

# Rebalancing Exmoor for Young Workers and Residents

## Exmoor Young Voices Summit

### Charter Action Notes

From Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at The White Horse Inn, Exford

Partners at the Summit included: [Exmoor National Park Authority \(ENP\)](#); [Somerset West and Taunton Council \(SWT\)](#); [Somerset County Council \(SCC\)](#); [North Devon Council \(NDC\)](#); [Webbers Estate Agents](#); [Stags Estate Agents](#); [Magna Housing](#); [Falcon Housing](#); [Caractacus Housing](#); [LivWest Housing](#); [Somerset Rural Community Council \(SRCC\)](#); [Somerset Community Foundation](#); [Exmoor Young Voices](#) (the individuals representing these organisations are listed at the end of these Notes).

[Will Lock](#), Hawkridge, Chair of EYV, welcomed delegates to the Summit, and thanked Steven Pugsley, Leslie Silverlock and Sam Harris for chairing, organising and co-ordinating the Summit, and Peter and Linda Hendrie of the White Horse for hosting the event.

Will reported that Focus Groups, conducted by Les Silverlock across Exmoor for the National Park, identified 4 key issues as the main reasons why young people find it difficult to live and work on Exmoor - **planning, housing, employment** and **social mobility**. Will asked the Partners for flexibility and understanding to help overcome these barriers.

Four EYV speakers gave short presentations on their experiences of why young workers find it difficult to continue living in the Park.

1. [Nick Hosegood](#), Luxborough, self employed tree surgeon: after studying at university Nick returned to Exmoor, took an apprenticeship and then became self-employed. Living on the unrealistic apprenticeship wage and the cost of setting up his own business was only made possible because of financial support from his partner. Lack of space for work vehicles makes renting in the private and social rented sectors very difficult.
2. [Becky Nelder](#), Wheddon Cross, young working mother: moved into the private rented sector and struggled to get a deposit together (children, paying rent, and low wages). Received a small inheritance and bought a house in Cutcombe. Becky raised the issues of the local occupancy clause and the high cost of childcare (£40 a day plus transport to the venue and back to work). Requirement for good holiday childcare provision to encourage people to stay on the Moor.
3. [Sam Camp](#), Roadwater, self employed carpenter: finds it hard to get jobs as a sole trader. Household monthly bills in the region of £600 a month + the rent. High costs of heating due to poor quality of housing. Partner finds it difficult to find work that fits in with his self-employed work. Need 2 vehicles as they live in a remote area and partner and children would be isolated. Nursery provision is too expensive at £150 for 2 afternoons a month.
4. [Sam Harris](#), Withypool, equine business woman and trainee vet, lives and works on Exmoor: gave an example of 1 village on Exmoor where there are 8 people aged between 18-30. Out of the 8 only 2 have been able to continue living in the village, both at home with 3 generations, working for the family farm and building trade. They cannot afford their own property.

[Steven Pugsley](#), Chair, opening the discussion, gained Partners' agreement that the Meeting will reconvene in the New Year to sign up to a Charter of Promises to help young adults continue living and working on Exmoor, and begin to restore a better population balance.

## Housing

[Peter Pilkington](#) (SWT) opened the discussion saying that “The issues raised here are the same as those 40 years ago.”

**CHARTER PROMISE?** 1. [Young resident workers to be actively prioritised for housing, digital inclusion, social mobility, and employment.](#)

“The call for sites has had a good response. The EYV tour of self-build, eco-friendly properties was popular,” [Dean Kinsella](#) (ENP)

“The Council is keen to deliver its own stock but we want people to say what they want. It is important that developments take into account the lifestyle of their occupants,” Leader Cllr [Frederica Smith-Roberts](#) (SWT)

“The Council is committed to doing some work on the Moor and reaching out to all parts of the new District.” “ It ’s important that any developments are appropriate and small scale (2-3 units) and guided by people who want to live there.” “There is an issue on how to protect houses re: affordability – options include building social rented, private rented, or housing for open sale.”  
[James Hassett](#), CEO (SWT)

Cllr [Steven Pugsley](#) (Chair) commented that planning for a principal residency is the maximum that can be achieved, so people need to work closely with ENP.

[Dean Kinsella](#) (ENP) informed the group that ENP are working with SWT Council with respect to the landscape character, the ability to future proof properties, and to make the process as smooth as possible.

[James Hassett](#) (SWT) asked about volume of properties required. [Ruth McArthur](#) said the Local Plan identifies a need for 238 units but this is not a target.

Cllr [Peter Pilkington](#) (SWT) said that the housing needs surveys were up to date at the point in time they were carried out. Housing surveys are necessarily a snap shot in time. However, experience has shown that numbers of households in housing need tends to remain fairly constant over time if no new development is provided to meet the need.

[Dean Kinsella](#) (ENP) said that EYV members need to complete housing needs surveys as they have an important part to play.

[Will Lock](#) (EYV) said that all EYV should register on Homefinder even if they cannot afford to rent as this informs need. The length of time for the results of housing needs surveys (5-6 months) were considered to be too long and not current. Homefinder is an alternative way of getting a picture of the situation.

Comment: the difficulty of using Homefinder was deterring people from using the system and the chances of getting a property were slim - so why bother?

[Tony Murray](#) (Magna) Chair of the Homefinder Board said that the application process is too long and is putting people off. An agreement has been made with all the Local Authorities to review the process including the IT software. A new Homefinder co-ordinator has also been appointed.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 2.** Simplify Homefinder to one page for initial registration. EYV will then encourage the 960 young adults in its catchment area to register.

Tony Murray (Magna) said that there were a lot of myths that people who are on lower bandings do not have a chance of being housed via Homefinder. This is not the case and that many people are housed especially in areas of lower demand. There is help available to get people registered (Fiona Stevens at the Talking Cafes in Dulverton and Minehead, Village Agents and the Advice Bureau). Sue Southwell (SWT) said that paper based forms were available if applying online is not appropriate.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 3.** Produce joint/agreed wide advertising of all available help to register.

Nick Hosegood (EYV) suggested that good news stories should be published to increase profile of Homefinder. Cllr Peter Pilkington (SWT) suggested a big PR push to get all of the housing options available out to people.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 4.** A publicity drive targeting young workers both on and around Exmoor about new and easier access to housing options.

Becky Nelder (EYV) said that Homefinder and housing needs surveys do not capture the people who want to buy their own home. Tony Murray (Magna) added that shared ownership was an option which was available. Will Lock advised that it is a better option to build your own property than to enter into a shared ownership arrangement.

Cllr Steven Pugsley (chair) asked what is required to build more houses in the Park?

Sam Southam (Falcon) responded that proof of need, availability of land, and grant funding, although West Somerset is not eligible despite requests for the policy to be changed.

Cllr Francesca Smith (SWT) suggested that the group write to MP to lobby for a change to the criteria. Suggestion from the floor that this is taken to the Committee of the HSWLEP

**CHARTER PROMISE? 5.** Approach Exmoor MPs to create access to grant funding. Also discussion tabled at HSWLEP.

Sam Southam (Falcon) reported difficulties with establishing need and gave an example - Falcon put a 3 bed house up for rent (not through Homefinder); 12 people expressed an interest but only 1 applicant – it is very difficult to find out why people are not responding.

Comment: there is a problem with advertising. Sam Southam relies on groups like the EYV.

Will Lock said that social media is the best way forward but there is a cost implication and could this be covered? Queried whether the problem with letting the above property could be that it is not suitable – need for extra parking (quad bikes).

**CHARTER PROMISE? 6.** Housing Associations to make full use of social media and establish a strong line of communication with EYV.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 7.** Magna bid for affordable sites and subsidise these to make them truly affordable.

Julia Ridge (SCC) commented on the decrease in numbers of children at Dulverton School as a sign of a general decrease in the population across Exmoor. The school was built for 250 and now accommodates 80 pupils. Data also shows high percentage of the population earn less than the living wage.

James Hassett (SWT) 80% of the population will be over 65 in the next decade and this will need to be rebalanced.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 8.** Understand that prioritising young workers means making exceptions in their favour and writing this into relevant documents.

Comment: people are leaving the area and there is a need to encourage people into the area – focus on looking outwards.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 9.** Facilitate incoming small business and homeworking enterprise, by positive help in planning and access to grants. Does the Summit partnership need a dedicated worker to achieve this?

Ruth McArthur (ENP) “There is no a policy stopping people coming into the area. In the early 1990s all property was open market and people could afford to buy them but this is now impossible. Affordable housing did not have a local connection tie. Timberscombe had an affordable housing development built and the highest need came from outside the area – local residents missed out and this caused bad feeling. Local connection was brought in as a result.”

**CHARTER PROMISE? 10.** Place local needs above external need, even if that entails waiting.

Dan James (ENP) said that affordability was related to raising the average wage.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 11.** Reconsider affordability in the light of £312 per week average gross wage.

Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair) concluded by saying that a debate needed to be held between the ENP and the Housing Associations and that more assistance needed to be made available to people to help them register on Homefinder.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 12.** ENP and HAs to work jointly producing a simple process for initial registration (see Promise 2).

## Planning

Dean Kinsella (ENP) ENP is actively looking at what can be done with design on self builds and continuing the dialogue regarding opportunities and sites available. Some Local Authorities have a policy on the percentage of self builds which changes depending on the size of the development.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 13.** Limited self build and sites to be encouraged for young resident workers.

Cllr Steven Pugsley asked if social housing providers will look at self build?

**CHARTER PROMISE? 14.** Social housing providers to report on options and possibilities for self build.

Adam Preece (LivWest) replied it was difficult due to the grant funding situation. Results of the survey are needed but this takes 6 months – there is a need to get everyone involved.

James Hassett suggested that serviced plots would allow demand to be assessed without high investment costs if the plots were not taken.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 15.** Serviced plots and sites to be identified.

Will Lock An issue with self build is that quite often they cannot be built where they are wanted/needed. Reference made to difficulties with S106 and mortgages but EYV are working with ENP and the Build Store company.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 16.** ENP, Webbers and EYV to continue working together on mortgage options for S106.

Affordability – low wages and high house prices (second homes) – social rent is hard to afford for some people.

**Napoleon Wilcox** (Webbers) questioned whether the rent was higher on Exmoor than compared to Taunton. Property rented to people in recent months – only 3 came from outside the area and only 9% of the houses sold by Webbers in past 12 months were for second homes. Market driven by retirees.

**Sam Camp** (EVY) commented that the running costs of properties are high in poor quality housing stock. Their night store heaters cost £800 a quarter on top of the £600 monthly rent.

**Adam Preece** (LivWest) asked what is an affordable rent?

**Will Lock** – rent is relative to wages and high living costs – car/transport, petrol etc

**Julia Ridge** (SCC) **average wage is £312 week before tax and average rent is £90 week = costs of £888 a month – fuel, CT, heating and lighting, petrol, childcare, food, clothing etc.** The optimum population to retain the infrastructure on Exmoor needs to be maintained.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 17.** Identify the optimum young adult population for Exmoor needed to retain the infrastructure. Use this information to obtain grants, lower rent and higher wages.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 18.** Identify ways to encourage owners of underused property to consider full-time occupancy.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 19.** Publicise the option to transfer occupancy of dedicated holiday cottages to full-time local needs.

## Employment

What can be done to boost employment on Exmoor?

**James Hassett** (SWT) “The most likely source of employment is in the care sector. Needs to be a shift in attitude towards working in the industry – massive shortfall of employees but low paid.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 20.** Create and promote opportunities for local young workers to work in the care sector, employed or self employed.

**Cllr Frances Nicholson** (SCC) Attractive industry needs to be brought into the area – high tech, low environmental impact and connectivity is improving.

**Dean Kinsella** said coverage is being extended to improve high tech work from home.

**Dan James** commented that a lot of focus was on downsizing and the positive needs to ‘beef up’ – connectivity is improving and is much better than many other areas. **1/3 population working in agriculture, 1/3 tourism and 1/3 ‘other’.** **40% of people are home based workers** – true picture is not known and Exmoor Rural Enterprise aims to identify what is going on on the moor.

**Simon Zeal** (Stags) Connectivity is a must for the majority of house purchases.

**CHARTER PROMISE? 21.** Promote Exmoor as a business destination for high-tech, low environmental impact industry, especially where connectivity is good.

**Cllr Steven Pugsley** What can the Local Authority do to increase inward investment?

**Cllr Marcus Kravis** (SWT) Market what is already there and boost investment to boost wages. Inward investment database being created. **James Hassett** said that data sharing can be co-ordinated.

Improvements in connectivity. **Dean Kinsella** said that ENP are looking at small scale equipment to improve coverage.

**Cllr Frederica Smith-Roberts** 5G is coming to the area but not wanted by some people on health grounds.

Comment: on the growth of Micro Providers.

## Social Mobility

Covers more than just education.

[Julia Ridge](#) (SCC) Raised the transport inequalities – full price for young people and discount for the elderly. Young people are not listened to.

Working on setting up a business hub for remote workers at Dulverton School (legacy from West Somerset Opportunities Area - WSOA). If successful this will bring in more people and provide childcare facilities.

Cllr [Peter Pilkington](#) reiterated that young people are not supported – Community Car Share scheme concentrate on the elderly not the young. Transport Agent now funded by WSOA to look at potential answers.

**CHARTER PROMISE?** Make young resident workers the priority for transport, business enterprise, and childcare.

Cllr [Steven Pugsley](#) thanked the EYV for giving up part of their working day and devoting so much time and energy to the cause. Organisations are asked, now, to work within their own agencies on Charter Promises which they will be able to action when the partnership reconvenes in the New Year.

Present	Organisation	Present	Organisation
Steven Pugsley, Chair	EYV Advisor and Somerset West and Taunton Council	Will Lock	Chair of EYV
Peter Pilkington	Somerset West and Taunton Council	Nick Hosegood	Exmoor Young Voices
Dean Kinsella	Exmoor National Park	Becky Nelder	Exmoor Young Voices
Frederica Smith-Roberts	Somerset West and Taunton Council	Sam Camp	Exmoor Young Voices
James Hassett	Somerset West and Taunton Council	Sam Harris	Exmoor Young Voices
Ruth McArthur	Exmoor National Park	Tony Murray	Magna Housing
Sue Southwell	Somerset West and Taunton Council	Sam Southam	Falcon Housing
Francesca Smith	Somerset West and Taunton Council	Julia Ridge	Somerset County Council
Dan James	Exmoor National Park	Adam Preece	LivWest Housing
Napoleon Wilcox	Webbers Estate Agents	Frances Nicholson	Somerset County Council
Simon Zeal	Stags Estate Agents	Marcus Kravis	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Tony Sloley	Caractacus Housing	Fiona cousins	Caractacus Housing

Becky Brown	Somerset West and Taunton Council		Leslie Silverlock	EYV Advisor
Keith Ross	EYV Trustee		Justin Sargent	Somerset Community Foundation
Sarah Bryan	Exmoor National Park		Fiona Stevens	Magna Housing
Michael Tichford	North Devon Council		Jane Lillis	Somerset Community Council
Jeff Brown	West Somerset Opportunity Area			