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## New 60-Home Development Proposed in East Malling Just Metres from Rejected Ivy Farm Site

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Residents in East Malling are bracing for another planning fight after the Vita Group announced early-stage proposals for 60 homes at Belvidere House, just a short distance from the previously rejected Ivy Farm scheme, *KentOnline* reports.

Villagers had recently celebrated a hard-won victory against a 52-home plan at Ivy Farm on Watlingbury Road. The decision came after a long campaign involving two refusals by the

area planning committee and, eventually, a final rejection by the full Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, despite internal pressure from planning officials.

Just months later, another developer has proposed a nearby plot, this time at Belvidere House, a Victorian estate about 700 metres from East Malling railway station.

In a community newsletter distributed by the Vita Group, the company confirmed it plans to submit an outline planning application for the new build. It is currently seeking feedback from local residents.

A spokesperson for Vita Group said, “Our proposals are still in a very early stage, and we wanted to engage with the local community as we know this area is being asked to take more housing. We are also aware of recent applications that the local community has raised concerns about.”

The developer said it believes the site can accommodate 60 homes, including 24 designated as affordable housing. It intends to preserve existing hedgerows and trees to protect biodiversity and soften the visual impact of the build.

“We will be preserving a key area of the site as open green space, providing dedicated areas for new residents to have spaces to walk and enjoy close to their homes,” the company added.

The scheme also includes plans for a new access point from Watlingbury Road and improvements to the off-site highways to manage traffic impact.

But for many residents, the news feels all too familiar. Gary James, a local who had spoken out against the Ivy Farm development, said: “The site virtually abuts Ivy Farm, so all the issues that the village raised there regarding traffic, safety, effect on heritage properties and biodiversity, would also be a concern here.”

He criticised the repeated challenges villagers face in resisting developers, stating, “The whole battle between locals trying to protect their area from over-development and the developers starts all over again. It’s relentless.”

Mr James also raised concerns about democratic engagement following a recent change by the council, which now limits public speakers to five per meeting. “The council has done its

best to hamstringing us by changing the constitution and taking away our right to speak,” he said.

Neighbouring resident Geoffrey Kenward, who lives adjacent to Belvidere House, also expressed frustration: “Their plan shows a number of new homes right beside my boundary fence, which obviously I am not happy about from a privacy point of view. There’s no indication of any screening on my side.”

He acknowledged that the site is mostly hidden but added, “There will still be all the traffic issues, exactly as there were with Ivy Farm. Traffic is a very big problem for everyone in East Malling.”

Liz Simpson, former borough councillor and current manager of the East Malling Centre, echoed local sentiment: “Villagers are saying ‘here we go again’. I just hope that people aren’t so disillusioned over the way the village was treated over Ivy Farm that they can’t face another fight.”

Belvidere House, largely hidden from public view, is a substantial Victorian residence with ten bedrooms, a swimming pool, a tennis court, and sits within 16 acres. It last sold for a reported £2.3 million.

No formal planning application has been submitted yet, but residents are already preparing for what they expect to be another contentious planning process.