**Introducing a Westbury Tree Group**

Westbury Parish Council has established a Tree Group.

When this idea was first mooted a village meeting was the obvious way to introduce the group but, due to current restrictions, we are delighted to introduce ourselves here.

Our motto is:

“*Plant the right tree in the right place*”

It is quite topical to state that this motto is based on science but it’s important when thinking about tree planting to consider the specific environment we live in, namely the steep southern scarp of the Mendip Hills (on the edge of the AONB) and the edge of the distinctive Somerset Levels.

This landscape contains important examples of an internationally scarce natural environment, namely unimproved upland calcareous grassland.

There is a need to increase the tree cover in the UK because of Global Warming and the many threats to our biodiversity.

Simply covering our hills with trees is not an option, we need a more nuanced approach. The most recent Somerset Wildlife Trust magazine puts it succinctly ‘if you want to plant trees first look at the flowers’.

Ash dieback, for which there is no remedy, has been creeping into our parish for some time but this year many trees are showing active signs of decay - this poses problems for all community landowners, large and small. There is a need to balance safety (as some trees become unsafe) against the possibility that some may survive.

In our community the large-scale loss of ash will mean losing very many of our hedgerow trees - Somerset County Council estimates we will lose 70% of our ash trees in the next 10 years - in our parish we might lose at least 40% of our tree cover.

This will mean that, at a time when we need to increase the tree cover, we will be going backwards, but who better to think about and work on this than those of us who live in and love our special landscape, especially as so many of us have garnered both solace and comfort in our natural surroundings in these uncertain and troubling times.

It is summer and not a time for planting trees but a great time to;

* learn what we can do to support our land in the coming months
* to develop a plan to help protect and restore
* develop appropriate tree planting plans
* to offer some support or direct landowners to appropriate help
* to investigate funding sources to help with the costs

Please contact us if you are interested in getting involved.

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