



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Duncan Sharkey
County Hall
The Crescent
Taunton
TA1 4DY

Our Ref: AS00454

11 October 2024

Dear Duncan

Re: Erection of 74 dwellings, 1 no. children with disabilities home, including means of access, drainage, landscaping and associated works. Land at Packsaddle Way, Frome, Somerset. 2023/0864/FUL

I have recently met with People for Packsaddle, the community group campaigning against the above planning application to develop the land at Packsaddle Community Fields.

As an MP, I do not take a public stance for or against planning applications. However I would appreciate clarification on certain aspects of the planning process that has been undertaken so far, specifically:

1. Most recently, and publicly uploaded onto the planning portal, is a series of correspondence and amended Viability Review Reports, primarily concerning a greatly reduced S106 for education contributions and a waiving of the 10% uplift on costs required to ensure a Net Zero standard, in order to improve the financial viability of the planning application. I believe you are in receipt of a letter from lawyer Tim Taylor of Khift Ltd detailing the specific questions on this the matter. I will not repeat them here but I would be keen to see your response.
2. According to PfP, Packsaddle Community fields were cleared by the Council in two stages, two months into the 'full season' ecological surveys, bat surveys and biodiversity benchmark assessment. The developer has denied the clearances had any impact on any of these surveys. The community feels that their attempts to understand the motivation behind the clearances were delayed by Council officers to the extent that an unanswered Freedom of Information request had to be referred to the Ombudsman. Even then, no answer was forthcoming due to the apparent costs of discovery. Can we please be provided with a full and adequate explanation as to the rationale being the land clearance? Can you please in addition explain the impact this has had on Natural England's bat monitoring?
3. PFP feel that there has been a lack of meaningful engagement from Somerset Council with the community regarding the fields. They list the following examples:



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- *Prior to the sale being agreed with Live West, a member of the local community expressed interest in buying the fields to bring them into community ownership, only to be told by the Estates Team that the price would be “millions” (the viability statement has since shown the price being paid by Live West is less than 1 million).*
- *There was no consultation with the community before the decision to the fields sell was made.*
- *Somerset Council tried to oppose the listing of the fields as an Asset of Community Value.*
- *The planning team have not respond meaningfully to legitimate objections and concerns raised by the community regarding the planning application (e.g. around flooding), whereas emails appear to show them working proactively with the applicant.*
- *People for Packsaddle have made a reasonable cash offer to buy the fields for the community to which Somerset Council have not responded to.*

I would be grateful if you could come back to me on the above issues at the earliest opportunity.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A Sabine'.

Anna Sabine MP

Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament
Frome and East Somerset