

June 2021



Use your vote by 4th June

IN LAST MONTH'S newsletter I outlined the importance of local government to our everyday lives. At that point there were two proposals for unitary authority reorganisation before the local government minister, Robert Jenrick. It was unclear whether the four Somerset Districts would go forward with their proposal to seek local people's opinions through a referendum. This is now definitely going ahead and you should all have received a postal notification from Mendip District Council last



Photo by [Glen Carrie](#) on [Unsplash](#)

week. You have until Friday, 4 June to cast your vote which you can do by post (allow two days at least) or **online**.

There has been lots of altercation between the two sets of proposers and local MPs have also had their say. As a reminder of the two arguments I suggest you see the following websites so that you can make up your own mind, but do have your say.

Sue Isherwood

A reminder of the proposals

For the SCC proposal, **[click here](#)**.

For the District Councils' proposal, **[click here](#)**.

Our hedges need help

THE WEEK BEGINNING 29TH MAY has been designated National Hedgerow Week. Its aim is to celebrate our hedges and alert the public to the risks they face. We are very lucky in Westbury in that we still retain extensive lengths of hedgerow around the village, something that many communities – for instance those in cereal growing areas – no longer enjoy. Most are still managed in a way that keeps livestock secure in a traditional way.

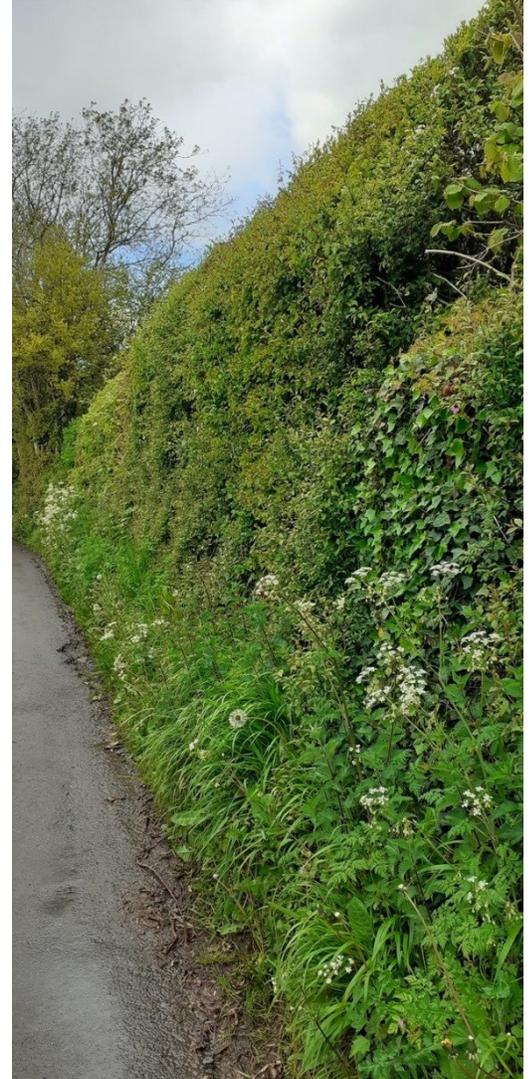
Hedges need to be thought about in other ways too. Their role in supporting wildlife of every sort is particularly important. Hedgerows are the road system for many animals and plants, enabling them to move through the landscape in search of food and new homes. The effects of global warming mean that these highways are now even more important. Warmer weather is causing a slow northern migration of many species and some are moving uphill because of their specialised needs. The significant decline of various species from sparrows to frogs, and the similar reduction in insect populations, mean we need to maximise the support to our local environment in order to sustain and promote wildlife.

Hedges are also important for livestock, providing shelter and food. How we manage hedgerows can help this process along. If a hedge is not cut every year it may look a little untidy. But it could give a tree a chance to grow through the hedge thereby allowing the landowner to promote its growth and replace our dying ash standards. Less frequent cutting helps provide food for birds in the winter, as some trees fruit on second year growth. Letting hedges grow taller increases the shelter available for livestock. And cutting so they are slightly wider at the base increases the light falling on all parts of the hedge and thus helps stop it getting 'leggy'. Although it can look savage, flailing is an effective means of hedge management since that creates a better hedge in the long term provided there is no cutting into the old wood below the new growth.

Trees in hedges provide shade in hot weather as well as being important for birds, insects and bats. The advance of Ash dieback through the local area is threatening this resource for both livestock and wildlife. In many situations there is no alternative to felling or pollarding these diseased trees as they could be a hazard to life. But we do need to plan the replacement of our hedgerow trees so that future generations will still see Westbury looking as lovely as it does now. This is not an easy task as it can be hard to add new trees into a hedge. If the hedge is left to grow up a bit, however, it might be possible to promote one or two trees already within the hedge to become the standards of the future.

Over the next few years, the tree group is working to provide trees that could be added to our hedges where landowners think this could work. Please contact us if you are contemplating creating a new native hedge, restoring an old one, or if you think you could accommodate one or two standard trees.

Buffy Fletcher, Westbury-sub-Mendip Community Tree Group



Westbury Community Shop AGM



WE ARE EXTREMELY fortunate to still have a village shop and post office in the village and we owe a great debt of gratitude to all the staff and volunteers who make possible its survival. Over the last year especially, it has proved its worth to the community, providing a safe shopping environment for essentials and operating a home delivery service for all those isolating.

This year's AGM for the shop is on 2nd June, starting at 6pm and held on Zoom.

Please note that the AGM has to be **quorate**, and the rules require 10 per cent, so 28 people, to be in attendance. Simon Reece, the Chairman, says, " I'd be very grateful if we could achieve this as successfully as we did the last AGM, also held by Zoom, so we do not have to re-organise in accordance with the rules."

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

Meeting ID: 847 4301 7210

Passcode: 94110

Agenda

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of the AGM 18th November 2020 (circulated).
3. Matters arising from the AGM of 18th November 2020.
4. Chairman's remarks.
5. 2020 Accounts (circulated) and Treasurer's report.
6. Shop activity in 2021.
7. Membership report.
8. Forward planning.
9. Committee: To consider Amanda Matthews for election to the committee (proposed by Simon Reece).
10. To appoint accountants to conduct an independent review for the 2021 accounts.
11. AOB.

Thank you, Simon

SPECIAL THANKS are owed to Simon Reece who will be stepping down as Chairman after five years. He has seen the shop through some trying times and risen to every challenge. The Parish Council has supported the community shop from the beginning and urges everyone to continue to use it. And volunteers are its lifeblood, so think if you could spare just a few hours in the week to help the organisation to go from strength to strength.

Sue Isherwood

Why we need a ban on using peat

NEW S THAT THE GOVERNMENT is contemplating a partial ban on the use of peat in horticulture is welcome even if inconvenient for gardeners. Once taken from the bogs where it forms, peat dries out and degrades, releasing carbon that has taken hundreds of years to accumulate. Despite knowing that we should stop this environmentally damaging practice we have so far relied on voluntary action that has been wholly ineffective.

It was way back in 2010 when government first consulted on a set of proposals for reducing the use of peat in England. They envisaged that compost used by amateur gardeners would become peat free by 2020 and that for professional growers by 2030. For over a decade very little happened. The 2020 target for garden centres to remove peat was ignored and only two leading retailers have plans to phase out sales in the future.

Now, according to the headlines, the government is committed to phase out peat by 2024, although the actual proposal, set out in the England Peat Action Plan, says only: "We will consult on banning the sale of peat and peat containing products in the amateur sector by the end of this parliament."

Peat bogs are one of the most important stores of carbon in the UK and worldwide. A hectare of peat 30cm to 50cm deep stores as much carbon as a hectare of tropical rain forest and more carbon is locked up in peat worldwide than in all the vegetation on the planet. It is in theory renewable but only very slowly – the average peat bog grows less than a millimetre per year.

Yet we continue to use three billion litres in our gardens every year instead of feasible alternatives!

Somerset is one of the last areas of England where peat is still extracted. Although no new licences for peat digging are being granted a

small number of firms retain the right to produce peat products, largely for horticulture. Commercial peat digging destroys rare and valuable plant and animal communities and leaves the land in a degraded state. By stripping away the living surface vegetation to get at the stored peat beneath, it removes the means of regeneration. Restoring the natural ecosystem is complex and time consuming and for most practical purposes impossible.

The picture in Somerset is complicated by a major environmental success story. Conservation bodies working on the Somerset Levels have taken over many of the sites of former peat workings and created a huge new wetland habitat. The Avalon Marshes Project has seen the creation of new reed beds and areas of open water that have become highly attractive to wildlife. The marshes are now a stronghold for the nationally scarce bittern for example, and host exciting new arrivals like the Great White Egret.

The fact that derelict peat workings can be rescued and turned into valuable wildlife habitat does not mean however that continued digging is fine. The original lowland heath with its distinctive ecosystem cannot be replaced and biodiversity is lost. Moreover, the carbon store built up over hundreds and in some cases thousands of years is destroyed contributing to the climate emergency.

Although Somerset Wildlife Trust are proud of the reserves they have created they are clear that "the best option for nature and the environment is to keep peat in the ground, and to keep it wet."

We must do more to reduce the damage to our shrinking peatlands. We need to reverse the drainage of upland bogs and stop the practice of burning heather on moorland. But we can all help simply by going peat free at the garden centre and making our own compost at home.

Mick Fletcher

The Westbury-Sub-Mendip Scarecrow Competition



**Build a scarecrow and help motorists drive carefully
through the village**

Design your scarecrow with a "traffic calming" theme

Prizes to be won



Entry forms and competition rules will be available from the village shop
and **[parish council website](#)**

Scarecrows will be positioned around the village to encourage safe driving



More information available soon!

Fire!

A **S SPRING FINALLY** advances there's lots of tidying up to do in the garden. And that makes for large amounts of waste. Just lately there have been several complaints about garden bonfires which have blown smoke and unpleasant fumes across other people's gardens and through their windows. This is particularly distressing for those who suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems.

Could we all be thoughtful about how we dispose of waste and use an incinerator or notice the direction of the wind and keep our fires under control?



Another fire risk comes from electric appliances in the house, particularly old fan heaters.

As it gets warmer we will be putting such equipment away, but before you use them again do get them checked out and tested – see the picture above of what could happen.

The Annual Parish Meeting

THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING took place via Zoom on Wednesday, 5th May and was well attended. For those who couldn't be there, my annual report and those of our Footpaths Officer and Village Hall Chair are available [here](#).

Our guest speaker was Judith Chubb Whittle, Planning Officer for the AONB, who gave a really convincing argument for the importance of Dark Skies. Unfortunately, her brilliant slides are just too big a file for us to load onto the website, but they are available by email from our clerk, [Kate Egan](#), as is an oral recording of Judith's words.

I'll reiterate what I said on the night. The parish council is here to serve its community so if there's anything you think we should be doing or would like us to do more of, then just let me know.

Sue Isherwood

Let's talk about dogs (and what they do)

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE topic. During the last year, the Parish Council has, again, looked into providing some dog waste bins for the village. In the end we decided against, as the only bins that the Mendip DC would approve of and agree to empty on a regular basis were very expensive – into four figures! So, we could only afford one or two and then where would we place them to be of greatest use? We also thought that Westbury villagers were on the whole a very responsible lot and would know to bag their dog poo and take it home to deposit in their own rubbish bins. However, recently the council has received complaints of dog poo regularly appearing in gardens on Hannah's Lane. There have also been instances of full dog poo bags hung from hedges. I know most do this already, but please remember to clear up after your animals and take the litter home.

The difficulties are not just confined to the built-up Village. The honorary wardens for The Beacon as well as the volunteers and wider organisation of the AONB report concerns about the increasing 'use' of the countryside for dog walking. The difficulties come in two forms. The poo itself is high in nitrogen and phosphorous and so enriches the soil. The limestone grassland habitat depends on its being nutrient poor so that uncollected dog poo is actively harmful. With only such a small area of this

limestone habitat left in this country it seems important to maintain this little as best we can. The poo also contains parasites that affect cattle and sheep so that for any areas that are grazed – ie all of the Mendip Tops – this is a significant stock management issue.

The other effect is that dogs not on leads wander all over the place. This particularly disturbs ground nesting birds like skylarks and meadow pipits as well as adders. This disturbance reduces their nesting and reproductive success which has already been compromised by the intensification of farming across the wider countryside. Much of the purpose of the AONB and the Reserves across Mendip is to prioritise such biodiversity in the face of the pressures that operate across this wider countryside.

It is the dramatically increasing scale of such dog visits that is at the heart of this problem. If all dog walkers kept their dogs on leads and collected all their poo and

took it home to put in their own bins this would go a long way to mitigate the pressures on the habitats and the animals and plants that live in these reserves and special places.

And if any of you have ideas about how the village should deal with this problem, do let the council know.

Sue Isherwood and Peter Bright



Photo by [Matt Seymour](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Staying in touch

Chair

Sue Isherwood

sueisherwood9@gmail.com

01749 870457

Vice Chair

Ros Wyke

cllr.wyke@mendip.gov.uk

01749 870347

Buffy Fletcher

buffyfletcher@hotmail.com

01749 870531

John Millbank

johnmillbo@btinternet.com

07768 465515

Sue Reece

sureece1@btinternet.com

01749 870618

Guy Timson

guytimson@hotmail.com

07885 025755

Jo Tucker

jo.poplarfarm@gmail.com

01749 870120

Clerk

Kate Egan

clerk@westburysubmendip-pc.gov.uk

01749 343910

Newsletter Editor

Martin West

martin_west@btinternet.com

01749 870009

Travelling to Europe?



IF YOU HAVE an old **red passport**, to travel to the EU you will need a minimum of **six months** left on your passport on the day you return to the UK. In addition, your passport **must be less than ten years old**. That means any passports with carried-over months will need up to fifteen months' validity (that's the regular six months, plus any you've carried over from a previous renewal). The rules are less stringent if going to the Republic of Ireland.

You can check the validity of your passport [here](#).

If you have a new **blue passport**, there should be no problem at all.

Your EHIC (European Health Insurance Card) should be valid until it expires. It can then be replaced with a GHIC (Global Health Insurance Card) available on the NHS website [here](#).

If you use another site you may be charged – this site is free.

If you have a smart phone, you can download the NHS app (not the Covid one) and your record of Covid injections and dates, along with medical history, should be visible to you – possibly a useful check if travelling.

Sue Reece