

“Notes and Recommendations from Session 2 of the Eco-Town Challenge”

DCLG - 31 July 2008

The Ford Airfield Vision Group (FAVG) Submission to the Panel

Ford - a CAFE Response

Vision

A.1. The FAVG proposal for a self-contained Eco-Town at Ford delivering 5,000 houses and 4,000 jobs continues to be a superficially attractive vision. This vision is said to be owned by a consortium of “concerned” landowners and developers but, despite altruistic implications to the contrary, the former are simply concerned to achieve the designation of their land for residential development in a location of low potential for such land-use, and then to effect the earliest possible profitable sale of the land.

A.2. In its support, the FAVG say that the associated FEH group acts as a ‘challenge panel’ of “interested and concerned local people”. However, the submission omits the information that the FEH group comprises just 3 people who have no links with Ford and who do not represent the views of local people. Their aim, since the FEH group’s formation in 2004, has been to prevent infill housing development to the west of Barnham in the area which two of them formerly represented as county and district councillors, and in which the other is still a parish councillor.

Consultation

A.3. The submission’s optimistic description of the FAVG’s recent consultation activities is not easily recognised locally. There have been very limited discussions with Town and Parish Councils, and the invariable result of any meeting has been almost total opposition to the proposals. The one point on which most agree is that “more new homes, and particularly affordable homes, are needed in Arun District”. However, the vast majority believe, and have made it very clear, that Ford is not a suitable location. Additionally, there has been no genuine engagement with any of the groups or organisations opposed to the proposal which, at this stage of such a large development bid, would be expected in order to ensure a balanced approach to community expectations.

Community Development Trust

A.4. The FAVG’s aspirational vision for community ownership, which has not been shared with, discussed with, or agreed to by any local organisation, gives

the impression of a self-standing gated settlement in the midst of the countryside between the villages of Ford, Yapton and Clymping. The idea of some 5,000 owners (including those in affordable houses) all being prepared to pay service charges in perpetuity on their homes is more speculative than realistic, and the suggestion of a Trust which will be “vested with land for affordable housing” is particularly worrying. This is the first occasion where this latter concept has surfaced; previous assumptions having been based on the clear and well-advertised assertions that the affordable housing would be delivered in full by the developers as part of the project.

Securing Quality

A.5. We would expect quality to be delivered and maintained as part of the normal local authority planning process, and are not impressed by this aspirational statement. What is clear, however, is that there would be very strong local opposition to the 3 individual members of the FEH group having any involvement. The community has grave reservations about the qualifications, expertise, experience, and impartial understanding of the 3-member FEH group. Indeed, it has been clear right from the outset that the FEH concept was more a summary of a vision put forward by three laymen, and it has always lacked the essential expert analysis and justification. What happens at Ford in the future, if the project was to be given the green light, should be nothing to do with the FEH group under any guise whatsoever.

Day in the Life

A.6. At best this can be described as an optimistic portrait of a mature futuristic settlement where significant changes in existing national cultural behaviour have been achieved. The ‘clip’ implies a secure family structure from Day-1; with all facilities and businesses in place. However, this would not be the case in the proposal’s formative years, and families would not be accommodated wholesale, as assumed, unless the Eco-Town was fully serviced in all aspects from the onset. This portrait means nothing in planning terms; simply being an emotional statement designed to attract sympathy.

Sustainable Infrastructure

A.7. A number of claims arise from this part of the FAVG submission which deserve further consideration before their acceptance as viable proposals. They include:

- a. The details of the energy-from-waste arrangements. It is noted that mention of biomass has now been re-introduced; having been dropped during the ADC Ford Eco-Town Select Committee Inquiry after WSP Consultancy, FAVG’s energy experts, confirmed that it was not a suitable solution for this location and type of development.

- b. The arrangements for the treatment of waste. Especially the concept of a “closed loop” which implies that no waste will need to be recycled or disposed of outside the site.
- c. The water supply and drainage systems. The words imply self-sufficiency, but take no account that the site is located within an area defined by DEFRA as being subject to serious water shortage.
- d. The provision of paths and cycle routes. The overall concept may be good, but it is not necessarily safe if it includes the use of the busy (and getting busier) A259 to Littlehampton. Nor is the purpose of the cycle routes clear. Are they to be used for leisure, journeys to work, or retail shopping?
- e. The statement that easy-access public transport services will be provided is more difficult to deliver than to describe. Cost, distances, accessibility, timing and future funding are all practical considerations, and all need to be properly defined before the FAVG’s concept can be accepted as a workable plan.
- f. FAVG continue to ignore the extant local communities. The latter have not been involved in any debate about any practical advantages stemming from a development at Ford. The key cross-over benefits remain to be outlined.