



An independent statutory advisory body administered by Exmoor National Park Authority, the appointing authority, from its offices at Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9HL  
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13<sup>th</sup> June 2025

## EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**To: The Members of the Exmoor Local Access Forum**

A meeting of the Exmoor Local Access Forum will be held **in the Committee Room at Exmoor House, Dulverton TA22 9HL on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025 at 10am.**

The meeting will be open to the press and public in accordance with the provisions of reg. 7 of The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007 (under s 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). There is public question time at this meeting when the Chairman will allow members of the public two minutes each in which to ask questions.

(The agenda and papers for this meeting can be downloaded from the Exmoor National Park Authority's website at [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)).

Sue Applegate  
Secretary  
Exmoor Local Access Forum

# MEETING AGENDA

**1. Apologies for Absence**

**2. Reappointment of Exmoor LAF Members & Resignations**

**3. Declarations of Interest:** Members are asked to declare any direct or indirect personal interests (including financial) in relation to items on the agenda for this meeting and shall disclose the nature of those interests to the meeting.

(NB. The regulations do not prohibit any member having such an interest from remaining in the meeting and participating in the discussion).

**4. Minutes**

(1) To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 [Item A].

(2) To consider any Matters Arising from those Minutes which are not elsewhere on the agenda.

(3) Request for items to be raised under AOB

**5. Meet the Community / Public Question Time:** This part of the meeting enables members of the public to engage with the Local Access Forum on issues concerning open access, rights of way and outdoor recreational pursuits in the National Park.

**6. ENPA Partnership Plan (5 mins)**

To receive an update from the Partnership Plan working group on the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025 [Item B]

**7. Meeting with Dartmoor LAF (5 mins)**

To receive a brief verbal report on a meeting between the chairs and vice-chairs of the 2 National Park Local Access Forums held on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

**8. Permitted Path Closures and Ash Die Back (15 mins)**

a) To provide feedback on a site visit held with the National Trust on 13th May 2025 to discuss this issue which was raised by a member of the public at the last meeting [Item C].

b) To consider any advice the LAF may wish to consider providing to the National Trust or others

**9. Active Travel on Exmoor (10 mins)**

To receive a presentation from Dan Barnett, Access & Recreation Manager on the findings of the Active Travel work (funded by Active Travel England) which was undertaken between March 2024-June 2025.

**10. Reviving Exmoor's Heartlands Landscape Recovery (Exmoor Heartlands) Access Project (10 mins)**

To receive a presentation from James Maben, Access consultant and allow LAF members to take part in an interactive session to provide input to this project at an early stage

***Interactive Session (15 mins) & Break (15 mins)***

**11. Other Externally Funded Access Projects on Exmoor (10 mins)**

To receive verbal updates and provide advice where appropriate on the following projects through which (wholly or partly) access improvements are being achieved and planned.

- a) DEFRA Access for All Funding – report on Year 3 and look ahead to Year 4
- b) Pioneers Royal Forest HLF Funded Access Work (includes Driver Farm access improvements)

**12. Public Path Orders / Legal Matters (5 mins)**

To note updates on orders made since the last meeting:

- i. Newcombe Farm – order made and confirmed, practical work pending
- ii. Ford Farm – informal consultation completed, order to follow

**13. Hinds Pitt Footbridge (10 mins)**

To receive an update on the position regarding this footbridge on the Tarr Steps circular walk which was closed in May 2025 [Item D]

**14. Access & Recreation Highlights December 2024 – June 2025 (5 mins)**

To receive a presentation on the work of the Access & Recreation Team since the last meeting (December 2024 – June 2025)

**15. Date of next meeting and agenda items:**

To agree the date, method (and venue if needed) of the next Forum meeting.

**16. Any Other Business of Urgency**

For further information about the Exmoor Local Access Forum and its work, please contact the Secretary, Sue Applegate, at the postal address, telephone number, or email address given at the top of this agenda.

## **EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Minutes of a meeting of the Exmoor Local Access Forum held on **Wednesday 4th December 2024** at 10:00 at Exmoor House, Dulverton.

### **PRESENT**

George Curry (Chair)  
Graham Lavender (Vice)  
Alison Kent  
Simon Gibson  
Nick Thwaites  
Rupert Martin

Andrew Bray  
Gill Whitehead  
Jon Richardson  
Mark Lutyens  
Mike Dicks  
Tony Lowe

1 member of the public was present.

Exmoor National Park Staff in Attendance:

Dan Barnett  
Sue Applegate

Ben Totterdell (part)

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

Chris Binnie  
Peter May  
Laura Carew

### **2. WELCOMES, REAPPOINTMENTS AND RESIGNATIONS**

Following a successful recruitment campaign – 5 new members were welcomed to the ELAF – Gill Whitehead, Jon Richardson, Mark Lutyens, Mike Dicks and Tony Lowe. Following the end of his 3 year term, Chris Binnie was reappointed to the LAF. Andrew Bray has replaced Dominic Elson as one of the two Authority representatives on the LAF. Robert Bilson and Kate O’Sullivan have stepped down from the LAF after serving since 2016 and 2019 respectively.

New members were asked to say a few words to introduce themselves.

**Action: SA to write to thank RB & KO’S**

### **3. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN**

George Curry and Graham Lavender indicated their willingness to stand again. There were no other nominations.

Chairman: George Curry was proposed by AK, seconded by TL

Vice-Chairman: Graham Lavender was proposed by TL, seconded by AB

Both were unanimously re-elected George Curry as Chairman and Graham Lavender as Vice-Chairman.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST : None**

**5. MINUTES: (1) APPROVAL**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**MINUTES: (2) MATTERS ARISING**

***Action: SA to chase OSS response on Wootton Courtenay ridge consultation from RB and forward to members***

**6. Meet the Community / Public Question Time**

1 member of the public was present who expressed concern about item 9 on the agenda (permitted path closures and Ash Die Back) – particularly the path through the East Water Valley. There has been considerable concern locally about the closure and the fact people are now unable to walk a route that has been walked for decades.

**7. Permitted Path Closures and Ash Die Back**

Members discussed this issue covering liability, risk assessments, whether there were other reasons for the closure such as nature recovery, concern for the environmental damage that might be done dealing with the trees and the question of whether the route could be claimed as a public right of way. Overall, members wanted to take a balanced and diplomatic approach to the issue and agreed that a site visit should be requested to allow members to understand the issue better.

***Action: SA to request and arrange a site visit to both sites highlighted by members of the public with 2-3 LAF members, NT representatives, ENPA Ranger/Officer***

The member of the public left the meeting.

**8. Inclusion Work on Exmoor**

A very informative presentation was given by Ben Totterdell covering the Learning and Engagement work on Exmoor. Very broad remit covering formal and informal learning – and physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual engagement. Emphasised the links of better connections with nature to increased health & well-being. Talked about the range of work through Pinkery, Young Ranger scheme, volunteering and nature prescriptions. Questions from members included how schools access green funding, whether Exmoor can go to the cities to talk to people rather than getting them to come here – this has been done with schools in Bristol but expensive and resources are limited, family volunteering, links with local groups and organisations.

GC thanked BT for a very informative and interesting presentation.

## 9. Feedback on Visits/Meetings held since the Last LAF Meeting

### a) Driver Farm Visit

GL, GC & LC visited on behalf of the LAF. The farm has come back in hand to ENPA – a remote but beautiful place. Some differences of opinion within those taking the group round regarding the introduction of access. Some discussion about potential permitted access through the Pioneers HLF scheme and a recent claim for a public bridleway across the farm.

### b) Meeting with Sarah Bryan

Following the letter sent on various topics after the April meeting, GC & GL met with Sarah Bryan in June with DB attending too. It was a productive and useful meeting. DB commented that drainage is still a balancing act as to how we best allocate our resources but that key drains were all done in the end last year and we have let a contract to do them all again this year.

## 10. Pharmaceuticals and Exmoor Rivers in relation of Access

Research by York University has looked at the levels of pharmaceuticals in rivers within National Parks – the Exe was singled out – testing was done at Exford and showed particularly high levels. This could present human health issues for wild-swimming, kayaking as well as for aquatic life. Issue seems to be that the pharmaceuticals are stemming from septic tanks and sewerage works. Paper has called for increased monitoring and testing in National Parks.

DB – attended a presentation from the EA – covered this issue and the issue of companion animal insecticide treatments ending up in rivers too. Also links to access eg. dogs in rivers. Biggest issues are septic tanks and small sewage treatment plants. JR – knowledge of an issue on the River Wye where citizen science has stepped in to increase monitoring.

**Action:** *DB/SA to circulate relevant links*

## 11. Active Travel on Exmoor

£100K from ATE for Exmoor Active Travel Plan. Usually goes to cities – this is a branch into rural areas. Active travel is walking, cycling, wheeling. This funding is to make a plan – an evidence base for future funding bids. Focus is on infrastructure – rights of way, roads, crossing points – local travel and visitors – also journeys to and from the National Park. ATE want to understand the rural situation and produce guidance. When Exmoor bid for the funding, it was made clear that we wanted to include visitor travel as well as local travel and that horse-riders needed to be included. ATE survey is still active if members want to contribute – link has been circulated to all members. 106 responses by 22<sup>nd</sup> November. 2 contracts have been let – ATOR study around Minehead and Parracombe, project to produce the plan. Have engaged locally with various groups and organisations to encourage participation. Questions from members included carbon-emissions from new facilities, travel to and from Exmoor, concerns about increases in signage.

## **12. Externally Funded Projects on Exmoor**

SA summarised the paper giving an update on these 3 externally funded projects:

- a) DEFRA Access for All Funding Year 3
- b) Pioneers Royal Forest HLF
- c) Landscape Recovery

## **13. ENPA Partnership Plan**

The Authority is very close to publishing the draft Partnership Plan – it was approved for consultation and will be circulated to the LAF in January 2025. It was agreed to set up a working group - ML, AK, MD, JR, GL – likely to involve 1-2 meetings.

**Action:**        ***SA to circulate link to the LAF members to Authority papers (ahead of the formal consultation)***  
                      ***SA to set up and arrange the working group meetings in conjunction with the consultation over the next few months***

## **14. Public Path Orders/Legal Matters**

The following orders have been completed since the last meeting– public path orders are slowly beginning to be processed again with the appointment of the RoW Support Officer.

- i.     Great Bradley Bridge (DU10/38)- confirmed and certified – new route open

## **15. Access and Recreation Highlights April – November 2024**

The forum received a presentation of the work carried out by the team in the last 6 months. This included the opening of the Exmoor stretch of the King Charles III England Coast Path (also the SWCP), car park improvements and the opening of the Great Bradley Bridge in October – carrying the Two Moors Way and celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Exmoor National Park.

## **16. Date of Next Meeting and Agenda Items**

**ACTION:** – ***SA to circulate a doodlepoll with dates***

## **17. Any Other Business of Urgency**

AK – observations at Haddon Hill – huge amount of dog mess and the increasing encroachment of vegetation and the impact this has on access. DB – Haddon a classic example of where a number of factors are leading to changes (eg. climate change, lack of swaling etc) – only 1/3 of the hill is owned by ENPA. Question re. how are the public encouraged to behave responsibly – public information and specific campaigns on sites like Haddon. Would like to do more and this is identified in our project pipeline as an issue for which we want to seek special funding.

The Chair closed the meeting at 13.05

## **LAF Working Group Partnership Plan**

**29/1/25**

**Present:**

**LAF Members:** Graham Lavender, Alison Kent, Mike Dicks, Mark Lutyens, Jon Richardson

**ENPA Staff:** Dan Barnett, Sue Applegate

**Apologies, Clare Reid, Head of Climate, Nature & Communities (ENPA)**

DB: Intro. Every 5 years, the National Park Authority are legally bound to produce a Management Plan that we call a Partnership Plan. Involves a whole range of people, groups and individuals not just the Authority. Preceded by large public survey & State of the Park Report. Will come into force this year and run until 2030.

This public consultation is the final stage of the consultation for it and runs until 10<sup>th</sup> March.

**Draft Partnership Plan as a whole**

**Comments from LAF members:**

GL: Statements are made in the draft plan and are not backed up by references. Eg. Shoots on Exmoor are well managed – this is more of a statement and is not referenced.

AK: Fair bit of repetition within the document.

JR: Broadband for businesses was not mentioned throughout the document, particularly in the economic section

ML: Welcome the Sandford principle being in the draft report.

GL: Some of the targets are very woolly and unspecific. Would like to see these targets more clearly defined – specifically how things will be done. DB – this will follow in the delivery plans.

GL: Need to be clearer that landowners need to take on more responsibility for things eg. clearing trees after a storm. DB – enforcing landowners to do things can be more costly and time consuming than doing it ourselves. SA – many landowners have helped a great deal clearing paths in the recent storm.

ML: Network of paths referred to as ‘rugged and narrow’ – to be welcomed – recognition of it being an upland area, routes in keeping with its history.

JC: ‘A night under the stars’ – what does this mean? DB – comes from the Glover Review. Maybe needs clearer definition – to experience the night sky?

MD: Hunting doesn’t get a mention in the document – culturally important on Exmoor and has a social and economic importance – should be in the document.

AK: Is there a review of the previous plan? DB – yes the State of the Park Report addresses this to some extent. But there was no ‘Delivery Plan’ element to it so very hard to measure.

Discussion regarding the state of nature and how to measure it. Discussion re. how much influence the Park Authority has over what goes on within the National Park – other agencies are responsible for different aspects eg. RPA for agricultural payments, EA for water quality. GL – ENPA own 7% but even on our own land, major issues with invasive species for example.



Acknowledgement that the Mires/SWPP is a huge step towards many of the targets.

### **Delivery Plan**

DB – explained that we are looking for guidance from the LAF on this. Displayed the headline sections – section D ‘A welcoming place etc’ is the biggest one really for the LAF – although access also integrated into other sections. Looked at detailed targets & measures for section D.

D1: Improve & Promote Accessibility. Is not a target you can hit – cant disagree with it but its more an expression of hope! National targets are referred to but there is no reference – this needs to be added. DB – these National Targets are currently not well defined or measurable and this has been fed back to DEFRA.

D6: Positive Action to Enjoy Exmoor. Again quite a woolly target. More about marketing. What is the action – needs to be spelled out.

D10: 80% RoW Easy to Use. This is actually measurable – but ENPA has moved the target down from over 95% to only 80%. This happened 2 years ago due to budget cuts. DB – this target does not count permitted paths and these are very important on Exmoor

D11: Improve Public Access. Wording isn’t great – too many ‘ands’ – needs rewording

D13: Visitor Satisfaction: Visitor survey looks at this every 3 years – but this is a snapshot and the real figure could decline significantly before this measure indicates this

D14: Active travel: Recent project in early stages but yes should be a target

The National Park would welcome ideas from the group as to what the measurables should be for the above targets. There was however some discussion about whether this would be a good use of time when National targets have not yet been finalised.

A suggestion for D1 could be for example - % of stiles replaced with gaps/gates, length of surface maintained for the less able, % increase in easy access routes, keeping Exmoor Strolls well maintained – targeting resources.

A suggestion for D14 could be completing the plan, another could be installing say 3 off road routes, increase in % of journeys done by active travel eg. walking, cycling, wheeling – sample surveys?

Further Discussion:

Parking can be quite an issue too and something that should be addressed in the plan.

Discussion re. commercial side of funding – this has already shifted to the point where 50% of funds now do not come from the core grant.

**DB – to circulate to the group list of 20 items which related to access & recreation (from previous plan)**

Some discussion around ‘wild camping’ and whether this could be introduced on Exmoor. Consideration of bike packing idea.

Query re. signage – ML feels we should reduce signage clutter – particularly highways signage. Pleased to see this is reflected in policy A9.

## **ITEM B**

AK – feels that something should be added regarding the impact of climate change in relation to access and how to adapt to it. Difficult in face of reducing resources – main issues are water management and paring.

**SA to circulate notes and SA/DB provide feedback to Clare Reid.**

Meeting closed 15.46

**SJA 29/1/25**

## **Site Visit to discuss Permitted Footpath Closures by National Trust (NT)**

Location- Horner Woods

Date- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Present- Rob Manicom (NT Senior Ranger), Nigel Garnsworthy (NT Area Manager), Mike Pearce (Natural England), Sue Applegate (Rights of Way & Access Officer ENPA), Charlotte Wray (ENPA Ranger), Graham Lavender (LAF Vice Chair), Chris Binnie (LAF Member) Tony Lowe (LAF).

SA introduced participants and outlined purpose of meeting which was to review permissive path closures by NT.

RM explained that the issues revolved around ash dieback. NT had zoned its areas of land into five categories from very high risk (danger to public) down to low risk and surveyed according to risk category. Highest risk surveyed on annual basis and low risk every six years. If ash crowns found to have lost more than 50% then action was to either fell or reduce crown, if less than 50% then monitor. RM said that the prime directive is to act for nature conservation and that public access is second priority. Since the land in the area of Horner woods is open access he did say that public were free to use the closed paths but at their own risk and that the NT would no longer maintain the routes.

MP from Natural England was asked to comment. He said that NT response to ash dieback was proportionate given the sensitivity of the site (SSSI) and that Natural England was generally in approval of the action taken by NT. The response had been reviewed by a national NE NNR committee which concluded it was entirely proportionate.

SA said on behalf of ENP that there were 300km of permissive footpaths within Exmoor National Park and that many were valued them highly. However SA agreed that the primary purpose of National park is nature conservation and that access is a secondary key objective – the Sandford principle applies where there is a clash between nature conservation and access which means that nature conservation should take priority.

RM took us to one of the sites where risk had resulted in closure of footpath. To reduce crowns of trees heavy machinery including telehandler type equipment, cherry pickers and extending arm chainsaws had been manoeuvred through a stream and along small tracks. This action was not taken lightly as potential damage to delicate habitats had to be considered. Part of the path had now been opened as a result of the work. It was not felt that this scale of work could be justified further up Eastwater Valley due to the amount of damage it would cause to the NNR.

There was a general discussion on closure of the permissive paths and the conclusion was that much of the NT action was understandable. The main issue however was that communication could be significantly improved. There was discussion of various ways NT could explain necessity of path closures and this would probably result in greater acceptance of the necessity for closure.

The meeting concluded with thanks to SA for organising and I think a much greater appreciation of work that NT is doing and that Nature conservation is their top priority.

**Graham Lavender**

**Vice-Chair Exmoor Local Access Forum**



**National Trust Barrier and Explanatory Signage in Eastwater Valley on Closed Permitted Path**



**Close up of Signage**





**Signs of Severe Ash Die Back in Trees surrounding the Closed Permitted Footpath**



**Higher Reaches of the Eastwater Valley – Open Access Land but the Permitted Path is no longer maintained by the National Trust**



**Closure of Hinds Pitt Footbridge – May 2025**

The Hinds Pitt Foot Bridge crosses the River Barle approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles north of Tarr Steps. It forms a vital link in the very popular 'Tarr Steps Circular Walk' one of the most popular short walks in Exmoor National Park.



The bridge was installed in 1957, apparently by the Devon and Somerset Stage Hounds with help from the army, landowners and local people. It is a 'Bailey Bridge' and likely to date from WW2. Over the decades the bridge has been used more and more by the public, largely on foot but also by bicycle and on horseback. However, there is no public right of way across the bridge or on the eastern bank of the river at this point. A public bridleway (DU10/38) crosses the river 200 metres south of the footbridge via a deep ford. This bridleway continues northwards on the western bank of the River Barle passing the western end of Hinds Pitt Bridge. On the eastern bank, access to the bridge is via a long-standing permitted path (by kind permission of the landowners).

Whilst the bridge is not owned by ENPA, Exmoor National Park Authority has had the bridge regularly checked and sought to maintain it in line with expert advice, given the levels of public use and the value of the bridge to the public. 5-yearly engineer inspections have been carried out as well as 3 yearly inspections by ENPA Rangers and have highlighted the deterioration in the condition of the bridge. After the last 5-year inspection in 2019, maintenance work was carried out and fixed-point monitoring was put in place which checked for any sudden changes in the structure. Additionally, we installed signs on the bridge advising no more than 4 people on the

## ITEM D

bridge at any one time and absolutely no horses to cross the bridge. This has allowed us to keep the bridge open and safe to use for as long as possible whilst beginning discussions with the landowners on the eastern bank over the replacement of the bridge in the near future. These discussions progressed well without reaching any firm conclusions, but they hopefully will pave the way for a secure agreement for the bridge to be replaced.

The bridge was inspected by an engineer in May 2025 and was closed immediately on receipt of the report which found it to be an overall 'critical condition'. Understandably members of the public have voiced their frustration and disappointment at the closure of the bridge on this popular route. We have kept it open as long as we possibly can but now have no choice but to close it and direct all available resources to working with the relevant landowners towards getting it replaced as soon as possible. Public safety has been at the centre of all decisions relating to the bridge – and very much still is.



Photograph 17. -View of the Typical Section Loss to the diagonal Bracings

We have publicised the closure of the footbridge widely on our website and on social media. There is a FAQ page on the website which goes into more detail and highlights the fact that there is still plenty to do when visiting Tarr Steps:

[Hinds Pitt FAQs | Exmoor](#)

The bridge has been blocked off at both ends and there are notices on the ground to give advance warning that the river cannot be crossed at this point.





# FOOTBRIDGE CLOSED

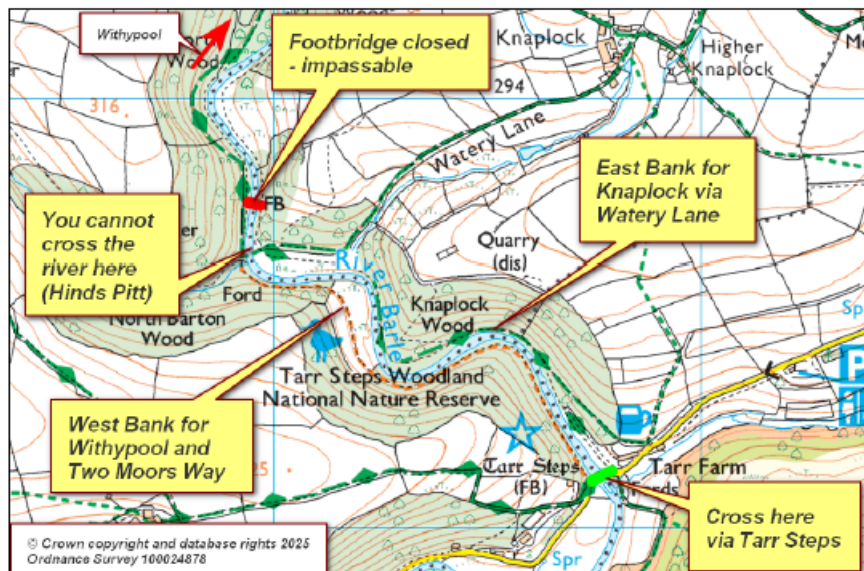
## FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

### Circular route not possible

You can still walk on both sides of the river but you cannot cross at Hinds Pitt and do a short circular walk.

The only crossing point available is at Tarr Steps shown in green.

For short walks we recommend the Knaplock Wood (East) side of the river.



**For Withypool & Two Moors Way, please use the west bank**

**For Knaplock via Watery Lane, please use the east bank**

*Signs on the approach to the bridge.*

With advice from consultant bridge engineers, we have considered whether anything can be done to safely extend the life of the existing structure. Unfortunately, there is no cost-effective option that will allow us to reopen the current structure, even for a short period of time. Our primary focus now is to keep working with all relevant landowners and other stakeholders on a plan for how and where Hinds Pitt Bridge will be replaced. We want to replace the Hinds Pitt bridge as quickly as we can and resolve the public access arrangements there, which for a long time have relied upon short-term agreements and unclear responsibilities for the bridge.

**Sue Applegate, Senior Public Rights of Way & Access Officer June 2025**