

# Minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel Meeting

## Held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021, at Exford Memorial Hall, 7pm

### Present:

Sue Newton & Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis), Roger Foxwell (Cutcombe), Margaret Rawle (Dulverton), Mike Ellicott (Exford), Ian Fraser (Porlock), Peter Pilkington (Timberscombe), Fran ABrook & David Williams (Upton), Colin Wilkins & John Bray (Winsford), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay)

### Also Present:

SCC Cllr Frances Nicholson, SWT Cllr Andy Milne, SWT Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)

### Officers:

Alyn Jones, Director of Economic and Community Infrastructure Operations (SCC)

Sam Murrell (SWT)

(The meeting commenced at 7.14pm)

### 1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Tony Howard (Withypool & Hawkridge), Patricia Bainbridge & Keith Turner (Brompton Ralph), Jeremy Hickman (Exford), Ruth MacArthur (ENP), John Anson & Vivian White (Cutcombe), Mark Shelford (ASP PCC), David Peake (SCC), Linda Brooks (ASP PCSO), Donna Nelmes (DSFRS), Jane Lillis (Village Agent), Cllr David Mansell (SWT)

### 2 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Area Panel

(Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 21st September 2021 were circulated with the agenda)

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 21st September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 3 Matters Arising

#### ENPA

- Disappointment was expressed at the lack of attendance at the Exmoor Consultative Forum meetings and the fact that these have been postponed recently due to “lack of business”. ENP should be seen to be consulting with the parishes irrespective of whether they bring forward Agenda Items.
- TB in deer – The NFU is convening a meeting by invitation only to discuss this topic and the implications for the farming community. Due to COVID and venue restrictions this is being targeted at specific groups for the moment. It is hoped that a wider remit will be extended as circumstances allow. *(Lydia Dahlin at the NFU has confirmed that she will keep Sam Murrell updated on any future meetings and other information which may be of use to the panel).*

#### 4 **Somerset Structural Change Order (Unitary Council)**

The Chair provided an update on the Structural Change Order for Somerset and what this would mean for parishes.

The Structural Change Order is essential for Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset and will establish the basic operating and governance principles for the transition from five existing councils (four district councils and the county council) to the new unitary council.

This will be finalised and laid before Parliament around the turn of the year and come into force by the end of March.

The Department of Levelling Up, Communities and Housing will give the five councils two weeks to respond to the proposals contained in the letter.

They key proposals outlined in the letter are:

- The new Council will be called Somerset Council.
- The first election to the new unitary council will be in either May 2022 or May 2023. If the first election is in May 2022 the elections will use County Council division boundaries but with 110 members elected rather than 55. This is the fall-back position which is still under review.
- It is proposed that Somerset County Council will be the “continuing authority” for the new Council.

The Chair stated that it was unclear at present what this would mean for the new Council’s representation on partner organisations such as Exmoor National Park.

There will obviously budgetary implications for the parishes if they have to hold contested elections. This needs to be factored into their precept setting process. It is likely that to minimise costs these would coincide with the SCC elections.

#### 5 **Exmoor Local Community Network (LCN)**

Alyn Jones from SCC provided an update on the Exmoor Area Panel Pilot LCN. The pilot was one of 4 being trialled in Somerset, but the only pilot to be dealing with SCC highways matters.

The first step had already been undertaken. This was to visit the parishes on Exmoor and take feedback on the planning of works, response to defects and current service standards. The main areas of work discussed were hedge/tree cutting, drainage and gully clearance. The use of local contractors and resources to enable quicker completion of the work was also highlighted.

The next step is for the feedback to be circulated to the parishes for verification. The various comments had also been shared with SCC’s main contractor for comment.

A scoping document for a Parish Steward Scheme is being put together. This would be for a trained operative of SCC to work directly with the parishes and

contractor, to target problem areas and tackle the quick wins (such as reported defects). The Parish Steward would also liaise with landowners about their responsibilities and feedback more complex issues to the Highways team.

The following points were made from the floor during the discussion: -

- What is a Local Community Network (LCN)? How does it work?
  - *It is a recognised group or community who come together to influence and commission local services. They may not actually undertake the work themselves but inform and make decisions about how it can be done. There is currently a LCN pilot in Frome which has been set up to influence the work of the Children and Families pilot, and the Exmoor Area Panel will be influencing the Highways Pilot. These pilot schemes are trials and if successful will influence the way LCN are established in the new Unitary Council across a variety of themes.*
- How will the SCC Highway programme of works be affected once the Councils merge? What will happen to any outstanding issues?
  - *As SCC will be a continuing authority there will be no change to the daily routines and service agreements. It is hoped that the Parish Steward will be able to address quick fixes and feedback via the LCN more complex issues.*
- How will the current issues that have already been highlighted be addressed? Some of the workflows in certain areas are not managed adequately and need topping up. A conversation needs to be had about how this can be achieved. (For example a hedge that needs cutting back more than the current once a year. It needs doing at least twice to ensure visibility is adequate on the Highway. This is a persistent problem).
  - *Has it been reported? If it's reported and is considered a danger it will be dealt with through the usual defect reporting process. This is the type of enquiry that the Parish Steward would address as part of their work-stream. If it's a service level issue then that would be looked into and conversations would be had around revising the contract and funding the additional work.*
- Some of the parishes expressed satisfaction with the online defect reporting system. Opinion varied but it was considered a good way of registering defects, getting an acknowledgement, and progressing the work.
- Hedge-cutting. This could be the responsibility of the landowner, but the SCC standard may need reviewing. Local contractors could be employed to undertake this type of maintenance work.
- The Parish Steward may be able to influence the cyclical maintenance, but their main area of responsibility would be the simple reactionary work that can be easily fixed.
- Concern was expressed about where the lines of responsibility fell. Who would be liable if there was a point of failure? The contractor will only undertake work relating to Highway Maintenance so what happens in those "grey areas" where the boundaries may not be clear?
  - *The Parish Steward may not be able to address those issues directly but they would be able to feed those concerns back to the Highways Team and work on a resolution. Communication is vitally important to*

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*ensure that the parishes, contractor and SCC Team are working collaboratively.*

- The Parish Steward will be a paid employee post, funded by SCC for the duration of the LCN pilot. They would take direction on their work from the parishes within current service level agreements. Main areas of responsibility would be tackling the response work.
- How can Utility Companies be brought back to rectify work that doesn't meet the service standard, and then results in defects?
  - *One way would be to call the contractor/operator to account. Invite them to meet the Area Panel and or LCN to discuss the complaints and understand first-hand what the issues are.*

Alyn Jones said that he would return to the Area Panel in January. Once the Scoping Document has been agreed, the plan is to mobilise, test and govern the pilot. Alyn stressed that the scheme needs to be easy to manage and not overly bureaucratic.

## **6 Avon and Somerset Police Report**

The PCC has tendered his apologies for this meeting but hopes to be in attendance for the January meeting.

ASP did not attend the meeting but submitted an October newsletter providing updates of the work currently being undertaken on Exmoor.

## **7 Somerset County Council Highways Report**

David Peake tendered apologies but a Highways Maintenance Update was circulated prior to the meeting.

Some comments were made directly to Alyn Jones in the meeting regarding the repairs being undertaken:-

- At Exford – the traffic lights and road closure;
- Surface water on the hill at Exford which freezes and is dangerous;
- The cost of the repairs at Upton where the road has subsided and the “temporary” traffic lights have been in-situ. The problem appears to be getting worse and the culvert under the road is adding to the issues. When is this going to be fixed? It is getting more costly as time goes on.

Alyn also mentioned the winter gritters were undertaking their first run of the winter season on Exmoor that evening.

## **8 Exmoor National Park Authority Issues**

- A zoom workshop is due to be held 2<sup>nd</sup> December. It is to determine whether a revision of the ENP Local Plan is required. It is a legal requirement to consult with parishes every 5 years and determine whether a review is necessary.
- Glover report – no new updates but in a statement released in June 2021 stated the Government will be working closely with partners over coming months including local authorities and National Parks. It will address the review's recommendations in full and consult on draft proposals later in the year.

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- The lack of attendees at the Affordable Housing Forums was deemed disappointing.
- Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund – the deadline for applications has been deferred but all projects must end by March 2024.
- Members expressed interest in the tree planting event on Exmoor over the weekend of the 6/7 November. A request for more information was made. *(A press release from ENP was circulated to all panel members on Friday 5 November detailing the arrangements for the weekend.*

**9 Items brought forward from parishes**

No items received.

**10 Parish Lengthsman Scheme and Update**

Letters have gone out from Dulverton Town Council asking parishes to make a submission if they want to be included in the scheme for the next financial year.

Deadline for returns is December 2021.

**11 AOB**

**Fingerpost Update**

The Chair will contact Shelly Blaylock at ENP for an update on maintenance of the fingerpost project. *(Caremoor for Historic Signposts Fund)*

**12 Dates and Venues for future meetings**

Thursday 13 January 2022 (Moorland Hall, Cutcombe at 7pm)

Thursday 10 March 2022 (Moorland Hall, Cutcombe at 7pm)

Thursday 9 June 2022 (Moorland Hall, Cutcombe at 7pm)

Meeting ended at 8:46pm

Chairman at the meeting on  
Thursday, 4 November 2021

