

**May 2021**



## ***Lights on! Lights off!***

**W**estbury-sub-Mendip is a gateway village to the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). AONBs are nationally recognised special places where the natural environment is celebrated and protected. The Mendip Hills AONB has a Dark Skies policy and back in 2007/8 Westbury Parish Council decided it would adopt a similar one.

The Council explored sources of light pollution and undertook a whole village survey of opinion on street lighting. The results were very clear. The majority of residents to the North of the A371 wanted streetlights turned off while those to the South in the Lodge Hill and Stoneleigh estates wanted them to remain on, which they still do.

After some lengthy negotiations with County Council Highways (Oh, we don't have a policy or procedure for that!) the great switch off was achieved. At the same time the Council organised talks on how to minimise domestic light spillage and a visit from a portable planetarium which was set up in the village hall. This allowed small parties of schoolchildren and interested adults to learn more about the heavens above us.

After nearly fifteen years there have been changes in who lives in the village and newer residents may be less aware of why Dark Skies are important and what we can all do to contribute positively to the quality of our night-time environment – for instance have you looked lately at your outside lighting? How sensitive are the sensors and do the lights just point downwards? Many of the planning applications for new builds and extensions which come before the Council include a lot of glazing and roof lights with no mention of how light spillage might be contained by good blinding and curtaining. A sensitivity to such factors can make the difference between approval and rejection.



*A pollarded ash in Cook's Field at night  
(photo by Tina Westcott)*

The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has campaigned for the importance of Dark Skies for some years and runs an annual star count, getting people to count the number of stars they can see in the constellation of Orion on one occasion over a two week period. This year we asked local stargazers to share their information with us and a few did. Our results showed scores of between eight and thirteen, but there are more than twenty to see! (In the City of Bristol

a more usual score is three.) However, the CPRE suggests seeing below ten suggests some level of light pollution, so clearly we could be doing more to protect the Mendip environment.

To help us on the way forward I have invited Judith Chubb-Whittle, Planning Officer for the AONB, to be the guest speaker at the annual parish meeting at 6pm on Weds 5 May. She says that her talk is a look at the impact of lighting and development design on the landscape, the environment, and the special quality of Dark Night Skies of the Mendip Hills AONB. We will consider why we need lighting to be in the right

place, the right amount of lighting, and for the right amount of time, and how this can be achieved through appropriate building and lighting design.

I'm really looking forward to it and hope as many of you as possible will be able to join us – Zoom link available from me or Kate, our Parish Clerk, from Mon 3 May, or to be seen on the agenda which is already on the village notice boards and website.

**Sue Isherwood**  
**Kate Egan**

## *Local Government and you*

**H**ow many of us know how local government works and what local councils provide for us? It's particularly confusing in rural England where there are first tier (county councils), second tier (district councils) and third tier ones (parishes). For instance, if you want to find out about roads, then the county council is responsible. Rights of way are also a county responsibility, but work on the ground is often delegated to districts. Districts are the main planning authorities, but not if the matter concerns quarries and aggregates, an important concern for Mendip. Libraries are a county responsibility, but sports and leisure centres are largely managed by districts. I could go on, but at the risk of losing you completely.

So why is it important to know a bit about this? Well, local services are of more daily utility to most of us than the shenanigans at Westminster. And changes in local government delivery will affect how those services will be delivered. Currently England is the odd country out in the UK where Scotland, Wales and N Ireland have all moved to unitary authorities some time ago. England is now being reorganised on a piecemeal basis. That means that counties and districts have merged with some areas, for example Cornwall having one new authority covering the historic county area while others have created new unitaries with new boundaries. For instance, historic Cheshire

has become two authorities, East Cheshire and Cheshire West with Chester.

Robert Jenrick, the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, decided that it was time to consider proposals for unitary government for Somerset. A decision will be made by the minister alone this summer and we will have a new council from 2023. There are two competing proposals on the table. There is One Somerset, led by the County Council, which proposes a single authority using the borders established in 1974. (Old Somerset was larger, but N Somerset and Bath and NE Somerset were bitten off and established as unitaries at that time.) This would still be one of the largest and most rurally dispersed unitaries in the country. The four District Councils propose Stronger Somerset, which suggests two unitaries based on East Somerset (current Mendip and South Somerset) and West Somerset (current Taunton Deane and Somerset West and Sedgemoor). They would establish shared delivery vehicles to manage children's services and adult social care. (There are already examples of all the Somerset authorities working as one – see the current Somerset Waste Partnership.)

There are, of course, far more detail and arguments about cost savings in the submission documents. If you want to go full nerd then you can access the rival proposals via the SCC and district websites – [click here](#) for One Somerset and [click here](#) for Stronger Somerset.

The formal consultation period has just ended, but the latest news on this front is that the district councils are hoping to go ahead with a referendum on the subject, despite strong discouragement from the minister.

### ***What the councils said on 22 April***

“The proposal for a local poll to give every elector in Somerset a vote on the two options for the future shape of local government in the county is now to be considered by district councils at the end of next week.

“You will know that the original item submitted was deferred while the councils sought further legal advice on the matters raised by the Local Government Secretary in his letter to us.

“Advice has now been received from James Goudie, Queen's Counsel. This advice will be reflected in the proposal going before members next week.

“The proposal recommends the holding of a local poll, with voting online or by post, starting on 18 May and ending on 4 June.”

Watch this space, as they say. If you would like to read some comment from local writers on this topic, [click here](#).

Whichever unitary proposal is chosen by the minister, it will have implications at parish level. There will be a democratic deficit as there will be fewer elected councillors with larger wards and so increased distance from local communities and needs. It will be important that parish voices are heard. Westbury-sub-Mendip is a small council with only seven councillors and a tiny precept, so we have just started meeting with other small parishes around Wells, facilitated by St Cuthbert's Out Parish, to discuss matters of common concern, highways, housing, planning and dark skies being among them. The idea is that we prepare our level of government to have a stronger voice for local issues as we move to the new unitary model. Both proposals acknowledge an increased role for parishes. We will need to be ready to hold the new system to account.

At the annual parish meeting on 5 May from 6pm we will have an annual report from me and others from our Rights of Way Officer and the Chairs of the playing field and village hall trustees. Most importantly will be asking those attending for their ideas about what should be our parish priorities. Or you can contact me or our clerk directly with your issues and ideas. We promise to consider them and try to act on your wishes at our monthly meetings.

**Sue Isherwood**

## ***Older Village Website Documents***

There is a village website bug that is preventing older (before April 2020) documents on the website from opening properly. A fix is being lined up, but needs discussion at the next Parish Council meeting. Hopefully the bug will be corrected soon after the 5th of May.



# *Spring is in full swing – and we need (some of) your weeds!*



*Westbury Tree Nursery, showing the netting and wind protection recently purchased with generous funding from the Westbury Society*

**I**t is that time of year again, when all that is stopping the weeds getting out of hand is vigilance, hard work and dry weather. Westbury is a village with many keen gardeners and many lovely gardens. Keeping on top of the weed problem can be hard work. It is often said that a weed is simply a plant in the wrong place – though in the case of bindweed I must confess I am hard put to think where the right place might be.

Our squirrels and jays were hard at work last year stashing away hazel nuts and acorns against the hunger of the winter months, and quite often forgetting where they hid them. Birds have been busy excreting the seeds of many other trees and bushes. Certainly I seem to get hawthorn sprouting from nowhere. Some of us in the village have been germinating seeds and potting up saplings to put into the new tree

nursery that is being established at Court House Farm. Once these have grown on suitably they will be moved to permanent sites. We have learned a good deal in this our first growing season, not least the somewhat annoying fact that it takes 18 months to germinate hawthorn from seed. It looks as though it will be some time before we have many plants for landowners to use.

So next time you are clearing your weeds away, and you come across seedling plants or saplings of hawthorn, hazel, oak, wayfaring tree, rowan, or other native trees, think before you throw away! You could pot them up and give them to the tree nursery. We can look after them until they are big enough for a more permanent home.

**Buffy Fletcher**

# ***Staying in touch***

## **Chair**

**Sue Isherwood**

**[sueisherwood9@gmail.com](mailto:sueisherwood9@gmail.com)**

**01749 870457**

## **Vice Chair**

**Ros Wyke**

**[cllr.wyke@mendip.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.wyke@mendip.gov.uk)**

**01749 870347**

## **Buffy Fletcher**

**[buffyfletcher@hotmail.com](mailto:buffyfletcher@hotmail.com)**

**01749 870531**

## **John Millbank**

**[johnmillbo@btinternet.com](mailto:johnmillbo@btinternet.com)**

**07768 465515**

## **Sue Reece**

**[sureece1@btinternet.com](mailto:sureece1@btinternet.com)**

**01749 870618**

## **Guy Timson**

**[guytimson@hotmail.com](mailto:guytimson@hotmail.com)**

**07885 025755**

## **Jo Tucker**

**[jo.poplarfarm@gmail.com](mailto:jo.poplarfarm@gmail.com)**

**01749 870120**

## **Clerk**

**Kate Egan**

**[clerk@westburysubmendip-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@westburysubmendip-pc.gov.uk)**

**01749 343910**

## **Newsletter Editor**

**Martin West**

**[martin\\_west@btinternet.com](mailto:martin_west@btinternet.com)**

**01749 870009**

# **Annual Parish Meeting**

All residents of Westbury Sub Mendip Parish are invited to attend the Annual Parish Meeting to be held virtually via Zoom

**On Wednesday 5th May 2021**

**At 6.00pm**

**For the Zoom link, [click here](#)**

Meeting ID: 817 6219 2213

Passcode: 387452

Telephone Number: 0208 0806592

## **AGENDA**

1. Apologies for absence
2. To receive the Chairman's annual report
3. Report from the Village Hall Committee - Chair Peter Bright
4. Report from The Robert Glanville Playing Field Trust – Chair Cllr Guy Timson
5. Report from the Rights of Way and Footpaths Officer – Colin Booth
6. Guest speaker *on Dark Skies - Lights on! Lights Off!* Judith Chubb Whittle, Planning Officer for the Mendip Hills AONB.
7. Matters to Consider

# Anyone for tennis....?

With the lighter evenings and improving weather, why not come down to the playing field for a game of tennis on the all weather surface? Our village is fortunate to have such a facility – not only for tennis, but also for netball and basketball.

The AWS was installed five years ago after a huge fundraising effort by the committee – which took ten years to come to fruition! Funds were raised through events such as Quiz Nights and the 100 Club, and stewarding at Glastonbury Festival. Grants were applied for and awarded by Mendip District Council, Simply Health, Clarks Foundation, Health and Well Being Fund and the Friendly Society, and there were a number of donations from local residents and businesses. We also enjoyed tremendous support from the Parish Council with our planning application.

Monies also have to be set aside, under Charity Commission guidelines, for a 'sinking fund'. This ensures that the AWS can be properly maintained. These funds are ring-fenced and cannot be used for other maintenance or projects on the playing field. Recently, the AWS was cleaned by Charles Lawrence Tennis Courts, the installers. The surface was thoroughly and professionally high-pressure washed and a moss treatment was applied.

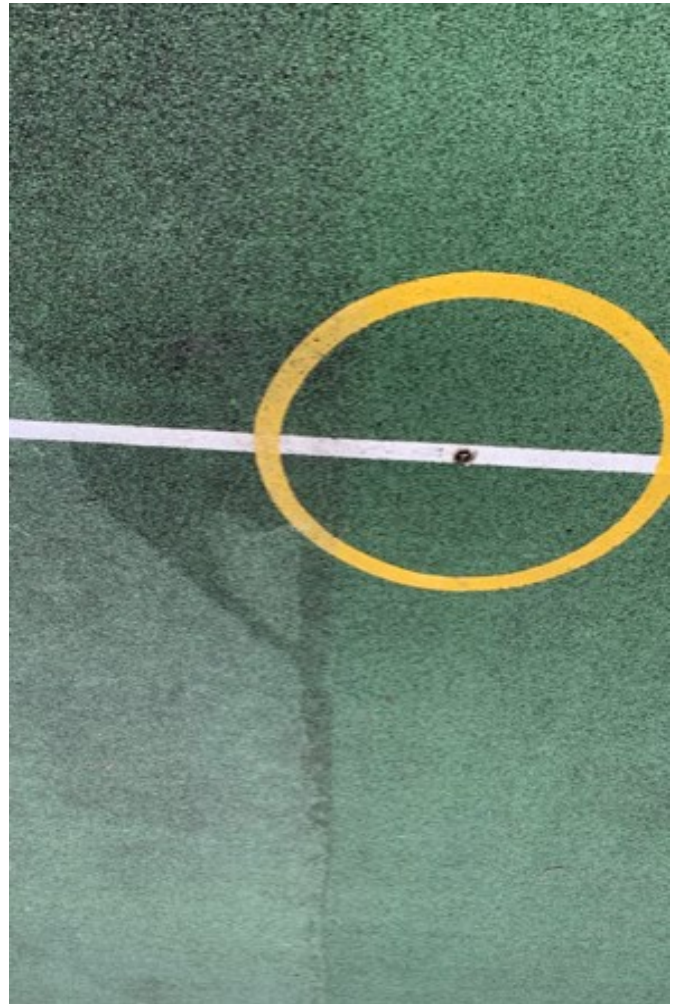
A new net has also been purchased and will be in place shortly.

So....all spruced up and ready for the spring and summer season!

## Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Election

Village Hall – Thursday, 6 May 2021

For candidate information, [click here](#)



*The all weather surface before and after cleaning*

The court is unlocked and free to use on a casual basis. It can also be booked through the Village Shop and those who've booked have priority over casual users.

On Friday afternoons, a number of adults come to 'Turn Up and Play' at a charge of £1.50 per person. If more than four players arrive, they take turns to swap in and out – and catch up with each other. All abilities, an active yet social event! For more information, please contact me (870009).

**Helen West**