

## **Arun District Council Ford Eco-Town Select Committee**

### **CAFÉ Closing Statement by D M Waller - 4 June 2008**

#### **Introduction**

At the opening session of your Inquiry last week, we advised you that the Communities Against Ford Eco-Town campaign group believe that the Ford area is an inappropriate location for an Eco-Town; and nothing that we have heard has done anything to change that view. As we see it, there is now even less justification than there was earlier.

#### **The Development Proposals**

You will recall that we described the two Ford Eco-Town submissions as being essentially elderly development proposals, which had been given a hurried coat of green paint and, as the Inquiry has progressed, this has become more and more obvious. The proposal from the Ford Airfield Vision Group is a dusted-off version of one submitted by Barton Willmore & Redrow Homes in 2000 in order to facilitate the sale of a large amount of prime agricultural land for house building. Similarly, the proposal from the Ford Enterprise Hub group is just a speculative attempt to divert attention from development in villages to the west of Ford.

#### **Findings**

It has become clear throughout the week that neither proposal has been properly thought-out, and that each is an attempt to persuade the Government, via a whole array of highly speculative assertions, that they are genuinely eco-friendly. However, nothing could be further from the truth, and this has become more and more obvious as your Inquiry has progressed. Indeed, almost every time the presumed eco-attributes of the proposals have been challenged, they have been either modified or abandoned.

A specific example was the proposal to provide a new strategic link road between the already congested A259 and A27. However, this link-road has now been deleted from the plan, and there is now no way by which the existing traffic bottlenecks can be alleviated, especially as it is clear that a full off-line Arundel Bypass is unlikely to be operational before 2020, if ever. Additionally, the proposals for increased bus and railway facilities had not been discussed with the local providers, and even the car and cycling policies are based on a flawed perception that people living and working in rural W Sussex would be pleased to comply with draconian “demand management” rules.

Similarly when challenged concerning the central concept of a Science Park as the means of providing high technology jobs in the proposed Eco-Town, this proposal was withdrawn with alacrity. Indeed, one of the proposals even suggested that businesses should be encouraged to re-locate from Littlehampton and Bognor Regis; thus leaving these two towns as residential dormitories. The fact that current business are struggling has been ignored.

A third example relates to the energy and waste. There were particularly optimistic projections about energy production from a whole variety of sources, but when challenged, the developers quickly

abandoned most of their proposals. Instead, they admitted that the Eco-Town's energy needs would be provided from a combination of natural gas and energy from waste, which would itself need to be moved into the site by road from all over W Sussex.

There is also much doubt about the proposal to re-locate families from Bognor Regis and Littlehampton on the ADC housing waiting list into the Eco-Town. Not only would this be counter to the wishes of the people concerned, but it would also damage the prospects for the alleviation of deprivation in the towns, as well as putting at risk the re-generation policies inherent in the South East's regional and sub-regional plans.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, CAFÉ remains convinced that the concept of an Eco-Town at Ford is a badly thought-out idea which is simply aimed at facilitating the long-desired development of an isolated housing estate in the rural countryside. Too far from the towns of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton for its inhabitants to manage without yet more cars, yet so near that it would impinge on the plans to improve the seaside towns.

In short, an Eco-Town at Ford would simply be yet another speculative and unsustainable development on some 350 hectares of private land, of which (despite a recent change to the DCLG's website) only 44 hectares (13%) are brownfield; the remaining 306 hectares (87%) being high quality productive agricultural land.

In summary, we maintain that Ford is quite the wrong place for the development for an Eco-Town. It would swamp several small rural villages and settlements in an area which has severe infrastructure issues, where there is limited demand for affordable housing in this particular part of rural West Sussex, and where there is restricted demand or scope for further employment. Based on the Government's own criteria, the site is unsuitable for the proposed eco-model, and we urge the Select Committee to reject such a development in its entirety.