

MINEHEAD AND WATCHET – HIGHWAYS SUB-GROUP

Friday 12 September 2025

**The Dunster Room, West Somerset House, Williton
from 10am – 12:45pm**

Attendees:

Cllr Mandy Chilcott	Somerset Council
Cllr Hugh Davies	Somerset Council
Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker	Carhampton Parish Council
Cllr Tony Brooks	Crowcombe Parish Council
Cllr Steve Harris	Dunster Parish Council
Cllr Mick De'Ath	Old Cleeve Parish Council
Cllr Jan Swan	Sampford Brett Parish Council
John Richards	WACET
Cllr Richard Barnham	Withycombe Parish Council
Kali Martin	SC Highway Maintenance
Graeme Burnell	SC Highways Superintendent
Katherine Tyson	SC Traffic Management
Ryan Chamberlain (Online)	SC Streetworks
Nathan Turnbull / Lorraine Warren	Kier
Sam Murrell (LCN Link Officer)	Minehead & Watchet / Exmoor LCNs

1. Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves, and Steve Harris representing Dunster, was welcomed to the meeting.

Apologies: Cllr Christine Lawrence (Retired), Cllr Mark Philipson (West Quantoxhead PC), Ben Parker & Craig Palmer (Minehead Town Council), Cllr Tracey Skinner (Sampford Brett PC), Cllr Loretta Whetlor (Watchet TC) Paul Tucker (SC Bridges and Structures).

2. Election of Chairperson

Cllr Mandy Chilcott nominated Brenda Maitland Walker to the position of Chair. This was unanimously supported by everyone present, so Brenda was returned for another year.

3. Review the minutes from the previous meeting on Tuesday 24 June

The minutes were circulated prior to the meeting. They were all agreed by those present.

4. Update on Actions from previous meetings not covered in later items:

Withycombe Retaining wall

Cllr Richard Barnham stated that Somerset Council Bridges Team were now in regular communication with the Withycombe clerk and the situation was improving. He thanked the officers for their input in working towards a resolution.

B3191 –Update

Objection to Proposed Road Closure

There had been no response following the objections to the Road Closure submission. It was agreed that Brenda Maitland Walker would seek clarification on the process, and chase officers for a decision.

Rights of Way – Invite Peter Hobley to a future meeting, to discuss outstanding legacy issues. It was suggested that this may better suit being part of an Active Travel Working Group. This could be widened to incorporate Public Transportation, as there were concerns about protecting the local bus services. Was agreed to discuss this at the next main LCN meeting, to gauge interest, but Cllr Mandy Chilcott agreed to provide an update.

Communication Tools and Reporting Mechanisms:

Sam provided information on the use of the One Network platform for tracking roadworks and reporting issues and emphasised the importance of using official channels and reference numbers for effective follow-up. (A reminder of the process is at the end of these minutes).

- **One Network Platform Demonstration:** Sam described how the One Network website can be used to view planned and ongoing roadworks, sign up for alerts, and access contact information for reporting issues. A demonstration video is available for those unfamiliar with the platform.
- **Reporting and Follow-Up Procedures:** Participants were reminded to use official reporting systems and generic email addresses rather than individual officers' emails to ensure timely responses and proper tracking of issues, with reference numbers provided for follow-up.

Community Resilience and Emergency Planning:

Sam announced upcoming community resilience workshops and highlighted the importance of local networks in responding to severe weather and major incidents, inviting parishes to participate in future sessions.

- **Resilience Workshop Planning:** Sam shared that Nicola Dawson, Community Resilience Manager, will be organising a workshop focused on severe weather, major incidents, and power outages, following requests from Exmoor parishes after recent events. Parishes from the M&W LCN are welcome to attend and information will be made available soon.
- **Community Response Effectiveness:** Sam praised the effectiveness of local networks and the rapid mobilisation of resources during the recent A396 incident, noting that lessons learned will inform future planning and resilience activities.

5. Extra Item – Public Transportation (No28 Service)

Bus Service Challenges and Updates: Cllr Mandy Chilcott gave a comprehensive update on ongoing issues with the 28 bus route, including overcrowding, unreliable service, lack of bus shelters, and the introduction

of new electric buses, with other participants contributing to the discussion and action planning.

- **Overcrowding and Service Reliability:** Mandy described persistent problems with the 28 bus route, including buses being full at the start of the route, leaving passengers unable to board at subsequent stops, and unreliable service with buses breaking down or not turning up. These issues have particularly affected students going to college in Taunton and hospital patients, with some left stranded or unable to attend appointments.
- **Bus Shelter Provision and Delays:** Minehead currently lacks bus shelters due to a contract ending unexpectedly, and despite conversations with officers in January, new shelters have not yet been installed. The delay is attributed to a blockage in the process, and Mandy has been in contact with relevant officers to resolve the issue.
- **Introduction of Electric Buses:** Mandy reported that new electric buses, built in Ireland and offering more seats and luggage space, are expected to enter service within ten days. However, concerns were raised about their larger size and the need for additional driver training, as well as the suitability of local roads for these longer vehicles.
- **Student and Social Mobility Concerns:** Mandy highlighted the impact of bus issues on students, noting that some are forced to stand for long periods or are unable to attend college, which raises broader social mobility concerns. Mandy has engaged with local schools and colleges to explore funding for additional buses and is advocating for Somerset Council to provide extra buses during peak periods.
- **Bus Partnership Engagement:** Mandy mentioned ongoing engagement with the Somerset Bus Partnership, including meetings and the possibility of inviting partnership representatives to future meetings to discuss service improvements and community involvement.

6. Planned Maintenance Updates Highways Schemes (KM)

Participants addressed recent and upcoming road closures, the effectiveness of diversion signage, and the need for improved communication and operational practices, with officers committing to follow up with contractors and Somerset Council.

Washford (A39 Minehead to Williton Road):

- **Recent Road Closure Issues:** Participants recounted confusion and congestion during the recent A39 closure, citing inadequate diversion signage and lack of clear instructions for drivers, which led to significant delays and difficulties for both local residents and visitors.
- **Signage Specification and Compliance:** The Highways team explained that advanced warning signage should specify closure start and end points, and that Somerset Council is working to ensure contractors comply with these requirements. Additional information boards and countdown signage are being considered to improve clarity.

- **Traffic Management During Closures:** Ryan reported that more operatives may be deployed during closures to manage traffic flow and provide real-time guidance, especially for HGVs and buses, and that stacking and turning areas are being reviewed to minimise disruption.
- **Feedback and Continuous Improvement:** Ryan and Kali encouraged participants to provide feedback on signage and diversion effectiveness, with Ryan confirming that such input will be relayed to contractors and used to refine future road closure management.

This road resurfacing work was subsequently completed on the 18 September, with less disruption than initially experienced.

Final Stage: Reinstatement of Cat's Eyes and Road Markings

Now all treatments are complete, cat's eyes and road markings will be reinstated during overnight closures, similar to the initial removal. Dates for this final stage will be confirmed in due course.

Traffic Management Schemes (KT)

Katherine Tyson confirmed that she was carrying out a site visit in Dunster the following week, and meeting representatives from the parish council.

Dunster Issues Discussed:

- **Traffic Speed and Size:** Concerns about speeding vehicles and large traffic (including buses and lorries) passing through Dunster village, especially around blind bends and narrow sections, creating safety risks for pedestrians, including those with mobility challenges.
- **Traffic Calming Scheme:** An existing traffic calming scheme from around 2012 (linked to the doctor's surgery) was never implemented on the Timberscombe side of the bridge.
- **Speed Limit Reduction:** Desire to reduce the speed limit to 20 mph through the village.
- **Vehicle Size Restrictions:** Current signage limits vehicles to 31 feet 2 inches except for coaches, but buses have become longer, leading to incidents of buses scraping buildings and lorries getting stuck.
- **Illegal Parking:** Issues with illegal and problematic parking, especially near the yarn market, causing blockages and damage to historic structures. Suggestions include better disabled parking and double red lines.
- **Emergency Access:** During a recent accident, ambulances were delayed due to traffic congestion. Suggestions included the ability to override traffic lights for emergency vehicles.
- **Dunster Marsh and Roundabout:** Problems with illegal parking at Dunster Marsh and requests for a roundabout at the A39/Marsh Lane junction.
- **Impact of Diversions:** Closure of the B3191 and other routes forces more traffic through Dunster, exacerbating congestion and safety issues.
- **Agricultural Vehicles:** Increase in the size of agricultural vehicles using village roads, which are not built for such large traffic.

- **Cost of Speed Limit Changes:** Concerns about the high cost (up to £15,000) for implementing a new speed limit, and questions about funding sources.
- **Coordination with Authorities:** Need for better coordination between the parish council, highways, Exmoor National Park, and other stakeholders, especially regarding signage, speed limits, and heritage concerns.
- **Community Engagement:** Discussion about the role of the parish council versus local action groups (like Safer Dunster), and the importance of official channels for effective action.
- **Forestry Haulage:** Concerns about forestry lorries using Dunster routes and the impact on road conditions and safety.

Public Utility Works (LG/RC)

Utility Works and Traffic Signal Management:

Ryan provided updates on ongoing and upcoming utility works, including gas main replacements and traffic signal maintenance, and addressed concerns about traffic management, emergency contacts, and communication with affected communities.

- **Gas Main Replacement Projects:** Ryan outlined the nationwide directive for gas main replacements, with current works on the A39 in Minehead and upcoming projects in Watchet and Williton. He acknowledged initial issues with traffic signals and assured that most have been resolved, with ongoing communication between contractors and local representatives.
- **Traffic Signal Issues and Emergency Contacts:** Sam and Ryan discussed problems with four-way traffic signals resetting to red, causing confusion and delays. Ryan confirmed that emergency contact numbers should be displayed on site and committed to ensuring clearer signage and operative presence.
- **Community Engagement and Access Planning:** Ryan described efforts to engage with local councils and residents, including site meetings and the possibility of public open days, to address concerns about access during utility works, especially in areas with limited alternative routes.
- **Traffic Signal Refurbishment Plans:** Ryan mentioned that the traffic lights at the bottom of Dunster Steep on the A39 are due for refurbishment, with Somerset Council's team handling the project and further details to be communicated to the community.

7. Winter Maintenance Update

Winter Maintenance and Grit Bin Audit:

Kali updated the group on preparations for winter, including the audit and distribution of grit bins across parishes, and encouraged timely communication and collaboration for efficient delivery and maintenance.

- **Grit Bin Data Collection:** Kali and colleagues have compiled and distributed a spreadsheet listing all known grit bin locations, using

'what3words' for precise identification. Parishes were asked to update the list with any additional bins they have purchased.

- **Procurement and Cost Sharing:** Sam suggested that parishes consider joint procurement of grit bins to reduce costs, and recommended purchasing bins with latches to prevent wind and livestock from accessing the contents.

8. Any other Parish Concerns / Updates

Volunteer and Chapter 8 Training for Parishes:

Sam and colleagues discussed the scope, requirements, and insurance implications of volunteer training for parish-organised activities, clarifying distinctions between low-risk online training and more advanced Chapter 8 training, with input from Katherine Tyson and others.

- **Volunteer Training Scope:** Sam clarified that the free online volunteer training is intended for organised activities such as street sign cleaning, weed clearing, and litter picking, but not for informal actions like picking up litter while walking a dog. The training ensures volunteers are aware of basic safety and risk assessment.
- **Insurance and Training Requirements:** Sam and Katherine discussed the need for volunteers to complete the online training to be covered by insurance, noting that requirements may vary depending on the insurer. Some councils require confirmation of training completion before adding volunteers to their insurance. It would be necessary for the parishes or community groups to check that they have adequate cover.
- **Chapter 8 Training Details:** Katherine and others explained that Chapter 8 Training, which covers traffic management and working on the highway, is more advanced and can last from one to five days depending on the level. Parishes sometimes share costs or buy in services from neighbouring councils with trained staff. (Minehead Town Council currently has suitably trained operatives, and would consider hiring these out to neighbouring parishes).
- **Memorandum of Understanding and Ongoing Maintenance:** Sam noted that Somerset Council's Memorandum of Understanding with parishes hosting speed indicator devices (SIDs) requires Chapter 8 training to be factored into maintenance bids, ensuring ongoing compliance and safety.

Planning Delays and Soil Movement Concerns:

Sam and others discussed delays in planning application processing due to a backlog and addressed concerns about heavy soil movements on local roads, clarifying the roles of the Environment Agency and planning authorities.

- **Planning Application Backlog:** Cllr Mandy Chilcott explained that Somerset Council planning officers are focusing on clearing a significant backlog by temporarily suspending consultations and site visits, which has led to delays in responses to queries from residents and councillors.

- **Soil Movement and Environmental Oversight:** Concerns were raised about large volumes of soil being moved by a local farm, with questions about whether proper planning and environmental permissions were in place. Kali clarified that the Environment Agency is responsible for waste transfer licences, and that planning authorities should coordinate with highways when significant vehicle movements are involved.

9. Recommendations to the Minehead and Watchet LCN Meeting

No active recommendations were made, but the Action Log has been updated.

10. Dates for meetings going forward:

Proposed Minehead and Watchet LCN meeting Dates	Highways Sub-Group Dates
Dunster Meeting Room (TBC)	Dunster Meeting Room
West Somerset House	West Somerset House
Thursday 16 October 2025 at 6.30pm	Friday 14 November 10am – 1pm
Thursday 8 January 2026 at 6.30pm	Wednesday 4 February 10am – 1pm
Thursday 9 April 2026 at 7pm	Wednesday 13 May 10am – 1pm
Thursday 16 July 2026 at 7pm (AGM)	

To take place at West Somerset House unless otherwise advised.

11. Meeting closed at 12:45pm.

How to report defects:

- **Report It Function:** The benefit of using the report it function for reporting highway issues, is the ability to track the progress of reported issues and ensure they are addressed promptly.
- **Function Benefits:** The report it function is monitored by duty officers, even out of hours, ensuring that urgent issues like fallen trees or blocked drains are addressed promptly. **This system provides a schedule number for each report, allowing for easy tracking and follow-up.**
- **Reporting Process:** Using the report it function ensures that issues are logged and monitored systematically. This process helps in triaging and prioritising problems based on their urgency and impact, leading to more efficient resolution. The hyperlink below takes you to the 'report it online' area of the Councils' website which explains how to report a problem or

issue associated with the highway. This will be suitable for most enquiries and the quickest way to get the issue resolved.

- The 'report a problem on the road' link takes you to 19 different categories to report online e.g. potholes, overhanging vegetation, flooding, blocked drains and gullies, which should all be reported online as you will receive a faster response as they are directly linked to our Highways Team. [Report a problem on the road \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/report-a-problem-on-the-road)
- **Follow-Up Mechanism:** If a reported issue is marked as completed but remains unresolved, users can follow up with the highways office **using the provided schedule number**. This ensures accountability and continuous monitoring until the issue is genuinely resolved.

The old County Roads email boxes are being replaced with two new email addresses, highways-east@somerset.gov.uk and highways-west@somerset.gov.uk .

[Highways-west@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:highways-west@somerset.gov.uk) covers the old Taunton Deane, West Somerset and Sedgemoor areas.

Streetworks (Public Utility issues) – streetworks@somerset.gov.uk or use this link to [One Network](#) for roadworks information.

Traffic matters – trafficmanagement@somerset.gov.uk

Bridges and structures – bridges@somerset.gov.uk

Highway trees – highwaytrees@somerset.gov.uk

Rights of way – rightsofway@somerset.gov.uk

Highway lighting – highwayslighting@somerset.gov.uk

Highway development control - highwaysdevelopmentcontrol@somerset.gov.uk

- **Early Reporting:** It is important to report safety issues like worn white lines early to ensure they are addressed promptly. Delaying reports can lead to safety hazards and longer resolution times.