

Agenda item 7

For decision – Planning Committee update

Author: Jane Llewellyn, Planning & Development Manager and Owen King, Planning & Development Officer

Summary (inc. recommendations)

This report gives an update on the work of the Planning Committee and team over the last 6 months with statistical data for the last year. It sets out the process for responding to the current Somerset Local Plan consultation asking for delegated authority for the Planning Committee to agree the response.

The report also sets out a new process for responding to licencing applications, for them to be considered by the planning committee. This will require a change to Standing Orders.

The recommendations are:

1. The formal response to the Somerset Local Plan consultation is agreed by the Planning Committee on 16 July.
2. Standing orders are amended to enable the planning committee to respond to licencing applications.

The Planning and Development function continues to play an important role in representing local interests within the statutory planning process, while also contributing to a range of strategic projects that will shape the future development of Frome.

During the year to June 2026, Frome Town Council considered 231 planning applications received by Somerset Council and submitted 205 responses, averaging around 20 applications per month. The most common application types were householder applications, which relate to changes to existing homes (61), tree works and felling within conservation areas (59), full planning applications, which are detailed proposals for new developments (45), and applications relating to Tree Preservation Orders, which seek permission for work to protected trees (18).

The Council raised objections to 21 applications. Of these, six were subsequently refused by Somerset Council and three were approved. The Council submitted no objection comments on the majority of applications considered, with six of these later refused and 126 approved. These figures show that while the Town Council seeks to work constructively within the planning system, it continues to challenge proposals where there are concerns about their impact on the town, its residents, heritage, environment or infrastructure.

Alongside this, a significant part of the team's work has involved engaging with developers and participating in the planning process for emerging sites across Frome. Key areas of focus have included Selwood Garden Community, Oldford Hill, developments in the Keyford area, and Packsaddle Fields. In each case, the team has worked to scrutinise proposals, assess their implications for infrastructure, access, landscape and community impact, and support informed decision-making through the planning process.

This has included attendance at Somerset committee meetings and planning inquiries, where the Council has sought to ensure that local views are properly represented and that proposals are considered in the context of the town's wider needs and priorities.

Summary of major Planning applications

Saxonvale

The site is currently on the open market, being marketed by CBRE, on behalf of Somerset Council. Whilst there are no current planning applications, a further planning application will be required before any development can take place.

Selwood Garden Community

The application was approved on behalf of the Secretary of State in April 2026, this is a mixed-use development comprising up to 1,700 dwellings. Over the past 5 years we have worked closely with residents, the developer and Somerset Council to push for the best possible outcome for Frome. That means proper infrastructure, improvements to the A361/A362 junction, investment in community buildings, employment opportunities and making sure active travel is built in from the start. The scheme secures approximately 510 new affordable and socially rented homes for local people. This however only the beginning, the next phase will be a further application to agree the Design Codes for the development followed by reserved matters applications.

Oldford

We are currently dealing with an outline application for the development of up to 360 dwellings & land for a community facility and public open space. As the site is not in Frome parish, we have had several meetings with Berkley Parish Council and the developers. This includes site visits, one to walk around the site and another to walk around the surrounding area with the applicant's transport consultants, to help understand their active travel proposals and the highway impacts.

The Planning Committee has considered the application, with our main concerns being the highway impacts and flooding/drainage. However, it was agreed to defer any response as further details are required to make a fully informed recommendation. Other statutory consultees have also requested further information.

Birchall Lane

We are currently dealing with an outline application for Erection of up to 120 dwellings, access and public open space. As the site is right on the Selwood Parish boundary, we have involved Selwood Parish Council in all our discussions as the development will impact properties adjoining the site. Again, the main areas of concern are the highway impacts and flooding/drainage. It was agreed to defer any response as further details are required to make a fully informed recommendation. Other statutory consultees have also requested further information.

Somerset Local Plan - Scoping consultation (Reg 20)

This is our opportunity to influence the plan at a key stage; Local Plans are essential because they act as the rulebook for future development. They dictate what gets built, where it goes, and which areas are protected. By balancing economic, social, and environmental needs.

The first consultation stage in the new plan-making system is on the scope of the Somerset Local Plan. This is where Somerset are asking for people's views on what the local plan should contain and how Somerset should engage with people.

Somerset Council are required at this stage to consult on –

- **draft Scope of the Somerset Local Plan** – this proposes the broad subject matters to be covered by the policies. It does not set out what the policies will say.
- **draft Local Plan Engagement Plan** – this sets out how the Council proposes to engage communities, stakeholders and statutory bodies across each stage of the new plan making process
- **draft Local Plan Vision and Outcomes** – this sets out a positive long-term vision and early statement of ambition for Somerset. It is supported by strategic outcomes that will guide our choices about growth, development quality, infrastructure and environmental enhancement.

In addition to this, the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) which identifies the land put forward in the call for sites has been published. This is supporting information/evidence to support the scope of the Local Plan and does not form part of the consultation at this stage.

The HELAA is a high-level assessment of the **suitability, availability and achievability** of sites. It is based on a straightforward assessment of key issues and available information with a view to understanding whether it has potential to feed into developable and deliverable supply of land for development in Somerset. It is not an absolute assessment of the detail of a site, project or proposal, and the outcome of the HELAA assessment holds no planning status. Determining a site as suitable, available and achievable does not in itself guarantee that planning permission would be granted, or that a site is appropriate for allocation in the Local Plan.

The consultation runs from 19 Jun - 24 Jul 2026 and as FTC are a statutory consultee, a formal response from the Council will be submitted. There is a lot of information to consider, so it will take some time to prepare our response. We will be asking for input from various departments to ensure we cover all the issues such as open spaces, sustainability and economic development. As the next Council meeting is on the 5 August, we request that the formal response to the consultation is agreed by the Planning Committee on 16 July.

Frome Area Movement & Place Plan

Significant progress has been made on the Frome Area Movement and Place Plan (Movement Strategy), including securing technical and policy support from Somerset Council with a view to developing a model that could be used more widely across the county. Engagement has

begun with neighbouring parish councils to co-develop the plan, and a specialist transport consultant has been engaged to carry out the data research and produce the report.

A programme of engagement activities has been scheduled for summer 2026, including field visits with parish representatives and stands at local events to share information and gather local issues and priorities. In addition, a MyFrome (GoVocal) page has been set up with a survey to help further understand local issues and priorities.

Shopfront Design Guide

It was agreed at the Council meeting in January to produce a Shopfront Design Guide for Frome, working in consultation with the Town Centre Working Group. We have not started work on this project yet, as the set up and preparation work on the Frome Area Movement & Place Plan is currently taking up capacity. We aim to get started on this project in September.

Licencing

Somerset Council are the licencing Authority, they administer and issue licences, permits, consents and notices for a wide range of activities in Somerset. FTC are consulted on licence applications within the parish, mostly for premises, pavement and street trading licences.

Our current process for responding to licencing applications, is to consult with the Ward Cllrs and relevant lead Cllr for their views. To ensure that we have a more formal and documented process in place, it is proposed that all responses to licencing applications are agreed by the planning committee. The relevant ward Cllrs will still have the opportunity to submit their views to the committee. As this will require a change to standing orders, the following change is proposed.

18. Terms of reference of the Planning Committee

- 1 The committee will be responsible for and review of:*
 - i. Undertake all duties of the Council under Town and Country Planning Acts, Orders and Regulations and all matters relating to roads and highways including Road Closure Notices, road signs, traffic management, traffic regulations ~~and~~, bus shelters **and licencing***
 - v. Delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, to respond to minor planning **and licencing** issues on behalf of the Council*

Note: The delegated powers are only used when there are time constraints, and a decision needs to be agreed before the next available committee meeting.

In addition to the above, day to day work includes responding to resident enquiries regarding planning applications and enforcement, supporting the implementation and monitoring of neighbourhood planning policies, and working with Somerset Traffic Management on speed limits, including managing the speed indicator devices in the town. We also support work relating to home energy and sustainability, nature recovery planning, and community-led development initiatives, including working with the Frome Area Community Land Trust.

Other options considered	<i>None</i>
Key considerations for the Council	To be confident that our standing orders and procedures are up to date and fit for purpose
Consultation and feedback	None
Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	Links to Aim 4 of the Council Plan – Improve Assets and Infrastructure
Financial and Risk Implications	Having up to date policies and procedures minimises any implications.
Legal / HR Implications	Standing Orders are a legal requirement. The GPC is a legal power
Equalities Implications	None
Community Safety Implications	None
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	None
Health and Safety Implications	None
Constitutional Requirements	None
Background Papers	None
Report Sign-Off	Jane Llewellyn

Recommendations

1. The formal response to the Somerset Local Plan consultation is agreed by the Planning Committee on 16 July.
2. Standing orders are amended to enable the planning committee to respond to licencing applications.