

## **NP Aims and Objectives – Village Consultation via Focus Groups**

Five focus mini groups @ 4+7+9+10+5 = 35

Village meeting = 32 + (only 3 of whom had attended a mini focus grp)

Sue Isherwood (The Hollow Neighbours)

I also had a small consultation session with 4 residents of The Hollow who don't usually come to public meetings later on Monday night. Briefly, they endorsed all the subject headings, aims and objectives and couldn't discern any major gaps. They were particularly concerned about a safe crossing of the A371 and of road speeds throughout the village. They would like to see a 20mph limit on all roads. They liked the settlement characteristics section and were strongly in favour of dark skies. Finally they were concerned that the school should be consulted and supported to play a stronger part in the village. (One idea of how the school could help with the main road traffic problems would be to use the minibuses to collect and deposit the kids from Stoneleigh/Roughmoor Lane at the Mortar Pits area so they didn't have to cross the road. This would ease the blockage of School Hill at the beginning and end of the school day.)

Village Hall Committee (14/10/2024)

**Housing Development:** Aim 3. - The hall was part of the infrastructure of the village. If more houses were built, a larger hall with more facilities would be needed, such as more parking spaces, small meeting rooms and changing rooms.

**Settlement Character:** Aim 2. - The hall would need to fit into the character of the village in terms of its design and appearance.

**Traffic and Transport:** Aim 1. - The location and siting of the hall were important so that it was as central as possible with good parking provision which could also serve the shop, the church and the playing fields. Good access via pavements wherever possible was important.

Sue said a priority of the Plan, expressed by many respondents to the questionnaire, was to make the A371 safer - as part of this a well-sited pedestrian crossing from the north to the south side was important.

**Environment** - The hall needed to be able to contribute to a space for an active life style with facilities for playing sports such as badminton, table-tennis and pickle ball as well as exercise classes. It would benefit from having changing rooms/small meeting rooms which could be used by the playing field participants as well as the casts of Footlights productions

Hilary asked if street lighting could be banned for new developments such as the proposed Roughmoor Lane development. Sue said this might be possible but it could be necessary to have lighting on the A371 for safety reasons.

**Community Facilities** - The hall was an important meeting place and a more conveniently situated hall increased the possibility of providing a hub for younger people as well as older residents and those with mobility problems. Sue said Henton village hall was a model which Westbury might wish to look at and emulate.

Tony said he felt the facilities for the playing fields and the hall should ideally be combined with which Denise agreed. Sue explained that under the regulations the housing development only had to provide 0.1 hectare for community space. The footprint of a new hall would take up most of this and there would be little room for parking! In order to obtain more space it was proposed to utilise the adjacent brown-field site for a new hall and its car park, which would mean it was closer to the church, pub and shop but further away from the playing fields, although still only a short walk away.

**Sustainability** - At present all that could be done in the existing premises was to put the gas heating on a timer and to keep the external doors closed. In the future a new hall could utilise a heat pump, solar panels, insulation and double-glazing. If it was easily accessible by a good footpath and bicycle, that would also keep emissions from cars down.

**Employment** - A hall with more usable storage space could provide facilities for community work shops. At present even the Art and Craft Group had no-where to store materials and had to transport everything they needed to each meeting.

### Mares Lane and Local Surround

The meeting took place at West Acre, Mares Lane, on Thursday 3 October, 2024. It started at 7.30 pm and lasted one and a half hours. 9 people were present: Joe Bone, Axel Goodbody (who chaired the meeting), Maggie Goodbody (who took notes), Angus Henderson, Joyce Henderson, Alex Hill, Mark Smith, Richard Stone, and Tony Westcott (on behalf of the NPWG).

Written comments concerning footpaths were also received from Colin Booth (Parish Footpath Officer). In a phone call Lin Phelps had made comments concerning land use, housing and support for local businesses: AG fed the gist of these into the discussion.

3 documents had been circulated prior to the meeting: 'Aims and Objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan' extracts from the 'Mendip Hills National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan'

AG reminded those present of the purpose of the meeting. He explained that the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group believed the Aims and Objectives document reflected the views of the community, but they wanted to check using focus group feedback. Neighbourhood plans were concerned with decisions on the use of land. When an application to change the use of land was submitted, the policies in the plan helped determine whether it was approved. The policies were derived from the aims and objectives set by the community. As long as they were consistent with national and local planning policy, they could have legal force.

He explained the make-up of the focus group. When Mick Fletcher asked him to host a focus group, two groups of people came to mind who he could invite: people associated with the Shop, and neighbours. His other thought was that it would be good to have some people present who might not have participated in the consultations and questionnaires which the Parish Council had carried out, for whatever reason, so that their views could be considered and perhaps taken account of in the document. He had invited some more Shop people, but they were unable to attend.

So everyone present was from the northern part of the village. However, that could be an opportunity rather than a problem. Other people in Westbury had been asked to host separate

focus groups. This group did not have to speak for the whole village. The Aims and Objectives document was largely concerned with the built-up area, and with how future applications for planning permission for new houses, or for extensions to existing ones, should be responded to. This focus group might make a special contribution by considering potential developments in the outer areas of the parish, matters to do with agricultural land use. That was why TW had suggested the extracts from the Nature Recovery Plan should be circulated and discussed.

TW explained that the group needn't be concerned with the exact wording of the Aims and Objectives document, because this was a draft. It would also be finalised by a professional consultant. Rather than going through the document, Aim by Aim, AG proposed going round the room asking everyone to name key things which they thought should be changed, had been left out, or they felt particularly strongly about.

Proposals for changes to the document included:

**Housing Development**, Aim 4: making solar panels and car charging points mandatory seemed unnecessarily specific and might in time become 'old technology'. The important thing was using appropriate technology to ensure new builds are carbon neutral. Also, inclusion of 'bike storage' as a requirement seemed unnecessary.

**Traffic and Transport**, Aim 1: improving visibility and sight lines seemed trivial in comparison with the requirement to slow traffic through the village, and unnecessary if a safe crossing of the A371 were provided.

**Traffic and Transport**, Aim 2: increased parking provision should be given higher priority

**Environment**, Aim 2: increasing appreciation of the value of local landscape features appeared aspirational.

Proposals for additions:

The '**Environment**' heading should be expanded to '**Environment and Landscape**', and this whole section should be expanded. The Neighbourhood Plan is for the whole parish, and this includes parts of the Mendip AONB (National Landscape). Preservation of the Southern Slopes corridor of biodiversity in the land (where the village sits) between the Mendip escarpment and the Levels was felt to be very important for Westbury. At the same time, there is an imbalance in this section between the space devoted to wilding/ maintaining biodiversity on the one hand and food production on the other. Farming and horticulture are in decline, yet we need farmers and horticulturalists to look after the land, maintain the landscape character and enhance biodiversity.

**Environment**, Aim 2: the Objectives listed here should be expanded to include some of the 'overarching objectives' in the Mendip Hills AONB National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan (pp. 45-6). For instance Objectives 2 (creating connective corridors for wildlife), 4 (rewilding unproductive agricultural land), 5 (reducing surface water runoff), 6 (planting the right trees in the right places), 7 (limiting and reducing light pollution), and 8 (supporting the establishment of a 'super' National Nature Reserve by working at a landscape scale along the south facing slopes of the Mendips).

**Environment**, Aim 3: it was important to support local market gardening, fruit growing, etc. as well as farming. (N.B. it is unclear whether financial or environmental sustainability is intended in the heading.)

**Employment:** providing employment opportunities in or near Westbury was considered to be very important. Apart from the self-employed, there is currently very little employment in the village. If the Roughmoor Lane development goes ahead, it was sadly likely that most of the new residents would commute to work elsewhere. This is not compatible with the goal of a carbon neutral economy, and environmentally sustainable.

Issues the group felt particularly strongly about:

**Landscape and Environment:** Food security demands that farming and horticulture are supported and maintained. We also have a unique landscape here which could be lost through development in the next fifteen to twenty years, with fields being divided up and taken out of production, and stables and 'barns' being built. The transition as land changes ownership and use therefore needs to be carefully managed.

**Housing:** objectives should include attracting young families and providing housing (at least 30% social housing) for local people (especially locally employed people).

**Employment:** need to provide incentives for setting up/ running local businesses, provide outlets for selling local produce, etc.

**Traffic and Transport** The A371: need for chicanes to slow the passing traffic; need for a safe pedestrian crossing

Lodge Hill Neighbours (8/10/2024)

I was very pleased by the response of my neighbours to an invitation to discuss the aims and objectives of the neighbourhood plan. Liz Clay, Sue Hooper, Johnnie Latimer, John and Karen Millbank, Amanda and Martin Smith Tony Cox and Sue Dennett attended a meeting on Tuesday 8th October. Ali Dando was not able to attend the meeting but spoke to me later particularly about the danger of crossing the A371 with a small child.

The draft Aims and Objectives document was sent to all attendees before the meeting and was used as the basis for our discussion. There was general agreement that the document was a fair reflection of the opinions within the group. Appreciation was also expressed for the amount and quality of work which has already been undertaken.

The following additional comments were made:

**Traffic & Transport:** Safe pedestrian access along and across the A371 was considered the most important issue for the neighbourhood plan to address. The size of HGVs has increased significantly in the last decade as has the number of smaller delivery vehicles. There is currently no safe crossing point and even where there is a footpath it is generally too narrow to allow pedestrians to pass each other without stepping into the road. If a safe crossing cannot

be provided due to lack of vehicle sightlines, then warning signs, speed restrictions and traffic calming measures should be introduced.

**Housing:** A balanced mix of new housing is required, particularly to encourage younger families into the village. However, whilst affordable/low-cost housing is a valid aim, restricting sale on the open market could be a step too far.

Ensure sufficient off-road parking for any future housing to prevent streets becoming extended car parks (e.g. Stoneleigh). Aspirations to reduce vehicle use and increase public transport are unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future.

**Environment:** Strong support for the village 'dark skies' policy, including reviewing the number and type of streetlights in Lodge Hill. The security lights on the industrial estate were also discussed and generally felt to be excessive but there was little hope any change could be achieved in the short/medium term.

Lynch Lane Neighbours (3/10/24)

Caroline Meyers, Peter Bright, Rob Tucker, Ann Langdon, Jackie Laws

**Housing:** Very important and good to see the objective of providing housing for young people, very important to make housing affordable – and not just social housing

Thinking about next 10-15 yrs, if we get Roughmoor Lane developed as proposed that will be enough.

Should be looking at smaller plots compared to roughmoor lane

Working from home reduces commuting. Provision of better range of facilities in village will help make WsM attractive place to live and work from home

Can Np revisit the question of allocating sites for housing if the number of houses set by SC in next local plan is over x numbers. Better for WsM to set out where it wants housing rather than have it imposed in context of long term growth of the village.

**Traffic & Transport:** Pedestrian Safety – safe crossing of A371 :

View expresses that a single track priority layout that would then provide space for pavement would not be good – too much delay.

Move the cross! / Slice off part of court hse farm boundary to give visibility on corner looking south

**Environment:**

Be stronger on dark skies – up hold, promote, expand, enhance not just maintain

Farming community: Biggest issue is movement of large kit through village. Having to avoid school lane during school pick up / drop off times.

Narrowing of access with ineffective parking block road for agric kit and for fire engine!

Wookey have organised a crocodile of kids – collecting kids from various parts of village and escorting them to school to cut down on vehicle use

Aim 3 Objective 1. Remove “predominantly”

### **Community Services and Facilities**

NP should set out an objective for village org (hall, shop, playing fields, footlights and others ) should collaborate to deliver the required community hub.

## **Neighbourhood Plan Village Meeting Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

### **Meeting Notes**

32+ attendees.

This meeting is the final opportunity for the community to give feedback on the Aims and Objectives of Westbury sub Mendip Neighbourhood Plan before the NPWG progresses to writing the policies. Once complete the plan will be submitted to SCC for approval and independent scrutiny followed by a village referendum in Spring 2025 (or sooner?). The Neighbourhood Plan should be complete by the end of 2025.

Attendees were reminded that the main purpose of a Neighbourhood Plan is to give local people more influence in the planning process.

Meeting feedback:

### **Housing Development**

- Low-cost housing supported but reserved housing for locals contentious despite the HNS identifying a need. **(cf 60%+ of surveyed(102 of 118) respondents said imp or v imp)**. Questions about how such a policy could be achieved (reference made to Nether Stowey NP).
- Sufficient off-road parking is essential to reduce or at least limit the need for on-street parking. Reference to SCC standard of 0.2 spaces per property not being adequate in a rural area.
- Management of rainwater run-off and increased sewage capacity are major concerns. Lack of adequate drain clearance and recent high rainfall levels have resulted in flooding. Agreement that infrastructure objectives are hard to enforce **(see sustainability)**
- Safe pedestrian links from any new development are essential. **(see transport)**

### **Settlement Character**

- Agreement that any new development should be contained within the current settlement boundary.
- Important for the village to maintain its' own identity and resist becoming a 'dormitory' to larger towns and cities.

- Reminder that the parish boundary extends as far as Westbury beacon and beyond Deer Leap on the Mendips and as far as the River Axe on the levels and that a NP can help to control development outside the development boundary.

### **Traffic and Transport**

- Agreement that traffic speeds through the village must be, at the very least, reduced. However careful consideration is necessary, as some potential solutions result in queuing traffic causing noise or light pollution and undesirable vehicle emissions.
- Protect against unnecessary street signage and restrictions that cannot be enforced (e.g., double yellow lines).
- Provide better connections within the village to safe routes for pedestrians. Promote active travel and safe walking routes beyond the village.
- Improve public transport.
- More parking close to the centre of the village.

### **Environment**

- Maintain and protect the village dark skies policy.
- Engage with the countryside and protected landscape. Add an objective to promote/require restoring eco system processes? (***what does this really mean – connectivity plus??***)
- Emphasize the importance of the National Nature reserve to protect the green landscape and support nature within the countryside and protected landscape. (***link to sustainability?***).

### **Community Services**

- Agreement from the Village Hall committee that the hall should move to a more central location as part of a village hub.
- A contribution (from CC/developer?) to upgrade/expand a new community facility should be sought from any new development.
- Consider upgrading facilities at the playing field in addition to a new village hall.
- Add a specific reference for the Court House Farm brownfield site to be retained for community, not residential use. (***see aspirations***)

### **Sustainability**

- Waste water management. Current capacity is insufficient for increasing rainfall levels.
- Include permeable parking within any new development or public parking areas.
- Management of surface water – keeping drains and road verges clear.
- Encourage small scale solar panels on new developments, farm, and public buildings, rather than ‘solar farms’ on agricultural land.
- Explore solar power options for any essential street lighting.

### **Employment**

- More opportunities for local employment but must be proportionate.
- Avoid any heavy or large-scale industry.
- Support construction and infrastructure for spaces which provide opportunities for home working.

### **Aspirations**

- The Brownfield site should be referenced in the NP and directly reserved as a community site.
- Allow temporary no-car zones within the village to encourage children's play and neighbour interaction.
- Active collaboration between village organisations towards development of community hub facilities.

Of the 32 + people present at this meeting, almost all had not attended one of the other focus groups. Five focus groups have been held involving 35 people; in addition three residents who were unable to attend a group gave their views individually.

There was considerable support for the aims as described in the draft, and a number of detailed changes suggested.

A reminder issued – The NP can produce policies for the built environment. Aspirations within the NP can be a public declaration but have no statutory power.