

**Westbury sub-Mendip – Neighbourhood Plan Working Group**  
**Comments on Church Commissioners proposals for the**  
**development of land south of Roughmoor Lane as presented on**  
**July 10th 2024.**

Westbury sub-Mendip Parish Council has established a Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG) to help prepare a plan for the parish. The group has commissioned a Settlement Character Assessment, an initial draft of which is available on the village website, a housing needs survey which is in the process of being finalised, a survey of village priorities for the future and a highway safety scoping assessment. The group is therefore well placed to comment on proposals for developing land south of Roughmoor Lane.

There is a minority of the village that does not want any housing development on this site due to impacts on rural character, traffic safety and amenity. However, based on community meetings and surveys, we believe a majority of the village accepts some housing development is necessary, but only if the proposals meet the requirements listed in WM1. The consensus within the NPWG supports the majority view – accepting that housing can be built on this land since it is allocated in the local plan but attaching great importance to the listed requirements. We feel that the details presented to us fail to demonstrate that they meet these requirements in several important respects and unless the formal application for outline planning permission addresses them it cannot be supported.

A development of 40 houses in a single estate would have a substantial impact on the character of the village where most housing is in smaller units that have developed slowly over many years. To build 60 or more on this one site would result in significant negative visual impact in this rural location. By several criteria the village is not a sustainable location, being poorly served by public transport and not presenting much opportunity for employment, health care, shops or leisure. Any increase over and above local plan allocation should be located in towns with better transport connections and facilities.

We note that such a large number can only be accommodated by placing the attenuation pond outside the allocated land when good practice would expect all such drainage features to be internal. We have seen no compelling reason for departure from what is standard practice in this respect and can only regard the placement of the pond as a contrivance to increase the number of housing units to be built.

Westbury residents have a long-standing concern about the danger posed to both pedestrians and motorists by a narrow and winding A 371 road running through the centre of the village. It carries heavy quarry lorries and wide articulated farm machinery, plus an increasing number of delivery vans and domestic traffic from large housing developments in Cheddar and Wells and long sections without pavements.. A development of the scale proposed will clearly exacerbate the problems caused by traffic and it is clear from the requirements attached to the planning allocation that this has been noted by the local authority. Neither of the

specific requirements identified in the plan however seem to have been addressed satisfactorily.

We see the requirement to provide “safe pedestrian access to the village core” as meaning a serious improvement to the safety of pedestrians crossing the road. In conversations with planners and Highways staff it is clear that they share this interpretation. We have seen no evidence that the application for planning permission will be accompanied by a plan to address this need. More time is required for the community to be transparently consulted on the options around this critical requirement as detailed in the Highways Scoping Assessment circulated to Highways and Litchfields / Church Commissioners. The objective needs to be that there is significant improvement for safe ways for pedestrians to cross the A371 – even if that results in some compromise of normal highways criteria.

Although there are proposals to address the related issue of increased traffic movements at the end of Roughmoor Lane, we do not feel that they provide a satisfactory or safe solution. In particular, vehicles exiting Roughmoor Lane on a single-track road will not be visible to vehicles entering from the new layout. There is a serious risk of congestion where the additional movements generated by the new estate will add to an already busy junction.

The sight lines from the proposed junction looking north-west are wholly inadequate and on a stretch of road where traffic is already speeding. The new junction and extra traffic will increase pressure on one of the worst pinch points onto the A371, where speeding cars have to apply emergency brakes on a regular basis as they realise they can't get past the oncoming car or truck

There is insufficient provision to replace the current mortar pits layby which provides for at least 10 spaces.. The loss of this provision is not acceptable for school parents, shoppers, visitors and residents. Any replacement parking provision needs to be close enough to facilities to remain practical.

As part of the evidence for the Neighbourhood Plan, currently in development, the village has commissioned a Settlement Character Appraisal. The current proposals have not considered this document and the current proposals do not respect the village character, the conservation area or the adjacent National Landscape (formerly AONB. )

The Outline planning application should fix not only access and number of houses but also layout, maximum house heights across the site, the mix of house sizes (number of bedrooms), as well as the environmental and ecology parameters, and community space allocation as set out in WM1.

The current proposal represents an urban design with a grid layout, bordered by roads which does not reflect village character. Roads should be narrower, present shared surfaces and should reflect the village style.

We note that the details of building materials will be a reserved matter, but the height of buildings should not be. The written evidence available to us is silent on height, though we understand that the intention is to provide a number of 2.5 storey

buildings which are out of character with this community; anything higher than 2 storeys will not be supported.

We note that the plans allocate the required minimum of 0.13 ha. accessible bat corridor, but the configuration is not suitable. For an effective corridor to allow bats to feed and move through the site an 8-metre strip is inadequate. Our local ecology experts have provided a detailed proposal, which could then be implemented with a local management plan in line with the Nature England Guide to Hedge Cutting. We have seen no proposals that indicate how the requirement of 10% BNG will be achieved.

Whilst we note the intention to undertake planting of shrubs and trees to help screen and integrate the development into the rural landscape and help maintain the amenity of neighbouring residents, a lot more green and open space is needed to reflect village character. More needs to be done particularly along the southern boundary. This needs to be broken up with more open green space and gardens at this boundary to better manage the transition from the built area to the countryside. Better use could be made of hedging interspersed with standard legacy trees to frame views through the development. This would help make the development more acceptable to the National Landscape which will be concerned with “Views out” from the scarp overlooking the village. The landscape visual impact assessment needs to consider impact on views out of the National Landscape areas, specifically including views from public footpaths along Broadhay Ridge and the nature reserve areas referred to locally as Cooks Fields, Lynchcombe and Deer Leap.

More justification is required as to why the development is not connected to mains sewage infrastructure. The area is within the catchment where any increase in phosphate levels from the development must be neutralised. The risk of future management not being part of the mains sewage treatment is not acceptable. There appears not be any reference to existing local footpath routes being protected, with no information about how the site will be linked with more footpath connections to the routes proposed for the multiuser paths along the Old Strawberry line route.

Finally, we are pleased that the plans reflect the village preference for community land to be located on the north-east corner of the site. The preference is for this allocated land to host a community hub to replace the existing small village hall. The village will be seeking assurances that the development of a village hub on this site would be acceptable to planners, conservation officers and the highway authority. It would be helpful for the location and size of such a development to be fixed and agreed in the outline application.

**Westbury sub–Mendip Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.**

**Monday 29th July 2024**