

### Agenda Item 3

For information and discussion – Update on major development proposals in Frome and potential next steps

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#### Summary

This report provides an update on proposals for major development in Frome including Saxonvale, Selwood Garden Community, Cherry Grove, Keyford and Little Keyford Lane, Sandy's Hill Lane, Marston Lane, Innox Hill and Packsaddle.

The report explores why we have seen so many major proposals come forward recently and highlights our responses to date.

At the meeting there will be a brief presentation and then a discussion around our potential approach to major development in the future.

#### Background

The two most prominent development proposals in Frome, Saxonvale and Selwood Garden Community will be familiar to most councillors. In recent months, we have seen a series of other speculative development proposals come forward.



The map (opposite) and table below (which will be presented at the meeting) show all the major development proposals that the Planning Committee has considered over the last 4 years or will be considering very soon. That's nearly 3000 new dwellings, plus some employment land and associated infrastructure. Some of those applications already have consent, and some are still to be determined or considered. Below is a summary of those applications.

	name	description
1	FRO001 Wainhomes/Pegasus	70 dwellings
2	FRO150a Keyford	up to 100 dwellings
3	FRO150 Keyford	up to 120 dwellings
4	Sandys Hill Lane	up to 200 dwellings 4.5ha employment land
5	FRO004 Keyford	up to 20 self-build
6	Caxton Road	157 dwellings
7	Selwood Garden Community	1700 homes mixed use
8	Consent for commercial development	small light industrial/business park
9	SGC Solar Farm	Withdrawn
10	Marston Lane 2022/0616/OUT	150 dwellings
11	Self build site LVA	5 dwellings
12	Saxonvale	Mixed use 300 dwellings
13	Cherry Grove	Erection of 24 affordable passive houses
14	Innox Hill	71 Dwellings
15	Packsaddle	SCC owned site under option for residential development - Possibly 70 houses +

## Saxonvale

There are two separate applications that have been received. The descriptions for each application and our responses to date are shown below.

### Acorn Property Group

2019/1180/OTS

Application for Outline Planning Permission with some matters reserved for the Retention of the 'Western Warehouse' and attached infill building, demolition of other existing buildings and mixed-use development for residential dwellings (C3) including flexible live/work accommodation, residential care accommodation (C2) and mixed workspace/retail/cafe/restaurant/bar/public/house/community/cultural/leisure uses (B1, A1, A3, A4, D1, D2), including an element of flexible use, and associated infrastructure, with details of access (additional information received 11.06.20).

FTC objected to the application primarily on the grounds of insufficient employment space and affordable housing. In total, there were 498 letters of objection and 2 in support. The application was approved by Mendip's Planning Board, but a consent will not be issued until the Section 106 legal agreement which has been drafted for some time, has been signed. We do not know what the delay is in signing it.

### Mayday Saxonvale

2021/2373/OTA

Application for outline planning permission with all matters reserved for a mixed-use regeneration proposal including up to 182 dwellings (use class C3), a hotel (use class C1), commercial and community provision (use classes E, F1 and F2), primary school (use class F1), an outdoor lido (use class F2), public open space/parkland and associated infrastructure.

The Mayday application has not yet been considered by Mendip's Planning Board, but was fully supported by FTC, in particular applauding the effort that has gone into this and the 'no profit' aims for the development. So far, there are 1159 letters of support and 6 objections. This level of support for any application, in my experience is unprecedented.

For both the Acorn and Mayday applications, we facilitated public meetings to help ensure that residents were fully informed, and their feedback was reflected in our responses.

Independent of either application, FTC has explored the potential for bringing the vacant former Western Warehouse and adjoining buildings back into productive use for cultural/community purposes. An application to the Government's Community Renewal Fund was made in 2021 to secure seed corn funding to undertake a detailed feasibility study. The application was unsuccessful, and the project is paused due to a lack of funding, but a brief is in place should this project be revived at some point in the future.

### Selwood Garden Community

2021/1675/EOUT

Application for Outline Planning Permission for the erection of up to 1,700 dwellings (Use Class C3), two care homes (Use Class C3), 12 hectares of employment land (Use Classes E, B2 and B8), a mixed-use local centre for primary school (Use Class F1), cafes/restaurant and convenience store (Use Class E) and other supporting social and physical infrastructure (Use Classes F1, F2 and E), provision of greenspace and other supporting ancillary works. All matters (Access (within the site), Layout, Scale, Appearance, Landscaping) reserved except for four new vehicular site access points from the existing highway. Land south of Frome bounded By Marston Road, B3092/railway Line and A361 (Frome Bypass) and including land to the south of the A361 Frome

This application was submitted in July 2021 and is still under consideration by Mendip. Amended plans are expected to be submitted shortly. Following the submission of the earlier plans, we arranged a series of public engagement events, including themed stakeholder meetings. As we have been aware for some time that revised plans and further supporting documents would be submitted, we have not yet formally responded to the plans.

We did formally respond to the pre-application consultation, stating that we would prefer to see a properly master planned approach to a development of this site, but the devil is very often in the detail, and we do not have all the detail yet. We are aware of the various campaign groups that are against any development in this area. To date there are 239 letters of objection.

A separate application for a solar farm was discussed by the Planning Committee and it was clear that there was little support for the application because of the impact this would have on the landscape, residents of Edmund Park and the surrounding area. Following those discussions and feedback from other consultees, the solar farm application has been withdrawn.

### Cherry Grove

Erection of 24 No. passive house dwellings with associated parking and landscaping along with re-arrangement of parking provision for Cherry Trees. | Land At 377314 147167 Cherry Grove Frome

This application has not yet been considered by Mendip's Planning Board. Originally FTC's Planning Committee objected to this application because of the loss of employment land. After lengthy discussions with the applicant and some reassurance that the future residents would not be impacted by noise from the adjoining commercial use, and just as important, that the adjoining business would not be under threat from noise complaints by those residents, we decided to support this application.

If approved by Mendip this will be the first affordable 'Passivhaus' scheme we have seen in Frome. Passivhaus (literally passive house in English) refers to buildings created to rigorous energy efficient design standards so that they maintain an almost constant temperature. We are constantly told by developers that it is not viable to build passive houses, let alone affordable houses, so this will be an exemplar development and we intend to work with the housing association involved to promote it to others.

### **Keyford & Little Keyford Lane**

Three separate sites at Keyford and Little Keyford, totalling 300 dwellings.

These sites are allocated for development in the Mendip Local Plan. As they are allocated, it was not a question of should they be developed, more a case of ensuring that the development was suitable. For all three applications the Planning Committee objected to, there was no comprehensive masterplan, the access arrangements were not acceptable, the layout and design were poor, active travel had not been properly considered and the sustainability proposals were very poor.

Working with Friends of Little Keyford and the District Ward Cllr, meetings were held with the two developers, eventually resulting in amended plans. In the case of all three sites, amendments were made. Whilst a lot of improvements have been made, we have said we still want to see even more. Two of the sites have now been approved by Mendip and the third is still being considered.

### **Sandys Hill Lane**

2021/1659/REM

Approval of Reserved Matters (layout, scale, appearance, and landscaping) regarding Outline Planning Permission 2019/1671/OTS for the development of 198 dwellings, parking open space, landscaping, and all associated infrastructure. Land North and South of Sandys Hill Lane.

This application covers part of the original outline application, which includes commercial development. That application will be submitted separately later. As with the Keyford sites, a strong objection was made to this application. One of the main issues here was the lack of sustainability of the build. The application was considered by Mendip's Planning Board, who agreed with our views and gave the developers the opportunity to amend the plans rather than refuse them. This application has now been approved. Like the Keyford sites, we worked with various parties and lots of discussions took place. We are happy that improvements were made but would still like to have seen more.

### **Innox Hill**

The Planning Committee received a pre-application presentation in March, proposing the erection of 71 dwellings. There is a long history of applications on this site, all of which have been refused or withdrawn.

The meeting was attended by 50 residents who are all opposed to any development here. There are many issues with this site including the landscape impact, traffic impacts, flooding, and its proximity to the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The message from residents and the Planning Committee was very clearly that this development would not be supported and at best it is just speculative development.

We expect the application to be formally submitted to Mendip within the next few months.

#### Marston Lane

2022/0616/OUT

Outline planning application (with all matters reserved except for access) for the demolition of existing outbuildings and erection of up to 150 residential dwellings including affordable housing with the provision of vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian access onto Marston Lane alongside public open spaces, community space, children's play, sustainable urban drainage systems, hard and soft landscaping, infrastructure, and earthworks. Land At 376568 146739 Marston Lane Frome

This application was submitted in March and will be considered by the Planning Committee on 28 April. We previously discussed this as a pre-application proposal. Again, the message from residents and the Planning Committee was very clearly that this development would not be supported and at best it is just speculative development.

#### Packsaddle

This site has been owned by Somerset County Council (SCC) for the last 50 years and earmarked for a future school site. SCC have now determined that the site is no longer needed and without any public consultation, have agreed an option with a housing association, to sell subject to gaining planning permission. There is no indication of how many houses at this stage, but I would estimate around 70 houses.

We have contacted the housing association and asked for an early discussion before any formal application is submitted. We are aware of the strong opposition from residents. With all these sites there has been a lot of negotiation and discussion going on behind the scenes, including pre-application discussions.

#### Why are we seeing so many development proposals?

In my view, this is largely because Mendip cannot demonstrate a 5-year land supply. This means that it does not have a valid Local Plan and therefore the policies in that plan cannot be applied. In these circumstances, the key consideration is what is said in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which focuses on whether development is sustainable.

I also believe that many developers are keen to get development built before the new Building Regulations 'Future Homes Standard' come into force in 2025, which will require a greater investment in sustainability measures and materials.

#### What is the Planning Committee's current approach to development?

We want to ensure that any development that comes forward is appropriate, in the right location, offers wider benefits to the town and provides a sufficient mix of housing, including

affordable and social housing. There should be appropriate infrastructure, active travel opportunities, open space, and employment opportunities on the larger sites. And obviously the impact on traffic, existing infrastructure and residents are key considerations (this is not an exhaustive list!)

The current approach is that we acknowledge that there is the potential for all the applications to be approved by Mendip as the Local Planning Authority. So rather than just object, where we can, we work with the developers to try and get the best scheme, making it clear that we may still object. We also make sure that Mendip Cllrs are aware of our comments and make representations to the Planning Board.

### What else has been done?

In addition to the major planning proposals referred to above, in the last year the Committee has considered many smaller applications. One of the main issues the Committee sees is the lack of sustainability measures for all new development. Mendip's policy is out of date and to be fair, government legislation and the building regulations have not caught up with the Climate and Ecological Emergency that we are now facing.

Working with Nikki Brain, Resilience Manager, a Climate Emergency Planning Guide was produced and adopted by FTC. Whilst this guide cannot be enforced as policy, it sends a clear message to developers about what the Town Council expects to see for all new development. I would also like to think that by doing this, it has encouraged Mendip to prepare their own Supplementary Planning Guide on sustainability, which once adopted will become Policy. We have been putting pressure on Mendip to do this for a long time. You can have a look at FTC's guide on our website here: <https://bit.ly/3uyHx33>

### Discussion

Building on the work that we have done, what do you think should happen next?

Some suggested questions for councillors to consider at the meeting include:

- Should we shout louder about the work we do and play more of a campaigning role?
- Should we change our approach, and simply object to all new development?
- Do we really need more new houses, if so, how many?
- Should we step up our work to identify the needs and aspirations of the community in preparing our response to major development proposals?