

Arun District Council Ford Eco-Town Select Committee

Housing

CAFÉ Submission by D M Waller - 29 May 2008

My name is Derek Waller, I live in Arundel, and today I represent CAFÉ.

Outline Proposal

1. The proposed Eco-Town site at Ford is located inland and several miles from Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, but the proposers envisage that at least 5,000 new houses will be built there, of which 40% (2,000) will be affordable homes.

DCLG Consultation Paper

2. The DCLG consultation paper states that some 1,500 affordable houses would be provided at Ford [over the 15 year period 2011 to 2026], that Arun District Council has a housing waiting list of some 3,900 families, and that the proposed rate of build of affordable houses [some 150 pa] would compare very favourably with total of only 61 homes delivered in 2005/06 and 2006/07.

West Sussex Structure Plan

3. The W Sussex Structure Plan defines the transport corridor stretching from the west of the River Arun [up to the Chichester District border] as an Area of Search for a strategic (greenfield) development of 1,000 houses in the period after 2011.

SE Regional Plan EiP Report

4. The SE Regional Plan EiP Panel's Report published in August 2007 highlights the potential development area in Arun District west of the river Arun, and recommends that rather than 1,000 houses being built there, the total should be increased to 3,000 between now and 2026.

Ford Eco-Town Proposals

5. Both the Ford Eco-Town proposals focus on the building of 5,000 houses in the Ford area. The FEH group proposal, which stresses that just 5,000 houses will be built, sees the development as meeting Arun District's total housing need for the next 20 years. However, the Vision Group brochure talks of a minimum of 5,000 houses, and makes it clear that this is seen as a basis for further development.

The Policy Need for Affordable Housing

6. The draft SE Plan stresses the need for increased provision of affordable housing across the South East, and the Regional Housing Strategy emphasises the over-riding importance of the delivery of new affordable housing. Thus, there is no doubt about

the policy context, and the challenge facing ADC is quite clear. More affordable houses are required in the District, and sooner rather than later.

Arun District Council Policy

7. The ADC Community Strategy makes it clear that the Council is committed to the provision of affordable housing, and particularly that any new housing developments should meet local housing needs. Similarly, the ADC Housing Strategy stresses the high priority requirement to meet the need for affordable housing. Indeed, current planning policy envisages that for developments of more than 25 dwellings, 40% will be classed as affordable housing.

Arun District Council Housing List

8. Clearly the provision of affordable housing in Arun District is a serious problem, and ADC has quite rightly been criticised for its past poor rate of building affordable housing, especially with such a large housing waiting list.

9. However, meeting the need of the 4,000 families on the current (May 2008) housing list by re-settling them at Ford would not be the right answer. Whilst both Littlehampton and Bognor Regis have pockets of serious deprivation, the solution is not to uproot the families concerned and to provide them with affordable housing in an area divorced from their existing communities.

10. Housing-need needs to be met where it exists. This is in and around Bognor, which needs some 2,000 homes, and in around Littlehampton, which needs some 1,500 homes. Inland, and in and around Ford, the numbers are very much smaller; being only about 200 homes.

11. The obvious imbalance between the aspirations of the promoters for development at Ford and the practicalities of providing affordable housing where it is required raises a number of concerns. In particular, the provision of such housing in the rural countryside at Ford would be unlikely to meet the needs of either the most vulnerable groups of people in the community or the needs of an aging society. Given that the greatest needs exist in the Littlehampton and Bognor areas, it would seem most likely that the provision of affordable housing at Ford would lead to the possibility of social isolation and the breakdown of support services.

12. The proposal to build some 2,000 affordable homes in a new settlement at Ford between now and 2026 (and possibly even more later in the Century) is therefore not the best way to meet the District's well defined high demand for affordable housing. Rather, it seems simply to be a convenient way in which to enable the two proposers to portray the alleged green credentials of their long-dated development plans.

The Overall Housing Requirement in Arun District

13. Definition of ADC's overall future housing requirement is difficult, as the precise numbers are unclear. The draft SE Plan has one figure (9,300), the EiP Panel's Report has recommended a second figure (11,300), and the Government's acceptance of the

Ford Eco-Town proposal could add up to 5,000 more. Thus the total could be up to 16,300 in the period to 2026.

14. If the EiP Panel's figure of 11,300 houses is considered, then in the period to 2026, ADC needs to plan for the provision of some 6,000 additional dwellings. These would need to be provided, via the LDF process, through a combination of sites within existing built-up areas, plus additional greenfield allocations.

15. Current indications are that some 3,000 of these could be built on sites within the existing settlement boundaries of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, where such development would be an important element in mixed-use proposals aimed at increasing the vitality and vibrancy of the two towns.

16. That would then leave some 4,500 to be built either on additional brownfield land within settlement boundaries or on greenfield land outside existing settlement boundaries, and this will be a major factor to be taken into account in the District Council's developing (albeit currently stalled) LDF process.

Housing Distribution

17. ADC's housing distribution policy is guided by Government policy, the draft SE Plan and by the W Sussex Structure Plan. In essence, the requirement is that new housing development should be in sustainable locations which have the necessary infrastructure, services and community provision, or where this provision is planned. Also, there is a need for such housing to be located where it best promotes sustainable economic growth and regeneration.

18. The approach adopted by ADC as a means of meeting the overall housing requirement, through its ongoing LDF process, has therefore been to consider the possibility of additional urban extensions to Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, as well as small scale housing allocations focused on some of the District's larger villages; as a specific means of meeting identified housing needs for the District's inland areas.

19. Additionally, there is the possibility of building in the W Sussex Structure Plan's Area of Search in the transport corridor westwards from the River Arun to the Chichester District boundary, bordered on the north by the A27 and on the south by the A259. This Area of Search encompasses the villages of Ford in the east and Aldingbourne in the west.

20. The Ford area is one of the 7 locations in the District that was highlighted in the ADC LDF Issues and Options public consultation document but, though it attracted the majority of votes from the District's residents, research by ADC has indicated that it is the least sustainable of all the locations considered.

21. This is not surprising in the light of the views of the two Planning Inspectors who have had the opportunity to consider the various proposals to build houses on Ford Airfield since 2000:

- 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 PDL, 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.

Conclusion

22. In conclusion, you have before you two long-dated development proposals to build houses on greenfield land adjacent to Ford Airfield. There are a whole variety of reasons why such proposals are unsatisfactory, but this paper concentrates on the housing aspects.

23. First, the building of 5,000 or more houses at Ford, either as a standard housing development or as an Eco-Town, would not be sustainable per se. Second, Ford is not a suitable location, as is suggested by the FEH proposal, as the location for all the District's housing requirements for the next 20 years. And, third, the idea that the District's need for affordable housing for families in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis could be met in distant, rural Ford is a totally invalid concept.

24. Clearly Arun District Council has a problem in deciding where future housing should be located, and it also has a major problem with the provision of adequate affordable housing to meet the needs of the 4,000 families on the housing waiting list. However, these problems are well recognised by the Council. So too is the unsuitability of the Ford area to accommodate any significant amount of additional housing; let alone 5,000 or more houses in a new Eco-Town which would result in the coalescence of the villages of Ford, Yapton and Clymping.

25. Thus, the proposal to develop a 5,000 house Eco-Town at Ford is not a suitable way in which either to meet the District's housing need for affordable housing or the best way in which to provide the total amount of new housing that is generally required in the District between now and 2026.

Derek Waller

29 May 2008

Authors Details: Mr Waller is not a planning officer, but has considerable experience with planning and housing matters. First, as a member of both the Housing and Planning Committees on Ribble Valley Borough Council between 1995 and 1998 and, second, as an interested and informed correspondent with Arun District Council in respect of the Arun District Local Plan and ADC's more recent LDF Issues and Options consultation exercise. He was also a participant at the EiP concerning the W Sussex Structure Plan.