

Patron: The Duke of Norfolk



COMMUNITIES AGAINST FORD ECO-TOWN

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27th May 2008

Councillor G Tyler
Chairman of The Select Committee
Arun District Council

cc. Howard Cheadle Esq
Arun District Council
cc. Jim Redman Esq

Dear Chairman,

ECO-TOWN PROPOSAL - FORD, WEST SUSSEX
SUBMISSION TO ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE
ON TUESDAY 27 MAY 2008

Introduction

1. I am joint Chairman of the local Communities Against Ford Eco-Town (CAFÉ) campaign and my purpose is to inform you and your Select Committee, that our campaign group, which has almost unanimous local support, believes very strongly that the Ford area is a totally inappropriate location for an Eco-Town. CAFÉ has been empowered to speak on behalf of the local communities in the district, namely: Arundel Town Council, Yapton, Ford and Clymping Parish Councils, Littlehampton Civic Society and Arundel Civic Society.

2. Let me start by saying that we welcome the DCLG's consultation paper about Eco-Towns. We are not opposed to the concept of Eco-Towns per se, we are

not opposed to housing and industrial development and we are not even opposed to development on green-field land. Thus please do not label us as a NIMBY group.

3. The two local Eco-Town submissions, which have been taken forward in the DCLG's consultation paper are both misleading; being essentially elderly development proposals which have been given a hurried coat of green paint.

Development Proposals

4. The one from the Ford Airfield Vision Group is a dusted-off version of a proposal to the County Council, by Barton Willmore & Redrow Homes in year 2000, aimed at persuading the local planning authorities, that the building of a new market town at Ford would satisfy the housing needs of the whole of the southern part of West Sussex. We perceive the updated brochure to be a triumph of spin over substance, in an attempt to facilitate the sale for development, of a large amount of prime agricultural land.

5. The second, by the Ford Enterprise Hub, is a speculative and seemingly altruistic attempt launched in 2004, by three local Councillors, to divert attention from development to the west of Ford Airfield. Its' prediction is that it will apparently and at a stroke, solve the transport, employment and housing problems from which Arun District suffers; but thereby avoiding the possibility of building on green-field land in or around other villages, further west of the Arun.

Eco-town Selection Criteria (DCLG)

6. CAFE opposes the proposal that Ford should be the site for an Eco-Town, because both the site and the proposals fail to satisfy many of the criteria set out by DCLG. In particular, our concerns relate to the following specified requirements:

a. Eco-Towns should be developed where there are good opportunities to make use of surplus public sector or brown-field land. However, the Ford site comprises some 350 hectares of private land and, of this, only 44 hectares (13%) are brown-field; the remaining 306 hectares (87%) being high quality, productive, agricultural land.

b. Eco-Towns must be places with a separate and distinct identity from existing towns and settlements. However the proposal would cause the coalescence of the small rural village of Yapton, with the even smaller hamlets of Ford and Clymping, would smother Walberton, Binsted and Bilsham and impinge heavily on the visually important wider Arun Valley and its clear access to the coast.

c. Eco-Town proposals should provide a good range of facilities within the town, including primary and secondary schools. However, “only” 5,000 dwellings would not generate sufficient secondary age children to warrant the development of a new secondary school and thus, this will be a traffic multiplier.

d. Eco-Towns are conceived as having their own retail centre(s), but in this case one would not be constructed (if at all) until the very late stages of the proposal, when generated profit might make it economically feasible. There will therefore be high dependence on off-site facilities; and hence more traffic.

e. Eco-Towns should facilitate the provision of affordable local housing to meet identified housing needs. However in this instance, the vast majority of the District’s housing need is concentrated in the towns of Littlehampton (1300) and Bognor Regis (1700); a need which would not be satisfied by the provision of housing in a rural setting several miles distant.

f. Eco-Towns should be resilient to predicted future climate change, and not be subject to flood risk. However the low-lying site at Ford is susceptible to coastal, fluvial and surface flooding, possibly simultaneously and there is a high risk of saline intrusion into the local water table, in due course; indeed the region has already been designated an “area of serious water stress” by DEFRA.

g. An Eco-Town should include mixed development, (including an employment zone). In this case, there is a speculative proposal for a ‘science park’ providing up to 4,000 ‘high-tech’ job opportunities. However there are already many local industrial units unfilled, both at Ford and in nearby Littlehampton & Bognor Regis and any such development - even it was possible without a nearby ‘high-tech’ university - would seriously hinder the planned re-generation of the two existing coastal towns.

h. An Eco-Town must be well placed in relation to existing towns. However the local roads around Ford are already heavily congested and forecast to get worse. An essential element of both proposals is the provision of an A27 Bypass at Arundel to deal with some of the existing congestion, but the Highways Agency scheme is not yet approved and, even if it could be started in the early part of the post-2016 timeframe, it is unlikely to be completed before 2020. Any significant development at Ford would seriously impinge on Arundel, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, not to mention the natural rail hub at Barnham.

7. In summary, it is difficult to see on which key criteria the Ford site lends itself as an Eco-Town. The site will in effect swamp several small rural villages & settlements, use 350 hectares of high grade, predominantly green-field land

(87%) and the area earmarked for business use is only proposed to be developed as and when market forces dictate. The area has severe infrastructure issues, in relation to highways & transport, there is limited demand for affordable housing in this particular part of rural West Sussex and there is restricted demand for employment in and around Ford. Thus our research leads us to conclude that the emphasis of this development proposal is simply to build houses, rather than to tackle the key issues and spirit inherent in the Government's concept of an Eco-Town.

Conclusions of Past Planning Inspectors

8. This conclusion is backed up by government officials. As you will be aware, proposals to build houses on Ford Airfield have been mooted since year 2000; and have been considered by 3 separate Planning Inspectors, during the past 6 years, with the following results:

- a. The Arun District Local Plan Inspector said, in 2002, that "the severe harm to the rural character of the locality, together with the serious sustainability drawbacks, outweighed any potential advantages of development".
- b. The West Sussex Structure Plan Inspector said, in 2003, that "as a whole the Ford Airfield area did not fall within the definition of brown field land, it was isolated and lacking in many existing facilities and it was not particularly well located for travel, other than by car, bearing in mind the lack of major facilities nearby".
- c. More lately, the South East Plan EIP Panel said, in 2007, that they "acknowledged local concern that the ability of this area, to accommodate large scale development, is inhibited by capacity problems on the A27, particularly at Arundel".

Community Feedback

9. Having conducted several presentations, to over 1000 local residents, received some 5,000 petitions and communicated with several hundred local residents by email, we can categorically state that 98% of the local population rejects the Ford proposal as being unacceptable to the local community.

Summary

10. In summary, we have researched this matter deeply, as has Arun District Council to date, but CAFÉ as a non-constitutional body has had the advantage of unfettered access to the general public and its embedded skills, and several other non-governmental but expert bodies. From this research, we have concluded that we should be strongly opposed to the possibility of locating an

Eco-Town at Ford. We therefore intend to present our case to the ADC Select Committee, and during the remainder of your Hearings, will show that this proposal, is not only non-viable, but positively harmful, in terms of planning, housing, business, transport, sustainability, energy consumption and climate change, to the District and surrounding community.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Knott

Terry Knott MC FRSM
Co-chairman