

**Eco-Towns Select Committee
Summary Statement – Tuesday 27th May 2008**

We have had a very interesting opening day and the context has been well set to enable the Committee to be able to explore the outstanding issues in more detail. However, there have been more questions than answers. The key issues include deliverability and the Arundel-by-pass is a critical factor. No-one denied that there would be at least 8 years traffic chaos.

A further key issue is the impact on Littlehampton and Bognor Regis - both housing and employment.

We queried 'Why Ford?' and established that the main factors are the strategic emphasis on development west of the River Arun, as well as the existing infrastructure in terms of waste, water, the railway and the river itself, together with the Atkins Study.

We have heard some strong local concern and opposition. The LSP are concerned about the process bypassing community involvement.

We heard with concern that the government is coming out with site specific planning policy advice as the eco-town procedure evolves, which may exclude public consultation.

Arun does have major problems - housing, employment, transport/accessibility and we want to probe further over the next days of the hearing whether the eco-town proposals can satisfactorily address these problems.

Eco-Towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Wednesday 28th May 2008

Roads and Transport

The Select Committee consider that the Arundel Bypass is perhaps the biggest obstacle for the eco-town to overcome and must be a prerequisite for any such development. There is no commitment to funding by the developers - they claim that Ford would bring forward the Bypass but we have seen no evidence of this, particularly as the Highways Agency has not attended. This is a critical area of concern.

The link to the Arundel Bypass also poses key difficulties - the only solution which has been explored is traffic lights but we do not believe this can be a credible solution to dealing with a single lane bottle neck to a complete new town.

We are concerned that the link through the site from the A27 to the A259 is now an option rather than a commitment. Both bids made much of the advantages that this would bring to the District and this needs to be resolved.

Rail - the Select Committee were hampered by the lack of direct evidence and the absence of Network Rail. We are concerned that the strategic rail authority is notoriously difficult to influence and this must question this area of deliverability.

Buses - we are concerned that there has been no meaningful negotiation with the bus operators for 3 years. The evidence provided was that an internal shuttle service even of the complete scheme would not be viable without subsidy, as would bus travel generally after 8.30 p.m. and at weekends. There also appear to be major difficulties with travel times on longer bus routes.

Internalisation - There are clearly many unknowns. The Select Committee can see that it is possible to design communities to favour non car use but, as above, these may well depend on subsidy and investment as yet unquantified. It is also agreed that successful outcomes rely on behavioural change over a long time frame whereas delivery would be in the next 6 - 10 years.

Eco-Towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Thursday 29th May 2008

Economy/Housing

All sides are agreed that more work needs to be done on the economic impact. FAVG have agreed to participate in an economic impact assessment with the Council, and this is very welcome, but that does make it difficult to see how we can make decisions without this further information. However:

Once again, the A27/Arundel bypass is a critical factor – the difficulties and challenges posed by delivering any significant employment in this part of the world, let alone high-end business, can only be overcome by improved road access, and so the bypass must be a pre-requisite. However, we have heard that even this may not be enough, given the macro-accessibility challenges of the area.

A key element of the FAVG offer is energy production, and the potential to support long term governance over employment and business investment. We will be debating energy production tomorrow, but we are not sure at this stage how location-specific this is, as energy is relatively efficient to move around.

It seems to us that there must, at some level, be some competition and therefore conflict with current regeneration programmes in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, and we have heard that while good progress is being made with these schemes, they are still at a relatively early and somewhat fragile stage of delivery, so any threat to them is a matter of serious concern. There is also concern over the future of employment sites in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, and the loss of local jobs to the Eco Town.

We have heard the FEH concept of a Science Park being doubted by FAVG, and this does seem to emerge as a significant difference between the bids. There was common acceptance that we would not get a Science Park on this site, and it is not clear whether the main factors for even a Technology Park would be present. The very fact the energy subsidy/long term governance are key factors implies that subsidy is required for the business/employment mix, so this again becomes a further area of uncertainty, both for initial delivery, and long term sustainability.

Eco-Towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Thursday 29th 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'.

Eco-Towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Friday 30th May 2008

Sustainable Living - Energy, Waste, Water

Friday afternoon's session was without doubt one of the most technically challenging for the Select Committee, as we were dealing with highly technical subjects, often at the forefront of technology where the debate is unresolved even amongst the experts. Some of the Eco Town claims include technology that is being introduced in Abu Dhabi, but is not yet trusted by the Portsmouth Water Company!

At the heart of our investigations were the central proposals for energy generation, which form the basis for exemplar status. We were concerned not only about these proposals in their own right, but also because of the reliance on energy generation to subsidise other elements, such as the Community Development Trust, and the employment/business mix.

What emerged from our discussion was that the central proposition is for a power generating plant, which would rely to a degree on gas burning, both initially and as a fall-back. In time, it would develop into a full blown waste- to energy plant, initially taking waste from the Eco Town. If the claims of the Vision Group of generating 4 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. To make sure the Select Committee isn't misdirected, I am going to ask the promoters if they can reach an agreement with the County Waste Officers on exactly what these numbers are, and what the possible waste catchment might be.

The promoters argue that these lorries would be on the road network anyway, but directing them to the Eco Town, and making it a net importer of waste is a matter of significant concern, and it seems to the Select Committee that this is not a sound basis on which to establish a sustainable New Town.

The claims for generating energy from the tidal flow of the Arun were found to be marginal to the scheme, so the main advantage of the site is the colocation of the MRF and the Waste Water Treatment plant. While the technical complications of using Waste Water Treatment residue for energy production might be overcome, the MRF would only be one element of the waste stream required, so this significantly diminishes this advantage.

The Council's advisers were concerned that the energy proposals are not wholly 'green', as they would result in carbon emissions, both from the energy production itself, and also from the initial waste 'cleaning' processes required. The promoters claimed they would achieve carbon neutral as a balance across many factors, but it was not clear how this would be achieved. There were many other difficulties, such as the reliance on agreements with waste contractors for feeding the waste stream, and overall the Select Committee were left with considerable concern at this element of the bid proposals.

With regard to the water cycle proposals, it is clearly possible to design and develop communities to maximise rain water capture, and reduce water consumption to a high degree of efficiency. The proposals to introduce a dual grey/potable water system seemed to be costly and wasteful if indeed the 'grey' water is in fact potable.

With regard to the design, townscape and landscape implications of high environmental performance, the promoters confirmed that they expect the development to be largely 2 storeys, while also achieving high densities, and in some, mainly central locations, storey heights might increase to 3, or at most 4 storeys.

Eco-Towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Tuesday 3rd June 2008

Environment

On many of the topics discussed under the overall heading of Environment there was a common theme in that while the area for the proposed Eco Town is not of itself of any great distinction, the environmental implications of an Eco Town need to be carefully considered.

On biodiversity, the particular concerns were with increased visitor pressure on the designated Climping Beach SSSI, and also Binsted Woods. While any major development in this general area would increase visitor pressures, the proximity of the Ford site to Climping beach was a matter of concern. However, there was a view that, on the information available, the biodiversity concerns are not a 'show stopper'.

On Flood risk there were again issues of assessment and analysis – for instance any impact of the proposals on the hydrology of the river Arun. It was established that 80% of the site is in flood risk zone 1, which is safe from flooding. Of the remaining 20%, much of this is in land north of the railway line and east of the Ford Rd, and proposed as managed open space/landscaping, so a very small part of flood risk zone 3 land would be in the area to be developed, and the promoters argue that any such area can be planned and managed so as not to put houses at risk of flooding.

We discussed the spine road, and established that it will not form a significant flood defence, and reassurances were given about the bridge over the railway acting as a bund to retain water run off from lower lying land to the north. There was some concern, however about the vulnerability of the Ford Rd north of the site to flooding.

On landscape and heritage, we heard about concerns about the role of the Arun Valley as a unique transition from the sea to the downs as presented to the South Downs National Park inquiry. Although the enquiry rejected boundary extension these are matters of serious concern. We heard that views from the town of Arundel 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.

Like other environmental designations, more information would be needed on e.g. the impact of visitor pressure on the Downs and light pollution to properly appraise the proposals. Developer contributions would be appropriate to deal with increased visitor pressure.

The promoters were challenged about the design concept, and argued that they were now moving away from the 'Versailles' approach and would be happy to follow the County's Landscape guidelines.

On heritage, the main concern was on the 'outstanding' rural setting of St Mary's at Yapton, with concerns also about views of Ford Place, particularly from the river.

On archaeology, although there are no specific known areas of interest it is expected that the site would yield evidence from Bronze Age through to Roman and Mediaeval periods – the promoters accepted that substantial survey information would be necessary. There was also an acceptance the more recent interest of airfield use would also 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.

Eco-Towns Select Committee Summary Statement – Wednesday 4th June 2008

Existing Land Uses

In the first session this morning on existing land uses, we heard about the range of uses in the area at present, and some outline of the proposed uses in the Eco Town. The vision group stated that they have general support of Ford Prison and SW water, partly on the basis of the energy/waste proposals, but also because of employment/training linkages.

With regard to the impact on the existing communities, 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 to later stages they would want to engage with local communities to work with them on these issues.

With regard to the Brownfield/Greenfield debate, there is no disagreement that a large part of the site is good agricultural land, but the government's definitions of PDL now allows curtilage land to be brought within the definition. This results in a range of figures, from the small amount of land actually under concrete, to the larger area including curtilage land now under agriculture, and there is clearly a local perception that the area is largely green.

Deliverability

The discussion opened with a presentation by the promoters of their overall deliverability strategy. This included an explanation of the flexible terms being discussed with landowners, which would leave a residual land value, rather than being bound to a fixed land value from the outset. They also advised that they were confident that this would generate a capital sum of the order of £200m to contribute to the scheme. They also outlined 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.

They went on to explain how their proposals for generating energy from waste would factor into the scheme, not only by delivering increased revenue (through agreement with the energy providers), but also by the interest energy providers would have in investing in the scheme. Examples were given of the basic energy infrastructure envisaged, and its life expectancy.

Many questions then arose about the background to this energy provision, referring back to the discussion on energy and waste, when the Select Committee expressed its concern at the prospect of an Eco town based on imported waste, and the number of lorry movements necessary to service the energy generation. The promoters have agreed to discuss these matters with the County Waste officers in an attempt to provide agreed figures to enable the County Waste officers to advise the Select Committee for its final report.

When questioned about whether the Eco Town was a platform for a waste facility or vice versa, the promoters argued that the two elements are symbiotic, and work very efficiently together.

With regard to depending for deliverability on the A27 bypass as a prerequisite, 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.