

Minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel Meeting

Held on Thursday 10th March 2022,

At the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe

Present:

Patricia Bainbridge (Brompton Ralph) Brian Chaffey (Brompton Regis) Jan Aldridge (Brushford), Roger Foxwell & Roger Webber (Cutcombe), Christine Dubery (Dulverton), Mike Ellicott & Jeremy Hickman (Exford), Janette Webber (Exton), Dave Powell & Anne Sparling (Luxborough) Max Lawrence & Scilla Barney (Selworthy & Minehead Without), Fran ABrook & David Williams (Upton), Peter Pilkington (Timberscombe), Tony Howard (Withypool & Hawkridge),

Also Present:

SCC Cllr Frances Nicholson

SWT Cllr Andy Milne, SWT Cllr Steven Pugsley, SWT Cllr Nick Thwaites

Officers:

Andrew Turner, Neil Guild, Craig Gowan and Adrian Lee – (SCC)

Sam Murrell (SWT)

(The meeting commenced at 7.05pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Margaret Rawle (Dulverton), Penny Webber (Selworthy & Minehead Without), Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay), Matthew Headley & Sarah Buchanan (Brompton Regis), Sally Moran (Clatworthy), Vivian White (Cutcombe), Christine Boland (Magna HA), Linda Brooks (ASP), Ruth MacArthur (ENP), SWT Cllr David Mansell.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting the Exmoor Area Panel 13th January 2022, and matters arising.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 13th January 2022 were circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Exmoor Area Panel meeting held on 13th January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters arising:-

- The large tree that was threatening the stability of the bridge at Withypool has been cleared and removed.
- The manholes at Chibbet Cross – this work is ongoing and moving towards a resolution hopefully soon.

3. Exmoor Local Community Network (LCN) Pilot

Andrew Turner 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 New Somerset Council [website](#). This is regularly updated as the various projects are progressed.

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.

3.1 Programme of planned and reactive works – Presented by Neil Guild (Asset Manager) and Craig Gowan (Programme Engineer).

The programme of planned works was presented to the Exmoor Panel by Craig Gowan.

The programmed works related to surface dressing, footway maintenance, earthworks, and drainage. The county budget was between 14-16 million, with a priority on highways resurfacing. The programme covered the period from August 2022 to February 2023.

It was planned to hold quarterly meetings with the Contractor undertaking the works, to ensure discussion and formulate plans on the proposed diversion routes.

The report had been circulated prior to the meeting and comments from the floor included the following: -

- Diversion routes where road closures were required – could these be relayed as early as possible to employers, the tourist board, accommodation providers and Exmoor National Park? It was important that communication remained open, so that visitors could be forewarned and plan their routes into Exmoor accordingly.
- Utilities – who controls their work patterns? Is there any possibility they could be tied in with the scheduled Highways Works to take advantage of road closures and minimise general disruption to the road going public? i.e., Tie in tree felling, hedge trimming and gully clearance where the road is closed for surface dressing?
- 1-day diversions were not generally seen to be problematic, but anything longer than this caused a lot of disruption. This was largely due to signage still being in place after the work had finished, or when the contractor was no longer on site. Neil Guild advised that signs should be removed as

soon as the works were completed. It was agreed that this could be one area of business for the Highways Steward to monitor.

- The point was raised that there must be better co-ordination of the routine maintenance programme, to ensure that work is carried out in the correct order. Gully maintenance is important when ploughing verges and as part of the drainage jetting programme. It makes more sense to carry out ploughing, gully maintenance and then finish with jetting, so as not to undo the previous work.
- In the past, there has been a particular emphasis on gritting and adverse weather relating to snow. Due to the milder climate recently, rain has proved more problematic than snow. Vegetation requires a harder cut and perhaps more frequently along the roadsides due to growing so quickly.
- Some of the parishes had concerns that the discretionary budget was not going to be enough to cover the amount of work that has already been identified. In particular the two ravines at Upton and Stone Cross. *It was pointed out that the LCN Pilot budget is extra spend and that we should expect the usual level of spending otherwise. Large-scale capital projects like that at Upton and Exford would be separately budgeted.*
- Some of the parishes were concerned that in the vastness of the new Unitary Council, the rural areas outside of the main urban areas would be forgotten. As it was, there is already a perception that in Somerset West and Taunton, all projects and budgets are Taunton focussed! How can the parishes ensure that this doesn't happen or get worse in the future? *It was pointed out that the new Local Community Networks would be put in place to prevent this from happening, but it was very important that elected representatives lobbied hard for their respective areas to ensure that the rural areas are not overlooked.*

3.2 Parish Online Technical Demonstration – Presented by Adrian Lee

A demonstration of parish online was carried out by Adrian Lee. He showed how the organisations that pay the subscription can record their assets online for other member organisations to view. Two organisations that currently use the software are the Environment Agency and Historic England. The maps provide visibility of their assets.

Comments from the floor during the discussion included the following: -

- What can be added to improve the data?
It can be constantly updated by the subscribed members to include their own asset data and can include school catchment areas, gullies, drainage and lighting columns. Parishes should also be able to upload their own information such as the location and availability of defibrillators and public conveniences etc.
- SCC pay a subscription to use the system and operate it via a licence. This is not transferable. Parishes wishing to use Parish Online would need to take out their own subscription and pay the annual fee. This is determined by the population of the parish.
- Are salt bins and gritting routes included?
- SCC are adding other maps and layers to the information to assist the parishes. ? Feedback is welcomed.

3.3 Update on Highway Steward Scheme

Andrew Turner advised that approval had been granted for the appointment of a trained operative with a vehicle who could carry out the work of a Highways Steward. It was hoped to have someone in post by May 1st. This person would concentrate on resolving issues and defects that the parishes identified and could be paid for using their discretionary budget.

It had been agreed at the Parish Sub-group that there should be a “broker” type role to coordinate the work of the Parishes and communicate these to the Highways Steward. 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 provide a conduit between the parishes and the Highways Steward

Feedback on the Parish Sub-group Meeting.

The sub-group 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 sub-group had met in January to talk through the current issues.

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

Some queries had been resolved, but there was a general feeling from the Exmoor Panel that there was no communication coming out of the meetings. It was asked that someone was put in place to provide dedicated administrative support, and capture the points being made. These could then be clearly relayed back to the respective parishes, or an update could be provided to Panel at its usual quarterly meeting.

4. SCC Highways Update

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.

Exford Road Collapse

The collapse of the road is caused by a complicated structural problem and is not easy to fix. There are H&S implications due to the location and inaccessibility issues. The ravine is extremely high, and the nature of the work is skilled beyond basic highway maintenance and will need bridges, structures, and geotechnical engineering support to carry out the repairs.

The required geotechnical survey has been expedited and Highways are waiting on the results before determining how to tackle the work. It is a complicated fix, but the works will hopefully be started in the summer.

Upton Road Closure

Ground penetrating radar has been used to identify the cause of the road subsidence. There is a culvert running under the road which neither Wessex Water Authority nor South West Water claim is their responsibility. This is compromising the stability of the road. A local civil engineering contractor has been employed by SCC to undertake the works before it deteriorates further. The heavy rainfall is contributing to the problem, so it needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Upton Parish Council asked that the clerk is updated on the situation via email.

5. Magna Housing Annual Report

Christine Boland was unable to attend this meeting and sent her apologies. She has been re-scheduled to attend the June meeting.

6. Avon and Somerset Police Report

Apologies were sent, but a report and newsletter were circulated prior to the meeting. Katherine Williams (PCSO Supervisor) has asked that parishes contact her direct if they have matters, they wish to discuss.

7. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Issues (DSFRS)

No representative in attendance.

8. Exmoor National Park Authority Issues (ENP)

- **The Glover Report**

Disappointment was expressed that so far ENP does not appear to have consulted with the Hill Farming Network on its response to the Glover Report. In reply, it was pointed out that anyone can take part in the consultation regardless of whether they are an organisation, parish council and or an individual. They can do this independently and do not need to go through ENP to do so.

- **Is ENP voting in new Somerset Parish Councillors following the election in May**

The situation is not clear at present, but a decision will be made following the elections in May when it will be clear whether there a change of representatives is required.

9. Parish Lengthsman Scheme

No current issues to report.

10. Items brought forward by parishes

- **Emergency Planning because of Storm Eunice.**

It was asked whether the parishes would be updating their emergency planning strategies following learning from the recent storms. A number of homes had been without power for several days, and it was suggested that the purchase of a "community generator" might be a good idea. These could be used to keep refrigerators in the village shop from defrosting, provide emergency hubs with power so that residents could charge up mobile phones, keep warm and not be isolated.

There was praise for the response of the emergency services, Exmoor Search and Rescue and SWT/SCC in ensuring that vulnerable households that had been identified were supported. Wiveliscombe Fire Station had also set up an emergency hub to co-ordinate the response to the rural areas.

There was confusion around why certain parishes had waited several days for power to be restored, whilst others were only inconvenienced for a few hours. It was suggested that Western Power is written to, to find out if these delays are avoidable and what can be done to alleviate the situation if it was to happen again in the future. i.e., Was it purely because trees brought down the power cables?

- **Attendance by PC Dan Cox – ASP Speed Awareness**

Could this officer be invited to attend a future Panel meeting to talk about speed awareness?

11. Dates and Venues for meetings going forward.

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

(The Meeting ended at 9.12pm)

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