

Arun District Council Ford Eco-Town Select Committee

Business and Employment

CAFÉ Submission by G Dixon and C Moore - 29 May 2008

Ford Eco Town: Where will the people work?

One of the Government's target outcomes for an Eco-Town is that there should be:

“An economic strategy relating business potential in the settlement to nearby towns, encouraging working from home and providing for local business support.” (Eco-Towns – Living a greener future)

If an Eco-Town is to work successfully, rather than become a dormitory from which people commute each day, there must be local jobs for those living in the town. Accordingly the proposals to build a new town at Ford must be scrutinised to ensure that existing businesses will not be damaged, and that there will be additional employment generated that as a minimum does not reduce the local job density, but rather increases it.

Current job density in Arun is just 0.68 (i.e. for each working age resident there is less than one job available) - the third lowest in the South East region. Figures indicate that more than three times as many Arun residents commute outside the area compared to the number coming into Arun for work each day. Arun is a net exporter of labour. An eco-town that does not work to correct this will not achieve the Government's aims of carbon neutrality.

The Proposal

The proposers of the town say that they will set aside 30 – 33 hectares of land within the entire development for employment purposes, which they claim will provide 4,000 jobs.

The FAVG proposal is for:

2,000 jobs – Business (B1)

1,333 – General industry (B2)

800 – General warehousing and distribution (B3)

The FEH proposal includes a Science Park and we have prepared a separate paper on that proposal – suffice to repeat here the conclusion of that document: ‘the science park is a tantalizing opportunity but that is all it is, tantalizing and out of reach. Ford needs a real distinctive advantage if it is to compete for investment with other science parks. It has none.’

The FEH bid also proposes that businesses be encouraged to relocate to the Ford site.

We consider that there are three specific problems within these proposals and we will address those here:

1. Impact on current businesses in the Ford area

There are 165 businesses in and around Ford. The Clymping and Ford Parish Action Plan Survey – December 2007 estimated that 885 people were employed by these businesses. Therefore each business employs an average of only 5.4 people.

The survey found that by far the biggest irritant to business is traffic problems, from traffic jams to the danger of speeding vehicles, with the majority of commercial vehicle movements being concentrated in the 8am to 11am and 4pm to 6pm periods.

The greatest benefit perceived by business survey respondents was the rural location, with many respondents citing the distance from housing as being a key reason for locating in the area. Many of the current businesses are clearly those which would be perceived as too anti-social to be located close to a residential area. In our opinion these existing businesses would find that the traffic associated with the building of a new town would damage their ability to operate, and that once new residents had moved in there would be conflict between the new residential and the existing commercial needs of the area.

It is also of concern that the attractiveness of the region to the tourism industry - from the shops and restaurants of Arundel to the 5 star hotel in Clymping – is its rural nature and the unspoilt views. Dwarfing Arundel with a town of the size proposed will damage this, and also count against the ambitions of other towns in the region such as Littlehampton to generate additional business from tourism.

2. Likelihood of success in attracting and generating businesses and jobs

To provide 4,000 jobs in organisations similar to those already at Ford would require an additional 750 businesses to be attracted into the area.

Yet today there are 19 empty units of varying sizes within the Ford area – these range from industrial units to a new built and highly specified ‘Tele-cottage’ in Horsemere Green Lane. The latter has been available for rent since 2001 and was built as a prerequisite of planning for a development of 40 houses; it has never been let.

The fact that these units and offices are empty is explained in part by the Arun and Chichester Assessment of Employment Needs Study 2005 (‘The Atkins Report’) which was a comprehensive review of locations for new business development in the Arun /Chichester district. The locations are ranked according to a number of criteria relating to accessibility, sustainability and marketability. Despite scoring 100% on marketability, Ford still ranked only 17th overall out of 18 sites in Arun.

There is existing experience within Arun which shows that land set aside for commercial development, such as the 23 hectares (about 70% the size of the Ford proposal) at Oldhams Farm Bognor Regis, which originally promised many of the benefits proposed for Ford, is now the subject of a supermarket planning application on the basis that there is insufficient demand for B1 business uses. This is a very likely outcome for the Ford site as well – greatly reducing the number and quality of jobs.

One factor which no amount of investment can change is that the Ford site is by the sea – businesses in the area need to be able to operate in a 180 degree economy with the limitations that brings for access and range of local customers. There are examples of successful seaside based regeneration projects, where Port usage has been combined with broader business, office, leisure, retailing and residential use. However given the prison, the recycling and sewage facilities at Ford, there are other sites such as Shoreham Harbour and Littlehampton that are more likely to attract investment for such aspirational development purposes.

3. Impact on the economic regeneration of the wider Arun region

The proposals specifically target attracting existing employment from Bognor and Littlehampton:

“Bognor and Littlehampton both have aging industrial/commercial areas, which have, over the years become “surrounded” by residential development. ... If we can encourage the voluntary relocation of some, or all, of Arun’s “residential locked” industrial/commercial businesses to Ford it would draw much HGV traffic away from the towns. The businesses would benefit too, with far quicker and easier access to/from the A27.”
(Ford Enterprise Hub Submission).

We have already seen that road access is the biggest problem facing the existing businesses at Ford today – even with the proposed new link road; we struggle to understand how anyone can describe Ford as an improved means of accessing the A27, but will leave out more detailed discussion of the roads from the business paper.

The claim that the current industrial areas in Littlehampton and Bognor are surrounded by residential development is not wholly accurate – for example the large industrial Lineside and Riverside estates are not locked in by residential areas and have direct access onto the A259. More important though is the implication that:

“The two towns would become mainly residential once again and the industrial/commercial areas serving them would be located just outside and equidistant between them.”
(Ford Enterprise Hub Submission).

This undermines the ‘eco’ credentials proposed for the scheme. The employment site within the proposed town is not equidistant between Bognor and Littlehampton. It is around 2 miles from Littlehampton and 5 miles from Bognor. Encouraging the

separation of residential and employment in any case is contrary to the sustainability ideals set out in the eco town prospectus. It is far better for people to be able to walk or cycle to work than face a commute along the A259.

Employment exported from the two towns of course would either come with an employee in post, offering no new resident a job; or the latter would be employed at the expense of the existing employee.

The proposals ignore the strategic plans already in place for the economic regeneration of the area. The Bognor Regis Masterplan and Littlehampton Vision are framework documents that set out the strategies for the two towns. At a wider level SEEDA has been pursuing a strategy of development: 1. regeneration within the five towns network, which includes Bognor and Littlehampton, 2. education led development including expanded campus facilities for the University of Chichester, 3. the St Modwen development in Bognor town centre, 4. the Littlehampton Harbour regeneration. In addition they have identified an opportunity to build a sustainable community of 4000 to 6000 houses at Shoreham Harbour.

Conclusion

The key problem of the employment proposals for the potential new residents of an eco-town at Ford is that no real assessment of the impact of the development on the rest of the region has been made.

If we accept that the Science Park proposal has no real substance, given the lack of hard evidence that there is any likelihood of this happening in the medium term, we must focus on the proposals for more general employment. In this context the proposals are sketchy and rely primarily on the hope that employment and businesses will relocate to Ford from within Arun. There are no proposals that set out any other competitive advantage that the site make offer to new start-up or expanding companies who can choose to locate anywhere they wish. Given the choice and high competition for such businesses, any incentives offered would necessarily be expensive – and at cost to other areas within Arun that would like to offer the same incentives.

However it is very significant to read that the FAVG proposal is making no promises for the development of employment land. In the Delivery section of their bid, they say:

“The development of land for employment will depend to an extent on Market factors in terms of demand from existing businesses seeking to expand or relocate and from new businesses seeking premises in the area. Good business sites need good residential sites as decisions to locate businesses often depend on the lifestyle and community features an area has to offer.” (FAVG Proposal document)

As has been discussed previously, despite the recent economic boom period, high quality B1 type office premises available in the area have remained vacant. This is despite high quality housing existing, including attractive new developments, locally.

It is most likely that the employment area will become a proposal for a supermarket site, and that those residents who are able to find jobs commute out of the area for work.

Co-authors

Geoff Dixon, Chartered FCIPD

Mr Dixon is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and has been a specialist in Human Capital Management for over 20 years. His professional career began in the Personnel Department at Royal Holloway, University of London, where he was responsible for staff development and HR support for research and academic activities. He was also the HR Strategy Manager for The Guinness Trust (a major provider of social housing in the UK) during a period of major restructuring. He now runs his own successful consulting business, specialising in helping organisations to benefit from modern internet enabled software to promote their employment practices. Recent clients have included BAA, Alcoa, Thomsons Holidays, Reuters and Sun Microsystems.

Clifford (Kip) Moore B.Sc, C.Eng, C.Dip.A.F.

Mr Moore is a Chartered Engineer with a degree in Chemical Engineering, a professional qualification in Accounting and Finance and is an Alumnus of Senior Management Strategy Courses at Cranfield and Ashridge Colleges. During his professional career he worked for Smith Kline Beecham (now GSK), for 23 years working at Engineering Project Director level with the McKinsey and Accenture Management Consultants in determining the optimal locations for SB's Global R and D and Manufacturing Networks. His experience includes leading study tours of U.S. and U.K. Science Parks and he has directed projects in Science Parks in the U.S, Spain, U.K. and Singapore.