

## **Eco-towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

On planned housing provision, the SE Plan panel have recommended that Arun District should provide 11,300 dwellings in the period 2006-2026 – an increase of 2,000 on the SEERA recommended provision. The panel report makes reference to the strategic potential of the broad area to the West of the river Arun, and also that this should support regeneration in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. However, it also says that this could be provided without coalescence of existing communities. Some of this is consistent with Ford as a strategic location, but some of it is not.

Work at Arun District Council has identified urban extensions as the solutions most likely to meet Arun's needs in an acceptable and sustainable way. However, this work also identifies a shortfall of 4,500 dwellings post 2016, and when probed, the Council's witness could not indicate whether this could be satisfactorily provided as further, or more intensive urban extensions.

With regard to housing need, it typically takes 5/7 years to move from the housing register into accommodation at present, and the register currently has about 1400 households in bands A, B and C, where there is a degree of need and 2,600 households in band D where the need is less. We were also told that local people will strongly resist relocating, even at the promise of improved housing.

All affordable housing locally depends on private developments through s106 agreements, and there is a significant shortfall in delivery.

The Council's witness argued that delivery through an Eco Town would be no more reliable than delivery through urban extensions, as they both depend on private funding and the market. The promoters claim that the scale and comprehensive nature of their scheme and the longer term resilience of the housing and property market support their commitment to achieve 5,000 dwellings and 40% affordable housing across the scheme as a whole. They also explained in some detail how they would procure the affordable housing, in partnership with the local authority and a selected group of RSLs.

It does seem to the Select Committee that there are severe housing problems facing the District, both immediately, and in terms of housing delivery through the planning process. The here and now problems cannot be addressed by the Eco Town, but the current poor delivery rate means that these problems are likely to be chronic, rather than short term, and in the long run, the planning delivery problems are going to need radical solutions to which there are no easy answers. The SE Plan report does seem to be contradictory in relation to location, but on housing delivery grounds alone, the Eco Town proposals and location would provide a solution. However, the Select Committee were not persuaded that the Eco Town is the best solution, as there was insufficient evidence available about other alternatives, such as urban extensions. It seems to the Select Committee that giving a commitment to a whole new town is too serious to decide on the evidence which happens

to be available to us today, and we believe it is imperative and urgent that further work is done to explore all alternatives for dealing with these housing problems, rather than just supporting an Eco Town because it's all that's being offered..

We discussed the question of whether the site can properly be described as Previously Developed Land, and while the promoters claim that a significant part of the site is properly PDL in terms of the government definition, local people perceive it to be mostly open and productive farmland, and furthermore, that the remaining structures within the Eco Town area have largely blended into the landscape, which would exclude it from the governments definition. However, this discussion will continue on day 5, under 'Environment'.