

Westbury sub Mendip Neighbourhood Plan Working Group
Minutes 7th October 2024

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

1. Apologies Al Hood,

2. Minutes . The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September were agreed.

Action: MF to post copy of minutes on the PC website.

3. Brownfield Site The Church Commissioners (CC) are yet to respond to offers to purchase the Brownfield site.

4. Matters Arising TW had circulated a paper prior to the meeting some of which will be covered later in the meeting. TW raised the question of how the wider landscape would be incorporated into the NP given that Liz Beth's report concentrated on the built area, the village, rather than the wider Parish area. TW explained that the Parish boundary went well beyond the village and it incorporated two National Character Areas (NCA) namely the SW slopes of the Mendip Hills to the North of the A371 and part of the Moors to the south. The boundaries of these areas touched the A371 in places. At the start of the NP process it had been agreed that the NP would include the whole of the Parish. The NP therefore needed to mention the NCAs particularly given the planning restrictions that currently apply there. RW stated that it was probable that these restrictions would be increased in the near future. It was also noted that the Parish included two Somerset Wildlife Trust nature reserves at Cook's Field and Lynchcombe and a Butterfly Conservation Trust one at Westbury Beacon. The new designated Kings Nature Reserve also included part of the Parish though it was recognised that this designation didn't create any new reserve areas than those that already existed.

It was agreed that the NP needed to reference all these areas and potentially pull out the salient points relating to the protection of these areas. It was suggested the National Landscape Team might be able to help, the contact being Jim Hardcastle (JH). **Action: MF to contact JH with a view to discussing how these areas would impact on the NP**

It was agreed that the wider landscape should be combined with the Environment section of the NP. It was noted that this section might be partly aspirational so we would have to consider how policy in the NP is written to allow the landscape to influence planning issues. It was agreed that the NP needs to respect the special features of the natural landscape areas and that any development should support and not undermine these areas characteristics. CL asked if and when we could have input to the new Local Plan. RW said Kate Murdoch (KM) was the lead in Somerset Council for this and it was agreed CL would approach her. **Action: CL to approach KM to see how the NPWG can feed our landscape and environment issues into the new Local Plan process.**

It was agreed that TW and MF would work up the combined Landscape and Environment Objectives and Aims into a sufficient state to be passed to Stuart Todd (ST) for comment. **Action: TW and MF to draft Landscape and Environment Objectives and Aims and pass to ST for review**

TW's draft letter of thanks to Kate Chubb (KC) was agreed. **Action: TW to forward letter to KC on behalf of NPWG.**

5. Housing Strategy for NP The Housing Needs Assessment was completed in the Spring by CNB. The NPWG had requested some changes to this document which initially CNB had been happy to do. In recent correspondence with CNB it is clear there is a reluctance to do this. ST has advised that the housing strategy should reflect the village view of its housing needs, backed up by data from the surveys, meetings, focus groups etc. It should also draw on the content of the CNB report where it supports the village approach but also explain why conclusions within the CNB report need to be modified by reference to our particular circumstances. ST said having independent reports as part of the process was a good thing. RW noted that the next local plan may put emphasis on the 15 minute community so future additional housing need may well be more focused on the towns and cities in Somerset rather than the villages.

Some discussion held about need for a housing strategy. Conclusion was that it wasn't needed and would be sufficiently covered in the vision, aims and objectives and the policies. We will continue developing the housing aims and objectives.

It was recognised that James Lewis may be able to input to the housing part of the NP given his knowledge of working within a housing association.

CL mentioned that his focus group talked about being able to allocate sites in the NP if the number of houses required within the Local Plan hits a trigger quantity. The answer to this may partly be informed by the housing strategy to be included in the new Local Plan. CL will include this in the proposed discussions with Kate Murdoch. It was recognised that NPs were capable of review and one review prompt could be if the new Local Plan allocated more than a certain number of new houses for the Parish. Consideration could be made at that point for site allocation but it would involve village consultation and agreement.

6. NP Aims and Objectives

Focus Groups update RW commented that it was pleasing to see the positive way that focus group members engaged with and seemed to own the various topics discussed. There are a number of focus groups organised in the next week before the village meeting. So far, the focus groups seem to be generally in support of the aims and objectives as written. ST has fed back on the first draft of the Aims and Objectives. He has clarified what are planning matters and what are aspirational matters. He has also given advice on some of the wording to use and wording to be avoided. It was agreed to continue using the first draft Aims and Objectives document at the remaining focus groups and then pull all the comments together after the village meeting.

CL noted there has been some feedback on the inconsistent approach to the Dark Skies policy in the Parish and that is something we need to include in the NP. TW suggested this might in part be due to lack of appreciation of impact on nocturnal wildlife and especially bats.

Village Hall meeting The majority of people present said they were able to attend the village hall meeting on 16th Oct. The aim of the meeting is to inform progress on the Aims and Objectives, check back our understanding of the village view and tease out any further new ideas. It was agreed the meeting could include (subject to audience already being art of focus grp or not)

- What a NP can and cannot achieve
- Where we currently are in the NP process
- What are the next steps in the NP process

- Talk about what needs changing within the first draft of the Aims and objectives following feedback from focus groups and ST
- Identify anything missing from the Aims and Objective draft
- Structure part of the discussion around how the NP will help with the various planning matters that may arise
- Recognise the need for housing in all it's forms that allows downsizing within the village and encourages young people to stay or come to the village.
- Invite final comments/observations on Aims and Objectives
- Seek additional volunteers to help with policy writing.

Final version of Aims and Objectives to be issued as soon as possible after the meeting. Everyone was encouraged to advertise the Village Hall meeting on 16 October via the various social media outlets, email groups, village website, posters. **Action: All to advertise the village hall meeting**

7. NP Policy drafting – next steps. Once aims and objectives are finalised we need to move on quickly to policy writing. CL suggested passing a couple of the sections to ST to draft policy statements for our review.

RW said it was important that there was a common thread through the various policy statements to give a coherent look and focus to the overall NP plan. The best plans avoid isolated, stand alone policies.

CL said he would speak to ST on how we approach writing policies and when we share drafts with Somerset Council. **Action: CL to discuss policy writing with ST**

It was agreed that rather than leave all wording of policies to ST we should each research examples of good and bad policies from other NPs and develop rough drafts for comment and amendment by ST . The following allocation was agreed

Green Spaces – RW

Housing Development – TW

Environment/Landscape – MF

Community Services and facilities –CL

Sustainability – PCo

Traffic and Transport – DM

Settlement Character SI

Action: All to research good/bad policy examples for topics as above to be completed by Thursday 31 October

8. Village comms

Promoting Village Hall meeting on 16th as outlined above. A PEW article will be drafted after village meeting but there is a tight deadline.

8. AOB None

9. Next Meeting

Agreed to be Monday 4th November at 8pm at 8 Stoneleigh

Meeting closed.