

Somerset Fingerpost regeneration project

Somerset County Council

Community

£15,000

Back in the 1960s, Highway Authorities were advised to remove all fingerposts and replace them with the modern, standardised road signs, now found everywhere. In Somerset this advice was ignored, resulting in Somerset having a wonderful back catalogue of fingerposts, remaining as iconic landmarks in our countryside and offering a tantalising glimpse into the past. Somerset County Council (SCC) has cared for these unofficial highway signs for more than 60 years but, as funding from central government continues to fall, it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify spending precious resources on non-mandatory services. Many road signs, such as safety and hazard signs, are mandatory but fingerposts are still classed as “nice to have” rather than essential.

Many local communities were interested in preserving these iconic landmarks for future generations to enjoy. Following meetings with Exmoor National Park (ENPA) and Southwest Heritage Trust, the Somerset Fingerpost Restoration Project was started.

South West Heritage Trust and SCC produced the “Somerset Traditional Fingerposts Maintenance, Repair & Restoration Handbook” and the project was rolled out across Exmoor in 2017. A Heritage Lottery grant and contributions by ENPA and SCC paid for a part time Project Manager, replacement components, repairs, paint and materials. It also funded ‘Highways Safety Awareness Training’ workshops and personal protective equipment.

An App produced by Device Magic allows volunteers to capture location and condition data so that it can be uploaded on to a map-based web page, viewable by the public.

SCC/ENPA are pleased to report that this project has had no reported Health and Safety incidents to date.

In conclusion, an identified need, enthusiastic community volunteers, targeted funded by public bodies, the innovative involvement of specialist small/medium enterprises, delivering a highly visible, well received project, makes this, in our opinion, a winner!