

# Minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel Meeting

Held on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022,

At the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

## Present:

Patricia Bainbridge (Brompton Ralph) Matthew Headley & Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis), Clive Knight & Jan Aldridge (Brushford) Sally Moran (Clatworthy) Vivian White, Roger Foxwell & Roger Webber (Cutcombe), Christine Dubery & Alan Ottey (Dulverton), Mike Ellicott & Jeremy Hickman (Exford), Alan Chapman (Exmoor) Val Carveth (Exton) Dave Powell & Anne Sparling (Luxborough) Max Lawrence (Selworthy & Minehead Without) Fran A Brook & David Williams (Upton), Colin Wilkins (Winsford), Tony Howard (Withypool & Hawkridge), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay)

## Also Present:

SCC Cllr Frances Nicholson, SWT Cllr Andy Milne, SWT Cllr Steven Pugsley, SWT Cllr Nick Thwaites

Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner – Mark Shelford (arrived 7:50pm)

## Officers:

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

Andrew Turner (SCC)

PCSO Jo Dawson (Avon & Somerset Police)

Sam Murrell (SWT)

(The meeting commenced at 7.20pm)

### 1. Election of Chairperson

#### **SWT Cllr Stephen Pugsley**

Proposed by Mike Ellicott (Exford PC)

Seconded by Vivian White (Cutcombe PC)

No other nominations received, and vote carried unanimously.

SWT Cllr Stephen Pugsley returned as Chair for the 2022 Calendar Year.

### 2. Election of Vice Chairperson

#### **Cllr Mike Ellicott (Exford PC, ENP)**

Proposed by SWT Cllr Stephen Pugsley (Chair)

Seconded by Vivian White (Cutcombe PC)

No other nominations received, and vote carried unanimously.

Cllr Mike Ellicott returned as Vice Chair for the 2022 Calendar Year.

### 3. Apologies

Apologies were received from Jane Lillis (Village Agent), Margaret Rawle (Dulverton), Richard Sealey (SWT), Penny Webber (Selworthy & Minehead Without), Peter Pilkington (Timberscombe).

It was also announced that PCC Mark Shelford would be late due to weather and traffic conditions.

A moments silence was recorded to acknowledge the recent passing of Sue Newton (Chair of Brompton Regis PC).

### 4. Minutes of the previous meeting the Exmoor Area Panel 4th November 2021, and matters arising.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 were circulated with the agenda)

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

### 5. Exmoor Local Community Network (LCN) Pilot

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

The other pilot schemes are:

- Wincanton On the theme of Health and Wellbeing
- Frome and District Focussing on Children, Youth and Families
- Bridgwater Assets / Service devolution

More information about the LCNs and how they are developing can be found on the One Somerset [website](#). This is regularly updated as the various projects are progressed.

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

#### 5.1 Feedback on the Highways Steward Scheme

When the Parish Lengthsman Scheme was first implemented it was set up by the parishes, West Somerset District Council (WSDC) and the Somerset County Council (SCC) and all the organisations contributed and paid into it. Over time this has reduced to just the parishes contributing and the scheme is facilitated by Dulverton Town Council (DTC).

DTC employ a workman to undertake the duties of the Parish Lengthsman Scheme and have concerns that the appointment of a Highways Steward would conflict with this role. A clear division between the two employees is needed so

that they have complementary jobs rather than duplicating work. It was agreed to have an offline conversation about this, and Cllr Pugsley suggested members of the Panel to represent the respective geographical areas. This was endorsed by the Panel. This sub-group will be co-ordinated by Andrew Turner SCC.

### **5.2 Sub-group to review Highways Steward role / Parish Lengthsman Scheme**

A panel has been established to work with Dulverton Town Council and strategize a clear way forward to progress the Highways Steward role alongside the existing Parish Lengthsman scheme. The panel to consist of the following: -

Andrew Turner (SCC)	Co-ordinator
Cllr Stephen Pugsley (SWT)	
Cllr Frances Nicholson (SCC)	
Mike Ellicott	
Andrew Bray (Vale rep)	Wootton Courtenay PC
Roger Webber (Moor rep)	Cutcombe PC
Christine Dubery / Margaret Rawle	Dulverton Town Council
Sarah Buchanan (Brendon Hill's rep)	Brompton Regis PC

Emails and contact details have been circulated to Andrew Turner to co-ordinate the first meeting.

### **5.3 Communications**

To improve communications between parishes and highways the following methods will be used: -

- The One Somerset website which contains updates on the LCN pilot projects across Somerset; [Local Community Networks \(newsomersetcouncil.org.uk\)](http://newsomersetcouncil.org.uk).
- Using the Highway Steward who will be a direct contact point dealing with parishes and operatives face to face.
- Via the Exmoor Area Panel – As a standing agenda item reporting on budgets, performance and the programme of scheduled works.

### **5.4 Budgets / Performance / Programme of Works**

It was agreed that the Panel would be consulted each quarter on the scheduled programme of works whilst making allowances for discretionary and reactive work that evolved. This would allow local knowledge to be applied to the works and for the LCN to influence the works according to its own priorities and method of working including diversions and road closures.

A discretionary budget would be made available. The LCN could use this to fund small scale works that they have identified with the Exmoor area. (It was emphasised that the amount was not yet known as this was a political decision to make in the budget setting process – not an officer one).

It would be an important part of the quarterly monitoring to check that the budgets and performance of the LCN were on target or identify areas for improvement.

It remained the statutory responsibility of SCC to maintain the roads to the standard of their national classification. (i.e. Inspections of A class roads –

monthly, B class roads – three monthly, minor roads – yearly). Responding to defects and emergency work would continue.

### **5.5 Highway Assets / Devolution of Services**

Provide parishes with better information about the services in their area and the lines of responsibility.

Also use local knowledge from the parishes on problem areas, such as where gullies block, drainage lines run, black ice forms on the roads etc

## **6. Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) – Mark Shelford**

This Police and Crime Plan was built around the PCC's manifesto. It details the PCC's priorities which are ensuring the Police are:

- Preventing and fighting crime.
- Engaging supporting and working with communities, victims and partner organisations.
- Leading the police to be efficient and effective and,
- Increasing the legitimacy of, and public confidence in, the police and criminal justice system.

The aim of the PCC is to support the police to improve their delivery and performance on a variety of policing issues under each of these four priorities.

Work that has been done since the PCC was elected in May 2020.

- Appointment of Chief Constable Sarah Crew, who is a nationally recognised senior police officer, and the NPCC lead for rape and adult sex offences through Project Bluestone.
- A focus on visible policing via “boots on the ground”, enquiry desks and being more accessible in the community. Facebook Lives and neighbourhood beat surgeries as one way to tackle this.
- Reducing the administration and picking up more on the intelligence to prevent crime.
- Focussing and educating about serious crimes that the public want the police to recognise – i.e., 50% of all crime is cyber related such as scams, computer fraud.
- Ensuring that the rural areas are not forgotten and that the budget ensures a “fair-share” for everyone. Less emphasis on Bristol policing and increasing the profile of the police outside of the City Centre. An example is the PCC attending the Remembrance Service in Taunton in 2020, when traditionally the PCC has always attended a ceremony in Bristol.
- Publishing the Avon and Somerset Police Crime Plan 2021-2025 (Attached) showing how the police plan to tackle low-level drug dealing, ASB drug related crime and domestic violence. Identifying the triggers to behaviour and how these can be prevented. Working to improve targets across all areas year on year.
- Tagging – Sobriety and Crime Prevention tags. Increasing usage and monitoring take up.

- The latest cohort of the “20K Boris Bobbies” are due to pass out in May 2022. The PCC has already earmarked an allocation of rural bobbies.
- Promoting Farm Watch, Speed Watch and Horse Watch more widely and encouraging take-up across the county.
- Operation Remedy – a focus group of officers who will provide proactive capability to tackle individual issues in specific neighbourhoods.

### Questions from the floor

- Is it worth reporting low level crime such as minor theft, low level Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) etc? There seems little point if there’s not much chance of getting the items back or the perpetrator has moved on...
  - *Always report crime no matter how small. Even if the perpetrator is unknown or the damage is slight, it helps build an overall crime picture when allocating resources to an area. A large number of petty thefts in one village/town will highlight the need for increased vigilance and more prevention/ bodies to tackle the problem.*
- What is being done to tackle the theft of farm equipment and machinery? This is a big problem in rural areas.
  - *Rural crime has doubled in recent years, and it is geographically widespread. The Rural Police Crime Unit is now equipped with drones and trackers to try and tackle the problem. There is also a way of marking equipment using DNA tagging which is unobtrusive and can help with recovering stolen equipment. 27 private police officers currently patrol Portbury Dock in Bristol which is recognised as being the quickest and easiest way of smuggling stolen farm vehicles out of the county. This has meant that a large amount of machinery has been recovered and effectively cuts off suppliers from their markets. More work is being done in this area.*
- Drug use? How prevalent a problem is it here on Exmoor? There doesn’t seem to be much evidence of it...
  - *For the first time, children in schools who sell drugs can be arrested. There will be a mechanism in place to ensure they have support, but this is part of a multi-agency response. (SCC Cllr Frances Nicholson asked to be updated on this as SCC Cabinet Member for Children and Families. It is vitally important that safe-houses and other resources are available to meet this response!) PCSO Jo Dawson also added that most drug dealing on Exmoor was low level and did not involve ASB or was related to crime. If the users could fund their own habit through wages or lifestyle then crime remained hidden. It only came to notice when people had to commit crime to pay for drugs, or when drug dealing was more overt.*
- Illegal raves or congregations of people. How can this be stopped?
  - *It is vitally important that if anyone believes a rave will take place, it is reported as early as possible. The more people reporting it the better. It is very difficult to stop a rave and disband a large group of*

*people once it has started! Preventative measures are easier to police and manage at the outset.*

*The police are looking at ways that they can deter ravers from attending by heavy profile of drink/drug driver units or issuing parking notices, but this must be done with discretion and does not tackle the immediate problem.*

*If people are reluctant to ring the police, then they can report crime via Crimestoppers which is an anonymous service. 0800 555 111. The information will be passed to the Police as a matter of urgency.*

*Wimbleball Lake – during the lock-down it was common for large groups of people to gather at the local beauty-spots. Although it could be a nuisance, they were not acting outside the law. Activities such as Tombstoning from the bridge, whilst very dangerous are not illegal and the police could only advise and ask people to desist. Equally if vehicles were parked legally on the highway, there was little that could be done, except to ensure that accessways were not blocked, and farm equipment and emergency vehicles could get through.*

The PCC was grateful for the opportunity to meet the Exmoor Area Panel and suggested that he was invited back annually as a Standing Agenda Item.

## **7. Avon and Somerset Police Report**

PCSO Jo Dawson had returned to work in the Exmoor Area following a couple of years based at the Bridgwater Police Station. She is now one of three police officers working out of Dulverton. Due to health and safety and lone working policies, neighbourhood officers no longer work alone. This means that there will be occasions when there is no officer on the beat, but the police can be contacted via the usual methods. Emergency 999, Non-emergency 101 and Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111

- **Communications**

A monthly newsletter is being issued to keep local people updated on what is happening, local crime figures and who their neighbourhood beat officers are.

- **Neighbourhood Beat Surgeries**

These are not just confined to Minehead. The Police also have a regular presence at the Talking Cafes and will be attending the Talking Café due to take place in Dulverton School every week. They also visit the first schools in the morning and engage with parents and pupils on the school runs. (Porlock, Dunster and Timberscombe). They are available to visit other events by appointment. They have tried to hold drop-in sessions in local cafes or other venues but generally these are not well attended, and it isn't a good use of police time.

- **Road Safety Event 31 January at Cutcombe Market**  
This is a multi-agency event co-ordinated by Exmoor Hill Farming Network, aimed at young drivers and preventing deaths on the road. It will place a particular emphasis on Road Safety, End of Evening Planning and Personal Safety. It will be held at Cutcombe Market at 7pm. The event is free and open to all in within the Greater Exmoor Rural community, but booking is essential for catering purposes. Please email [admin@ehfn.org.uk](mailto:admin@ehfn.org.uk) or ring 01643 841455.

Due to recent tragic events, a special constable from the Drink and Drug unit will be checking on speeding traffic on the roads.

- **Drink / Drug Driving**  
Police can only act on intelligence if a crime is reported. If people are aware that a crime is being committed and a habitual drinker/drug user is regularly using a vehicle whilst driving under the influence, then report it! There is also a misconception amongst some young people that the use of some drugs negates the effects of alcohol and vice-versa. Education and prevention are very important in equipping young people to make sensible choices. If there is a reluctance to report crime, then use Crimestoppers to remain anonymous.
- **Cross border / multi agency liaison**  
Police forces do share intelligence across the force area and with neighbouring counties. Therefore reporting of crime is particularly important. If a crime is committed in the Somerset area, then it will be ASP who respond.

PCSO Dawson also expanded on some of the points made by the PCC, about how the local neighbourhood team were flexing the service to meet local need.

## 8. SCC Highways

There has been a change in personnel in the SCC Highways office. David Peake has been redeployed to work on procurement of the new SCC Highways contract and Kevin Bridgwater is the new SCC Highways manager. Weekly reports and highways updates will continue to be provided for circulation to parishes. (These have been featured in the SWT weekly newsletter since March 2020).

Parishes should use the online portal to report defects in the first instance. Emails or phone calls could be made in the event of an emergency.

### 8.1 Exford Road Collapse

It was raised once again about how long the temporary traffic lights would be in situ and what was being done to alleviate the problem. The road was deteriorating all time and would get worse, compounding the problem and increasing the cost.

Andrew Turner responded that the collapse of the road was caused by a complicated structural problem and was not easy to fix. There were H&S implications due to the location and inaccessibility issues. The nature of the work

was skilled beyond basic highway maintenance and would need bridges, structures and geotechnical engineering support to carry out the repairs. SCC were also exploring options around re-routing the road itself and checking the legal status and land ownership implications. There was no timescale on how long this could take. Andrew Turner said he would keep the parishes updated on the situation as and when more information became available.

### **8.2 Upton Road Closure**

Unfortunately, this was a similar problem to the above which did not necessitate a quick fix. SCC have no choice but to close the road to protect the road-going public and ensure public safety. Andrew Turner agreed to keep Upton PC updated on progression of the works.

### **8.3 Large Tree toppled at Withypool**

The tree had toppled over and was blocking the river by the bridge. The tree was resting against two of the bridge piers. Withypool PC was unsure who would be responsible between SCC and the rivers authority and had tried to report it on the SCC portal without much luck.

Advised to report it as a matter of urgency to the SCC Bridges and Structures Team. The tree could cause damage to the structure of the bridge and make it unsafe. Anything that affects the integrity of a highway's asset should be reported to SCC as soon as possible.

### **8.4 Dashcams to report defects**

SCC Highways operatives do not have dashcams in their vehicles but are legally obliged to report faults and defects whilst out and about on the district.

Members of the public can also do this via the SCC Mobile portal. If it is safe and legal to do so, defects can be reported using a mobile device and uploaded straight to the SCC website. This will record the date and location of the fault and will keep the informant updated on progress.

The full range and how to report is available here [www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/).

### **8.5 Manholes at Chibbet Cross, Exford**

The problem with water squirting up from the manholes is still ongoing. During the winter this freezes leading to dangerous ice forming on the highway. Cllr Mike Ellicott has been salting and gritting this himself, but the basic problem needs addressing. This fault lies in an Openreach conduit, but they now claim it is a SCC responsibility. Alyn Jones agreed to follow this up.

## **9. Devon and Somerset Fire Rescue Services**

There were no representatives present but Dulverton Fire Station are seeking new recruits for On-Call Firefighters.



## **10. Exmoor National Park Issues**

There is parish council planning training organised for 20 January 2022, which will include the review the ENP Local Plan, as well as updates on national planning issues and an item on improving the thermal efficiency of older homes. Towns and parishes were urged to sign up for this session if they had not already done so.

## **11. Parish Lengthsman Scheme and Update**

The Parish Lengthsman scheme year is to commence on the 1 April 2022, with currently four parish councils signed up to it.

Andrew Turner from SCC will be contacting Dulverton Town Council, to coordinate a meeting around how the Parish Lengthsman Scheme will complement the employment of the Highway Steward, and how both roles can work towards mutually agreeable solutions.

## **12. Items brought forward by parishes**

Due to COVID-19 and some illness over Christmas, some of the parish precept forms have not been returned to SWT. The deadline for returns had been extended until the 19 January 2022. If the precept form is not submitted on time, then parishes will have to find alternative methods of funding their services in the next financial year.

If there are difficulties in returning the forms, please contact James Howells [J.Howells@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:J.Howells@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) as a matter of urgency.

## **13. AOB**

### **Training and upskilling of Parish Cllrs / Clerks**

Concern was expressed about the variety of business that parish councils may be required to take on in the future. What can be done to encourage participation and expertise especially in young people or people with the required skill set? It is difficult to manage services on a few hours a week especially when relying on volunteers.

Cllr Pugsley stated this could be considered as a future agenda item.

### **Parish Elections – Costs**

Concern was expressed about the cost of a contested election if the Structural Change Order confirmed that parish council elections needed to be held this year. The point was made that the elections would coincide with the SCC/One Somerset vote to reduce the cost to the parishes. Parishes should be prudent and include this in their precept forecasts.

### **Timings of Exmoor Area Panel Meetings**

A query was raised about the timing of the Exmoor Panel Meetings which have been scheduled for Thursday evenings only when they used to alternate between Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is due to the availability of the Clerk, and to avoid

SWT meetings which usually happen in the early part of the week. Some parish councils also hold their meetings on the earlier days of the week, and it was to try and minimise clashes in the diary.

**14. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward.**

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

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

(The Meeting ended at 9.30pm)

**Unitary - Parish and Town Council virtual conference**

Thursday 17 February 2022 6-9pm via zoom.

Theme – Creating connections and developing Peer to Peer Support

Details will be forwarded nearer the time.

DRAFT