

Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup
Held on Friday 20 May 2022,
At the Dulverton Sports Pavilion from 10.00am – 1.00pm

Present:

Cllr Stephen Pugsley (Chair)	SCC/SWT
Cllr Frances Nicholson	SCC (virtual)
Andrew Turner	SCC (virtual)
Craig Gowan	SCC
Kate Brown	SCC
Scott Davies	Milestone Infrastructure
Luke Green	SCC
Kate Brown	SCC
Bev Norman	SCC
Mike Ellicott	Exford PC
Jeremy Hickman	Exford PC
Christine Dubery / Margaret Rawle	Dulverton TC (Town)
Andrew Bray	Wootton Courtenay PC (Vale)
Roger Webber	(Moor)
Sam Murrell (Clerk)	SWT

1. Apologies

Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis PC), Stephen Marsh (SCC).

2. Scheme Promotion (CG)

2.1 Highways Schemes

The programme of planned works was presented to the subgroup by Craig Gowan. Comments were as follows: -

2.1.1 A396 Schemes

- Local knowledge as well as geographical knowledge was very important when considering where to place diversions and road closures. There were alternatives to closing off the roads at Wheddon Cross, such as using the Rest and Be Thankful car park as a turning point for larger vehicles. This would avoid the tight turn as vehicles could approach in a straight line. The car park had been reinforced in previous years to enable this, but it seems the knowledge has been lost at SCC.

Action point – Bev Norman (SCC) to meet with Roger Webber (Moor rep) on site to explore the options.

- Timberscombe – Cutcombe (Road slippage) Can traffic signals be used instead of closures to keep traffic moving? *Dependent upon the stability of the road and the operating safety zone for workers and machinery. If it is feasible then it is considered, but in areas of instability, or with pinch points the safest option is to*

completely close the road. In relation to this scheme, it is not practicable due to the narrowness of the road.

- School buses and service buses must be considered when closing the roads, otherwise it means long diversions for school age children and increases the length of time travelling. Factoring this into the school day means earlier pick up times which can lead to tiredness and difficulty concentrating.
- Using “B” classified roads as an alternative route for smaller vehicles so that the “A” road diversions are less congested. Road users with local knowledge will not follow the recognised routes but will use small side roads as an alternative. This could ultimately lead to rat-runs and snarl up in the villages. It is important that this is managed with signage – such as temporary one-way systems and speed limits.

2.1.2 A39 Schemes

- Andrew Bray as the Vale Rep said communications must improve. There had been a lot of confusion recently about works that were due to take place on the A39 at Tivington, which would necessitate a complete road closure. There was a long diversion that was going to be implemented routing through Lynton and heavy vehicles were going to have to stack and be escorted through at lunch time. The parish had not been consulted, and then they were told – again at short notice – that it was no longer happening!

Bev Norman responded that work on the scale that was needed had not been through the correct approval process. Months of planning is required, and SCC would need to consult with partners, parishes, freight, and bus companies etc before implementing a planned road closure and would provide plenty of notice in advance of what was happening.

2.2 Surface Dressing

Most of the comments were issues already highlighted in 2.1.

2.3 Traffic Schemes

- Margaret Rawle / Christine Dubery highlighted the fact that most parish clerks were part time and didn't routinely check emails. This meant that urgent notification of works may not be picked up and passed on in time. How could a fail-safe be implemented to overcome this?

Action Point – All parishes need to appoint a Highways Warden who will ultimately be responsible for liaison with the Highways Steward, and SCC officers if necessary. A list of these representatives' email addresses will be forwarded on to Kate Brown so that she has contact details. (Details of Highways wardens to be collated at the next Area Panel meeting).

- **Action Point** - Luke Green offered to show Andrew Bray (Vale Rep) how to use the one.network website polygon plotter, to set

up and receive email alerts or pings via email when highworks works are added to an area.

- **Action Point** – Scott Davies / Milestone – To draw up generic traffic management plans – with bespoke offer based on zones. This would keep diversions consistent and tap into local knowledge. It would outline where signage was to be placed and work with parishes and the Highways Steward on timings and schedules. There would also be a standard plan on the requirements of working on the highway, so that parishes could factor this into any procurement arrangements they may be making.
- It was asked whether training could be given to parishes on how to draw up proper specifications so that tendering exercises were consistent. Scott Davies said this could be arranged.

2.4 Public Utility Works

- Contractors such as Open Reach need to consult with parishes before undertaking the works to tap into local knowledge. They also need to provide plenty of notice that works are to take place. SCC will prosecute “rogue contractors” who try and “buck the system” and cause inconvenience to communities and businesses. It is very important that parishes report any such works so that action can be taken.
- Scheme promoters are responsible for their own diversions and signage, as well as collecting the same when the works are completed. This was considered equally if not more important than displaying the signs in the first place. Some signage had been known to be lying around for months, which was causing an inconvenience to businesses who relied on tourism. (*Is there any way that uncollected signs can be reported? i.e., via the Report it Function on the SCC website?*)
- Road closure signs need to be clearer and indicate the times and dates that the diversion etc will be operating. There also needs to be better placement so that road users are not filtered away from businesses or parishes needlessly, especially over weekends when the contractor may not be working.

3 Devolved Funding

The Exmoor Highways LCN Pilot has been given a time-limited discretionary budget for the 2022/23 Financial Year. The LCN can use this to fund small scale works that they have identified within the Exmoor area. At the present time the money allocated is £20k for revenue spend and £10k for capital works.

The thinking is that the parishes would submit their plans for schemes into the Highways subgroup based on the Exmoor Area Panels priorities for the year. The sub-group could then determine which schemes get referred to the Exmoor Panel for approval.

It was important to consider the delivery mechanisms of the works, as they still would need to be subject to regulatory controls regarding procurement and Health and Safety. Local contractors could be used to deliver the works, but quality and cost was very important, as well as meeting the required standard.

The following points were made:

- The table listing the relevant schemes which fall within the capital budget are more representative of Somerset as a county rather than the Exmoor area. Some of the works highlighted such as Tree Maintenance fall under the responsibilities of private-landowners and would not be considered for the Exmoor Pilot.
- It was likely that some parishes would be considering Speed Indicator Devices and was there likely to be enough funding within the pilot to cover this? (*Additional funding would be required for some capital works and would need to be met from other sources whether match funding from the hosting parish, sponsorship or drawing down grants from central government*).
- It is important that there is transparency on value for money and costs when work is being procured and delivered. It is also important that the Exmoor Area Panel deliver their own work rather than triage the works to Taunton. This would ultimately cause the pilot to fail as moving away from Localism.
- It is important to establish the baseline for provision on the maintenance budget before considering “enhanced works”. Enhanced means an extra, over and above the service level requirement. There needs to be discussion on this, especially in relation to the more routine tasks of grass and hedge cutting, gully emptying and drainage which are the main areas of concern on Exmoor. Need to apply consistency across the whole area, so that parishes are treated equally.
- It would be for the Exmoor parishes to determine what their priorities are for the year, and the table in the budget could be adjusted once consultation has taken place.

Action Point – Andrew Turner – Modify the funding paper to include planned and reactive work specific to Exmoor, based on current delivery. i.e. Grass cutting – currently set at 2 cuts per year, but does this need to be increased to 3, with associated costs added?

4. Highway Steward

4.1 Update on Highway Steward Scheme

Scott Davies advised that a Highways Steward had been selected from amongst the Milestone Staff based at the Highways Depot in Minehead. This person was very experienced, had lived in the district for many years and had extensive local knowledge. Due to his working within the Highways team, he could build on existing networks and already had a good relationship with the contractor and SCC Officers. He was due to take up his employment on Monday 13 June.

It was also commented that the Highway Steward would need to coordinate his work alongside the Parish Lengthsman, so that they complimented each other's workload rather than duplicating it.

Andrew Turner advised that SCC were now looking to appoint the “broker role”, who would be responsible for line managing the Highways Steward, prioritising the work from the parishes and provide a point of contact between the two. This would ensure there was no duplication of work and prioritise areas according to urgency. Andrew Turner said this was likely to be someone employed internally by Somerset County Council. They would also provide administrative support, triage work and attend the Exmoor Area Panel meetings. They would ensure transparency when dealing with all parties.

4.2 Update on Programme

Whilst the Highways Steward has been selected, there are still a lot of parishes who have not submitted their work requests to Andrew Turner. These will form the basis for his work programme and assist with co-ordination. The parishes were emailed at the beginning of April inviting them to submit their work requests for consideration. The representatives present said they would chase this up with their parish clerks.

Andrew Turner stated that SCC would be sending out a quarterly satisfaction survey to those parishes participating in the Exmoor pilot to get feedback on how they thought it was working. This was vital learning for the LCN process going forward.

5 Parish Online

Following the demonstration of the Parish Online system at the last Exmoor Area Panel meeting, Andrew Turner had managed to secure some funding to enable the Exmoor Area Panel parishes to use the resource.

A budget had been drawn down from the Local Government Association, and at the cost of £800 all the parishes could use Parish Online for a test period of one year. They would be able to access it, load up information and make enquiries on the system. At the end of the trial period, it would be for the Exmoor LCN to determine whether they wished to continue accessing Parish Online, and if so, how it would be funded in the future.

A point of debate centred around the fact that some parishes had already subscribed and were paying for it themselves. How could they be compensated?

Action Point - Andrew Turner and Cllr Pugsley to talk this through outside the meeting to determine a way forward.

6 Recommendations to the Exmoor Area Panel

6.1 Andrew Turner to revise the Devolved Funding Paper to be more representative of the Exmoor parishes so that this can then be approved by the Exmoor Area Panel. This includes but is not limited to the Capital budget options listed in the table at Point 2.0.

6.2 Formally endorse the role of the Highways Steward, including Terms of Reference and line management responsibilities.

6.3 Ensure that each parish within the Exmoor Area Panel has appointed a Highways Warden as a point of contact with the Highways Steward. Contact details for same to be provided as soon as possible, and forwarded to Kate Brown (SCC)

6.4 Endorse the adoption of Parish Online for the Exmoor Area Panel. This to be for a trial period of one year at a cost of £800 paid for by the Local Government Association.

7. A.O.B

7.1 Works request forms

To redistribute the email to parishes and members of the sub-group. Ensure that parishes are aware of the importance of the forms and how this fits in with the work of the Highways Steward. The email has been circulated with additional contact details for: -

Jeremy Hickman (Exford Parish Council) boots93@live.co.uk
Roger Webber (Moor Rep) RogerJWEbber@BTconnect.com

7.2 Terms of reference for the Highways Subgroup

To determine at future Exmoor Area Panel Meeting the terms of reference for the Highways Subgroup, including parish representation.

7.3 Exford Road Slippage

It was questioned whether there had been any further progress on this work, and Andrew Turner said he would follow up the Geo-Tech report from the Structural Engineer.

8. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward

The Chair set the date of the next sub-group meeting for **Friday 15 July** and asked if the venue could remain as the Dulverton Sports Pavilion.

Future meetings to be determined with Stephen Marsh, but to be set at the middle point between Exmoor Area Panels (dates below).

Exmoor Panel Date	Proposed Sub-Group Date
1 September 2022	15 July 2022
24 November 2022	14 October 2022
12 January 2023	9 December 2022
16 March 2023	10 February 2023

Meeting closed at 12:57pm.