

Agenda item 5

For decision: The Housing White Paper & brownfield employment land

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Summary

This report identifies a threat to brownfield employment land (land previously developed for employment purposes) due to the Housing White Paper.

There will be a debate at the meeting on the following questions: -

1. How do we best protect brownfield employment land?
2. If we cannot protect sites identified as valuable employment sites in the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan, how do we provide for future employment that the town needs?

The report recommends that authority is delegated to the Planning & Development Manager to continue discussions with the MDC Policy Officer about whether any of the brownfield sites identified by MDC for inclusion on a new statutory brownfield register can be allocated through Part 2 of the Mendip Local Plan as employment land before the register is published.

The White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market' was presented to Parliament in February 2017 and sets out a broad range of reforms that government plans to introduce to help reform the housing market and increase the supply of new homes.

Section A.41 of the White Paper says:

'Bringing brownfield land back into use:

The Government has already embarked on an ambitious programme to bring brownfield land back into use, which includes:

introducing statutory brownfield registers which local planning authorities will use to indicate which previously developed sites are suitable for housing. These registers provide a platform for granting permission in principle for housing on suitable sites, giving early certainty to landowners, developers and communities'

This could potentially undermine the Neighbourhood Plan Policy BE1 (now part of the Local Plan) which is to protect the remaining "valuable employment sites" many of which are brownfield sites (land previously developed). The Planning Advisory Group have been advised of this issue, although no paper was submitted for discussion.

The concern is the loss of brownfield land within Frome due to a new statutory duty of the District Council to prepare a brownfield register. Once a site is on the register, it will effectively have outline consent for housing making it more desirable to developers. This would exacerbate the problems that already exist in terms of the steady loss of employment land to housing. The results of survey work commissioned by FTC provides evidence that: -

- The increasing demand for housing land is a 'real problem' since it places greater value on land that can be used for housing and results in landowners (of employment land) seeking permission for residential development.
- There is limited land designated as employment land within the town centre where many businesses we have surveyed wish to operate. As such the likelihood of new business space becoming available in the short to medium term is limited. The demand for residential developments is placing upward pressure on land value within and close to the town centre, thereby causing a 'knock-on' effect on available employment land.

Peter Wheelhouse, Economic Development & Regeneration Manager & Deputy Town Clerk will provide further information and lead the discussion on this issue at the meeting.

Recommendation

Delegate to the Planning & Development Manager to continue discussions with the MDC Policy Officer about whether any of the brownfield sites identified by MDC for inclusion on a new statutory brownfield register can be allocated through Part 2 of the Mendip Local Plan as employment land before the register is published.