

**Westbury sub Mendip Neighbourhood Plan Working Group  
Minutes 2nd September 2024**

**Present** - Chris Langdon [CL] (chair), Mick Fletcher [MF], Ros Wyke [RW], Tony Westcott (TW), Sue Isherwood (SI), Penny Colwill (PCo), Guy Timson (GT), Al Hood (AH), Dave Maguire [DM]

**1. Apologies** Adamos Euripidou

**2. Minutes and Matters Arising.** The minutes of the meeting held on 31 July had been previously agreed by email. CL welcomed AH to the group. AH gave some detail of his background. As he lives opposite the brownfield site it was noted that he should decide if discussions about the brownfield site would cause any conflict of interest. There were no other matters arising not covered in the agenda. **Action: MF to post copy of minutes on the PC website.**

**3. NP Aims and Objectives**

**a. Review document issued to Stuart Todd**

CL said this document was circulated in July and amendments made following some feedback. A copy has been provided to Stuart Todd (ST), neighbourhood planning consultant. He has yet to reply as he has been on holiday. The headings used in the document are those used in the surveys plus a question on employment.

A grant of £4k has been secured to fund the work to be done by ST.

CL confirmed that the next steps were to get feedback on the aims and objectives from ST and the villagers and then for ST to write/assist us to write the policies needed to support the objectives.

ST will also advise on whether or not we have sufficient evidence to support the policies to be written.

It was agreed that the aims and objectives need to address the whole area of the parish not just the built areas.

There was a general discussion on how to get the views of more of the villagers. There are approx 635 adults in the village and we have had responses to the surveys from over 100 people which is a good percentage of respondents replying. There were about 35 people attending the village meeting. It was noted that despite having a stall at the village day, very few people visited the stall. Whilst we intend to piggy back on other village events to seek people's views and engagement with the NP process it was recognised that people may not wish to engage at such social events.

RW mentioned that specialist planning guidance was about to be issued – Place Making – and that ST should be aware of it. It was agreed that the NP did not need to go in to detail where clear guidance already existed.

It was noted that the new government had already indicated that there would be changes to planning guidance. It was therefore a difficult time to be engaging in writing the NP as changing guidance may mean some issues are missed or we include issues that are to be covered by the new guidance. It was however accepted that we need to get on with the NP process as, even with a NP in draft form, it would add weight to the village view on any planning matters. RW stated that the concept of primary village designation may be dropped in the future.

CL read through the various aims and objectives by to review agreement and tease out suggested changes or omissions. Asked that, as time was short at this meeting, consider

principles rather than detail of specific wording. Following this meetings an updated document will be issued for review by ST and then subject to feedback from further village consultation.

See appendix to minutes for review of NP Aims and Objectives draft 1

**Action. CL to issue updated Aims and Obj doc reflecting key points raised to Stuart Todd**

**b. Wider Landscape objectives and WsM Farmer consultation**

TW spoke about the importance of the wider landscape. There needs to be an appreciation of the views of the parish down from the Mendips and across the moors. Said it is important to engage with the farmers in the village to enable the village community to be supportive of them. Discussion about whether we actually know what the local farming community wants. Community includes people who live outside the parish but farm land in Westbury and also farmers living in Westbury farm across parish boundaries. GT commented that local farmers may not wish to be involved with the NP. TW said a discussion with a farmer outside the parish suggested a suspicion of NPs and a lack of willingness to talk about the NP process. **Action: TW will circulate his note on importance of wider landscape.**

It was accepted that there will be tensions when discussing the NP with farmers given the desire for people to enjoy their land and preserve the current character which may not be in tune with changing farming practices. It was suggested that Simon Dennis, Jo Tucker and Dave Limond may be possible people who could engage with the farming community to get their input to the NP. A discussion with the local NFU representatives might be beneficial. Maybe one to one chats with farmers may be productive at getting their input. **Action: MF to consider how best to involve farmers**

**c. Next Steps** - Need to secure review from ST and take forward village consultation including the small discussion groups . See 6 below.

**4. Development of a WsM housing strategy – next steps.**

Owing to lack of time, this item was deferred to next meeting but should be first discussion item at that meeting.

**5. Kate Chubb update.**

Kate has looked through 20 other NPs including some outside Somerset. Her conclusion was that the Nether Stowey plan was the best fit to be used as a framework to help in writing our NP. Coincidentally, the NP consultant used by Nether Stowey was ST.

Kate has pulled out of any further involvement with the NPWG because she feels she has insufficient time to take forward any further issues for us. This has been discussed and agreed with the university. TW confirmed that we engaged with the university at the correct time but Kate was late to decide to join the project.

TW has reviewed the Nether Stowey NP and using a similar process, has drafted a write up on housing for WsM to test how well we can link evidence to aims / policy . **Action: TW to circulate his draft copy on housing**

The group would need to consider how to undertake the work it had been planned that Kate would carry out on the wider landscape character and the protection of green spaces.

**Action: All**

A formal thank you letter should be sent to Kate for her input. **Action : TW to draft thank you note.**

**6. Village focus groups.**

An idea generated from last NPWG meeting. Smaller in house / neighbourhood meetings to discuss NP. CL suggested we try to hold 4 or 5 small focus groups of 6 or 7 people to get feedback on issues for NP from a wider cross section of the village. James Lewis has volunteered to organise one in Bell Close. The idea is to see if people agree with our view of the aims and objectives that we feel arise from the surveys and village meetings and consider what is missing or is unnecessary.

PCo agreed to do one in Lodge Hill. SI will ask Will in the Hollow to run one. John Ball was also suggested as a possibility.

GT suggested using non geographical existing groups such as Playing Field Group, Tree Group and WI. GT said he will organise Playing Field focus group and SI said she will ask Sue Reece at WI to organise a group. **Action: MF to oversea organisation of focus groups.**

**7. Community comms**

Need to use a PEW article/Facebook messages/email to advertise the focus groups and where we are piggy backing on other events.

It was agreed there was a need for another village hall meeting in early October. Hopefully this will be before any planning application re RL is sent in as that will distract people away from the NP

Action – CL to ensure comms ref village meetings and focus groups is issued and to book village hall

**8. AOB None**

**9. Next Meeting**

Agreed to be Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October at 8pm.

Meeting closed.

## **Appendix to NPWG meeting 2 Sept 2024 – Review of NP Aims and Objectives Draft 1**

*Community Services and Facilities* – It was suggested that public transport should be included in this section with a cross reference to the Transport section. The reference to “all groups” should be amended to just “groups”. It was felt it was important to include the post office as well as the shop. The post office is a separate entity to the shop and is a key village facility. The need to increase village storage facilities should be included as currently this comprises 3 containers and the goodwill of residents allowing the use of their barns and garages. Increased storage would allow the containers in the park car park to be removed creating an increased parking area.

*Housing Development* – It was felt the aims and obj needed to stress importance of access within and to and from the village before any housing development was allowed. The village infrastructure needs to be improved to facilitate movement in and around the village. The improvements already made to footpaths along the A371 were cited as examples of good practise to be built on. Parking is an issue that needs to be addressed particularly given the increase in large cars and business vans that are owned and used by residents. Developers need to contribute. The lack of medical services in the village was raised but it was felt that the village was too small for the NHS to support health care provision within the village.

Concern was expressed over the phrase “Acceptable scale”. This was felt to be too much open to interpretation.

Discussion about sustainability re housing developments. RW stated two main pinch points on power distribution limiting development within Somerset. Requirement for EV charging will increase demand so have to ensure power supply adequate before development.

*Settlement Character* – Recognition that parish boundaries are well beyond the built areas of the village. The conflict between green wedges and infill building rather than estate building was discussed. Green wedges and views considered to be a very important aspect of the village character. Need to reflect in the objectives the importance of respecting, enhancing and not damaging the views from and to the AONB. Also need to reflect the need to retain the working landscape including the moors.

Al had moved from Bristol to Westbury and noted the scale of matters being discussed would be insignificant in a city urban environment but they were very important to retaining the peaceful rural environment in Westbury. It was felt that footpaths could be improved but in a rural not urban way for example, on one side of a road only and relatively narrow.. Need to safely move around the village whilst retaining rural character. The dark skies policy was seen as important but need to be sensitive to how newcomers to the village will feel about this. It can be quite strange walking around in complete darkness if you are used to an urban environment. Enforcement of dark skies policy needs to be considered as there are examples in the village where lighting goes beyond the spirit and application of the dark skies policy.

Agreed that views into the village were as important as views from the village.

*Traffic and Transport* – Need to be more precise re public transport services ie improve frequency but also connectivity to adjacent villages, towns and cities as well as connecting to railway stations. Timing of services needs to allow villagers to get to and from school/work/entertainment.

*Environment* – Cuts across things raised under the other headings. Needs of farming community discussed later in meeting.

*Sustainability* – Discussion as to whether sustainability should be included in all the other aims and objectives previously considered or if it warrants separate aims and objectives. Sustainability does cut across all other areas but conclusion was it needs separate aims and objectives to help future proof the NP. The repetition within other aims and objectives is important. Given the importance of home working sustainability should include access to good broad band connections.

*Employment* – Group needs to consider question of supporting businesses within the parish. There was not a lot of feedback about this so far from surveys and village meetings. GT said it was important to provide support to help people in the village improve their skills and a neighbourhood hub would be important in this. Large percentage of office based work force now work from home so importance of broadband connectivity stressed but also provision of recreational facilities such as café playing field facilities and open space to reflect similar opportunities in traditional work place. Need to be open in NP to conversion of barns to work spaces. Need to be positive in supporting and encouraging people to run businesses from home and garages being supportive in considering planning applications to achieve this aim. Caution raised that NP needs to be balanced as making village very attractive as a place to live and work may have the effect of increased growth to the extent that the character and size of the village is totally changed.