**Response to the Consultation for the Church Commissioners’ Proposal for the Roughmoor Lane Development**

1. **Public Consultation**

The way in which village residents been consulted about this proposal has not been sufficient either to inform about the plans or to engage with viewpoints regarding the impact this will have on our community.

Holding a public consultation via Zoom, at 5:00pm has excluded working people and those not able to use the internet or to connect to Zoom from the process.

In order to present the proposal to the village in a fair, inclusive manner, a face-to-face public meeting needs to be held as soon as possible, to provide clarity on the plans, and also to gauge public opinion and gain a full picture of the housing needs that exist within the local community.

1. **Density of buildings**

The plans are currently for up to 60 dwellings to be built on the area outlined for development. While the Local Plan specifies a minimum of 40, to put 60 buildings on this site is a huge increase on the minimum number, and is not necessary in order to satisfy the conditions of the Local Plan. This would also require the loss of excellent agricultural land and obliterate the open aspect of the neighbourhood. There seems no justification for more than 40 buildings other than profit.

Such a high density of additional properties would greatly increase the village population and that of the wider local community, taking into consideration similar developments in neighbouring localities. I strongly believe that Westbury would be better served by infill development over a longer timescale, making use of existing spaces along the main road and within the village development limit as set out in the Local Plan. This would be far more appropriate in terms of population increase and the nature of the properties themselves.

1. **Roads and Safety**
2. While the junction onto Roughmoor Lane from the A371 is already dangerous in its present state, the new proposed access is not fir for purpose. Currently, this road is used by farm vehicles that are extremely wide, in addition to cars going to and from residential houses. The bend in the road shown on the plan combined with the need to go through a residential area makes it not only unviable but also extremely dangerous with regard to the vehicles that will be using it.
3. There is a pinch point on the A371 parallel to Roughmoor Lane which requires large vehicles to wait adjacent to the junction. An additional 120 vehicles would exacerbate this problem.
4. It has been pointed out that there is no safe point in the road going through the village to place a pedestrian crossing. The additional vehicles on the road combined with the proposed rerouting of the junction would have a severe impact on the safety of pedestrians and other road users going through the village. It is not clear from the plans how disabled, elderly or people with pushchairs would safely access village amenities. The Local Plan stipulates a requirement for safe pedestrian links – it is clear from the plan that this condition is not met by the current proposal.
5. **Adverse effect on the residential amenity of neighbours**

Residents of Roughmoor Lane and the Stoneleigh estate will have their long reaching views impacted by this and potential future development on the bottom half of the field. There is no evidence in the plan that adequate screening will be added to mitigate this. This condition is clearly not adequately met by the proposal and would undermine the safety, character and and nature of the landscape that is currently enjoyed by the residents of the neighbouring houses.

The additional traffic on the road directly adjacent to their properties and noise generated by new residences will also directly affect the residents of what is presently a quiet, predominantly agricultural area. Plans to locate the village hall (that people would be obliged to access by car) in front of existing residences and directly next to the playing fields would further increase traffic and cause congestion, with inadequate parking and poor road layout.

1. **Impact on AONB**

The map outlining the development limits set out in the Local Plan clearly shows the AONB boundaries. From certain points in and around the village, there would be a very clear view of the development e.g. from the footpath running along the hill of Broadhay the view would be looking directly down on it. There are many other locations within the AONB boundary where this is also the case e.g. Deer Leap. I would call for a further survey to be done of the visual impact of the development on the immediate surroundings.

1. **Section 106 and Allocation for Community Usage**
2. The allocation for Community use is not fit for purpose in the context of the village. The area earmarked for a new village hall is comparatively small, and very poorly designed, with no car parking facilities and poor access for village residents. This really needs to be reconsidered if residents from other areas of the village are to use this facility. It would be difficult for elderly residents to access. A person from the other end of the village would have a long and potentially dangerous walk to get there and back. This aspect of the plan needs to be reconsidered. I would also question why the buildings alongside the proposed development site are not to be used for a community hall, shop or car park.
3. I feel there is a strong case for a Section 106 obligation to include more land to be set aside for the benefit of village residents e.g. for a community orchard, forest garden or allotment site. This is something that the village does not currently have as an asset, primarily because no land has been available to set aside for this purpose.
4. **Dark Skies**

Westbury-sub-Mendip is designated as a dark skies village with minimal lighting at night. Any street lighting would not only change the character of the village but also have a negative effect on nocturnal wildlife. Our ‘dark’ village is very special, and any development should not include any street lighting.

1. **Wildlife**

The proposed ‘biodiversity net gain’ set out in the proposal is not in fact giving the full picture of the habitat needed to sustain wildlife such as bats, mammals and glow worms. The hedges and ‘bat foraging corridor’ need to be redesigned and enlarged in order to be truly effective. It seems that a true contribution to biodiversity has been sacrificed in order to squeeze more buildings in – in effect, an extant stable habitat is being lost. Adequate contribution to the preservation of this must be reconsidered and I feel that there is a strong argument for a larger strip of land being made available between the houses and Roughmoor Lane as it presently exists, with the added benefit of screening the development from Stoneleigh and Roughmoor Lane residents.

1. **Strain on Public Services**

The school in the village is already under strain and has been federated with the neighbouring village of Priddy to avoid closure. Class sizes are currently small, but the school would not necessarily be in a position to accommodate a large influx of new pupils all at the same time. It is also extremely important to view this in the wider context of additional development in the local area and the impact of an enlarged population on local services and amenities.

1. **Water and drainage**

The fact that the attenuation pond is located outside the development limit seems to be to maximise housing density and indicate the potential for further development in the future over the rest of the site.

1. **Sustainability and design**

There is no mention in the plans about the design of the houses themselves. Local residents feel that it is highly important to retain the character of the village by ensuring that any development is not homogenous, and that care is taken to make these properties appear in keeping with heritage buildings in the context of the village. A large, high-density estate of identikit homes would be detrimental to the conservation nature of the village and the wider community as a whole.

The houses mentioned in the proposal suggest 2 storeys or 2.5 storeys, which currently are not present in the village. The houses must be varied in size, in order to respond to the needs of the population and must include more one storey buildings. A height greater than two storeys would not be appropriate for the location and out of keeping with the context of existing buildings.

There is also no mention of sustainability to be incorporated into the design, and I would very much like to see this play a substantial part when it comes to the full planning stage. There is currently no evidence that a low environmental impact and energy resilience has been suggested, and it is short sighted not to factor this into any new build plans. According to the Passivhaus Trust, “buidings are…accountable for 35% of total global energy consumption”. Factoring in lower-impact dwellings with renewable energy infrastructure, rainwater harvesting and water reuse, plus charging points for electric cars, needs to be part of the design in order to deliver buildings that are ready for a decarbonised grid.

1. **Affordability and housing need**

The way in which social and affordable housing can be accessed does not necessarily give members of the existing community access to these new homes, even if they are in a position of housing need. 30% affordable housing should be a required minimum, and should include both social housing and homes available under the Help to Buy scheme. A development of this nature, while it does meet the government’s ‘requirement’ for more homes, does not address the inequality currently seen within the housing market, and further excludes younger and low-income people from home ownership in rural areas. In order to create more diversity in rural areas such as this, we need to see more social housing made available with a simpler means to access the homes that many people desperately need. There has been no indication that any new dwelling will have a local tie or that the design that people in the community would like to see has been taken into consideration.

Eleanor Mains 26/1/2022