

Three plans face village

THREE major housing schemes face the villagers of Thorncombe.

But members of the Village Trust breathed sighs of relief when they heard last week that no decisions would be made until district council planning officers have had time to consider their impact on the historic village.

The majority of residents in the village had already opposed the first

scheme, submitted by Mr Michael Fearn as agent for Thorncombe farmer and councillor Jim Atyeo.

This involves the building of 25 new houses, craft workshops and the conversion of a farmhouse at Higher Farm.

This was followed by two new proposals.

● The first is not a formal planning application but an offer of land to the district for low-cost housing to help the village.

The offer has been made by Mr Brian Maber and involves one acre on High Street.

Mr Maber would stand to get above agricultural value but below development value for the land, thus enabling the district to provide the low cost homes.

But a disadvantage of the site, which is opposite Mr Atyeo's land, is that access would have to be made through a high bank.

● The other proposal is a planning application by West Dorset builders C. G. Fry and Son Ltd, of Litton Cheney, for outline permission to build 27 houses on a more than two-acre site on Chard Street, opposite the village hall.

This would comprise a mixture of terraced, semi and detached properties — 15 two-bedroom "starter" homes, four four-bedroomed and eight three-bedroomed houses.

One of the main reasons why a decision on any of the proposals has had to be deferred is that South West Water Authority has

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made it quite clear that its sewage works cannot cope with existing demands, let alone cater for any "significant" development.

Another factor is that West Dorset District Council's chief planning officer, Mr Desmond Derrien, is keen to prevent the village from being swamped with new development.

The County Structure Plan describes Thorncombe as a priority village, meaning effort should be made to retain its school, employment facilities, opportunities, shops and other facilities — in return for which it suggests development of 50-150 new homes within the plan's 1980-96 period.

But Mr Derrien has advised councillors to look at the low end of this range.

His department will now consult with SWWA, and evaluate the impact of further development on Thorncombe. It is likely to take two to three months before the proposals come back to the planning committee.

Thorncombe Village Trust secretary Mr John Whitbread said the members had hoped for this "period of appraisal" rather than see a "first past the post" race by developers.

He said Trust members had guessed there would be more than one development proposal put forward for the village.

They were also aware that pressure could be put on the planning authority by national developers.

But they are concerned to know how long the "appraisal" of the proposals is going to take and are contacting other societies and groups in Dorset, such as the Beaminster Society, which have faced similar situations.