

## Westbury-sub-Mendip Annual Parish Meeting 19 April 2023

### Chair's Report

Westbury is a small rural parish and our population and precept are small so spending pots of money to improve parish amenities cannot be regularly upon the cards. However, over the years we have been able to raise funds to create pavements in two places in the centre of the village and have taken a major part in securing the future of our community shop and Post Office. Over the last year we , together with Wells City Council and with the support of Somerset Council, have joined the Somerset Bus Partnership and have campaigned successfully to retain our local bus service, although only as far as the county border in Axbridge at present.

A key role in business of the council is to comment and approve or object to local planning applications which have come from Mendip District Council. From this month onwards the planning authority will be the new unitary Somerset Council. It is too early to ascertain whether this will make a material difference, but we are inclined to think not as the Mendip planning team has transferred to the new council. Currently our comments are advisory and not binding on the planning authority. We would like local opinion to have more clout so this year we have decided to restart the Neighbourhood Planning process which was started several years ago ,but ran foul of working party changes and more importantly, the Covid crisis. If a parish has a Neighbourhood Plan, which has to be finally approved by a local referendum, then the planning authority is legally obliged to take account of it. The Plan is not just for today but for the future health of the community in 10, 20, 30 years' time. So we've set our community a major task. We've drafted terms of reference and a new group has been formed which has councillors on it, but not in the majority. I am very grateful to Chris Langdon and Mick Fletcher who have agreed to co-chair and to other members - originally Liz Hughes who had to step back because of pressure of work ,replaced by Dave Maguire, Tony Westcott, Adamos Euripidou and Ros Wyke. We have been meeting, initially monthly, since the autumn.

Most planning applications we deal with are for small scale house alterations or extensions and for tree felling orders within the conservation area which are only rarely contentious. We regularly address two or three per meeting. But occasionally much bigger plans come our way. 2022/3 has seen an interregnum between a first pre- application for 60 houses on Church Commissioners' land between Roughmoor Lane and the back of Court House Farm and a second which we expect in the next few months. As many of you will remember, after a major consultation with well over 100 villagers attending, the Church Commissioners and their agents, Lichfields, decided to go no further with their plans until they had also researched the possibilities of the adjacent brownfield site with 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century old barns. They have recently come back to the council with some suggested changes which in the council's opinion do not answer many if any of the community concerns. We expect this potential development will take many hours of council and community time over the rest of 2023. The council cannot officially comment until a formal planning application is before us, but the Neighbourhood Planning group , which has members with professional planning and governmental experience, are currently expecting to commission research which will provide expert advice on such matters as traffic safety and settlement character, relevant to both long term planning matters and more immediate development.

So aside from planning what else takes our time? Ensuring efficient communication within the village is one thing . A few years ago now the council commissioned a village community website which is ably managed by our webmaster, Mark Smith. All council notices and minutes are posted there and there is a calendar of happenings and events for all village organisations to use – please do so. If

anyone is feeling technophobic, Mark can advise and support. We have also refurbished two older wooden parish notice boards and purchased a new one for Stoneleigh. So there is now a noticeboard on the wall at the beginning of Drappel Lane and the next site planned is on Station Road. During the Covid lockdown the council purchased a Zoom account to enable remote meeting . This is free for any village organisation to use for meetings.

After some lobbying, this year the council finally resolved to buy some dog waste bins for the village. Permissions have been sought, sites surveyed, all agreed by planners and paid for, and regular emptying arranged Three bins are on order and we expect them to be erected shortly, many thanks to Adamos Euripidou, at the junction of Free Hill, Drappel and Back Lanes , on Station Road near the bridge and on Roughmoor Lane. We hope this will stop once and for all, the hanging of poo bags in the roadside trees and hedges! This is a village which values and respects its wonderful countryside.

The council also makes available a small grants fund for local organisations to apply to for village amenities and improvements. We usually consider these grants in October each year ,but are open to approaches at other times , funds allowing. This year we have supported the community shop, the Robert Glanvile Playing Fields, the Westbury Tree group and the Strawberry Line Association which has opened up the new all-weather path between Station Road and Erlong Lane . This is proving very popular and we wish them every success in getting the next leg of the path to Wells established.

Our meetings are held monthly, usually on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm here in the village hall. The first 15 minutes is a public session and all residents are welcome to attend and comment on any items on the agenda. Between times you can also contact any of the councillors if there is a relevant issue you'd like to raise.

Over the last year your councillors ,who stood unopposed in May 2022, have been myself as Chair, Ros Wyke as Vice-chair and Adamos Euripidou, Buffy Fletcher, Ellie Mains and Guy Timson. I'd like to thank them for the amount of hard work and attention to detail that everyone has shown. At the same time we also are most grateful - to Colin Booth , our rights of way and footpaths officer, who has kept a close eye on the state of all our paths and kept them open and accessible , often at his own expense - to Mark Smith for maintaining and managing our website and to Kate Egan,our clerk, who knows all the rules and keeps us in as good order as is possible.

Finally ,I'd like to thank Ellie Mains who is standing down as councillor because of work and family commitments. She has been a breath of fresh air and good common sense in our meetings and moreover has agreed to continue with the revival of a monthly parish newsletter. Many thanks Ellie.

We are allowed to have 7 councillors, but only 6 people stood for election last year ,so with Ellie's resignation we have two places to fill. I am very glad to say the two people ,Maggie Beebee and Penny Coldwell have put their names forward for election and we hope to co-opt them at our May meeting . It will be great to have a full team.

Sue Isherwood  
Chair Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council