

“Notes and Recommendations from Session 1 of Eco-Town Challenge”

Department for Communities and Local Government - June 2008

Ford - a CAFE Response

Vision

There is no doubt that the FAVG proposal is based on an exciting and superficially attractive vision, and that the developer’s aspirations are to be commended. However, as was stated by the senior SEEDA representative at the recent Arun District Council Ford Eco-Town Select Committee Inquiry, this vision and these aspirations needed to be balanced by an acceptance of reality and an understanding of the risks. Painting an optimistic (futuristic) picture of an Eco-Town at Ford is very much easier than delivering such a concept on the ground, and especially gaining buy-in from those who may wish to rent or purchase the houses.

The Relationship with the Two Separate Bids

The overlap between the two Ford-related bids is directly related to their provenance. Whilst both are long-dated proposals which have been given a hurried coat of green paint, the FAVG is essentially an updated version of the 8-year old proposal by Barton Willmore, Redrow and Wates Homes to develop housing on a large area of high grade agricultural land, isolated from any settlement of significance and located in a very rural setting. The current proposal is merely an opportunist move to obtain planning on extensive greenfield land.

On the other hand, the FEH proposal is a speculative concept designed as a diversionary tactic with the objective of precluding the possibility of building in and around the villages of Aldingbourne and Westergate, which lie to the west of Ford. It is therefore no wonder that there are overlaps and contradictions between the two bids.

Issues Affecting Arun

The main issues affecting Arun relate to the lack of affordable housing, the lack of employment opportunities, and the need to re-generate the two coastal towns of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis; both of which contain pockets of defined deprivation. The re-generation plans, which are supported by both SEERA and SEEDA, are designed to contribute to the solutions of all these issues, although there is no doubt that a gulf exists between the need for affordable housing and the current rate of provision of such houses.

We agree that ADC has a poor housing record with some 4,000 families on the District's housing list, although only 200 of these are in Categories A and B (the most urgent). However, housing-need should generally be met where it exists. This is in and around Bognor, which needs some 2,000 affordable homes, and in and around Littlehampton, which needs some 1,500 affordable homes. Thus the superficially attractive promise to build 2,000 affordable homes at Ford is not the right solution, especially as the majority of those in urgent need of re-housing in both Littlehampton and Bognor Regis have a very clear view that they do not wish to be housed away from their local environment.

Possible Attraction to Businesses

FAVG appear to have no intention of building any commercial facilities. Rather, their master-plan merely designates an employment zone which is envisaged to be built in the final phases of the Eco-Town by third parties. If promoted in this manner, the market and the planning system will determine what businesses, if any, will invest in such sites, and the promoters will thus be unable to influence the type of jobs being created.

Whilst the challenge is to attract businesses capable of providing high quality jobs, the concept of a science park has been discarded on the basis that Ford has neither the critical success factors for attracting science and high technology businesses nor competitive advantages over alternative locations. Given the poor transport infrastructure, the lack of business investment, and current unemployment in Arun today, any successful business development at Ford would probably attract investment away from Bognor Regis or Littlehampton; thus worsening the situation in the existing towns. Also, it is questionable whether the local labour-base is suitable for

these jobs or, as feared, the Eco-Town will simply encourage inward commuting.

Minimisation of Off-Site Commuting

The developers will not be able to influence or restrict residents' employment choices, and there is no way of guaranteeing that any high quality jobs that might be attracted to Ford could necessarily be reserved for Eco-Town residents in order to minimise commuting. Also, unless FAVG could phase the development to ensure that housing provision goes hand-in-hand with employment provision, there will be no means of ensuring that a commuting culture is not established before any employment opportunities are created.

Developer Funding for the A27 Arundel Bypass

The proposal in both bids for a developer contribution to the building of an A27 Arundel Bypass is essentially a “red-herring”, designed to attract government support for the Eco-Town proposal. The A27 is a Highway Agency-managed trunk road, and as such improvement schemes are funded through national and regional budgets rather than via developers' Section 106 agreements.

The essential point about traffic in and around Arundel and Ford is that the A27 is already 100% stressed, and that this congestion, which is forecast to get worse over time. The provision of bypasses to resolve such congestion is part of national and regional policy, and action is in hand with the DoT and the Highways Agency to consider the best way of resolving the problems.

As highlighted in the DCLG's Eco-Towns Consultation Paper, “the relationship of the site [at Ford] to pressures on nearby trunk roads and particularly the A27 is a major issue”. There is no doubt that a 5,000 house Eco-Town at Ford with its associated business, retail, education and power-related activities will bring with it significant additional road transport, and it is the implications of this traffic on the existing road congestion in and around Ford which is a major problem to be considered. The policy set out in the W Sussex Structure Plan as far as the Ford area is concerned is essentially “No bypass, no development”; a position which was agreed by the EiP Inspector.

Personal Rapid Transit Systems

The 'Ultra' personal rapid transit system is being developed as a first commercial trial by BAA at Heathrow following the completion of Terminal 5. The system is based on driverless pods powered by electricity and with zero carbon emissions. However, it is designed to link the business car park at Heathrow with the main terminal building. It is a fixed link with one point of origin and one destination, and would seem to be irrelevant as a replacement for the car in an Eco-Town with its multi-origin, multi-destination requirements. Additionally, it is likely to be a very expensive project, and whilst it is possible that such a system could assist with in-town movements, it would not contribute to the reduction of car movement either into or out of the Eco-Town.

Use of Green Spaces

The provision of civic open space is of course a welcome facility in any new development. However, as far as the Ford proposal is concerned, there would be a negative impact in relation that the lack of distinct and separate substantial landscaped green boundaries will have on the existing rural settlements. In essence, though the bids emphasise the provision of green zones and landscaping, the Eco-Town reflects an urban identity which fails to embrace the rural nature of existing communities and the district as a whole.

We also have concern about how the green space strategy will be managed over time. It seems as those who are to live in the Eco-Town will be responsible for the maintenance (and costs) of all the green spaces, allotments and orchards, the wetland habitat, and the water feature to be based on a portion of renovated canal. Indeed, we doubt the ecological benefits and we are concerned about the financial costs of using part of a very old canal, which was closed over 100 years ago, the route of which is only traceable within the site by a trained archaeologist, and lies mostly under existing developments on the Ford site.

Carbon Emissions

As a matter of principle, CAFÉ supports the building of sustainable housing, as well as the concept of carbon-neutral development. However, from the details that were heard at the ADC Ford Eco-Town Select Committee

Inquiry, we are not convinced that the developer's assertions will deliver their promises. In particular, the energy proposals, which are now based on the burning of natural gas and the conversion of thousands of tonnes of biodegradable waste (being brought into the site by HGVs) into heat and power are likely to create a significant carbon footprint. We might wish it was otherwise, but the reality seems likely to be at odds with the aspirations and assertions.

We are also concerned that FAVG have already begun to indicate their preference to move away from Code 6 Building Standard for the initial housing, which is the affordable element. Additionally, we fail to see the connection between reducing carbon emissions and the intention to continue to encourage very large three weekly markets (labelled as re-cycling events) on the site. These markets draw customers and traders from a significant catchment area beyond Arun District, generating up to 600 private cars visiting the site each market day.

Energy Generation

Our best estimate for the total average power load for a 5,000 home Eco-Town at Ford is likely to be between 3 and 5 MW. However, the developers are forecasting that their plans will produce four times the inherent requirement, and be available either for either subsidizing the development as a whole for its entire lifetime or for sale to the national grid. Thus the output required from the Eco-Town's power station, which will be a CHP waste-to-energy plant will be in the region of 12 to 20 MW.

However, on the basis that 1 tonne of waste will produce 0.67 MWh of electricity and 2 MWh of heat when operating in CHP mode, such a plant would need up to 700 tonnes of feedstock per day (7 days per week), or some 260,000 tonnes per year. For comparison, this is similar to the figures relating to the Sysav Incinerator in Malmo, Sweden which uses 200,000 tonnes of consumer waste per year and generates approximately 17MW of electricity.

What needs to be very clear, however, is that the provision of such power is critically dependent on the conversion of waste to energy. At present, W Sussex' sole Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) is being built at Ford. However, there can be no question whatsoever of the main streams of dry waste (paper, cardboard, plastic, metal and glass) planned to be "recovered"

by the Ford MRF being used to feed the Eco-Town's energy-from-waste (CHP) power plant.

The on-site waste that the CHP could use would be any residual unrecoverable waste from the MRF, plus some arisings from the sewage plant, plus the bio-degradable waste from the Eco-Town itself, plus possibly the same sort of waste from Ford Open Prison. This would however be insufficient. The FAVG plan is therefore based on the speculative hope that Ford will become the location for a huge single W Sussex-wide waste disposal facility that will preclude the landfill of about 250,000 tonnes of bio-degradable waste per year.

Potential for Local Food Production

Clearly anything is possible as far as aspirations are concerned, but the suggested mix of residents; families from deprived areas, young working childless couples, and a fair proportion of pensioners, would seem to make this more visionary than a reality. Also, it is important to emphasise the irony of this suggestion bearing in mind the loss of hundreds of acres of prime, productive agricultural land as the cost of this proposal.

We understand that local food growers have already expressed their concern about the effect that an Eco-Town will have on their businesses, and that they have intimated that they may have to re-locate due to further weakened infrastructure. This would lead in a further loss of essential local food supplies, particularly salad foods, and this would adversely affect the whole county.

Evidence of Local Support and Community Benefits

As far as evidence of local support is concerned, there is almost overwhelming local opposition, from both the community and local government. There is a very strong community campaign (CAFÉ) representing at least 10,000 local residents who are opposed to the proposal. The directly affected parish councils, as well as the adjoining parish and town councils (14 in total), are all opposed to the Eco-Town, along with Arun District Council and West Sussex County Council. Also, SEERA and SEEDA have strong reservations about the development, as do the local civic societies and groups.

FAVG have thus far failed to demonstrate the positive benefits that the whole local community will experience from the Eco-Town on their doorstep. The key elements, energy and public transport, are very much concentrated within the new town, with no visible overflow to the immediately adjoining communities; a key criteria outlined by DCLG.

2020 Road Map

Any road map purporting to describe the progress of the Eco-Town up to the year 2020 will need not only to address days in the life of an Eco-town inhabitant, but also the inhabitants of the villages of Yapton, Ford and Clymping at various stages of the development. It will need to explain how the development will promote social cohesion between the existing and the Eco-town inhabitants, especially in the light of the possible contrast in lifestyles between those within the Eco-Town, and those in the villages on its immediate periphery. Indeed, as the Eco-Town boundary crosses all the main local thoroughfares between Yapton, Ford and Clymping, and even eliminates one of the main commercial routes to the A27 (Ford lane), it will be necessary for the FAVG to set out very clearly just what steps will be taken to ensure that the Eco-Town development does not detract from existing local rural cohesion and life in the three villages that the development will engulf.

Also, from the information available to us, it seems likely that the phasing of the project would mean that the Eco-Town's residents will have few of the promised new facilities, including the power and transport systems prior to 2020 at the earliest, and possibly not until 2026.

Management of Future Growth

There is little true potential for future growth in spatial planning terms. The site has not been identified as suitable for a new settlement at regional, county or district level, and unless the density of development is substantially increased, more valuable highly productive agricultural land will be developed.

Additional Factors for Consideration

Whilst the Panel have commended FAVG on their understanding of sustainable living within an Eco-Town, if the layers of the FAVG

presentation are peeled back there is very little attempt to address the inherent physical problems with Ford as a location. Also, there is no obvious intent or commitment to ensure that the Eco-Town will be ready to fully function from inception, in terms of:

- a. high quality permanent jobs being available on site.
- b. Sustainable infrastructure, such as an internal and an improved external road network or even guaranteed frequent, regular and free public transport.
- c. Basic urban facilities, particularly shops, schools, civic space and other essential facilities.

By not tackling these issues, any Ford Eco-Town will merely become a residential development with a strong dependence upon distant towns for employment and services, and thus preclude any major reductions in car use.

To make any sort of rational judgment, it is necessary to understand the full nature and implications of the isolated and rural location of Ford as a site. The inference is for housing for low income families and the elderly, but Ford will only succeed if guarantees can be given that all infrastructure, especially a new public transport network, is fully in place when the first dwelling is occupied. Without such guarantees, residents will either become totally isolated or will remain totally dependent upon the private car. The Rowntree Report (July 2008) emphasises the growing disparity between urban and rural communities in terms of public transport, and considers that the private car should be an essential item in rural areas.