

Arun District Council Eco-town Select Committee

Land use

CAFÉ Submission by V C Newman – 4th June 2008

Introduction

The Ford Eco-Town site comprises of an area of predominantly agricultural land use. It is bounded by a railway line to the north, the minor road - Ford Road/Church Lane to the East, the B2132 to the west and the north edge of Yapton Village to the south. It incorporates a former World War II airfield which was decommissioned in 1958/59.

The three villages of Yapton, Ford and Clymping lie on the site's extremities.

1. Existing Land Use/Brownfield land

The DLGC eco town document clearly sets out that:

“Land Use - Where there are good opportunities to do so the scheme should make use of suitable surplus public sector land, or brownfield land....imaginative proposals to create additional green infrastructure...integrate green space and features to enhance biodiversity....”.

Ford Airfield Site has been identified as a suitable due to its brownfield status, which is a key element to its eco town credibility.

The site extends to 350 hectares privately owned land of which only 44 hectares are of brownfield land. This brownfield land consists of 4% airfield concrete strip which currently has some modern industrial units operating on it along with a weekly market. The remaining 96% within the proposed site is used as highly productive prime agricultural land. In essence, of the 350 hectare site, only 2.5 hectares is not used to its current maximum potential and positively contributing to the local and wider economy.

It should be noted that the site's brownfield credentials vary between the FAVG and its own consortium members, the FEH and the DLGC.

The FAVG claim the site is 30% brownfield and 70% greenfield. Whereas Wates describe the site as '900 acre large scale Greenfield site in West Sussex' (Wates.co.uk website 2008), and Barton Willmore refer to it as 'a 360ha site comprising brownfield land situated between the settlements of Yapton and Ford'.

FEH refer to the site as 110 acres of previously developed land within the curtilage of the airfield.

The DLGC confirm that of the 350 hectare site, there are 110 acres (44ha) of brownfield land. ie 87% is greenfield, and 13% is brownfield.

The curtilage land within the site at Ford has been farmed efficiently for at least the last 40 years and blends into its rural surrounds, further blurring its brownfield status. It should be recognised that some areas of former runway have even been reclaimed and returned to agricultural use.

The actual degree of true brownfield land at Ford is therefore open to interpretation.

PPS3 'Housing' (11/2006), (Annex 1) clearly states that in the case of land that was previously-developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape in the process of time (to the extent that it can reasonably be considered as part of the natural surroundings):

'There is no presumption that land that is previously-developed is necessarily suitable for housing development nor that the whole of the curtilage should be developed.' Such sites need to be assessed on a site by site basis.

2. Green Space

Both the DLGC Eco-Town's; Living a Greener Future document and Barton Willmore's proposal stress that additional green infrastructure must be incorporated into Eco-Towns. There is an emphasis on enhancing and expanding existing green space.

The net loss of publicly accessible rural open space will be 306 hectares, as will an established network of public footpaths frequently used by residents of all three villages. This land forms a key spatial gap between the villages, and naturally extends the important Clymping Gap from the coast to Arundel and the South Downs.

Barton Willmore's document stresses that the proposal will provide the opportunity to enhance the overall ecological value of the site; improving existing habitats and creating new.

The key agricultural land will be first to be developed. This open rural space will be replaced by housing with only linear street and town square forms of landscaping incorporated.

The identified open spaces lie at the extremities of the site, divorced from the key residential areas by existing and proposed roads, the railway line and the proposed employment zone.

The open area to the east of the site is a high risk flood area and cannot be developed. In the Clymping zone, the open space is on existing prime agricultural land that lies within the Ford Airfield curtilage i.e. perceived brownfield Land. The remaining open space lies to the north of the railway line which has no accessibility.

3. Existing settlements

...Eco-Towns must be places with a separate and distinct identityfrom existing towns/settlements...

The Barton Willmore proposal involves a development encompassing a land mass which merges the three small rural villages of Ford, Clymping and Yapton to form one large new Eco-Town.

The proposal does not allow for any spatial separation between the new Eco-Town and three existing small rural locations. It fails to recognise each village's importance in both terms of existing community identity and their physical rural definition.

Ford and Clymping merge into the business zone and housing to the south of the site. There is no provision of any buffer zone or spatial separation between these historic settlements and the new town. Yapton merges with the new housing to the west. The FAVG proposal shows a minimal planting strip to distinguish between the village of Yapton and the new settlement. There is no recognition of the village as a whole or sensitivity towards Yapton's conservation area in its northern sector.

During the Arun District Local Plan Inquiry, the Inspector found - in relation to objections relating to the Ford Airfield site - that.... development of the site would lead to a loss of the sense of separation between settlements in the area and the severe erosion of the rural settings of Yapton, Ford and Arundel. It would encourage the coalescence of settlements in the visually important wider Arun Valley, and would result in the loss of Grade 1 agricultural land. ...

The Inspector went on to say,that a development on this scale would substantially change the character and appearance of this rural area. The mass and form of the development would stand out as an incongruous intrusion and the harm to the appearance and setting of the villages in this area and the surrounding open agricultural character of the countryside would be substantial.....

He concluded that:the severe harm to the countryside and to the rural character of the villages of Yapton, Clymping and Ford, together with the serious sustainability weaknesses outweigh any potential advantages....

4. Conclusion

The existing site is predominantly agricultural land. The extent of brownfield land is uncertain with estimates varying from 4% to 30% of total land area. The brownfield site has returned to agricultural use since the airfield was decommissioned in 1958/59 to the extent that some areas of runway have even been reclaimed and farmed.

The rural nature of the location is very apparent, apart from the hangars and runway. The farmland within the former curtilage of the airfield joins seamlessly with adjoining fields.

PPS3 clearly defines that there is no presumption to develop such land, and that it must be considered on a site by site basis.

The proposal fails to re-address the loss of existing open publicly accessible greenfield land.

Finally, the Eco-Town will subsume the existing three villages of Ford, Clymping and Yapton and destroy their rural character. There is no meaningful attempt to separate the new settlement from these villages and reflect their rural nature.