

Re-think on plans for new Forest village

FOREST councillors have agreed to look again at how to provide for thousands of new homes over the next 20 years after 7,000 people signed a petition against the "preferred option".

by Mark Elson

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The council agreed last year that its preferred option for the new Local Plan was for a new settlement to provide a large proportion of the houses needed, and there has been much discussion about the location being in the Churcham area.

At the full council meeting last Thursday councillors agreed to look again at the strategy, including dropping the new village idea.

The Local Plan process — which will act as blueprint for development up to 2041 — prompted what campaigners claim is the largest petition ever brought before the council.

John Francis, of campaign group No New Town, told councillors: "This level of opposition to the formation of a Local Plan is unprecedented."

He said the opposition had increased because the preferred option was being "driven through without consultation" — a claim denied by the council.

Cllr Francis — who is chairman of Churcham Parish Council said the preferred option did not meet the four tests of "soundness" required by national planning policy.

He said: "While we recognise the pressures of housing allocation, now is the time to address the future of the district."

"Use the opportunity of housing to bolster and develop our

towns and villages, make them sustainable, reduce traffic and give our people environments to flourish in."

Cllr Chris McFarling (Green, St Briavels), who is responsible for the development of the Local Plan, said: "It is critical that consideration of the location of a new settlement is taken in the round and is evaluated with other response to the Local Plan strategic option consultation that took place recently."

"As more evidence is gathered and more feedback assessed, the proposed locations for development can be reviewed and reassessed."

The details and implications of the points raised in the petition will be discussed with members so they can be fully informed of all the planning considerations in choosing the most suitable sites across the district.

Rejecting the claim about lack of consultation, he said: "The petition has arisen as a direct result of a specific consultation exercise."

Cllr Philip Burford (Ind, Hartpury) proposed that consideration of the Local Plan should include possibly dropping the idea of a new village which was later agreed by the council.

He said: "I agree the issues raised in the petition need to be considered in the round."

"I think we need to go further to give the petitioners confidence that all options for the development of a new Local Plan will be considered and



Campaigners deliver a message as councillors arrived for last Thursday's meeting of the full council

this may include not developing a single settlement."

Council leader Cllr Tim Gwiliam (Ind All, Berry Hill) said new evidence brought by the campaigners suggested Churcham might not be the right place "and that might be the case".

He added: "It doesn't say the preferred strategy is wrong, it just says a mistake may have been made by suggesting the area in the first place."

He also underlined the importance of agreeing the Local Plan to protect the area against indiscriminate development.

"I welcome this end of the first stage of consultation. When we enter into the next stage of consultation, which will be very soon, we will consult with every councillor, every council, parish and town so we can develop a Local Plan which we can defend as a district, that we can support as a district."

"We might not all be happy with the findings, we might all have to put up with something we don't like but as a district we can keep away those large developers who just want to build the houses they want to build where they want to build them."

Council chair

THE NEW chair of the Forest of Dean District Council is Julia Gooch.

The Independent Alliance councillor for Newent and Taynton was elected at last week's meeting of the full council.

The vice-chairman is Independent councillor for Coleford Clive Elsmore.

Covid tests

A MOBILE testing unit will be available at Cinderford, Hartpury and Lydney.

The unit will be in the Newerne Street car park tomorrow (Thursday), the university on Saturday and Sunday and Cinderford rugby club on Monday and Tuesday.

Anyone with symptoms of Covid-19 can have a test, which must be booked in advance.

To book a test or for more information on testing, go to the NHS website or call 119.

Correction

AN article in last week's For-ester, 'Plans for £20m Forest housing bid', referred to a plan for housing in the Forest of Dean.

This was incorrect, as the bid has been submitted for leisure facilities.

We apologise for any confusion caused by this error.



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