Somerset Council
County Hall, Taunton
Somerset, TA1 4DY

Exmoor Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Date: Thursday 6 November 2025

Time: Commencing at 7pm

Location: The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe TA24 7DL

LCN Core Membership Attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair)	Somerset Council
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Somerset Council
Patricia Bainbridge (Clerk)	Brompton Ralph Parish Council
Sarah Buchanan (Clerk)	Brompton Regis Parish Council
Jan Aldridge (Clerk)	Brushford Parish Council
Cllr Sally Moran	Clatworthy Parish Council
Cllr Eric Norman	Cutcombe Parish Council
Cllr Nick Thwaites	Dulverton Town Council
Jennifer Yates (Clerk)	Exton Parish Council
Cllr Duncan McCannlis	Porlock Parish Council
Cllr Philip Beauvais	Skilgate Parish Meeting
Cllr Katy Attwater	Timberscombe Parish Council
Cllr Colin Wilkins	Winsford Parish Council
Cllr Tony Howard	Withypool & Hawkridge Parish Council
PSCO Linda Moden	Avon and Somerset Police
Rev David Weir	Exmoor Benefice

Other attendees

Name:	Representing:
Jonathan Rollanson	Skilgate Parish Meeting
Cllr Roger Foxwell	Cutcombe Parish Council
Cllr Lee Baker	Somerset Council (From 20:45)

Officer Attendance:

Ann Shilton (LCN Link Officer), Kali Martin (Highways Officer), Callum Davey (ICT Specialist), Laura Smedley (Partnerships Officer), Syed Shah (Public Liaison Officer)

Online attendance:
Michelle Brooks (LCN link Officer), Colin McDonald (Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler), Lydia Hodder, Ali (Luccombe PC)

Apologies:
Sam Murrell (Exmoor LCN Link Officer), Cllr Mike Ellicott (Exford PC), Cllr Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay PC), Margaret Rawle & Christine Dubery (Dulverton TC), Fran A Brook (Upton PC), Stephen Kimsey (Huishchampflower PC), Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC), Sally Baker (Brompton Ralph PC), Sally Baker (Exton PC), Loretta Whetlor (SALC)

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Item: Summary of key points of discussion and outcome:

1. **Introductions:**
   The members of the team were introduced.

   Sam Murrell was unwell, and Anne Shilton was covering the meeting in her absence. Well wishes were extended to Sam for a speedy recovery.

2. **Apologies**
   Apologies noted as above.

3. **Avon and Somerset Police Update**
   PCSO Linda Moden provided a comprehensive police update on recent crime levels, anti-social behaviour, and community safety initiatives, addressing questions from Councillor Nicholson and others regarding drug-related intelligence and emergency communications.

   Recent Crime and ASB Overview: Linda Moden relayed an update from PC Calloway, noting that crime levels have remained low, with a notable burglary in Porlock where two vehicles were stolen and later recovered. The police are actively investigating, and anti-social behaviour (ASB) remains a focus, with the team collaborating with other agencies to address issues such as noise, vandalism, intimidation, and drug-related activity.

   Support for Vulnerable Individuals: Linda Moden emphasized the police's role in safeguarding vulnerable community members, including the elderly, children, people with disabilities, those with mental health concerns, victims of domestic abuse, and individuals facing substance misuse or financial hardship. The police encourage reporting concerns to ensure appropriate support and intervention.

   Community Engagement Initiatives: The police are restarting the mini police program at Exford School, promoting Farm Watch and Horse Watch schemes for

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rural crime prevention, and attending local markets to offer crime prevention advice. Residents are encouraged to use Crime Stoppers for anonymous reporting if they are uncomfortable contacting the police directly.

Drug Intelligence and Police Response: In response to Councillor Nicholson's concerns about perceived inaction on drug dealing reports, Linda Moden clarified that all intelligence is logged and analysed, with actions taken as evidence allows. She reassured attendees that photographic evidence is not required for police action, and that building a case often relies on accumulating detailed reports over time.

Emergency Communications and Mast Activation: Phillip Beauvais raised questions about the activation of emergency communication masts, noting uncertainty about which masts are operational and the impact on both emergency and general mobile coverage. The group discussed difficulties in obtaining information from the Home Office and the importance of police advocacy for improved communications infrastructure.

4. **Guest Speaker: Syed Shah, Somerset Council Public Liaison Officer (A39)**
Email contact to sign up the newsletter: syed.shah@somerset.gov.uk

Syed Shah, Somerset Council's Public Liaison Officer, provided a detailed update on the A39 traffic light upgrade project, addressing operational challenges, community engagement, and lessons learned.

Project Scope and Initial Challenges: Syed Shah explained the project's scope, including the need to remove lights from the central island and the resulting traffic management complexities. An unexpected sensor failure exacerbated congestion, particularly during peak periods associated with Butlins traffic, which had now been resolved.

Manual Traffic Management and Communication: To address congestion, the team implemented manual traffic control during peak times, with Sydd Shah personally overseeing operations and maintaining direct communication with Butlins management. Regular newsletters and real-time updates were provided to the community.

Community Feedback and Live Information Tools: Cllr Katie Attwater praised the improvements and the availability of live traffic information via mineheadtraffic.co.uk which helps residents plan their journeys. *(Please note this is an independent website and not run by Somerset Council).* Syed Shah highlighted the importance of direct engagement, including hand-delivering newsletters and attending parish meetings.

Lessons Learned and Future Planning: In response to Councillor Nicholson's inquiry about incorporating lessons learned, Syed Shah described his proactive

approach to stakeholder engagement, advocating for earlier involvement in project planning to anticipate and mitigate issues. He shared examples from previous projects where post-completion feedback informed future practices.

Project Timeline and Contingency Planning: The project aims for completion before the Easter break, with contingency plans for manual control during peak periods. Syed Shah assured attendees of ongoing communication and his commitment to being present and responsive throughout the project's duration.

Attendees were invited to sign up for his regular newsletter by contacting him at syed.shah@somerset.gov.uk. He also endeavours to reply to messages within 24 hours.

5. **Guest Speaker:**
   ENPA Housing Needs Survey – Colin McDonald, Somerset Council, Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler

   Contact email to request paper copies: localplan@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

   Survey open from 1 February – 31 March 2026.

   Colin McDonald provided an update on the upcoming Exmoor National Park Rural Housing Needs Survey, detailing its scope, methodology, and the inclusion of both online and paper formats, while addressing questions about parish eligibility and the use of survey results. Any questions should be directed to localplan@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk .

   Survey Launch and Distribution: Colin McDonald announced the survey's launch date as 1st February, with letters signed by the National Park Chief Executive and co-branded by Somerset Council and North Devon. The survey will be primarily online, with paper copies available at four libraries and by request for those unable to access digital formats and will be open for three months.

   Target Audience and Parish Inclusion: The survey targets residents within the National Park and Brushford, with provisions for those with legitimate connections to the area. Colin clarified that parishes wholly outside the National Park are not directly included, but individuals with relevant ties may participate via the online link.

   Survey content and technical Details: Colin demonstrated the survey interface, which uses routing logic to tailor questions based on respondents' answers. The survey includes options for young people and others living with relatives who need independent housing, and will be promoted through social media, posters and parish communications.

Use of survey results and policy implications: The survey aims to inform the evidence base for the National Park's local plan review, potentially influencing future housing policy. Colin discussed recent planning approvals for affordable housing and the challenges posed by land availability rather than planning restrictions.

Empty homes and housing supply issues: Colin addressed concerns about long-term empty properties, explaining the limited powers of local authorities and the complexities of compulsory purchase. He noted that the survey's findings on housing demand could impact future development decisions, especially where sites with planning permission remain unbuilt.

6. **Agree the notes/minutes of previous meetings**
The notes from the meeting held Thursday 6 November 2025 were accepted as true record of the meeting.

7. **Matters arising** (not itemised elsewhere on the agenda)
Most items would be discussed at later points on the agenda, so there were no matters arising.

8. **Feedback on Emergency Planning Workshop**
The slides from the session were circulated with the agenda pack.

Cllr Phillip Beauvais and the attendees discussed outcomes from the recent emergency planning workshop, highlighting the prioritisation of power outages and winter problems over pandemic risks in the local context and confirming that Somerset Emergency Planning will consider these concerns in future planning.

9. **Exmoor National Park Update**
Attendees expressed concern over the reduced frequency of Exmoor National Park Consultative forums and the need for greater engagement, with suggestions to leverage the LCN and parish representatives to enhance communication and advocacy.

ENPA Forum meeting frequency and representation: Cllr Roger Foxwell and others noted the absence of regular National Park forum meetings, advocating for at least annual gathering to facilitate dialogue. The group discussed the role of parish representatives and the potential for the LCN to fill some of the consultative gaps, provided the National Park Authority is receptive.

10. **Highways** –(Notes from the subgroup meeting held on Friday 28 November 2025 were circulated with the agenda pack.

Kali Martin provided a comprehensive overview of winter maintenance operations, addressing concerns about gritting routes, salt and grit bin provision, and specific

local issues, while engaging with multiple parish representatives to clarify procedures and plan improvements.

Winter gritting operations and challenges: Kali described the impact of the recent cold weather, explaining the limitations of salt effectiveness at very low temperatures and detailing the decision-making process for gritting runs based on specialized weather forecasts and road temperature data.

Gritting route coverage and school bus safety: Parish representatives raised concerns about the extent of gritting, particularly on routes used by school buses and in smaller communities. Kali explained the criteria for route selection, the use of automated gritter programming and the challenges of expanding coverage given resource constraints.

Salt and grit bin provision and replenishment: The group discussed issues with grit bin refilling, discrepancies between maps and actual provision, and the process for parishes to request replenishment. Kali advised using the previously circulated spreadsheet to report needs and offered to coordinate deliveries for self-help distribution. This spreadsheet can be located at …….[link to be inserted here]

Green routes and policy advocacy: Persistent frustration was expressed over the lack of activation for designated 'green routes' in rural areas. The group agreed to pursue a meeting with Jeremy Fry, the project lead for winter and emergency services, and to apply political pressure for policy changes to better serve isolated communities.

Comparison with Devon and statutory duties: Patricia Bainbridge highlighted differences between Somerset and Devon's approaches to grit bin provision and snow warden schemes. Kali clarified Somerset's statutory obligations, the rationale for current policies and the support available for parishes to acquire and maintain grit bins.

Specific highways maintenance issues: The meeting addressed several specific highways concerns including persistent drainage problems, road closure signage and the need for improved communication and responsiveness from contractors, with Kali providing updates and action plans.

- **Great House Street drainage at Timberscombe:** Cllr Katy Attwater and Kali Martin discussed the longstanding drainage issue at Great House Street, confirming that a scheme is scheduled for the next financial year 2026/7. The problem involves a natural spring and local geology and the solution will require collaboration with the property owner and further investigation of the private pipe's condition.

- **Reporting and response mechanisms:** Kali emphasized the importance of using the council's online reporting system for hazards such as black ice, as this ensures the fastest response from the Superintendent and maintenance teams. He clarified the process for escalating issues and the role of self-help salt provision. He also emphasised using the highwayswest@somerset.gov.uk to gain a quicker response rather than his own email address in case he was away from his email address for any time.

- **Road closure signage and contractor practices:** Attendees raised concerns about the use of 'road closed' signs for minor works without adequate notice, leading to confusion and frustration. Kali acknowledged a shift in contractor practices and committed to raising the issue with Kier and other contractors as necessary to ensure more appropriate and timely communication.

- **Brushford signage and traffic management:** Nick Thwaites highlighted problems with signage and adherence to scheduled road opening times during works at Brushford. Kali confirmed that he and Chris Tucker had reviewed the requirements with the contractor and would ensure compliance and improved information for residents.

Other local maintenance concerns: Councillor Wilkins reported issues with drainage following recent works and the absence of cats' eyes on a dangerous corner. Kali agreed to monitor the situation and raise the need for interim safety measures until scheduled surface dressing is completed.

11. AOB

Election scheduling and unitarisation: The Chair clarified that, following recent unitarisation, Somerset will not experience further postponement of elections as had been reported in the local press, addressing a query about potential government changes to local election scheduling.

12. Dates of future meetings:

Proposed Exmoor LCN Dates **The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe**	**Highways Sub-Group Dates – Dulverton Sports Pavilion**
	Friday 20 February 10am – 1pm
Thursday 5 March at 7pm	Friday 17 April 10am – 1pm
Thursday 4 June at 7pm (AGM) – *This date to be re-arranged.*	Friday 10 July 10am – 1pm