

WSSC Select Committee Meeting - 21 May 2008

CAFÉ Submission by D M Waller

I represent the Communities Against Ford Eco-Town campaign group, and I support your Agenda Paper. May I start by reminding you that Ford has not been selected as being the very best place for an Eco-Town. Rather, it is in the DCLG list simply because 2 sets of developers have suggested it. I wish to highlight 4 specific concerns: Housing, Business, Transport and Climate Change.

Housing

There is much talk of just 5000 houses, but the Vision Group sees this as a basis for further development. Also, and this is worrying, the FEH group see the development as meeting Arun District's total housing need for the next 20 years. ADC has quite rightly been criticised for its past poor rate of building affordable housing, but meeting the need of the 4000 families on the housing list by re-settling them at Ford is not the answer. Housing-need needs to be met where it exists. This is in and around Bognor, which needs some 2000 homes, and in around Littlehampton, which needs some 1500 homes. Inland, and in and around Ford, the numbers are very much smaller; being only about 200 homes. The promise to build some 2000 affordable homes at Ford is therefore a deceptive mirage.

Business

There is great concern about the impact on business in Littlehampton and Bognor, as well as the investment and re-development plans for the 2 towns. In particular, the FEH brochure says that existing businesses will be encouraged to move to Ford so that Littlehampton and Bognor can become residential dormitory towns. Clearly this has not been properly thought-out. Rather it is just another speculative proposal designed to look good in a glossy brochure. The same applies to the idea of a Science Park, which is often very difficult to establish, even with high tech universities alongside.

Transport

Here your own Structure Plan says no "A27 Arundel Bypass, no development" because of the congestion on the A27. Also, of course, the

same sort of congestion exists on all the smaller local roads as well, especially the A259 and all the local north-south roads. Both developers acknowledge that an Arundel Bypass is an essential element of their schemes, and this is also seen as a constraint by DCLG. However, current indications show that an Arundel Bypass is unlikely to be up and running before 2020, and the developers idea that their so-called A259/A27 Link Road, which will go right through the middle of the new settlement, will solve all the transport problems is just not believable.

This new road is forecast to take traffic (inc HGVs) from Bognor and Littlehampton to and from the A27, as well as all the traffic from the homes and businesses in the settlement. However, it does not link directly with either the current A27 or even with the line of any new bypass. It simply joins the Ford Road just north of the station, and thus all the traffic will go up and down the Ford Road straight into the heart of Arundel until there is a full bypass.

Climate Change

Here I want to highlight flooding and water supply. Whilst I agree that the development could be built on Flood Zone 1 ground, I ask you to consider the possible position 25 to 50 years hence in the light of climate change. The South-East is likely to most impacted by the negative aspects of climate change, and Ford is a low-lying area, susceptible to fluvial, tidal and surface water flooding, all of which could occur simultaneously. Also, scientists predict that saline intrusion into the water table is highly likely as time passes. Is this therefore the best place to build a new town?

Conclusion

It is difficult to see why the Ford site lends itself as an Eco-Town. The development will cause the coalescence of three small rural settlements, use 350 hectares of mostly prime agricultural land (87% of which is green-field) 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 particular part of rural West Sussex. The real reason for this development proposal is simply to build houses. Thus, Ford is quite the wrong place for an Eco-Town, and I urge you and your Committee to agree with this proposition.