

Planning proposals for land south of Roughmoor Lane.

Response to proposals.

Number of Houses.

Westbury is not a big village and a development of this size will have a disproportionate effect on its facilities by increasing the overall number of houses by about 20%. Clause 3.2 states that a minimum of 40 homes should be built and this should be adhered to, not an uplift of 50% to 60 suggested in clause 4.3. The reasons for this are referred to several times below.

There are wider implications for excess development. There are a very large number of new houses in the Cheddar Valley through to Wells and building has been allowed in nearly all of the villages. There has been no or limited corresponding uplift of medical, educational and community resources which clearly strains existing arrangements. This is a very powerful reason for restricting the number of houses in this proposal to the minimum number of 40.

Nature of Buildings

A mix of smaller and larger, flats and houses and range of price should be incorporated so that the site is not merely a homogenous set of identical structures.

Building styles and materials should be similar to those already in the village.

Roofs should be strong enough to support solar panels which should be installed as a requirement from the outset on all roofs that are predominantly south-facing. Consideration should be given to the southern boundary comprising a further ground-level row of solar panels.

Density of housing.

Reading from the plan, the density of housing and size of gardens is completely inappropriate for a very rural village of Westbury's character. This is a further strong argument for reducing the proposed 60 units to the 40 which are required.

Height of houses.

There are hardly any houses of more than 2 storeys anywhere in the village. None of these buildings should be more than 2 storeys to remain in keeping with the nature of the village. Suggesting that they should be an average of 2.5 storeys can only mean that the proposal includes some that are 3 storeys.

Width of roads.

Again reading from the scale of the plan, the width of the roads is inadequate. Roughmoor Lane carries farm machinery and adequate 2 way access for larger vehicles and emergency vehicles is essential., especially bearing in mind that extra houses always results in cars being parked on roads.

The new proposals for the junction with Stoke Road seem to be an improvement.

Sewage treatment.

An assessment is needed of the village sewage treatment capacity and alterations made if this is insufficient to avoid overflows, sanctioned or otherwise, ultimately into the River Axe, during periods of heavy rain. Recent data released by the Environment Agency produced under the EU water framework directive draws attention to the severely polluted status of many UK rivers. Any pollution of the Axe must be avoided and action taken to reduce it. (See also *Blueprint for Water*).

Street Lighting.

Westbury takes its dark skies extremely seriously and the amount of street lighting is extremely small, a very much cherished and appreciated aspect of village life. There should be no street lights in these plans. There is an important population of glow worms in Roughmoor Lane which has been the subject of study for many years,

providing a remarkable data set. Glow worms and other nocturnal insects are proven to be severely adversely affected by street lighting. No street lighting is part of the BNG and there is little point in making provision for bats if this does not also include providing some insects for them to eat. (See BNG below).

BNG.

Much more than lip service must be paid to the ecological impact and opportunities offered by this proposal. Again reading the width of the proposed hedge from the plan, the hedge widths which are supposed to act as bat corridors are completely inadequate by any analysis. After the road is widened, a mixed hedge of native species should be planted alongside it, a grassy verge of native wildflowers allowed to develop, a pleasant, green footpath installed, then another verge and another hedge, altogether at least 10 - 12 meters wide. This will allow the hedge to develop enough height and give space for some trees to become full grown standards. This then becomes a viable and effective bat corridor. The same argument applies to the boundary with the playing field and the 'Boundary buffer planting'. A hedge is shown on the playing field which does not actually exist.

All the trees in the proposal should be native species and enough space given to allow them to grow into adults. This will soften the view of these buildings from the Mendip Scarp, an important and frequently stressed aspect of its AONB status.

The swift has been added to the Government's Red List of species of conservation concern. Swift bricks, effective elsewhere in the village, should be incorporated as nest sites to all the two storey houses, following advice about aspect.

The eaves of the houses should be of a design that house martins will use as nest sites. Bat access points should also be included, preferably within the construction, but at least of the bat box type, external to the construction.

Thought should be given to making the attenuation pond into a decent piece of wildlife habitat by creating a permanent shallow pond, surrounded by marginal plants and scrub.

Some of these points will require more space to be made available for BNG, a further reason for reducing the housing density from 60 to 40.

Community Use.

The plan locates the area for community use almost as far away from the rest of the village as it could be, much reducing its usefulness. This should be located in the area labelled 'Existing agricultural buildings'. There is no point in building a new village hall unless it has better facilities than the current one. A large meeting room, bigger than the current one and a separate smaller meeting room, together with kitchen and usual associated facilities would constitute improvement, but the real improvement would be considerable extra parking. This can easily be provided in the area that I have indicated. If a new facility is not better it should not be done.

There are ideas about moving the Village Shop as well, though they are not mentioned here. There are many important considerations to think through associated with this and it should not be taken for granted that these can easily be achieved. That said, a bigger, better equipped shop with associated car parking in the 'Existing agricultural buildings' area might be an improvement.

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