

**A summary of the Westbury Sub Mendip community response to the Jan 2022 proposed development by the Church Commissioners of land South of Roughmoor Lane.**

Please note: Community responses to the proposed development have been well documented and communicated to Lichfields, the planning consultants for the Church Commissioners. The summary comments below have been collated from a number of community led meetings held in Jan / Feb 2022, a village survey with 250 responses (1/3rd of village), a traffic survey undertaken in Jan/Feb 2022 and from an exit poll following a consultation meeting set up by Lichfields (circa 60+ responses from 150 attended). These responses have been from across the village on not just those most affected.

“Westbury Sub Mendip (WSM) is rightly proud of its community spirit, heritage and location at the foot of the Mendip Escarpment, and recognition as a gateway village to the Mendip Hills AONB. It rightly expects and deserves that any housing development in the village to be a high-quality sustainable development, respecting strong environmental and ecological concerns, whilst providing dwellings which meet the local housing need for affordable, highly energy-efficient homes in a pleasant environment, safe for families, pedestrians and visiting walkers, respecting the rural landscape and scenic views.”

**Number of houses proposed and design**

- The proposal for 60 houses in addition to existing windfall permissions and with the brownfield site being an addition to the allocated area would present a growth of over 80 dwellings in the next 7 years. This is too many too quickly.
- To limit the numbers the following points need to be taken into account
  - o The brownfield land should be developed but only as part of the local plan allocation. The view is that the area of old buildings needs to be developed for better access / removal of health & safety hazard of derelict farm buildings / less of an eyesore / central location for community facilities / lower density – but not if it means yet more houses.
  - o Locating the large attenuation pond outside the allocated area allows for more housing than was proposed inside the allocated area. This does not seem reasonable – the development and its drainage requirements should be achieved within the boundaries of the allocated area.
  - o The density and layout of houses proposed does not respect the settlement character of the village which taken as a whole presents significant open spaces integrated with housing.
  - o The location on the edge of the Mendip AONB and Mendip escarpment is a setting that the current proposal does not respect.
- The type and mix of housing need to reflect local needs and the data relied upon should be up to date. Affordable homes for young first homers and those in local employment, and smaller properties for older people wishing to downsize locally, need to be reflected in the mix of house sizes.
- The proposals from Jan 2022 appear to include provision 2.5 storey houses. This should not be accommodated in this rural village location and more 1 storey properties are needed to reflect the need to minimise visual impact and provide for older people in the community.
- The proportion of affordable homes needs to be at least 30% and this should be fully integrated into the layout.

## **Highway safety**

- Pedestrian safety is already at risk with both the lack of pavements along much of the A371 and the absence of a safe crossing point. The development would dramatically increase the risk for pedestrians to walk safely along and across the A371 with most of the community facilities North of this road. The development should not be allowed without a satisfactory solution for pedestrians crossing the A371 between the development and the core village community facilities.
- The A371 is already having to support traffic numbers well above its capacity. Several pinch points in the village which are repeated between Wells and Cheddar exacerbate the problem for vehicles and pedestrians (lack of pavements). The traffic generation from the development in Westbury-sub-Mendip needs to be assessed along with the large increases in housing and businesses in Wells and Cheddar that will use the A371.
- The parking area at Mortar Pits currently available on the A371 West of Court House Farm buildings need to be retained – it is one of very few places to park safely for access to facilities.
- The access to any new development needs to be located through the brownfield site, as the sight lines are much better. The existing Roughmoor Lane access should be left as it is and not combined with any new development.
- The development will increase the need for travel by private car for a village already poorly served by public transport and now threatened by cessation of the only bus service available. Any development should therefore include significant contribution to improving connectivity to the proposed Strawberry Line multiuser path between Cheddar and Wells.

## **Community Facilities**

- The area of land to be made available for community facilities needs to be located close to the centre of the village and not as originally proposed on the western extremity of the site.
- Just over half respondents to the village survey thought on balance that a replacement village hall could be the best thing for the community land but there has been no discussion on its profile and in further discussions through the NP process people's ideas may well evolve. If a village hall is seen as most important this needs to provide large and small meeting spaces with good parking adjacent to the church to benefit both the congregation and the general community.
- The village church has asked for some land to be made available to provide an additional area for the graveyard.

## **AONB, Ecology and Visual Impact**

- Westbury-sub-Mendip is a dark skies village with 88% of village survey respondents confirming that any new development should respect the village dark skies policy.
- The wildlife corridors proposed do not provide sufficient width to mitigate effectively against impact on Lesser Horseshoe and other bat foraging routes.
- Satisfactory wildlife corridors and the need to provide connectivity for public foot and multiuser paths are not sufficiently considered in current proposals.
- The site is sensitive to the visual impact of this development given its location within the AONB and on the edge of the Mendip escarpment. Current proposals do not respect this and

present a blot on the landscape. Fewer houses and more open space to break up visual impact are necessary.

### **Drainage**

- The site lies within the area of the Somerset Levels and Moors that requires developments to be nutrient neutral. The solution to ensuring no increased pollution of RAMSAR sites should be found within the allocated site and not exported to other parts of the district.
- The design for surface water drainage for the development should follow the well-established SUDS hierarchy. (Current proposals do not follow this hierarchy.) Any attenuation ponds required by the development should be delivered within the allocated area.
- Local plan consultation documents raise questions about the capacity of the local sewage works with improvements apparently needed. Development will add pressure and increase risk of polluting discharge in normal and certainly following heavy rainfall events. No botched measures should be allowed!

### **Consultation process**

The village is united in its opposition to proposals for 60 houses put forward by Lichfields in January and February of this year for the large range of reasons highlighted above.

Peoples views were divided and very strongly expressed. For some there is a desire to stop the build with others expressing a pragmatic wish to work with the CC, accepting the local plan allocation and acknowledging that there is a need for housing and as a primary village Westbury should be expected to take its share. As a major landowner in this village the church is uniquely placed to shape both its housing stock and the location of community facilities in ways that respects the needs of the community and the settlement character and location. The Parish Council and members of the community have encouraged the agents and the Church Commissioners to live by the recent Church of England publication "Coming Home".

The consultation experience so far has not allowed for the partnership approach this document describes.

No community can stand still, but the need for growth must be proportionate, respecting both location and existing infrastructure.

There is therefore a preparedness to engage with the church authorities, taking perhaps a longer timescale and working on a larger canvass to produce a mutually beneficial outcome.