

Westbury sub Mendip Neighbourhood Plan Working Group
Minutes 13 January 2025
8 Lodge Hill

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

1. Apologies (Tony Westcott, Adamos Euripidou, Guy Timson)

2. Minutes. The minutes of the meeting held on 9 Dec were agreed.

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

3. Matters Arising

- a) RW continuing to list potential green spaces – about 50% progress. Remainder to be done by Feb NPWG meeting
- b) PCo had reported on conversation with M Phelps ref occupation of old court farm buildings CC were taking action through agents, local knowledge suggests occupiers may vacate during Feb
- c) Stuart Todd (ST). CL has asked ST questions around whether NP can influence affordable housing allocation on small sites, a design guide / code, leveraging S106 monies and need for a Transport Plan in email ref NP Aims – awaiting further contact.

4. Update on Neighbourhood Plan policy drafting (Todd Assoc) and draft 3 of aims & objective doc

CL informed the group that ST had been instructed as agreed and was writing up a first draft of policies to support NP aims. We hope to see the results of this within the next week.

Draft 3 of the NP Aims and Objective document not yet done – this will be amended following comments from ST , the last NPWG meeting and perhaps the discussion policy justification / explanatory notes tonight.

5. Neighbourhood Explanatory Notes. Progress on content for following policy areas:

a. Housing

MF summarised his paper issued last week – key elements of evidence were demographic data and the mix of house sizes in WsM from Housing Need Survey together with village survey data and existing local plan rationale on scale of growth.

General discussion ensued with following points being raised:

The evidence supports plan proposals on the scale of housing growth, mix of house size needed and provision for affordable housing (to meet social and local needs)

Small scale interpreted by MF as 10-12 houses since that was the minimum threshold to deliver the affordable homes that the village supported– though accepting that some would see small scale as under 5 houses. The paper responded to ST's question as to how we define and evidence "at a pace and of a scale that reflects the size of the community and its rural context"

For smaller developments the design of any "in fill houses " would be critical to suit context of village character – agreement that this element belongs in settlement character section

and we should limit the housing section to address scale, mix of sizes and provision of affordable housing.

The acknowledged conflict between preference for small scale developments around village rather than big blocks and the need to provide affordable houses and also protect green wedges needs addressing – probably at next community meeting when drafts presented.

The existing local plan makes the argument that 15% growth of primary village is a maximum that should be built into plan period. Uncertainty as to robustness of this argument. Future local plan likely to argue that housing growth should be weighted towards where there is good connectivity / towns / new towns and less on rural villages of questionable sustainability. However this not yet written.

ST advice has been sought on whether village NP can write own affordable allocation rules / secure funding from 106 monies f where additional houses / bedrooms added and also how to square the conflicts

CL suggested the explanation might refer to CNB forecast on house size mix and refer to existing local plan policies on mix and scale.

Action MF to make amends to housing explanation copy once comments from discussion above added to doc by CL

b. Settlement Character

CL summarised that the prepared paper by SI and CL had chosen to refer to and extract relevant evidence for protection and enhancement of settlement character rather than write up draft explanatory copy (to be done). There was a lot of evidence to lean on ref protection and enhancing settlement character. CL summarised various layers being available from NPPF, Local Plan Policies, AONB / NLA plans, WsM Village Character Assessment (VCA) report and village surveys. CL suggested a refresh read of VCA would be valuable to all as it spells out key aspects of village character that are known to be important to community and includes some strong guidance on design.

The extracts from VCA usefully refers to basis of key village characteristics including green wedges, importance of views (in / out and around), the conservation area, key built features. There is also a significant section on guidance for design of new housing development which covers most if not all of what has been identified as important.

AH commented that the VCA was the report that he found most interesting and of value in considering a neighbourhood plan for future development.

CL questioned whether the two NP aims under Settlement Character should be reviewed so that one considers “whole aspect” of settlement character and the other refers to the more detailed layout and design elements. Broad discussion concluded that the aims and objectives as currently written separate these sufficiently – we await policy wording

Some queries on whether VCA covered views of historic features, streams, views around the village sufficiently. Also was there sufficient emphasis on green “infrastructure” – trees, ecological connections.

Action CL and SI to write up explanatory notes using evidence and comments from this discussion.

c. Landscape and Environment

Discussion on paper circulated by TW agreed that some sections needed to appear in main introduction and not under landscape. (Historical Dev and Community Interests). Strong summary of importance of landscape and environment but the copy needs to be shorter. Section on topography and geology important to retain, the village survey responses covers the following – key features (woodland, wildlife, green open space, farming) footpath

connectivity; Importance of AONB / NL; Views of and from landscape; Protection of Green Wedges; Land use protections; Nature recovery key objectives align with NP objectives. The nature recovery element leading to a set of objectives that would support the important ecological objectives as stated by village. The explanation for ecological objectives needs headlining. Reference to local plan policy on Mendip landscape should be added.

Agreement to seek extracts of main intro copy, summarise / shorten the evidence from village survey rather than detail answers to questions asked; check references to SSSI / Archaeology. Headline justification for ecology objectives. Various views on the relevance of too much ancient history (Stone-age, Domesday, Spring line development). How relevant were they to NP / justifications

Should this section also reference surface water and flood management (this is an objective within sustainable section as well)

Action. CL to add comments to TW paper for consideration

d. Highways & Transport

DM summarised paper circulated which uses the draft policy wording already put forward as basis for the copy. Key emphasis is on pedestrian safety along and across the A371 reflecting village priorities.

The justification section as written makes strong reference to lack of connectivity by bus / train, hence need for cars, the lack of parking (off road and public), the safety of pedestrians crossing the A371 being a number one priority, Foot access and lighting conflict, Lack of community control to solve these issues, some options for action, some behavioural changes needed. Some fixes advocated

RW felt we should make more of the negative impact of the “stranger” traffic we have to cope with (Cheddar – Wells) which with the caravans and narrow bends creates negative impact. A 371 one of few east / west trunk routes

There is a conflict between the ask for safer pedestrian use of roads and the dark skies policies – needs to be acknowledged. Can we also refer to health impacts along with safety (traffic volumes / queuing traffic)- discussion concluded probably insufficient evidence to prove health impacts.

Parking. RW suggested we should look at new Supplementary Planning Guidance issued by Somerset Council on Place Making as it has been used recently to apply very limited parking provision in rural village location – this appears not meet the needs of rural villages. DM summarised the number of cars per household along one road in Stoneleigh versus the parking provision. A useful exercise that could feature in NP. DM to show map of public parking provision around Westbury as part of evidence scarcity.

Public Transport – suggestion that we show image of timetable and highlight how it is not possible to get to and from a work place using public transport. Impacts on parking requirement being over and above normal standards and also the need for better bus service. Parking requirement a planning issue – can we state the need for a standard that represents somerset parking standard plus 20% (example)

Action. DM to update copy following CL comment additions to doc (policy references)

e. Community Facilities

PCo had not been able to complete the explanatory notes to justify community facility objectives. Discussion revisited the NP aims and objectives for this section and general agreement that main source of evidence for these would be village survey results.

Important to make the link on pedestrian safety where access across A371 to community facilities is critical. Also CL to fwd some policy references to PCo

Action PCo to write up copy referring to village survey evidence and local plan policies (which help to protect existing.)

f. Sustainability

No discussion had on sustainability explanation. We will await policy drafting and review.

6. Summary of Evidence requirement

MF comments that it is difficult to find key documents on PC website ref NP evidence. Some missing (summary of village meetings), others not easy to find.

Can we all consider docs we have referred to that we think important and send to MF for collation. CL confirmed copies of reports, meetings, surveys are all located in WsM NP folder structure that others have had access to (and is still available)

AH suggested using AI to find relevant docs and provide summaries. AH agreed to run some tests and report

Next Steps on items 5 and 6

Item 5. Minutes refer to amends / additions to explanatory texts. These to be processed before issuing copy to Stuart Todd for review. **Action CL and then MF, TW, DM, SI**

Item 6. **ALL of us to fwd documents** or list of documents they have referred to in any research which we see as important – MF to collate

7. Updates

a. Housing Needs Statement . A final draft that reflects most of the amends we requested was received in early Dec. CL to highlight where the changes are and circulate. MF reminded all that ST advice is we treat this doc as an independent assessment and pick the elements from it that are relevant.

Action CL to issue Housing Needs Statement (Draft 2) with change highlighted to NPWG

b. Highway (pedestrian Safety)

CL updated progress with arranging meeting with Highways and Planners. Dates being forwarded for DM, SI, RW and CL to meet Highways and Planners. Agreement that meeting should cover full assessment of scoping report, identify where highways standard can flex to give a route to a solution, Highways pre-app opinions to CC to be re-booted.

8. RL allocation of community land – pre-application approach to planners in order to test scale of community hub proposal

A pre-app approach to be made by PC to planners. TW and Paul Hamilton are drawing up some plans, CL agreed to write up a summary of proposal (Village Hub on allocated 0.1 ha) and RW agreed to talk to Nikki White to ensure she is the planner to which the pre-app is directed

9. Neighbourhood Timetable – Refresh

CL circulated current NP timetable agreed about 9 moths ago. We are running 2 or 3 months behind. The urgent need is to get an informal submission of draft NP to planners, a reconsult with community on draft (before or after informal submission?) and then formal

submission of draft to Somerset Council at which time the document becomes “material consideration”. (We need to check process / timetable for this element)

We agreed we should set ourselves a target date of 31 March 2025 for informal submission of draft NP to planners.

CL to check this timetable with ST

10. Communications

Action SI to write up copy for PEW summarising PC actions on 20 mph zone app, highways meeting, brownfield site status, NP continuing progress

11. AOB

CL to send DM OS Plan of village

CL to send AH some links for key docs for AI test

12. Next Meeting

Tuesday 18th Feb 8pm. Old Ditch