Parish Council will not be able to attend unfortunately but has shared his learning and presentation which was recently demonstrated at the Somerset Prepared Annual Conference.
- Attendees are invited to come along with their emergency plans, whether they are complete or in draft form. The focus of the session will be to share learning experiences, address local challenges and how these can be mitigated.
- **Trauma Informed Communities Workshop.** The Link Officer discussed updates on emergency planning following the A396 incident, including the development of non-certificated first aid and trauma awareness training for schools and the wider community, and the availability of workshops to support those affected.
  - **First Aid and Trauma Training:** The Link Officer described the introduction of a non-certificated first aid course and trauma awareness workshops, with the aim of better preparing community members and school staff for future emergencies.
  - **Community Inclusion in Training:** The training is being offered not only to schools but also to the broader community, recognising the widespread impact of the incident and the need for resilience across all age groups.

- **Workshop Content and Accessibility:** The Link Officer explained that the workshops cover psychological effects of trauma, such as PTSD, and are open to anyone affected, with online sign-up forms and sessions held in various locations to maximise accessibility.

## 9. Dates of future meetings:

**Trauma Informed Communities Workshop**  
**Friday 14 November, 5.30pm at Minehead Eye.**  
 Sign up information is on the attached poster.

**Emergency Planning Workshop (Power outages) – NOW FULL**  
**Thursday 20 November, 6;30pm at Timberscombe Village Hall.**  
 This session will be facilitated by Nicola Dawson, Somerset Council, Civil Contingencies Team.

T

<b>Proposed Exmoor LCN Dates</b> <b>The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe</b>	<b>Highways Sub-Group Dates –</b> <b>Dulverton Sports Pavilion</b>
	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

A copy of the Action Log is attached.