

## Agenda Item 4

### For decision - Selwood Garden Village

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#### Summary

This report sets out the role Frome Town Council can take in ensuring that Frome residents are fully engaged and informed about the proposals for Selwood Garden Village and to ensure that the development proposals that emerge best meet the needs of the town.

#### Background

Grassroots Planning, on behalf of Land Value Alliance (LVA) and a consortium of landowners are seeking to deliver a large, mixed use development to the south of Frome, known as Selwood Garden Village.

Their aim is to deliver a well-connected new community, with around 1500 new homes (market, social and affordable housing), employment land, a new local centre and community hub to be delivered in the initial phases. As part of the proposals there are significant infrastructure improvements, which will include new roads and junctions and public open space, cycle routes together with a new primary school, playing pitches and public transport infrastructure improvements.

Frome Town Council see this proposal as *potentially* an opportunity to provide much needed facilities and infrastructure for the town, both on and off site. A comprehensive proposal offers far more opportunities to provide this than the current piecemeal development proposals that are coming forward, that do not add to the existing infrastructure of the town.

However, this is just the beginning of a process in which we want to ensure that the community, along with the town council, is closely involved as the project develops. We also want to ensure that the development proposal best meets the needs of the existing town and is one that we could all be proud of. By working together with the community and developers we aim to get the best possible results with excellent design, building and environmental standards and the best possible facilities for the town.

We are committed to exploring with LVA, the consortium of landowners and the District Council and Selwood Parish Council how these aims can be met.

#### Process so far

A public consultation event was organised by LVA took place on Tuesday 10 December (between 2pm and 8pm) and Saturday 14 December (between 11am and 3pm). The proposals can also be viewed [online here](#). This was the first public consultation and it set out the initial vision on consultation boards, showing a masterplan of how the proposal could be achieved.

We expect that this is the first of many opportunities for the community to engage, to understand the proposals, to propose improvements and to say what the town needs from this development. To this end, discussions have taken place with LVA and Grass Roots Planning regarding how the town council can lead this engagement process. LVA believe that the town council are best placed to do this. We have confirmed that we would like to take on this role and have been very clear from the outset that we are and will remain neutral in the process and that our involvement does not imply our support for the proposals.

We have also met with Mendip District Council and discussed our involvement with them. They have confirmed that they are supportive of this but are not in a position to offer any resources or carry out any engagement themselves other than the statutory consultation once a formal application has been submitted.

In considering our involvement in this process, some questions have been raised by Cllrs that need to be considered and answered through the process of engagement. These questions cannot be fully answered at this stage, but some initial comments are set out below.

- **Does Frome really need this amount of houses?**

The Mendip District Council Local Plan Part 1 & 2 sets out the amount of new homes the District needs to provide over the plan period from 2006 – 2029. The figure for the district is 11,253 and the figure for Frome is 2,776.

The number of houses built and approved since 2007 together with the number of houses allocated through Part 2 of the plan indicate that Frome is well on the way to meeting the figure of 2,776 new houses. However, the District Council will have a residual number of houses that will need to be accommodated within the district and preference will be given to the five towns as the most appropriate places to accommodate further development. As Frome is the only town in the district with a train station it is likely to be viewed as the most sustainable, making Frome a favoured location for large scale strategic growth of the type being promoted by the Selwood Garden Village.

- **Is Selwood Garden Village the only option to expand Frome?**

We are aware that alternative ideas are being proposed for land to the east of Frome by the Civic Society. To ensure that Cllrs are fully aware of these alternative ideas, the Civic Society have been invited to present the alternative to Cllrs, including District Cllrs and Selwood Parish Cllrs.

We need to keep in mind that even if Cllrs agree that the alternative is a preferred option, the proposals for Selwood Garden Village will still go ahead and we need to ensure that we influence those proposals to ensure that if it approved, it best meets the needs of the town.

- What does Frome need for the next 20 years?

This is an important question that will need to be considered as part of the upcoming revision of the Mendip Local Plan Part 1 and subsequent Local Plans. This is a wider piece of work that will have to be carried out over a longer period than is available to respond to the Selwood Garden Village proposals. An update of the Frome Community Plan is one way to approach this and the findings of the engagement on Selwood Garden Village will be used to inform the updated plan.

### Next steps

Following the public consultation by LVA and Grassroots Planning, discussions have confirmed that the feedback from the consultation did not clearly identify what the town needs and wants in terms of infrastructure from the development. Infrastructure is not the only consideration at this stage, layout and character are also important considerations for the masterplan and, again, this was not clearly identified through the consultation responses. The finer detail of design and layout will be part of subsequent reserved matters applications.

The feedback from the public consultation emphasises the need for Frome Town Council to take the lead in enabling the community and stakeholders to set the vision, concept and principles of the development that will underpin the plans for Selwood Garden Village. We also need to ensure that the existing town and residents will benefit from the proposals by providing:

- improved highways infrastructure
- improved and integrated public transport
- integrated cycling and walking infrastructure
- affordable/social housing
- commercial/workspace
- access to improved services and amenities, including education and medical services
- good design to encourage community and reduce car use
- access to integrated and high quality green spaces and the river corridor

To achieve the above, we will need to put together a detailed plan of community engagement, identify all the relevant stakeholder groups within the community in order to compile the principles of development for what the town needs. This would include setting up a Community Stakeholder Forum that can continue to work with developers to influence the planning of Selwood Garden Village.

These principles may include:

- Ensuring that the new community is integrated with Frome both physically and socially
- Developing facilities that meets the needs of the existing community
- Providing a suitable mix of housing to meet local need including social as well as affordable housing
- Ensuring good quality employment in the right environment that reduces the need to travel to work

- Walking and cycling provision that is prioritised with public transport so that provision significantly enhances the current network
- Community ownership and stewardship of open spaces
- A carbon neutral development that takes an innovative approach to renewable energy generation, waste reduction and sustainable transport as part of a town wide strategy to address climate change
- Flexibility in design that enables the new community to adapt and change

The issue of the layout and character of the development could be addressed through the Design Review Process which would include the town council and other local stakeholders. A review would ensure that any advice is independent and would be funded by LVA.

To be able to deliver proper community engagement, we will need to resource this project as it will require a significant amount of time of the Planning & Development Manager working alongside the Community Development and Marketing & Communication teams. We will, therefore, need to backfill the existing duties of the Planning and Development Manger which, in turn, will require some financial support. We have established that MDC are not in a position to offer any financial support and therefore propose to request support from LVA.

To ensure that we are transparent in this process we would need to draw up an agreement that clearly states what role the town council will play, what will be delivered and that we will remain neutral in the process. If LVA agree to funding any agreement it would be made publicly available.

#### Recommendations

1. Frome Town Council take the lead in enabling the community and stakeholders to set the vision, concept and principles of the development that will underpin the plans for Selwood Garden Village.
2. Draft a detailed plan of community engagement, identify all the relevant stakeholder groups within the community and identify the principles of development for what the town needs.
3. Request financial support from LVA to enable the above, subject to an agreement that FTC will remain neutral