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Incorporating Dean Forest Mercury, Dean Forest Guardian and Lydney Observer

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7,000 sign petition against homes plan

A LOCAL action group is hoping to persuade Forest of Dean District Council to rethink the Preferred Option of its Local Plan for a 5,000-home settlement at Churcham in a meeting of full council this week.

The group, called No New Towns, will present a "landmark" 7,000-signature petition opposing the development to the council this Thursday (May 20).

In what is described as "the biggest planning application the Forest has ever seen", the district authority revealed plans for the large-scale development in the vicinity of the A40 and A48 back in January following a Freedom of Information request by the action group.

The council has identified the new settlement as its Preferred Option to meet the government's housing allocation figures for the district in its Local Plan, which will set out how the Forest of Dean will develop over the next 20 years to 2041.

by Jake Chown

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The action group is made up of six local parish councils as well as other individuals and organisations that would be affected by the Churcham development.

Thursday's meeting will mark the first time in the council's 48-year history that a petition has gained enough support, with 25% of the votes cast in the last district election, to be put before full council.

Group leader Councillor John Francis, chair of Churcham Parish Council, will make a presentation about the petition, which was launched ahead of public knowledge of the impending public consultation on the Local Plan and "stands in its own right" as a democratic representation specifically against a new town in Churcham.



Continues on Page 2

Thousands have signed a petition against a proposed 5,000-home settlement near Highnam Woods

Murdered student's parents 'pleased' over killer's death

THE parents of murdered student Joanna Parrish say they are not sorry her killer died in jail last week - despite losing the chance to finally see him tried for her murder.

Serial killer Michel Fourniret - known as the Ogre of the Ardennes - confessed to the 1990 killing of the 20-year-old from Newnham-on-Severn three years ago, and was due to appear in a French court to answer the charge.

But the monster's death at the age of 79 a week last Monday, in a secure hospital unit in France, has robbed parents Roger Parrish and Pauline Murrell of the chance of seeing him in court after a three-decade campaign to get justice for Jo.

Fourniret was serving two life sentences for murdering at least eight young women, and finally told French authorities in 2018 that he had also killed Joanna and a disabled woman from Auxerre, Marie-Angèle Domèce.

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Weather Watch

By Jonathan Powell

Everydayweather.co.uk

Forecast. Changeable with showers or longer spells of rain. Windy.

Thursday Rain/Showers. Day 13C/55F Night 7C/45F in Coleford. Mod south-westerly.

Friday Rain/Showers. Day 13C/55F Night 8C/46F in Ross-on-Wye. Moderate south-westerly.

Saturday Scattered showers. Day 13C/55F Night 7C/45F in Lea. Moderate westerly.

Sunday Chiefly dry. Day 15C/59F Night 6C/43F in Hardwicke. Light/Mod south-westerly.

Monday Scattered showers. Day 15C/59F Night 8C/46F in Foy. Light south-westerly.

Tuesday Showers. Day 16C/61F Night 8C/46F in Birdwood. Light south-westerly.

Wednesday Chiefly dry. Day 15C/59F Night 8C/46F in Stroat. Light south-westerly.

UV: Low/Moderate

Outlook: Settling down.

Sunrise: 5.12 a.m. Sunset: 9.06 p.m.

Moonrise: 12.58 p.m. Moonset: 3.27 a.m.

Chemists' Rota

A pharmacy is open between 10am and 2pm on Sunday, May 21 at: Mitcheldean Pharmacy, 5 Churchill Way, Mitcheldean (01594 544997).

If it is necessary that you have an URGENT (as written by your doctor) prescription dispensed when no pharmacies are open, you should contact your GP or the police who will be able to help you.

Forest school pupils and staff get on their bikes

by Jake Chown

jake.chown@theforester.co.uk

PUPILS and staff from two Forest schools "got active" when travelling to school last month as part of a nationwide challenge to improve physical wellbeing and reduce carbon emissions.

More than 20 schools from across the county took part in the Big Pedal 2021 challenge, which encouraged pupils, staff and parents to cycle, walk, wheel or scoot their way into school everyday for two weeks from April 19.

The scheme was organised by walking and cycling charity Sutrans and schools from the Forest of Dean, including Severnbanks Primary in Lydney and St White's Primary in Cinderford, signed up to take part.

The event is the UK's largest inter-school cycling, walking, wheeling and scooting challenge and aims to encourage active travel to and from school.

The theme for this year's challenge was 'Amazing Journeys', with children encouraged to "see their local area from a new perspective and discover amazing journeys to school from around the world" as well as getting active.

Gloucestershire County Council's Thinktravel team helped to promote the scheme by encouraging schools to take part, in line with the council's climate change and air quality strategies, which aim to increase walking and cycling in the county.

On each day of the challenge, participating schools competed to see who could record the greatest number of pupils, staff and parents cycling, walking, scooting or using a wheelchair to travel to school.

More than 45,000 "active



Pupils at Severnbanks Primary in Lydney signed up to take part

journeys", including over 9,000 on a bike or scooter, were completed during the challenge, with 24 schools from across the county taking part.

The number of active journeys was a 56 per cent increase in comparison to the Big Pedal 2019, when 15 schools took part, logging a total of 28,822 journeys.

Each school's best five days determined their final position in the rankings, but all had the opportunity to take part in a one-day challenge instead if they wanted.

St White's Primary finished 206th in the overall national rankings, while

Severnbanks finished 272nd.

On her school's participation in the event, Severnbanks Headteacher Mrs Poole said: "The great thing about this competition is that more pupils are still being active even after the event."

"The aims were to improve the children's physical activity and wellbeing plus reduce the number of cars on the road, therefore carbon emissions."

"All year groups participated from nursery to Year 6. The highest class total was Ash Class (Year 4) with 464 journeys."

"We were 29th in the southwest out of 62

schools and our grand total was 3,087 journeys."

Philip Williams, lead commissioner for community infrastructure at Gloucestershire County Council, said: "I'm delighted so many schools in our county took part in the Big Pedal and completed so many active journeys."

"Active travel is a great way to boost children's physical health as well as mental health and wellbeing, while raising awareness of road safety and reducing congestion."

"I hope children and parents enjoyed the challenge and will carry on walking, cycling and scooting to school this summer."



7,000 sign petition against homes plan

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"For the Forest of Dean District Council to pursue the preferred option in the face of so much opposition is staggering", Cllr Francis said ahead of the meeting.

"The petition against the preferred option equates to 25% of the total vote cast for all district councillors in the last election. The groundswell of support and outrage is palpable in the community."

"This is a time to work with the community to benefit all, not just create profits for developers that have a track record of not delivering for the community."

The group would like to see development dispersed throughout the Forest rather than in one "Coleford-sized" new town on a greenfield site, which they say would be damaging

"environmentally, economically and socially" as well as causing "major gridlock" on both the A40 and A48, which are the main arterial routes between Gloucester, the Forest of Dean and Monmouthshire.

Forest of Dean MP Mark Harper is backing the dispersal strategy, along with local business chiefs, several district and county councillors and hundreds of local residents, who have aired their views on social media.

The council is opposed to that approach because it believes that adding more homes to existing communities would potentially do more harm than good, with forward plans manager Nigel Gibbons saying in March that dispersing the development would "load a number of areas with insufficient capacity for

transport and environmental considerations."

Developer Robert Hitchens published its ambitious "West of Severn" scheme earlier this year.

The scheme would involve the construction of two new roundabouts off the A40, three schools, a business park, a railway station, a park and ride and sport facilities in addition to the 5,000 homes.

The action group established a communications campaign following its Freedom of Information request to encourage local residents to have their say on the developments during a public consultation period, which has now ended.

A spokesperson for the group, 27-year-old Hannah Freeman, said of the campaign: "The communication group was formed to educate the local population of

the impending consultation period and alert them on how they could have their say regarding the council's decisions."

"Through successful social media campaigns, leaflets, banners and press articles, the public swamped the councillors' inboxes."

"This multi-channel campaign during lockdown paved the way to reaching more than 50,000 people, as well as gaining over 7,000 signatures on our petition."

"Keeping the public engaged, within the most pivotal decision regarding the Forest of Dean's future, is critical."

"Although the consultation period has now closed, our job is more important than ever. We will work alongside supportive stakeholders including Mark Harper MP, councillors, key

business figures and the public to ensure we hold the council accountable and achieve the best outcome for the future of the Forest of Dean."

An extension to the public consultation was refused during lockdown and the group were unable to leaflet residents during that period.

The group say they had to "resort" to Freedom of Information requests to ascertain that Churcham was the designated greenfield site for the new settlement, which if approved, would be home to around 10,000 people.

At an online meeting in March, district councillor Chris McFarling, who is cabinet member for climate and planning, said that construction of the homes would start in 2030 if the plans win approval.