

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECO TOWN PROPOSALS AT FORD  
17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2008**

**REPORT TO ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL  
FROM FORD ECO TOWN SELECT COMMITTEE**

**FORD ECO-TOWN PROPOSAL**

**1.0 Executive Summary**

1.1 Arun District Council's Select Committee process into the proposal for an Eco-Town at Ford sat over a six day period and heard a variety of evidence. The key areas of concern arising from their deliberations include:

- (i). A27 By-Pass - In the view of the Select Committee any substantial development of the type proposed must be subject to the pre-requisite of a by-pass being provided at Arundel. Although Eco-Towns aim to reduce car use, if unrealistic expectations of reduced car use are not achieved, the implications of establishing an Eco-Town in this location on the road network would be chaotic. In the absence of a firm commitment to a by-pass the Eco Town should not proceed.
- (ii) The Select Committee were concerned that the District Council is not delivering housing to meet the current and projected needs of the District, and considered that, in these terms alone, an Eco-Town could provide a potential solution. However, the Select Committee were concerned that giving a commitment to a whole new town is too serious to decide on the evidence which happened to be presented, and they therefore concluded that 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 that is all that is being offered.
- (iii). The Select Committee heard conflicting evidence about the potential impact of an Eco-Town on the regeneration objectives of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. However, the Select Committee were not persuaded by the more ambitious objectives of the Eco-Town promoters, particularly the Enterprise Hub bid, and, particularly in the absence of strategic road improvements considered that economic investment in an Eco-Town would be at the expense of, in competition with, and therefore detrimental to the regeneration objectives of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis.
- (iv). During the hearing it became apparent that the Eco-Town bid is highly dependent on an energy generation strategy based on waste-to-energy proposals. The Select Committee were deeply concerned about the concept of the Eco-Town being a net importer of waste as a basis for

economic deliverability and implementing its environmental and economic objectives.

- (v). Overall, the Select Committee were concerned about the potential impact of an Eco-Town on the existing community, the disruption and the substantial change in character of the district and this part of the coastal plain. They were also concerned that there was a lack of evidence from key partners, who are essential to delivery, and that without this supporting evidence, the proposals lacked credibility. Overall, therefore, they were of the opinion that the proposals are deeply flawed and should not be supported.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 The Select Committee recommends that the Council should express its opposition to the Ford Eco-Town Proposals, and urge the Government not to take the proposal forward to the next stage of development. The Select Committee's main concerns are:

- (i) A27 by-pass – without a by-pass for Arundel, major development in this location would cause significant congestion on the strategic and local highway network, and the Council does not accept that car reduction measures would be sufficient to mitigate this impact acceptably.
- (ii) Employment and retail investment in the Eco-Town would be in direct competition with regeneration programmes for Littlehampton and Bognor Regis and, particularly in the absence of strategic road improvements they are unlikely to attract sufficient investment to overcome this effect.
- (iii) While the Eco-Town might provide solutions to the District's housing problems in the medium/long term, alternative solutions should be evaluated before committing to an Eco-Town as a housing solution.
- (iv) The energy generating proposals are considered to be unacceptable as
  - a) they depend on the town becoming a net importer of waste from a wide area,
  - b) the waste-to-energy proposals subvert the County Council's waste strategy which has been subject to substantial community participation across the County.
  - c) The net benefits of a waste-to-energy scheme should not be restricted to an Eco-Town, but should be available to the community as a whole.
- (v) The Eco-Town would have a significant and damaging impact on the existing community, and would result in a substantial adverse change in the character of the District and this part of the coastal plain.

(vi) The Select Committee is concerned that the Eco-Town proposals at present amount to little more than a desk exercise in view of the limited discussion and commitment from significant partners who would be essential for the successful delivery of the scheme, including WSCC Education, Waste and Highways, Highways Agency, Water authorities/Companies, Rail authorities/Companies and bus operators, and this severely undermines the credibility of the scheme.

2.2 The Select Committee strongly urges the Council to pay urgent attention to housing delivery, and to demonstrate to Government before the decision on further shortlisting of the Eco-Town proposals that there are other, more sustainable options for meeting the District's housing needs.

### 3.0 Introduction and Background

3.1 In July 2007 the Government published the Eco-Town Prospectus and invited bids to establish what it called Eco-Towns. Eco-Towns are proposed to be small new towns of at least 5-20,000 homes. They are intended to create a complete new settlement, to provide a zero carbon development and to provide more sustainable living.

3.2 Two Eco-Town bids were submitted to the Government, one by the Ford Airfield Vision Group (FAVG) on behalf of three landowners and backed by major developers Wates and Redrow using the services of Barton Willmore and WSP consultancies. The second, the Ford Enterprise Hub (FEH), is by three local people (Tony Dixon, John Penfold and Harold Hall) with no land or business interests in the proposed Eco-Town area,

3.3 The Council was notified by letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April from the Minister that the Ford bids had been included in the 15 proposals assessed as being appropriate for further consideration as a site for an Eco-Town. This was the beginning of a selection process to reduce the 15 bids to between 5 and 10 bids to be taken to the next stage.

3.4 There are four stages involved in sifting the 15 schemes down to 10 as follows:

#### *Stage One:*

Three month consultation on preliminary views on Eco-Town benefits and these shortlisted locations; (ends June 30 – extension granted)

#### *Stage Two:*

Further consultation this summer on a Sustainability Appraisal, which provides a more detailed assessment of these locations, and a draft Planning Policy Statement.

*Stage Three:*

A decision on the final list of locations with the potential to be an Eco-Town and the publication of a final Planning Policy Statement, later this year.

*Stage Four:*

Like any other proposed development, individual schemes in these locations will need to submit planning applications which will be decided on the merits of the proposal and other material considerations, including the development plan and government policy.

3.5 At a Special Cabinet Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008 it was agreed that the Cabinet should recommend to Council that a Select Committee should be established to provide further information on which the Council could base its response to the Stage 1 consultation.

3.6 The Select Committee was asked to address the following question:

*“Is development of an Eco-Town at Ford (comprising at least 5,000 homes and associated employment, social and community infrastructure) sustainable, viable and deliverable? What long term impacts might such a scheme have on the rest of the District?”*

3.7 Members of the Select Committee were chosen to ensure that, as far as possible, they did not have any prejudicial interest in the merits of the Eco-Town proposals. An independent planning consultant was appointed to support the work of the Select Committee, again to ensure that, as far as possible, independent and unprejudiced advice would be provided by the Select Committee. Details of the Select Committee membership, the independent planning adviser and the structure and procedures for the Select Committee are attached as Appendix 1 in the form of the “Notes for Participants” which were prepared for the Select Committee.

3.8 The Select Committee ensured that there was a local contribution at each debate. Town and Parish Councils, together with action groups such as CAFÉ and the Walberton Village Action Group were invited to participate at specific sessions throughout the hearing. A list of those invited and attending is attached as appendix 2.

3.9 The Select Committee was run on the model of an “Examination in Public” (EIP). This is a tried and tested way of examining complex planning issues, used for instance to examine the West Sussex Structure Plan and the South East Plan. The procedure took the form of a series of topic discussions, with invited participants providing a range of expertise to assist the Select Committee.

3.10 The independent planning adviser introduced each session with a summary of the issues of concern to the Select Committee. This was then followed by a public question time session which provided an opportunity for those attending but not otherwise participating to ask questions or make statements on the topic under discussion.

- 3.11 Following public question time, one of the participants was invited to open the discussion on the topic. Thereafter, the Chairman directed the discussion to ensure that participants contributed as appropriate to ensure that the Select Committee obtained all of the information that was available. This included direct questions from Select Committee members to participants.
- 3.12 At the close of each session the Select Committee retired to assess the debate. The Chairman then shared a summary of the Select Committee's findings with those in attendance,. The summaries are attached as appendix 3 to this report.
- 3.13 In addition to the topic discussions, the closing session on the afternoon of 4<sup>th</sup> June 2008 was held at the local village hall at Yapton. This session was designed to provide for local groups to contribute to the Select Committee's considerations and it took the form of contributions from those in attendance, including representatives of Parish Councils and local groups and members of the public. A summary of these contributions is attached as appendix 4.
- 3.14 The Select Committee generated extensive documentation, all of which is available on the Council's website and will not be duplicated in this report. All submissions made to the Council by participants or other third parties were posted on the website as was each summary of the day's proceedings.
- 3.15 This report now takes each topic in turn and presents the Select Committee's findings on each topic. Reference is then made to public questions and local input followed by an overall assessment of the Select Committee's findings and finally, conclusions and recommendations.

#### **4.0 Impact on Arun and the Sussex Coast**

- 4.1 The discussion on the opening day was wide ranging, aiming to look at the overall issues relating to the Eco-Town proposal in terms of the Council's policy context, particularly the LSP and the community objectives for the district, as well as spatial planning strategy in the form of the draft South East Plan and the work to date on the Local Development Framework (LDF). The hearing opened with a presentation from the Promoters - the FAVG and the FEH. The Select Committee also heard from the two local MPs both of whom oppose the proposals.

##### *South East Plan*

- 4.2 The South East Plan is being prepared by the South East Regional Assembly (SEERA), and will provide a strategic spatial planning framework for the whole of the South East Region. The Plan has been through its Examination in Public and the report of the EIP Panel to Government was published last August. Apart from general policies on sustainability, provision of infrastructure etc. the policies for Arun District are within the Sussex Coast sub region, giving priority to promoting sustainable economic growth and regeneration and seeking to provide a better balance between the provision of housing and the economy. There is also a specific reference to linking new

development opportunities to sustainable urban extensions in Arun. In addition, the Panel Inspector's Report recommends that the housing allocation for the District should increase from the 9,300 dwellings proposed by SEERA for the period 2006-2026 to 11,300 dwellings. The Government's response to the Inspector's report is expected in July.

#### 4.3 *Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Community Strategy*

The LSP for Arun has produced a sustainable Community Strategy - "Our Kind of Place" - which is being reviewed in tandem with the LDF. Key priorities include "sustainable communities" and ensuring there is a housing supply which meets all local needs. It also addresses climate change and environmental impact, financial inclusion and population change.

#### *Local Development Framework*

- 4.4 Work on the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) has been hampered by repeated changes of context. Key underlying objectives include the regeneration needs of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, and meeting housing and employment needs in a sustainable way. The emerging LDF was based on SEERA's recommended housing provision for the District of 9,300 dwellings for the period 2006-2026. The approach to addressing this housing requirement was to focus on sustainable urban extensions to Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, for optimum environmental sustainability and also to support the regeneration and housing need objectives of the two towns, while also protecting the rural character of the District as a whole.

#### *Discrepancies Between the Two Bids*

- 4.5 The Select Committee were concerned that there were key differences between the two bids, although they were being presented on a common platform. At the opening session both groups of promoters suggested that the two bids are broadly similar with differences of emphasis rather than principle. The Select Committee returned to this issue at various points during the hearing as, in a number of key areas, differences did become apparent.

#### *Housing Requirements*

- 4.6 A Senior Civil Servant from Communities and Local Government (CLG) was in attendance, and endorsed the Select Committee's investigation. While he was unable to comment on specific elements of the Ford proposal, he was specifically asked whether, if the Eco-Town proposal is successful, its housing numbers would be additional to the South East Plan targets. His advice was that this was not necessarily the case and that Eco-Town delivery could be offset against housing targets for the area. However, he did caution that there would be further pressure to increase housing delivery, and in due course, further housing would be necessary beyond that to be identified in the South East Plan.

#### *Community Involvement*

- 4.7 In the remainder of the discussion, two overriding concerns emerged. Firstly, process - the Council and the community of Arun have invested a great deal of time and resources in establishing a sound policy framework for the future of the District, and in spatial terms, focusing on urban extensions to

Littlehampton and Bognor Regis has been the strategic direction of future development in the District. Previous debates (West Sussex Structure Plan/South East Plan) have consistently supported urban extensions as the most appropriate way to develop Arun's spatial planning strategy, and the Eco-Town proposals effectively dismiss this community investment and commitment.

#### *Regeneration & Housing*

- 4.8 Secondly, there was concern that the Eco-Town would not support the regeneration of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, but would rather compete with them. Furthermore, the housing provided in the Eco-Town would not directly meet the housing needs which are greatest in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. On these grounds therefore, the Select Committee were concerned that the Eco-Town proposals are not consistent with current policy in progress.

#### *Arundel by-pass*

- 4.9 A further theme of concern was the Arundel by-pass which was subsequently debated more fully under "Roads and Transportation", but this is such a fundamental matter that the Select Committee were concerned that this went to the heart of the principle of an Eco-Town in this location.

### **5.0 Roads and Transportation**

- 5.1 In this discussion, the Select Committee wanted to probe both internal transportation issues, i.e. how the Eco-Town would achieve high levels of non car dependence internally, but also external dependence, i.e. how the Eco-Town would fit in with the wider highways and transportation network.

#### *A27 Arundel by-pass*

- 5.2 With regard to integrating the new town to the external transportation network, discussion focused on the question of the A27 Arundel by-pass. At present the Highways Agency has no formal scheme for an Arundel by-pass, the most recent proposal having been withdrawn on environmental grounds. The promoters argue that some development could take place within the proposed Eco-Town in advance of a by-pass being built - a phase of approximately 1,000 dwellings was suggested, but they agreed that the A27 is required for the Eco Town.

- 5.3 It emerged that Eco-Town proposals are being discouraged by CLG from being dependent on provision of road infrastructure for their delivery, the objective being to design Eco-Towns and their infrastructure to discourage car use and therefore to diminish the impact and dependence of the new town on the highways network. Advice from the CLG challenge panel on the Ford submission commented that it should not contribute funding to the by-pass as this would not be consistent with sustainable principles.

- 5.4 However, Arundel Town Council, Arun District Council and West Sussex County Council all support the case for an Arundel by-pass as a key requirement of the regeneration and housing objectives for the coastal

communities. Furthermore, while the promoters recognised CLG's aspiration to uncouple road infrastructure from Eco-Town development, they did not themselves go further than arguing for an initial phase of development prior to an Arundel by-pass being provided. There appeared to be unanimity therefore that a by-pass is a pre-requisite for the Eco-Town as a whole. The Highways Agency was not in attendance to give evidence on this point.

#### *Links to A27*

- 5.5 A second key question was how the Eco-Town would link into the A27 by-pass. Even assuming the final by-pass proposals are similar to the (rejected) blue/pink route, i.e. a complete southern by-pass of Arundel and with a two level junction at Ford Road, the promoters' proposals do not link directly into the by-pass. They rely on a stretch of the unimproved Ford Road, which was subsequently identified as being at risk of flooding.
- 5.6 Furthermore, an Eco-Town at Ford would still generate traffic along the whole of Ford Road into Arundel, even if the by-pass is built e.g. as a direct route to the A29/London, and at its northern end, Ford Road is reduced essentially to single way working due to on street parking for houses where there is no alternative parking available. The only "solution" to this problem which is being investigated is traffic lights to ensure balanced flows in each direction through this stretch, but the Select Committee did not believe that this would be a credible solution to deal with a single lane bottleneck on an access road to a complete new town.

#### *A259/A27 Link Road - the "spine road"*

- 5.7 The bid documents submitted by both promoters both made provision for a link road across the spine of the site which also served as a strategic connection between the A27 and the A259. This was argued by both promoters to be a significant benefit of the scheme, consistent with West Sussex County Council's Local Transport Plan objective of improving road links between the A27 and the South Coast to facilitate coastal regeneration.
- 5.8 While there was much discussion about the consequences of a spine road in terms of additional traffic congestion consequences at different parts of the highways network, during the hearing the FAVG advised the Select Committee that their proposals have now been amended to abandon a direct spinal link road in favour of a more diffuse highway network. The Select Committee expressed concern about the additional cost implications of this approach. This also seemed to confirm their initial perception that there are significant differences between the two bids, with the consequent difficulty of how to properly evaluate them.

#### *Railway Infrastructure*

- 5.9 On the proposals for new rail infrastructure, specifically a new station west of the current station within the site, the main concerns were with deliverability in the context of the rail industry's priorities. The Select Committee also questioned the capacity of the line to take increased rail traffic, particularly given the very high number of level crossings on the South Coast route as a whole. The desirability and practicability of new passing loops at Ford could

not be tested because of the absence of a Network Rail witness, and there have been no substantive discussions between the promoters and Network Rail and the train operators to address these issues.

- 5.10 The removal of the level crossing at Ford would clearly be a welcome benefit. However, providing a new bridge over the railway line would inevitably act as a traffic magnet through the site. The newly announced proposal to provide a diffuse and traffic managed route through the site would appear to build contradictory and conflicting strategic and local highway objectives into the scheme and it is difficult to see how these could be satisfactorily reconciled.
- 5.11 Another difference between the two bid proposals is the emphasis of the FEH proposal on a “parkway” station whereas the FAVG propose limited car parking for residual use only, assuming most access to the station would be by alternative forms of transport. During the hearing the FAVG further distanced their proposals from the “parkway” concept.

#### *Bus Services*

- 5.12 Evidence from the bus operators suggested that the bid proposals to provide improved bus infrastructure would be welcomed and supported. Extending current routes to and through the Eco-Town without additional subsidy would not present major difficulties, although whether the proposed coastal expressway service should divert off the A259 would require careful consideration. Providing internal bus services would, however, require subsidy, as would providing bus services outside core hours e.g. after 8.30 in the evening and at weekends. There are major infrastructure difficulties in achieving good competitive performance on strategic bus routes (e.g. Portsmouth/Brighton), and realistically, such journeys are likely to be more attractive by rail.

#### *Other Forms of Transport - Achieving Behavioural Change*

- 5.13 With regard to other forms of transport (walking, cycling, car sharing, car clubs) the promoters suggest that these can be designed into the new community in such a way as to change behaviour from assuming car travel by default. Comparison was made with other communities where such design has effectively reduced car use even though in some cases (a settlement in Germany was cited), car ownership might still be relatively high.
- 5.14 The Select Committee agreed that car use can be discouraged by design but were doubtful whether, regardless of design, a new settlement in this location could achieve the step change in car dependency urged by Government. Not only does this challenge the practicability of the Eco-Town concept, but if the Eco-Town is established on unrealistic expectations of behavioural change, the consequent impact of traffic overload on the already congested highway network would be chaotic.

### *Commercial traffic*

- 5.15 All of the discussion at the hearing on road transport related to reduced car use. There was no discussion about reduced commercial vehicle use. The Select Committee therefore assume that the commercial traffic generation of the employment uses would be similar to employment uses elsewhere in the District, noting the contribution of refuse lorries serving the waste-to-energy plant, referred to later in this report. The promoters argued that the effect of commercial traffic could be mitigated by night time use, but this seems to the Select Committee to be antisocial because of the traffic noise for residents and the unsocial hours for the employees

### *Deliverability*

- 5.16 While deliverability was dealt with as a topic in its own right, this was a consistent and recurrent issue in the debate on roads and transport. With regard to the A27 Arundel by-pass, the FAVG did not envisage providing direct contributions to the funding of the by-pass, although a partial contribution might be an option, in competition with other benefits. However they argued that the Eco-Town proposals per se might influence the by-pass proposals to be brought forward. This, however, does not seem to be consistent with the advice from CLG that Eco-Towns should not rely on highways infrastructure investment.

### *Achieving Reduced Car Use*

- 5.17 A written submission by Car Free UK was made available to the Sub Committee. Car Free UK is a respected charitable organisation promoting the reduction of car use and their advice is being fed into the Government's challenge panel assessment of the Eco-Town bids. Their assessment is critical of the Eco-Town shortlist as a whole on the grounds that new settlements are invariably less sustainable than extensions to existing settlements, and they cite a number of examples including Camborne and Poundbury where new settlements close to existing towns have resulted in a high degree of car dependency.
- 5.18 However, in their assessment of the 15 short listed Eco-Town sites, while most of them are rejected as performing poorly on car dependency, Ford is one of only four which they consider provides some potential for achieving relatively low car dependency, largely because of the potential for good rail service to the site. They also suggest that the scope for an attractive riverside walking/cycling route to Littlehampton is a potential advantage.
- 5.19 They did comment however that Littlehampton and Bognor Regis are both too small to act as parent conurbations. They are also critical of the station being at the northern edge of the site. This was raised in discussion at the Select Committee, and the promoters said that they would be prepared to consider developing their plans to locate the new town further north to ensure equidistant accessibility to the station. However this land is not within their control, so this would pose deliverability issues, and it was subsequently also identified that the area north of the railway line is subject to flooding.

## 6.0 **Economy**

- 6.1 There was common ground on the economic problems and challenges facing the District, and in particular, the challenges posed by the under performing economies of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis which are being addressed by significant regeneration programmes in both towns. The key question therefore was whether establishing successful economic investment in a new Eco-Town would support the regeneration objectives of the coastal towns or act in competition to and therefore detract from them.

### *Deliverability of the employment proposals*

- 6.2 Discussion centered on the nature and credibility of the employment proposals, given that employment investment particularly in the coastal sub region invariably requires subsidy. This not only raises the question of the difficulty of attracting employers in the first place but also of retaining them in the long term.
- 6.3 The FAVG argued that a key advantage of their scheme is their strategy to generate significant quantities of energy. This would either be available to the new community in the form of reduced energy costs, or, if the energy is exported to users or the grid, this funding could be controlled by a Community Development Trust who could make investment decisions on behalf of the community as a whole.

### *Nature of employment provision*

- 6.4 On questioning, the FAVG accepted that the “higher order” science parks referred to particularly in the FEH proposals would not be achievable on this site but argued that a slightly lower order “technology park” would be deliverable, probably with subsidy, but that this could attract “high end” employment into the area. Arguments against this expectation were based on the difficulty of attracting such employment and investment to currently vacant commercial sites of similar character at Bognor Regis which have failed to attract “high end” employment. Some of them are now being proposed for supermarkets.

### *South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)*

- 6.5 SEEDA attended the hearing and expressed their concern both that the strategic housing requirements were too high for the location and for the housing/jobs balance of the area and the economy, and also that the employment investment might detract from the regeneration of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. Overall, though, these were expressed as concerns by SEEDA on which further evidence should be sought, rather than objections.

### *SEERA*

- 6.6 SEERA submitted a paper expressing their concern that Eco-Towns could divert scarce resources from other areas in need of infrastructure improvements, although they were referring here to regional competition with e.g. growth areas rather than more local competition with Littlehampton and Bognor Regis.

### *Economic Impact*

- 6.7 During the discussion it was agreed that more work needs to be done on economic impact and FAVG agreed to participate in an economic impact assessment with the Council.

### *A27 Arundel By-Pass*

- 6.8 Once more, in this discussion, the A27 Arundel by-pass emerged as a critical factor. The Select Committee considered that the difficulties and challenges posed by delivering any significant employment in this area, let alone “high end” business, could only be overcome by improved road access. The by-pass must therefore be a pre-requisite, although even this may not be enough given the major structural shortfall in road infrastructure in the sub region.

## 7.0 **Housing**

- 7.1 During the discussion on housing, it emerged that Arun District has significant unresolved housing needs. These take the form both of critical “here and now” needs related to affordable housing and social housing. There are also significant challenges in meeting increasing housing requirements firstly from the former Structure Plan and more recently from the South East Plan Inspector’s Report.

### *Planning Delivery*

- 7.2 The Council acknowledges that there is a shortfall of 4,500 dwellings post 2016 based on the South East Plan Panel Report figures and the Council’s housing delivery trajectory. The Council has been hampered in moving this work forward to identify solutions to this problem by the contextual developments firstly of the publication of the Panel Inspector’s Report recommending an additional 2000 dwellings over and above the basis on which the LDF was being developed, and latterly, the potential for an Eco-Town within the District.

### 7.3 *Location*

The locational arguments against the housing proposals of the Eco-Town were on two fronts, firstly that the site has been assessed as being unacceptable by the Arun District Local Plan Inspector and the West Sussex Structure Plan Inspector. However both the West Sussex Structure Plan and the South East Plan identify the area west of the River Arun as being suitable for strategic development in some location, the size of the requirement increasing from 1000 in the West Sussex Structure Plan to 3000 in the South East Plan Panel Inspector’s Report.

- 7.4 The second main argument against the housing provisions of the Eco-Town proposals are that they are not appropriate to meet the current housing needs of the District which are focused on Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. Evidence was given to the effect that, even though it typically takes 5-7 years to move from the housing register into accommodation at present, local people will strongly resist relocating to different communities, even at the promise of improved housing.

### *Housing Delivery*

- 7.5 Another area of contention was whether an Eco-Town would be more reliable for delivering housing and particularly affordable housing than urban extensions, where housing delivery has faltered in recent years. While 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 5000 dwellings and 40% affordable housing across the scheme as a whole.

### *Select Committee Findings*

- 7.6 The Select Committee concluded that there are severe housing problems facing the District both immediately and in terms of housing delivery through the planning process. While current housing problems cannot be addressed by the Eco-Town due to the timescale for delivery, 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 and there are no easy options. Therefore, on housing delivery grounds alone the Eco-Town proposals and location do appear to have some merit.

- 7.7 The Select Committee were concerned, however, about the lack of evidence of alternative solutions to these housing problems such as urban extensions. It seemed 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 them, and they therefore concluded that 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 that is all that is being offered.

## **8.0 Physical Structure and Community Infrastructure**

- 8.1 In this discussion the Select Committee reviewed the proposals relating to schools, health, social issues, community development, policing and emergency services, in other words the making of a new community within the new town.

### *Education*

- 8.2 Perhaps the key area of contention in this discussion was education and schooling, including nursery provision. While these pose financial deliverability challenges like many other elements of the Eco-Town proposals, they also pose challenging practical and community issues in terms of integrating the new community with the existing community in an appropriate and balanced way. There was much discussion about capacity at existing schools both primary and secondary, and while, subject to funding, the promoters are prepared to provide schools for the occupants of the new town, in the early stages of occupation the number of pupils would not reach the thresholds necessary for practical satisfactory education provision.

- 8.3 There are other complications associated with educational provision including potential competition for the educational provider, practical limitations on the scope of existing schools to extend, and the governance of schools such as church schools which have wide catchments and their intake cannot be readily identified with particular locations such as the Eco-Town. The promoters expressed a desire to work with the community to meet their overall education requirements, including faith schools if there is sufficient demand.

#### *Health*

- 8.4 With regard to health provision, the location of the Eco-Town broadly midway between the hospitals of Chichester and Worthing mean that the recent decisions about concentrating strategic health provision at Worthing would serve the location equally as effectively as the current arrangements. Furthermore the PCT assured the hearing that the population of the Ford Eco-Town had been factored into their planning estimates.

#### *Community Development*

- 8.5 With regard to community development and youth provision, the promoters argue that the potential for a Community Development Trust to take advantage of revenue from the energy generating proposals would provide a substantial resource to support significant community development in both the establishment and development of the new community.

#### *Emergency Services*

- 8.6 The requirements of the police and the emergency services were explored and this would be a key design and infrastructure investment requirement of the new town.

#### *Retail Provision*

- 8.7 Retail provision is another area where there were apparently differences between the two bids, in that the FAVG bid aims to provide more self containment of shopping requirements whereas the FEH bid aims to direct dependence for retailing on the existing communities of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. No evidence was provided to the Select Committee on the question of retail provision and the impact of the proposals on Littlehampton and Bognor Regis.

### **9.0 Sustainable Living**

- 9.1 The discussion on sustainable living proved to be a turning point in the hearing, as it was here that, on questioning, the significance of the energy production proposals became apparent. The energy production proposals are a cornerstone of the scheme – they provide the required sustainability exemplary status for the scheme as well as the income generation/reduced energy costs which are claimed to provide the basis for sustained community and employment investment.

### *The Energy Scheme*

- 9.2 While the bid documents spoke in general terms of a variety of “green” energy generation including bio gas, waste to energy, tidal energy, combined heat and power and other local energy sources, it became apparent during the hearing that the focal point of energy production is proposed to rely to a degree on gas burning, both initially and as a fall back. In time, however, it would develop into a full blown waste to energy plant, initially taking waste from the Eco-Town. If the claims of the FAVG of generating four times the energy requirements of the Eco-Town are to be achieved, this would require a large number of refuse lorries to feed the plant, importing waste from further a field.
- 9.3 While it is a good environmental principle for communities to consume their own waste and convert energy from it, what was of concern to the Select Committee was the dependence on waste from the wider area, to the extent that what is proposed almost amounts to a solution to County, if not sub-regional waste disposal problems. The County Council have been conducting a comprehensive consultation exercise on a County waste strategy in parallel with negotiating a new waste contract on a competitive basis with new contractors. It therefore seemed to the Select Committee wholly inappropriate that waste generating proposals of this magnitude and significance should arise through the Eco-Town process, thus invalidating the financial and resource cost of the County Council’s strategy. It is also procedurally flawed to introduce strategic proposals of this nature in this manner, as they have not been subject to the same scrutiny and environmental appraisal as alternatives and, if relied on to promote the Eco-Town, may result in sub optimal and anti-competitive proposals in relation to the County Waste Strategy and procurement.
- 9.4 If a waste-to-energy plant at Ford is the optimum solution for the County, this would have emerged in the Waste Strategy following full assessment of all alternatives, which it has not. It may or may not form part of the solutions for the new County waste provider, but it would be wrong for the Eco-Town proposals to drive this process.
- 9.5 Furthermore, the essence of the link between waste to energy (or even just energy generation) and the Eco-Town is long term profitability and subsidy into the new community. However, this benefit would arise whatever the eventual waste solution for the County, so the Select Committee questioned why should these benefits only go to the Eco-Town - should they not be dispersed as a community benefit to the whole of the County, or whatever area benefits the waste disposal/energy service provider?

### *Lorry Movements*

- 9.6 With regard to concerns about lorry movements, again, the concern is of the principle of the Eco-Town becoming a net importer of waste. While the number of lorries is significant and of concern, it does need to be put in the context of overall traffic generation for a new town, and no evidence was provided to the Select Committee on this point.

### *Location*

- 9.7 The justification for the high environmental performance of the energy to waste proposals in relation to the Eco-Town in this particular location was probed by the Select Committee and it became apparent that the two key locational advantages are the availability of residual material from the sewage water treatment plant within the site which could be utilised to feed the gasification/energy generating process, and the Material Recycling Facility (MRF) currently under construction on site, which the promoters claim would provide a source of material with which to feed the energy generating process.
- 9.8 While there were some technical concerns about the utilisation of residue from the sewage water treatment as an input into the waste process, there was no disagreement that this could be overcome technically, albeit at some financial cost and subject to additional treatment which would add to the land take of the energy generating proposals. With regard to residual material from the MRF, this would also require pre-treatment before being usable by the energy system, also with cost and space implications.
- 9.9 However, the ultimate objective of generating energy from waste would mean a much larger volume of input into the feed for the energy generating process, and this is clearly not specific to this location. This would also require substantial cleaning and preparation before being available for use, with significant cost and land take implications. Overall, in its ultimate form, the Committee were alarmed at the scale of the proposals and their cost and the locational advantages of the waste water treatment plant and the MRF seemed to be modest in relation to the overall input to the energy generating process. They therefore did not consider that the waste to energy facilities justify the location of an Eco Town on this site.
- 9.10 The Select Committee also probed the particular need to co-locate the Eco-Town itself with the energy generating process. Although it is technically easy to transport energy, and there is no technical barrier to siting the community at some distance from the energy generation, the promoters claim, and it was not disputed, that there are significant efficiency benefits to co-locating energy production and the community, particularly in terms of facilitating combined heat and power systems. There is also a material loss of efficiency in transferring energy through the national grid.

### *Carbon Zero Performance*

- 9.11 The Council's advisers were concerned that the energy generation proposals did not depend significantly on truly zero carbon sources, particularly wind, solar and tidal energy. While the bid documents include some detail of the hydro-generation from tidal flows, at the Select Committee it was acknowledged that this would provide a small proportion of the energy requirements, probably sufficient to supply a countryside visitor centre.
- 9.12 The core energy generating system of generating energy from waste is not carbon neutral although the promoters argue that this would be factored into the overall carbon footprint of the town which they expect to be zero. The

Council's advisers would have expected wind power to be a key element of the proposals - needing approximately 2-4 large wind turbines (120m high), but these are not proposed. Although the bid proposals refer to micro-generation from sources such as photo voltaic and micro wind turbines, the Council's advisers do not consider that these would make a significant contribution towards zero carbon.

#### *Water*

- 9.13 Turning to the proposals for the water cycle, the FAVG bid includes a leading edge dual-water system which provides for dual circulation of potable and grey water. Used water would be treated and re-circulated for grey water use (toilet flushing, garden water, car cleaning, industrial use etc). While concerns were expressed about potential contamination from the recycled water, the FAVG claimed that the purification processes would ensure that the treated water would be of potable quality. However, because of concerns by the Portsmouth Water Company about recycling such water in a potable supply, the FAVG are proposing that this would be treated as non potable water' and therefore circulated around the community in a dual water supply system. While the Select Committee could understand the concerns of the Portsmouth Water Co., the dual system did seem to be a wasteful investment of infrastructure if the treated water is in fact potable.

#### *Site Drainage*

- 9.14 The other major element of the water system would be a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS). This is now a commonplace element of sustainable development and a requirement of Council policy. It is therefore clearly a practicable proposal, but it is not leading edge technology and therefore not exemplary.
- 9.15 Another element of the bid proposals is the utilisation of existing watercourses to underpin sustainable surface water drainage, including re-establishing part of the Portsmouth to Arundel canal within the site. Because of the high water table, this could be retained as a water feature for the development while also serving as an effective part of the water cycle.

#### *Design and Density*

- 9.16 The Select Committee probed the relationship of design and density to environmental performance, as most examples of development with high environmental performance are high density, and might typically be five or six storeys high. The promoters argued that they would tailor the design to the context and character of the site in its rural Sussex location, so that the majority of the town would be of two storeys, albeit that some of this could be at a very high density because of design in relation to streetscape and street use, parking provision and use of gardens and open space. However, they acknowledge that in some parts of the site, particularly at focal points relating to the mixed use/community areas, storey heights could increase to three or, at most, four storeys.

## 10.0 Environment

10.0 The discussion on environment dealt respectively with bio-diversity, the impact on the natural environment, flood risk and drainage, landscape and heritage.

### *Bio-Diversity*

10.1 The promoters argue that the proposals would have a beneficial impact on the natural environment. They claim that the site does not contain any natural designations and there are no species of note recorded in the area, which they claim to be largely agricultural monoculture. Their proposals are claimed to introduce new protected wildlife areas, and specifically a managed wetland area adjacent to the River Arun which would provide for enhanced biodiversity.

10.2 Local people are clearly concerned about the loss of a green environment and concern was also expressed about the effect of birdlife and the loss of historic hedgerows. The West Sussex County Council advisers confirmed that substantial survey information would be necessary before they could advise on impact on the natural environment and any mitigation measures which might be necessary.

### *Visitor Pressure*

10.3 The impact of increased visitor pressure, particularly on the fragile eco-system of Climping Beach and also Binsted Wood were areas of significant concern. Climping Beach is already under pressure from visitors from as far a field as London, and the fragile nature of the beach shingle eco system is particularly vulnerable to intensive visitor pressure. There is concern that this could be exacerbated by a community of 12,000 or so residents, many, if not all within walking distance.

10.4 Similar concerns relate to Binsted Wood, together with concerns about urban fringe problems such as fly tipping, crop damage, trespass and impact on agricultural activities. There was general agreement, however, that these factors would affect any substantial development in this broad location, and therefore would probably apply at least some degree to any inevitable alternative to the Eco-Town within the District.

### *Flood Risk and Drainage*

10.5 The Select Committee's concerns on this matter were highlighted by flooding within the proposed site earlier in the hearing week. The Environment Agency representatives advised that a sequential test must be applied to new development particularly where the site is not in Zone 1, (the safest place for development). In discussion it was ascertained that 80% of the Eco-Town site is within Flood Zone 1 with about 15% in Flood Zone 3. However, the promoters argue that the Flood Zone 3 land includes land north of the railway line which would be substantially a landscaping buffer, and the area east of Ford Road which would be designed as a managed wetland area, where occasional flooding would be integrated into the management approach. The

promoters accept that about 5% of the area of the Eco-Town is within Flood Zone 3 where it is proposed to provide development. However, they argue that any such area can be planned and managed so as not to put houses at risk of flooding.

- 10.6 In the initial stages of the hearing, and in the bid documents, it was suggested that the A27/A25 link/spine road would provide a form of secondary flood defence across the site. However, during the hearing the FAVG advised that this is not now proposed, as a more diffuse approach is proposed to be taken to road permeability, so the question of a secondary flood defence does not arise.
- 10.7 On questioning, it emerged that the area to the north of the railway line is vulnerable to flooding, and there was concern that the run off from this area could be trapped by the proposed bridge over the railway line. Assurances were given, however, that this would be managed so that there would be no barrier to water run off from the lower land to the north.
- 10.8 Mention was made of the wider river Arun management plan with proposals as far a field as Pulborough Wild Brooks having some implications for the flood management of the river. It was suggested that this might mitigate flood risk to the development site. This would be explored as part of the flood risk assessment for the development.

#### *River Defences*

- 10.9 With regard to the cost of river defences, the Environment Agency aims to prevent development in areas where long term investment in flood defences is required. There would therefore be no expectation of increased or long term investment in river defences for this development. Any flood protection infrastructure required by the developer would have to be funded and maintained by them.

#### *Landscape*

- 10.10 The site of the Eco-Town is not in any area of environmental designation. It is attractive countryside and forms part of the character of the coastal plain between Arundel, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, and clearly the development of an Eco-Town would have a significant effect on the overall character of this area. Concern was raised about the more strategic impact of development, and the Select Committee heard of evidence provided to the South Downs National Park Boundary Inquiry to the effect that the corridor from the sea via the River Arun to Arundel and the Downs provides one of the only unspoilt transitions from the sea to the Downs and is therefore a unique countryside and heritage experience. Whilst the proposed National Park boundary extension that related to these concerns was not accepted, this clearly is a factor to be taken into account.
- 10.11 The Select Committee heard that views from the town of Arundel across the site of the Eco-Town itself are limited, but there are long distance views into the site from Arundel Park and Perry Hill above Burpham. The promoters argued that visibility was not of itself a damning factor, noting that many

buildings on the site already are unsightly and prominent. However, the overall erosion of the rural environment, particularly in the setting of a historic town and a designated National Park are matters which must be given serious consideration.

- 10.12 Other areas of concern under this discussion related to the impact of visitor pressure on the Downs and light pollution. These would have to be appraised and taken into account in any proposals which might be brought forward, and it might be appropriate for development contributions to be made to deal with increased visitor pressure.

#### *Heritage*

- 10.13 On heritage, the main concern was the outstanding rural setting of St. Mary's at Yapton, with concerns also about views of Ford Place, particularly from the river. While mitigation measures might help limit the impact of an Eco-Town on these and other heritage concerns, there is no doubt that there would be some erosion of historic and landscape character in these areas.

#### *The Eco-Town in its Context*

- 10.14 The County's landscape advisers were concerned that the bid proposals did not take into account the County's strategic landscape assessment and commented particularly on the inappropriateness of the framework design in the bid documents which depended on broad boulevards (reflecting the airfield/runway heritage) which have no precedent in the Sussex context and would result in a settlement at sharp odds with its context. The promoters advised that their design work is very much in development and, particularly if the principle of an Eco-Town is accepted, they would work with local communities and the County Council taking full account of the County's strategic landscape advice in taking forward the detail of their proposals.

#### *Archaeology*

- 10.15 On archaeology, although there are no specific known areas of the interest within the site it is expected that the site would yield evidence from Bonze Age through to Roman and Mediaeval periods. The promoters accepted that substantial survey information would be necessary. It was also accepted that the more recent interest of airfield use would merit investigation and recording. The question of unexploded ordnance was raised, and while the MOD will have given the site a clean bill of health when it was decommissioned, this would require careful attention.

### **11.0 Existing Land Uses**

- 11.1 The discussion on land uses revolved around use of agricultural and "green" land for development and compatibility with surrounding uses, particularly Ford Prison. It also considered the question of greenfield/brownfield land.

#### *Ford Prison & Southern Water*

- 11.2 The proposals are supported by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on behalf of Ford Prison, partly on the basis of the energy/waste proposals but also because of employment/training linkages. The promoters also claim to have

the support of Southern Water, again on the basis of the energy/waste proposals. The Select Committee queried the discussions the promoters had held with key agencies, noting the different interests of different water companies. The promoters confirmed that letters of support will be forthcoming, and a letter of support has been received from the MoJ, but otherwise none has been received to date.

#### *Coalescence*

- 11.3 The impact of the Eco-Town on the heritage interest within the site is dealt with above, but in this discussion reference was made to the effect of the Eco-Town coalescing the three settlement areas of Ford, Yapton and Horsmere Green, Climping. The promoters argue that the scheme is at an early stage and is only dealing with broad principles at this stage. If the scheme is supported at later stages they would want to engage the local community to work with them on these issues.
- 11.4 There would inevitably be some effect and consequence of a new Eco-Town in relation to the existing communities, and some of these may be welcome e.g. improved accessibility and enhanced community and other facilities, better access to jobs and choice of housing etc. However, many local people argued that the rural context of the local communities is an essential element of their character and characteristics, and the impact of an overwhelming and largely urban settlement in such proximity could only and undeniably have an adverse effect on this character.

#### *Brownfield/Greenfield*

- 11.5 With regard to the brownfield/greenfield debate, the Select Committee heard that while a relatively small percentage of the site is actually under concrete, the Government's definitions of "brownfield" land or "Previously Developed Land" (PDL) allows curtilage land to be brought within the definition. The promoters therefore claim that 30% of the land is, under the Government definition, PDL.
- 11.6 There was no disagreement that a large part of the site is good agricultural land, and a relatively small part of the site is actually under concrete. Discussion then moved on to the more general concerns about developing agricultural land of such good quality particularly in the face of increasing food and oil prices, and the overall sustainability equation of food production versus sustainable urban development.

#### **12.0 Deliverability**

- 12.1 There is a sense in which all of the hearing led to the deliverability discussion, as a recurring concern was the delivery of the proposal to justify the claims of the promoters that this development will meet all the highest environmental standards, and will invest in the new community as set out in the bid documents. The Select Committee repeatedly heard of costs that from a lay perspective seem extraordinarily high, and the promoters have consistently asserted that their experience elsewhere gives them confidence that they can honour their claims. They have made it clear that this will involve a degree of

trading off between objectives, but stand by the broad principle that the bids are realistic and deliverable and noting that the FAVG bid expressly specifies that all infrastructure can be funded without Government support.

#### *Deliverability Framework*

12.2 The promoters explained that their contractual agreement with the landowners does not bind them to a fixed land value from the outset, but rather deals with land value as a residue of overall development costs and value. Value would be realised not only from housing sales but from sales of other land including employment land, and other elements of commercial interest including energy generation where significant value is available and might result in capital investment/realisation of capital value.

12.3 The promoters advised that they were confident that the global development equation would generate a capital sum of the order of £200m to contribute to the scheme. They explained how their involvement in other similar developments gave them confidence that this would be sufficient to deliver the scheme broadly as outlined, and gave some examples of the sort of costs they were assuming such as for the schools and the railway station. The Select Committee expressed some scepticism about some of the costs, and in particular the costs of secondary school provision seemed to indicate a bare minimum level of provision which was at odds with the high aspirations of the scheme for social and community sustainability.

#### *Energy Generation*

12.4 The promoters also explained how the proposals for generating energy from waste would factor into the scheme, not only by delivering increased revenue (through agreement with the energy providers e.g. to invest profits in the Community Development Trust or to provide funding for such investment or to subsidise energy to the residential or commercial community) but also by the interest that energy providers would have in investing in the scheme. The basic energy infrastructure would itself have significant capital value, and once installed would be easy to maintain and retain in effective use for future generations. This led the Select Committee once more to probe the basis for the scheme in relation to its dependence on the waste to energy proposals and as before the dependence of this on importing waste from a wider catchment area.

#### *Infrastructure Cost Per Dwelling*

12.5 Some “thumbnail” calculations were made of the infrastructure cost per dwelling, and a figure of £40,000 was suggested. The promoters made comparison with Site 6 (a major development site in Bognor Regis currently being implemented) where Section 106 Agreement costs are small c£30,000 per dwelling, which they argue is comparable.

*A27 by-pass*

- 12.6 With regard to depending for deliverability on the A27 bypass as a pre-requisite, the promoters confirmed their initial position, which is that some development could commence ahead of a by-pass, which would not be available before 2018, and also that CLG are encouraging schemes to be independent of road improvements. They accept that the Eco-Town would generate external traffic movements, but argue that these would be significantly less than from conventional developments, because of the design and investment in alternative transport.

*Governance*

- 12.7 The discussion on deliverability raised questions of governance, as the proposals assume a direct relationship between energy generation and long term revenue support for the new community. The Select Committee were sceptical about these arrangements, partly because of the priority this would afford to the new community at the expense of the existing community, and partly because of the question of democratic accountability, and the potential for commercial interests to determine community issues in the Eco-Town.

**13.0 Public Questions and Local Input**

- 13.1 The closing session of the hearing was devoted to local input, and the Select Committee heard a number of contributions from local representative organisations such as Parish Councils, interest groups and individuals - all strongly opposed to the Eco-Town proposals. The statements and questions are referenced or summarised in Appendix 4 to this report. Appendix 4 also summarises or makes references to other contributions made before or during the Hearing either by way of public questions in the public question time sessions or written contributions which were made available to the Committee and also posted on the Council's website.

- 13.2 It was made clear that in the time available to the Select Committee, it would not be possible to exhaustively deal with individual points made or to provide specific responses. However, the generality of the concerns made were picked up in the discussions and, in many cases have influenced both the discussions and conclusions of the Select Committee.

**14.0 Overall Assessment**

- 14.1 The purpose of the Select Committee was to ask:

*"Is development of an Eco-Town at Ford (comprising at least 5,000 homes and associated employment, social and community infrastructure) sustainable, viable and deliverable? What long term impacts might such a scheme have on the rest of the District?"*

*Sustainability*

- 14.2 The evidence provided to the Select Committee demonstrated that there are many elements of the proposal that would provide high environmental

performance for the new Eco-Town. Evidence was a long way short of demonstrating that the environmental performance of the new community would be carbon zero, particularly because of the difficulty of convincingly demonstrating that car reduction measures would be effective, and because of the reliance of the energy generating proposals on non-green technology. Furthermore, if the car reduction measures are not effective the new Eco-Town would certainly not be sustainable, particularly if the Eco-Town is established without commitment to the A27 Arundel by-pass. If the Eco-Town does depend on the A27 by-pass, it would apparently not appear to meet Government environmental sustainability objectives.

#### *Viability/Deliverability*

- 14.3 On the evidence available to the Select Committee it was difficult to conclude whether the proposals are viable and deliverable and economically sustainable in the long term. The Select Committee did come to appreciate how the site could generate significant capital and revenue which could support both viability, deliverability and long term sustainability, but this raises questions of how the approach to energy generation and revenue support is consistent with wider community objectives locally and at the County and sub-regional level.

#### *Impact on the District*

- 14.4 The Eco-Town would certainly have some adverse impact on the District over and above the wider traffic impact referred to above. It would result in loss of rural character, loss of agricultural land and impact on local road congestion. With regard to the regeneration objectives of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, there would certainly be competition at some level, and the Select Committee was not convinced that there would be sufficient confidence in the economy of the Eco-Town to draw down substantial investment to the area to benefit the coastal regeneration schemes. A further impact on the District would be the difficulties of integrating the new communities with the old - there would certainly be community disruption due to the crossover between the communities e.g. on affordable housing and competition for community resources and facilities.

#### *Consequent Issues*

- 14.5 (i) A27 by-pass  
Without an Arundel by-pass an Eco-Town in this location would have a significant detrimental impact on sub regional and local accessibility. Even with extensive car use reduction, increased traffic on the road network would have major adverse impact on the community - and even if people in the new Eco-Town have public/alternative transport options available to them, many in the District who rely on the road network do not and have no alternative. If the Government is concerned that Eco-Towns should not rely on road investment they must be given more chance of succeeding in car reduction, and the general view is that this is best achieved with urban extensions rather than freestanding satellite settlements.

- (ii) **Employment**

The claims for 'high end' employment were watered down at the Select Committee. Investors see improved road access being critical to economic success, and distancing the Ford proposals from the A27 improvements is a major concern. Employment outcomes can only be secured through subsidy from the energy generation proposals, but the question then arises why that investment should benefit a new community rather than the existing communities, particularly given the community investment to date in addressing the issues locally. On balance, the Select Committee were not convinced that the Eco Town would attract sufficient investment to benefit the economies of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, and would be more likely to hinder the regeneration programmes.
- (iii) **Housing**

The Council faces severe challenges on housing delivery, and has not yet fully addressed the challenges posed by the South East Plan Inspector's recommendations to provide an increase of 11,300 dwellings for the period 2006-2026. In the absence of alternative proposals, and subject to deliverability, the Eco-Town would provide a solution to the housing problems facing the district. Support for an Eco-Town might hamper delivery in the short/medium term on existing sites, and particularly in the face of current difficulties in the housing market as the uncertainties and potential alternative opportunities of the Eco-Town influence investment decisions. The Select Committee nevertheless does not support the Eco-Town on housing grounds as it would not be able to evaluate alternative options.
- (iv) **Energy, Waste and Water**

The Select Committee's main and most fundamental concern about the Eco-Town proposal is its dependence on what virtually amounts to strategic (County/sub-regional) energy from waste facilities. The tenuous local benefit of a Materials Recycling Facility and waste water treatment plant do not justify the location. The waste to energy proposal challenges and undermines the community investment in the County's waste strategy, and the current waste procurement process.
- (v) **Other Issues**

There are clearly many other concerns about the Eco-Town proposals - use of agricultural land, erosion of rural character, impact on local roads etc. Many of these would apply wherever strategic development takes place so, as with the other factors referred to above, what is lacking is a comparison of options so that the local community can participate in decisions about its own future, and constructively debate the best way forward for the District as a whole.
- (vi) **Supporting evidence**

The Select Committee were concerned that there was a lack of evidence from key partners, who are essential to delivery, and that

without this supporting evidence, the proposals lack credibility. Overall, therefore, they were of the opinion that the proposals are deeply flawed and should not be supported.

## 15.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

15.1 Taking all of these considerations into account, the Select Committee recommends that the Council expresses its opposition to the Ford Eco-Town proposals, and urges the Government not to take the proposal through to the next stage of development. The grounds for concern include:

- (i) A27 by-pass – without a by-pass for Arundel, major development in this location would cause significant congestion on the strategic and local highway network, and the Council does not accept that car reduction measures would be sufficient to mitigate this impact acceptably.
- (ii) Employment and retail investment in the Eco-Town would be in direct competition with regeneration programmes for Littlehampton and Bognor Regis and, particularly in the absence of strategic road improvements they are unlikely to attract sufficient investment to overcome this effect.
- (iv) While the Eco-Town might provide solutions to the district's housing problems in the medium/long term, no alternative solutions were available to the Select Committee to consider to see whether they could provide better alternatives.
- (iv) The energy generating proposals were considered to be unacceptable as:
  - a) they depend on the Eco Town becoming a net importer of waste from a wide area;
  - b) the waste to energy proposals subvert the County Council's waste strategy which has been subject to substantial community participation across the County;
  - c) the net benefits of a waste to energy scheme should not be restricted to an Eco-Town, but should be available to the community as a whole.
- (v) The Eco-Town would have a significant and damaging impact on the existing community, and would result in a substantial adverse change in the character of the district and this part of the coastal plain.
- (vi) The Eco Town proposals at present amount to little more than a desk exercise in view of the limited discussion and commitment from significant partners who would be essential for the successful delivery of the scheme.

- 15.2 The Select Committee accepts that the Council faces significant challenges in meeting its housing obligations, particularly in the light of the South East Plan recommendations, but reiterates its opinion that, although the Eco-Town would, subject to deliverability, provide a solution to the housing problems of the District in the medium to long term, it would be wrong to support a new town, simply because of a lack of alternative.
- 15.3 In this respect, the Select Committee urges the Council to pay urgent attention to housing delivery, to demonstrate to the Government before they make final decisions on the Eco-Town proposals, that there are other, more sustainable options for meeting the Council's housing needs, and that these options would meet the Government's housing and sustainability objectives, as well as the objectives of the local community, and would have the support of both the Council and local community and a commitment to ensure that they become a reality.

Cllr Graham Tyler, Chairman, Ford Eco-town Select Committee.

Members of the Select Committee:

Cllrs Bence, Mrs. Briggs, Buckland, Chapman, Mrs. Smee, Dr Walsh and Wensley

17<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Background papers:

All background papers relating to the Select Committee are posted on the Council website under [www.arun.gov.uk/ecotown](http://www.arun.gov.uk/ecotown) -

- 📄 Public Debate
- Supporting Information.