

Arun District Council Eco-Town Select Committee

Natural Environment

Statement by Emma Tristram – 3 June 2008

Executive Summary

I live in Binsted and wrote its village millennium book. I am secretary of Walberton Action Group, an Agenda21 community group, and I represent the views of that group, also Arundel Town Council and Ford and Clymping Parish Councils.

I have written the attached short paper called 'The Arun Valley and Ford Eco-town', which I have submitted to this Inquiry, showing how the Ford Eco-town proposals are likely to bring more harm than improvements to the sensitive landscape quality of the lower Arun valley.

I'll summarize the main points of my paper. In 2004 the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) gave detailed evidence to the South Downs National Park Public Inquiry about the lower Arun valley. It described the whole landscape, 'river valley and tributaries, tidal estuary and coastline', as 'an assemblage of outstanding quality and rarity'. It considered this landscape to be 'of great national significance', and it said that despite the existing built-up area on part of Ford airfield, 'the area is remarkably unregimented, in great contrast to the urban areas beside it to the east and west.'

CPRE stated that 'the whole southern setting of Arundel', down to the sea, was critical to the composition of the landscape. The 'setting of Arundel' is protected in the Local Plan by Policy Area 3. CPRE described the riverbank footpath from the sea to the Downs as 'probably one of the most outstanding footpaths in West Sussex'. And it included both Binsted and Tortington in its appreciation of the Arun valley, saying 'they are both examples of parishes of understated but profound beauty'.

I therefore argue that the building of the Eco-town at Ford on the west bank of the Arun would severely harm the landscape and heritage of the Arun valley, and the environment of Arundel, Tortington, Binsted, Walberton, Yapton, Barnham, Ford, Clymping and Littlehampton.

THE ARUN VALLEY AND FORD ECO-TOWN: Natural Environment (landscape and heritage)

This is a note concerning the landscape and environment of the Arun Valley and the potential effect on them of the proposed Ford Eco-Town. The purpose of this

submission to you is to demonstrate that the Ford Eco-Town proposals are likely to bring more harm than improvements to the environment of the lower Arun valley as it crosses the coastal plain to the sea.

The Government's consultation paper requires any Eco-Town to show appropriate use of land in terms of quality and mitigation of impacts on biodiversity' (Eco-towns 'Prospectus', Outcome VII, p. 18).

I hope to show that an Eco-Town at Ford is not an appropriate use of the high quality land in the lower Arun valley.

I therefore offer you some evidence in support of these concerns. This paper draws on the evidence submitted by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) to the South Downs National Park Public Inquiry in 2004, proposing an extension to the National Park – the whole of the Arun valley right down to the sea at Clymping. Their evidence included much that is relevant to the Ford Eco-Town proposal, and some excellent descriptions of areas that are proposed to be within the Eco-Town, which support the argument that the Eco-Town proposal would be a disaster for the area's landscape quality. Their objective landscape assessment predates the Eco-Town proposal by several years, but no changes have taken place since then that would affect it.

Significant points which support the argument against the Eco-Town proposal are as follows:

1. The CPRE-proposed extension to the National Park recognized the importance of 'the whole landscape comprising river valley and tributaries, tidal estuary and coastline, which as an assemblage is of outstanding quality and rarity.' The Eco-Town would fill up a prominent part of one side of the 'tidal estuary' right up the river Arun itself. Although some proposed plans show this area next to the river Arun as public open space, the presentation by FAVG (the developers) on 27 May 2008 at Arun District Council showed that it is likely to be built on, or used for some other purpose. Possible uses for this area which were mentioned include a 'small hydroelectric plant'; a sewage system making use of the rise and fall of the river Arun; and 'local housing' (shown filling that area on FAVG's wall diagram).
2. CPRE pointed out that 'A substantial proportion of the valley floor south of Arundel remains valuable grazing marsh. The main concentrations are between the east bank of the river and the Littlehampton railway line, along the western bank of the river close to Ford, and between Ford church and the A259 bridge over the Arun.' In summary, 'the dune system, shingle banks and grazing marshes of the coast and lower Arun valley are of outstanding quality, particularly in the context of the rest of the coast of southeast England.' Part of this outstanding grazing marsh is on the west bank of the Arun, which is part of the Eco-Town site (see 1 above).

3. CPRE pointed out that 'The Arun Valley meets the last section of open and undeveloped coastline between Selsey Bill to the west and Seaford in the east. There are clear views to the magnificent chalk ridge to the north. The minor blemishes at Clymping and Atherington, the closeness of well concealed modern buildings at Ford, and the open agricultural prospect inland are insignificant elements by comparison with the great ensemble of coast, river, valley and panoramic views. There is an overwhelming sense of wholeness and resolution in this landscape when contemplated in its entirety. CPRE considers this ensemble to be of great national significance.' This national significance, sense of wholeness, and 'great ensemble' would be lost if the Eco-Town went ahead.

4. 'Bell's Pocket Book of Sussex' (Winbolt and Ward, 1928, p. 124) describes this section of the coast in the following passage: 'There is no better bit of Saxon coast than that enclosed by the railway line between Littlehampton, Ford, Barnham and Bognor.' As CPRE put it, 'Even before the loss of most of this tract of countryside, it was recognised as a rare and impressive landscape. What remains is now more precious still.' This comment refers to the whole of the Eco-Town site and suggests that every part of it that remains undeveloped is precious.

5. CPRE pointed out that apart from the already-existing built-up area on part of Ford Airfield, 'the area is remarkably unfragmented and has an exhilarating openness, in great contrast to the urban areas beside it to the east and west.' If the Eco-Town was built this 'exhilarating openness' would be lost. The fact that there are already existing buildings in the area, some of them rather ugly and at odds with the natural environment, is no reason why the whole area should be similarly blighted.

6. Analysing the Arun valley in more detail, CPRE said: 'The whole southern setting of Arundel is critical to its composition and the proportions of the chalk ridge, slopes leading down to the town, and the Arun washland 'carpet' above which the town rises. The character of the river, meandering through the valley through its tidal stretch, can be appreciated along a remarkable public right of way from the sea to the town of Arundel. There is a powerful link between the sea and the Downs drawn by the river.' The 'setting of Arundel' is protected by the Arun Local Plan, which contains the policy (Area 3) 'No development will be permitted...which would adversely affect views of Arundel or its special setting.' The Plan also says 'Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect the long distance views of Arundel Castle or Arundel Cathedral.' The 'character of the river', and the 'whole southern setting of Arundel', would be substantially changed for the worse by having a town on its west bank.

7. CPRE further describes the 'remarkable public right of way' very well as follows: 'Probably one of the most outstanding footpaths in West Sussex is that which runs from the mouth of the river Arun to Arundel and beyond. This path

offers the powerful experience of walking uninterruptedly from the sea into the heart of the South Downs following an unspoilt river bank, along a route that reveals the ever changing relationship between the various components of the landscape.' This 'remarkable public right of way' would go along the edge of the Eco-Town. The river bank would no longer be 'unspoilt'.

8. At Binsted, immediately north of the railway, is an area of which CPRE says: 'The experience of attractive countryside has been enhanced recently by the construction of new wetlands and associated tree planting in sympathy with the low lying damp landscape surrounding it.' These new wetlands and tree planting would be included in the Eco-Town. They would no longer be 'attractive countryside' but an urban park, or part of the resited railway station or 'arts centre'. If the 'parkway' station concept was chosen, a large area would be needed for car parking.

9. CPRE thought that Binsted and Tortington made up an important part of the 'setting to Arundel'. It said: 'The delicate topography and intimate secrecy of Binsted, and the harmonious dip slope towards Ford station in Tortington, are vital to the coherence of the setting of Arundel. They are both examples of parishes of understated but profound beauty.' The 'intimate secrecy' of Binsted would be lost if the Eco-town went ahead immediately to the south of it. The 'harmonious dip slope towards Ford station' at Tortington would instead be dominated by the proposed new spur road joining the Eco-Town to the proposed new Arundel Bypass.

10. Although the new proposed boundary for the South Downs National Park did not include the land CPRE wished to include at Arundel, this does not negate the value of CPRE's evidence. The Inspector chose a boundary 'more closely focused on the core chalk landscapes', and also decided to exclude towns such as Petersfield, Arundel, Lewes and Midhurst. However, he did include an addition at Binsted. This was the 'small addition' put forward by the South Downs Campaign and Friends of Binsted church (CPRE wanted to include the whole of Binsted). This inclusion means that all previously researched routes for the western end of the Arundel Bypass (including the 'Pink/Blue' route across Tortington Common which was chosen in 1993, and the 'Green' route through Binsted which was compared with it and found to be more damaging) would be within the designated National Park. If the Ford Eco-Town were to be built, this would generate more pressure to build an off-line Arundel bypass, with the western end going through the National Park. The Eco-Town would thus be the instrument for further serious damage to the environment.

Conclusion

The opening presentation from Ford Airfield Vision Group quoted from the 'Wates report' on what makes for 'sustainable development'. One of the criteria was that development should not 'disinherit our grandchildren'. I would prefer not to

disinherit my grandchildren, or anybody else's, of the chance of enjoying this landscape which according to the CPRE evidence has 'outstanding quality and rarity', 'exhilarating openness', and 'great national significance'.

In my opinion the building of the Eco-Town at Ford would severely harm the landscape and heritage of the Arun valley and coastal plain, and the environment of Arundel, Tortington, Binsted, Walberton, Yapton, Barnham, Clymping, Ford and Littlehampton.