

Patron: The Duke of Norfolk



COMMUNITIES AGAINST FORD ECO-TOWN

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5 June 2008

Councillor Keith Mitchell
Chairman of the Executive Committee
South East England Regional Assembly
Berkeley House, Cross Lanes
Guildford, GU1 1UN

Dear Councillor Mitchell,

Eco-Town Proposal - Ford, West Sussex
SEERA Executive Committee Meeting - 13 June 2008 - Agenda Item No. 7

The purpose of this letter is to advise you and your SEERA Executive Committee that our campaign group, Communities against Ford Eco-Town (CAFÉ), which has almost unanimous local support, believes very strongly that the Ford area is a totally inappropriate location for an Eco-Town.

We asked the SEERA RPC members to take our views into account, during their recent debate about Eco-Towns and we are keen to ensure that such views are similarly taken into account on 13th June, when your Executive Committee is debating the Regional Assembly's formal response to the Government's Eco-Town consultation paper.

We are of course aware from Agenda Item No 7 that your response will rightly focus on the Assembly's concerns about the Government's process for the selection of Eco-Towns. However Ford is one of the three potential Eco-Towns in the South East and we wish to encourage you to place rather more emphasis on the specific geographical aspects of your response than is presently obvious.

There are two Ford Eco-Town submissions which have been taken forward in the DCLG's consultation paper, both of which are essentially elderly development proposals which have been given a hurried coat of green paint. The one from the Ford Airfield Vision Group is a dusted-off version of a proposal by Barton Wilmore and Redrow Homes in 2000 to build a new market town at Ford. The other, called the Ford Enterprise Hub, is a seemingly altruistic

attempt launched in 2004 by three local Councillors to divert attention from development in villages to the west of Ford (where some of them live).

CAFÉ while supporting carbon-neutral schemes in general, totally opposes the proposal that Ford should be the site for an Eco-Town for a whole variety of practical reasons, not least because both the site and the proposals fail to satisfy many of the criteria set out by DCLG. In particular, I emphasise our concerns in relation to the following topics:

a. Housing. Each proposal talks of building just 5,000 houses, with one seeing this as a basis for further development and the other seeing Ford as the site for *all* Arun District's housing requirements for the next 20 years. The District Council has been criticised for its past poor rate of building affordable housing, but meeting the need of the 4,000 families on the housing list by re-settling them at Ford is not the answer. I am sure you agree housing-need should be met where it exists. This is in and around Bognor Regis, which needs some 2,000 homes and Littlehampton, which needs some 1,500 homes. The promise of some 2,000 affordable homes at Ford, with which to solve the District's housing problem is therefore sadly a mirage.

b. Business. There is great concern about the impact an Eco-Town would have on business in Littlehampton & Bognor Regis, as well as the considerable investment and re-development plans for the two towns. In particular, one proposal suggests that existing businesses will be encouraged to move to Ford, so that Littlehampton and Bognor can become residential dormitory towns. It also proposes the particularly impractical idea of a Science Park, which experience suggests is very difficult to establish, even with high tech universities alongside. Indeed, when challenged at the recent Arun District Council Ford Eco-Town Public Inquiry, the Science Park concept was peremptorily withdrawn.

c. Transport. SEERA hardly needs reminding about the congestion on the A27 trunk road at Arundel and especially the need for a bypass, yet here we have a potential development, which is contrary to the W Sussex Structure Plan's policy and which says "no A27 Arundel Bypass, no development". Both Eco-Town schemes acknowledge that an Arundel Bypass is an essential element of their schemes, and this is also seen as a constraint in the DCLG consultation paper. However, despite current indications which show that an Arundel Bypass is unlikely to be up and running before 2020, the developers continue to press their unsustainable ideas on Government. We simply do not believe the developers' promise to improve the public transport system, or the roads, is likely to be implemented until financial returns on housing permit: this would be far into the new town's emergence.

d. Climate Change. The area in question is subject to both flooding (even this month) and water supply problems. Whilst development could certainly be built on Flood Zone 1 ground today, no account has been taken of future climate change. This is a particularly important omission, not least because the South-East is likely to be most impacted by the negative aspects of climate change and because Ford is a low-lying area, susceptible to fluvial, tidal and surface water flooding. Also the scientists involved in the UK Climate Impacts Programme have predicted future saline intrusion into the Arun Valley aquifer, due to rising sea levels.

e. Energy Production. The proponents of the Ford Eco-Town are laying great stress on the environmental and financial advantages that would follow from their proposals for the production of energy, both electricity and heat. However when pressed at the Arun Inquiry, it was admitted that the Eco-Town's proposed power station would burn a combination of natural gas and waste; the latter (some 200,000 tonnes per year) to be imported onto the site by a considerable number of HGVs, probably from all over W Sussex.

In summary, it is difficult to understand why the Ford site lends itself as an Eco-Town in the eyes of the Government. The development would cause the coalescence of several self-contained and healthy rural villages, use 350 hectares of mostly prime agricultural land (87% of which is green-field), at a time of dramatic rises in crop prices and severely damage the planned re-generation of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. The area has severe road infrastructure problems and congestion, and there is limited demand for affordable housing in this part of rural West Sussex.

We believe the harsh reality of the proposal is simply to build houses. Thus Ford, which fails to satisfy the government's own criteria, is quite the wrong place for an Eco-Town and I should be most grateful for anything that the Regional Assembly can do to encourage the Government to eliminate Ford from its list of potential Eco-Town sites.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Knott

Terry Knott MC FRSM
Co-chairman

p.p.

Nick Herbert MP
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