

Should Westfield Parish Council purchase land at Waterside Valley?

The section of Waterside Valley shown below came on the market early this year and local residents contacted the Parish Council with their concerns and aspirations for the land.

The Parish Council is aware that the land is unlikely to be given planning permission for housing under present planning law, but that might change. The only way to achieve certainty, and safeguard this valuable green space for future generations, is to purchase it.

Why focus on this land in particular? Waterside Valley is a dearly loved asset in the community, valued for its wildlife. Its fresh air is an antidote to the toxins of the A367, and it is an environment for enjoying nature, sledging in winter and animal grazing. It can help alleviate issues of mental health and is an outside space to walk, especially for the increasing number of people working from home.

As one local residents described it, *“Waterside Valley is a key area in the community, it is used by many people in many different ways, if the usage of the field was restricted or the environment was impacted due to a developer there would be an impact on many people’s lives and the wildlife that resides in it.”*

“The community is using the land for the following reasons (although its use is not restricted to these reasons): Dog Walking, Exercise (runners and walkers), Bird Watching, Sports (children play football and ride their bikes), Exploration of Nature”

“Wildlife is in abundance including: Variety of Bats, Deer, Rabbits, Buzzards, Woodpeckers, Barn Owls, Falcon, Hedgehogs, Foxes, Pheasants”.

“The area is also maintained by the community. A resident of Birch Road uses a sit on lawn mower to mark out paths for people to use as they walk through the field. There are often community groups getting together to clean the miners pool and remove rubbish from the river. People donate their time and efforts to this area for the good of the people who use it and the animals who live in it. If the community already takes responsibility for it to an extent, imagine what can be done working with the local authority.”

What is the financial impact of purchasing this land on the people of Westfield? This is an important question. At its meeting in February, the Parish Council stated its intention, should the purchase go ahead, to seek to use s.106 funding for green space and grant funding from other organisations. The capital cost of purchasing the land would therefore not have an impact on the Westfield precept. Of course, the ongoing maintenance of the land as the years go by would probably have an impact. Westfield Parish Council has a history of seeking grant funding where it can and carefully monitoring its spending to ensure value for money, so we

would do all we can to keep ongoing costs down. We know that the local residents care deeply for this land and there is already a high degree of voluntary work going on there, which would be encouraged. Finally, we would explore with local farmers the grazing of animals to help keep the grass down and our B&NES Councillors would apply to Bath and North East Somerset Council for Community Infrastructure Levy money to improve the public right of way footpath.

How can we access Waterside Valley? Why not take a walk through the valley now? There is a public footpath which runs the length of the valley up to the back of Westfield's Industrial Estate. It is part of the Westfield Heritage Walk which can be found on our website – <https://www.westfieldparishcouncil.co.uk/community/heritage-walks/>

How do we respond to this consultation? The Parish Council would love to hear from you – we need to know if there is a will in the community for this initiative to go ahead and we would like to hear the concerns too. Please contact the Parish Council at council@westfieldparishcouncil.co.uk or write to Westfield Parish Council, The Oval Office, Cobblers Way, Westfield BA3 3BX. We are also putting the consultation on our Westfield Parish Council Facebook page and you can respond that way too. If you can get your thoughts to us by 28th March 2021 that would be great. Your parish councillors are out and about all the time and can be reached using the contact details on this website.