

SELECT COMMITTEE

27th May - 4th June 2008

Present : Councillors Tyler (Chairman), Dr Walsh (Vice-Chairman), Bence, Mrs Briggs, Buckland, Chapman and Wensley.

[Note : The following Councillors were absent from the meeting during consideration of the matters referred to in the Minutes indicated:- Councillor Mrs Briggs, Minutes 82-86; Councillor Buckland, Minutes 87-91; and Councillor Dr Walsh, Minutes 75 to 79 (part); Minutes 97 to 101; and Minutes 106-110.

Councillors Biss, Bower, Mrs Brown and Dendle were also present during part of the Inquiry.

75. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION - 27TH MAY 2008

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and read out a statement setting out the background as to the reason for the Select Committee and the process for the hearing.

All those present who were taking part in the Inquiry were asked to introduce themselves.

76. CONTEXT SETTING WITH PROMOTERS

As part of the context setting with the promoters, the Inquiry received a power point presentation from the Ford Airfield Vision Group (FAVG), representing various developers, and Mr Tony Dixon from the Ford Enterprise Hub (FEH) gave a verbal presentation. The Government had indicated that the two proposers must now work together to put forward a refined eco town bid.

77. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chairman stated that any question put forward might not be answered today but would be picked up in the discussion where appropriate.

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Questions were then asked about a) the Environment Agency flood indicator map and whether plans had been made to prevent this area being cut off by the sea and b) carbon neutrality and whether this would be covered by activities brought into the site.

78. CONSULTANT SETTING THE SCENE

Mr Redwood, the independent planning consultant advising the Select Committee, gave an overall perspective on the eco town proposal and informed the Inquiry that the Select Committee would be addressing whether, on the basis of evidence being put before it, the proposal was sustainable, deliverable and viable.

79. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The Select Committee then received statements from Nick Gibb MP and Nick Herbert MP, who were both representing the views of their constituents by opposing the siting of an eco town at Ford for the reasons stated.

Representations were also received from CAFÉ (Communities Against Ford Eco Town); Mr Cleary from the Department of Communities and Local Government; the Town & Country Planning Association; the Villages Action Group; and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Discussion took place between all the participants on general concerns about the proposals and the promoters responded where appropriate.

80. IMPACT ON ARUN AND THE SUSSEX COAST

The Head of Planning and Housing Services advised the Inquiry on the process that the Council had been undertaking to comply with government guidance in respect of the Local Development Framework (LDF), which had resulted in the LDF Subcommittee bringing forward a paper on sustainable urban extensions as being the predominant policy that would most benefit the community of the District. The eco town debate sat outside that process and it was felt that the proposers must now put forward their case as to why and how the eco town at Ford would be a better option for addressing the special needs of the area, with particular reference to regeneration in Bognor Regis and Littlehampton; deprivation; and transport issues.

81. SUMMARY OF THE DAY'S FINDINGS - 27th MAY 2008

The Chairman read out the following statement before closing the proceedings for the day :-

"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 Bypass 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 Local Strategic Partnership 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."

82. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION - 28TH MAY 2008

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

83. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - ROADS AND TRANSPORTATION

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the day's session by stating that a full day had been set aside for dealing with Roads and Transportation because the Select Committee thought that, of all the difficulties and challenges facing the District, transport and accessibility was one of the most critical. In the many areas of environmental performance that would be discussed, there were probably technical solutions, albeit at some cost, also the risk areas of failure were less direct, but with transport the following also had to be taken account of:-

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- deep seated human behaviour
- choice in a consumer society
- social interaction and dependency structures
- the environment
- the economy

The view was expressed that the solutions might look fine on paper but they were much more difficult to make a reality. The risk factors, too, were severe and direct. Fine examples of car free communities were expected to be seen, all of course achievable and desirable, but if it went wrong the result would be social, economic, and environmental chaos. It was significant to the Committee that in the list of promises given yesterday, the promoters were happy to commit to a carbon zero community but there was no specific commitment about transportation and accessibility.

The Select Committee would want to probe very deeply, therefore, into both the internal proposals for transport and accessibility within the town, as well as the major obstacles posed by the Arundel Bypass; the full traffic implications of the new link from the A27 to the A259; the difficulties and practicability of the railway proposals; the problems caused by the new station being exocentric to the town, i.e. not at its geographic heart; the issues posed by a parkway station potentially drawing even more traffic into the town and onto the road system; links and accessibility to the communities of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis; and, of course, the huge cost of this and what this would mean for the deliverability of the town as a whole, bearing in mind the commitment that all infrastructure costs would be borne by the development, together with all the other costly deliverables, such as affordable housing, schools, water/waste/energy, systems, etc.

84. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A number of questions were asked and statements made, together with comments from Felpham Parish Council.

85. ROADS AND TRANSPORTATION

In debating this matter, it was accepted that the government targets for car use were challenging and it was noted that the Highways Agency had not accepted an invitation to attend the Inquiry. Representations were received from Stagecoach, West Sussex County Council, West Sussex Enterprise Partnership and CAFÉ and the FAVG/FEH responded to issues raised at the meeting.

86. SUMMARY OF THE DAY'S FINDINGS - 28TH MAY 2008

The Chairman read out the following statement before closing the proceedings for the day :-

"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."

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87. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION - 29TH MAY 2008 – MORNING SESSION

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

88. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - ECONOMY

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the morning's session by stating that it was expected that there would be general agreement on the key economic problems facing the District - the overall 'underperformance' of the economy, the low wage nature of local employment, the links with unemployment and deprivation, particularly concentrated on Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, so it was not expected that the ensuing discussion would dwell on those issues.

However, there did seem to be significant disagreement on what the effect an eco town would have on those problems - if successful, would an eco town at Ford boost the local economy and, in so doing, lift the economy and performance of Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, or was there only a limited amount of available investment that would be sucked from the regeneration programmes in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, so causing them to falter and maybe even fail. The cascade effect of economic investment was notoriously difficult to predict.

In addition, availability was seen as a key factor. The FEH bid emphasised a Science Park solution, and the Select Committee would want to hear why a Science Park should succeed there - were the key success factors present? Why should employment investment in an eco town succeed where similar sites, particularly the LEC site at Bognor Regis, had failed? The question was also posed that, if accessibility was a key factor, would an eco town on its own overcome the difficulty the macro-accessibility this part of the world suffered from?

89. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions asked or statements made.

90. DISCUSSION ON THE ECONOMY

The Select Committee received presentations from SEEDA, the Council's Economic Regeneration Manager, St Modwens, Drivers Jonas, Villages Action and CAFE and detailed discussion centred around the

proposals for a Science Park/High Tech Park/Innovations Centre within the eco town. The FAVG/FEH responded to concerns posed at the meeting.

91. SUMMARY OF THE MORNING'S FINDINGS - 29TH MAY 2008 - ECONOMY

The Chairman read out the following statement before closing the session on the Economy :-

"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."

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92. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION – 29TH MAY (AFTERNOON SESSION)

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the afternoon session and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

93. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A statement was read out by a representative of the Climping and Ford Action Plan Committee advising that, whilst accepting that development of the area was inevitable this must be carried out at a manageable rate and should retain the strong rural sense of community and therefore 97% of the community rejected any development over 50 houses and were totally opposed to the eco town.

94. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - HOUSING

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the afternoon's session by stating that there was no doubt that Arun had pressing housing needs, and that the Select Committee needed no persuasion of that. There were critical 'here and now' issues of housing for the present population, with affordable and social housing a key issue and, on top of that, there were significant challenges in meeting increasing requirements, firstly from Structure Plan days, then more recently from the South East Plan Inspector's report and now the Eco Towns programme. The Promoters claimed that the eco town was a neat solution to the problems and, on the face of it, there was something of a match between the shortfall of 4,500 dwellings the Council accepts exists post 2016 (based on the SE Plan Panel report figures) and the eco town's estimated delivery trajectory.

However, it seemed to the Select Committee that all the work to date had identified urban extensions as the solutions most likely to meet Arun's needs, both social and economic, and the Council's sustainability work had supported that. This had also appeared to be the prima facie conclusion of the Structure Plan EIP (Examination in Public) and the SE Plan Panel Report - noting that the panel report had assumed an additional 2,000 dwellings more than the Structure Plan, and yet still favouring urban extensions.

The promoters were claiming that the higher numbers could be delivered in a much more sustainable way as a single large scale development. A key question therefore was whether the increased housing numbers facing the District now meant that a threshold had been reached where a new settlement was a better solution than urban extensions. There

was then a secondary question about location - if there was to be new settlement in Arun, was the location significant in housing terms?

There was concern that housing needs were greatest in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, but if the eco town proposals were to be achievable, was the location a deciding factor, given the relatively short distances involved? If a person lived in unsatisfactory housing in Littlehampton or Bognor Regis, and they had the promise of a new flat or house a few miles away would that not be a satisfactory solution for them?

It was felt that this session should attempt to get to the bottom of the claims about brownfield land, or PDL (previously developed land) as the new jargon referred to it. The promoters had stated that this was one of their main locational advantages and the site had variously been referred to as 'waste' land (which it clearly was not), and highly productive agricultural land. Perhaps the definition in Planning Policy Statement 3 could be of assistance here but it should be noted that the eco town prospectus specifically referred to disused airfields as potentially suitable locations.

95. DISCUSSION ON HOUSING

The Select Committee then received representations from the Council's Principal Planner, CAFÉ, Hyde Martlet Housing Association, Drivers Jonas, and the FAVG/FEH responded to issues raised at the meeting. In addition, as the Select Committee was still unclear as to how to assess and place sufficient weight on whether this was a key locational advantage due to the confusion about the PDL and Greenfield issues, the FAVG gave an undertaking to provide Members with more detailed information.

96. SUMMARY OF THE AFTERNOON'S FINDINGS - 29TH MAY 2008 - HOUSING

Due to time constraints, the Chairman closed the proceedings and read out the following statement on Housing prior to commencing the session the following day :-

"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.

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Work at Arun District Council has identified urban extensions as the solution 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 with the promise of improved housing.

All affordable housing locally depends on private developments through Section 106 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 government's definition. However, this discussion will continue on day 5, under 'Environment'."

97. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION - 30TH MAY 2008 (MORNING SESSION)

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

98. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - PHYSICAL AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the morning's session by stating that there were two topics to be discussed - Physical/Community Infrastructure and Sustainable Living. It was pointed out that there was an inevitable cross over between the two and indeed, the Council's topic paper for the morning did refer to waste, water and energy to a degree. It was therefore suggested that the morning session should concentrate on the 'community' side, i.e. deal with social and community issues such as schools, health, social matters, community development, policing and emergency services. The afternoon session would then concentrate on the 'green' issues relating to sustainable living, particularly the claims in respect of energy, water and waste.

On the community side, it was highlighted about the recent news regarding hospital provision in West Sussex, about which of course there was no direct evidence but the Select Committee would want to hear the views of those present. More directly, education and schooling was a key social and community issue and the ultimate provision of schooling for the development would want to be explored, together with the incremental challenges as the development unfolded.

On the question of community development, the Select Committee would want to understand how the promoters intended to make their buildings into a community. Their bid documents seemed very firm that only one community worker would be provided, and that would be associated with their sales service. The Select Committee would want to hear more about that.

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Sussex Police had submitted a paper about the impact of an eco town on their resources and the Select Committee would want reassurance that community policing would be a key ingredient of the proposals, and how that was being factored in, both practically and financially.

99. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A statement was read out on behalf of Barnham Parish Council and questions were asked by a) East Preston and Kingston Preservation Society about the supply of electricity and bio mass matter and b) a local resident about what was meant by the term "eco town" and whether this was a means of by passing the planning system.

100. DISCUSSION ON PHYSICAL AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Select Committee then received representations from representatives of the West Sussex County Council Education Department; Villages Action Group; CAFÉ; the Primary Care Trust; the Police; the Fire Service; and FAVG/FEH responded to issues raised at the meeting.

101. SUMMARY OF THE MORNING'S FINDINGS - 30TH MAY 2008 - PHYSICAL AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Chairman read out the following statement before closing the session on Physical and Community Infrastructure :-

"This morning we covered a lot of ground in a short time, ranging over the main elements of the social and community infrastructure necessary to build a successful town, and the impact of this to the existing and developing communities of Arun. In many of the areas the outcomes will be dependant on discussions and engagement with service providers, community groups, emergency services and statutory agencies.

Funding is an underlying issue, both capital and revenue. The promoters are confident that capital investment discussed this morning presents nothing to them which they consider extraordinary and is within their broad budgeting. While they may be in a position to pump prime other services, they do not see long term revenue support of public services being their primary responsibility, although the Eco-Town is promising to deliver a revenue stream from its energy generation programme which will be for the Community Development Trust to disburse.

Perhaps the main challenge arising out of the discussion is in relation to education and school provision. Achieving a satisfactory outcome, both for existing schools and residents of the new community as it becomes

established, poses difficulties which are not just financial but are more deep seated, and where the options available all seem to present difficulties which are not easy to address."

102. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION – 30TH MAY 2008 (AFTERNOON SESSION)

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the afternoon session and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

103. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - SUSTAINABLE LIVING

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the afternoon's session by stating that the discussion on sustainable living would be testing the credibility of the proposals for making this a truly environmentally sustainable community. The key areas to be covered would be energy, waste and water, not least because of the exemplar claims for energy and water management, but also because much of the argument in support of other areas of concern, such as employment and economic development, were presaged on the energy credentials of the scheme, with the promise of reduced energy costs as an incentive and/or income for supporting job/economy profiles and objectives.

The claims for the scheme would need to be examined for their overall consistency with the sustainability objectives - for instance, bio mass was increasingly being challenged because of the cost relationship with an increasingly challenging market for source material and there were also the concerns with regard to carbon emissions. There were also questions about the need to locate such facilities on high grade agricultural land, given the relatively low grade product required as a source material. There is also a more general concern about how location-specific the energy production proposals were, given the relative ease of transporting energy. The Select Committee was struck by the repeated concerns in the Council's briefing note about the credibility of a low density development achieving high environmental performance and, relating this back to earlier concerns about the height of building, which will no doubt be discussed further on day 5 of the Inquiry.

There were concerns also about the degree to which the water cycle proposals were challenging, tested or practical, e.g. in relation to the potential for cross contamination between grey and potable water flows.

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The Inquiry was advised that, whilst sustainability also clearly embraced many other topics such as transport, accessibility and flood risk, these had either been discussed or were yet to be discussed and so should not perhaps be the main focus for discussion at this session.

104. DISCUSSION ON SUSTAINABLE LIVING

The Select Committee received representations from the FAVG expert; West Sussex County Council's Waste Management team; and CAFÉ's expert Chartered Electrical Engineer and, in the course of discussion, the promoter agreed to provide a list of the buildings that were to be used to enable Members to ascertain the scale of the proposed operation, particularly as it was being suggested that it would be close to the centre of the community.

105. SUMMARY OF THE AFTERNOON'S FINDINGS - 30TH MAY 2008 - SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Due to the complexity of the issues discussed, the Chairman closed the proceedings and read out the following statement on Sustainable Living prior to commencing the session on 3rd June 2008 :-

"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 afield. 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 co-location of the MRF (Materials Recycling Facility) 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."

106. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION - 3RD JUNE 2008

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

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107. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - ENVIRONMENT - BIODIVERSITY, FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE, LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the day's session by stating that, with regard to bio diversity and impact on the natural environment, the promoter's position was that this was basically a pretty dull place naturally, with no notable natural designations and few species warranting specific consideration. Given that significant development was inevitable in the Arun District, the question must be asked - was the impact of an eco town on the natural environment as benign as can be expected on this site?

On flood risk and drainage, the promoters claimed that the site was predominantly flood zone 1 land, but there were areas of flood risk and they stated they would ensure that the link road was elevated to avoid flood risk and provide additional flood defence and that all development would be designed and located to protect against flooding. However, at macro-level, it must be questioned whether the site was a sensible location for strategic development, given that some of it was at risk of flooding.

On landscape and heritage impact, the concerns would be more subtle. It was recognised that Old Yapton was a delightful and charming settlement focused on Grade I Listed St Mary's Church at the heart of the two conservation areas, with many Grade II Listed Buildings. While it might be possible to separate the new town from these historic settlements, and of course Yapton had already experienced more recent development, could the character of these old areas survive the impact of such a large urban settlement on its doorstep?

The bid documents dismissed landscape impact concerns on the grounds that the site is not itself subject to particular designation but what of the impact on the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), soon to be National Park, and the setting of historic Arundel.? Statements had been made that the town would be mainly 2 storey but there would be some taller buildings and the energy generating plant might well have higher plant which, in this largely flat terrain, would be significantly visible from long distances - the very wide impact of the gasometer at Littlehampton demonstrated this very effectively.

108. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A statement was made in respect of climate change and the long term impact this could have on the District, with the conclusion that the location of Ford for an eco town did not make strategic sense.

109. DISCUSSION ON ENVIRONMENT - BIO DIVERSITY, FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE AND LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE

The Select Committee received representations from West Sussex County Council regarding bio diversity and landscape and heritage; the South Downs Joint Committee; CPRE; the Sussex Wildlife Trust; relevant Council officers pertaining to landscape, conservation, heritage and flood risk issues; and the Environment Agency and the FAVG/FEH addressed the issues raised at the meeting.

110. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS - 3RD JUNE 2008 - ENVIRONMENT - BIO DIVERSITY, FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE AND LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE

Prior to closing the proceedings, the Chairman read out the following statement on the Environment, with particular reference to bio diversity, flood risk and drainage and landscape and heritage :-

“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 (Site of Special Scientific Interest), 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 Road north of the site to flooding.

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On landscape and heritage, we heard about concerns about the role of the Arun Valley as a unique transition form 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 that 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."

111. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION - 4TH JUNE 2008

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and requested all those who were taking part in the Inquiry to introduce themselves.

112. INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC - EXISTING LAND USE AND DELIVERABILITY

On behalf of the Select Committee, the independent planning consultant then introduced the day's session by stating that the aim of this session was to focus on existing uses in and around the site and to consider the implications for them of the eco town proposals. The main difficulty was

envisaging what circumstances would be like if the Eco Town was built, particularly when the town became more established and the current uses had adapted to the new circumstance, for better or worse. The concerns ranged from the compatibility of major land uses such as Ford prison, to the fate of small settlements and industrial estates.

This session would also finally address the question of previously developed land to achieve an understanding of the government's policy and what it meant for the site, as well as the issues of local perception.

The Inquiry was advised that, apart from this being the last formal session, there was a sense in which all of the Hearing to date had brought everyone to this point, as a recurring concern was the deliverability of the proposals to justify the claims of the promoters that this development would meet all the highest environmental standards and there would be investment in the new community, as set out in the bid documents. The Select Committee had repeatedly heard of costs that, from a lay perspective, seemed extraordinarily high and the promoters had consistently asserted that their experience elsewhere gave them confidence that they could honour their claims. They had made it clear that this would involve a degree of trading off between objectives, but they stood by the broad principle that the bids were realistic and deliverable and it was noted that the Vision bid expressly specified that all infrastructure could be funded without government support.

It was, of course, necessary to respect the promoters' commercial confidence in the assessment of deliverability, and this would inhibit more detailed debate. However, it was hoped that there would be a better understanding gained of the broad basis for deliverability to enable the Select Committee to form a view about whether the Eco Town was broadly achievable in general terms, and hence if the major elements such as the energy from waste proposals, the affordable housing, the new railway bridge, station and passing loop (etc) really could be provided without public subsidy.

113. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A number of questions were asked and statements made relating to loss of prime agricultural land; use of cars on the proposed site; loss of bird habitat; and the location of an eco town in such a beautiful area.

114. DISCUSSION ON EXISTING LAND USE AND DELIVERABILITY

The Select Committee received representations from CAFÉ and DTZ and FAVG/FEH addressed issues raised during the morning session.

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115. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS - 4TH JUNE 2008 - EXISTING LAND USE AND DELIVERABILITY

Prior to closing the session, the Chairman read out the following statements on Existing Land Use and Deliverability :-

“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 the general support of Ford Prison and Southern 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.

On 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 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 the DCLG (Department of Communities and Local Government) 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.”

116. PUBLIC SESSION

In reconvening the Inquiry for the afternoon, the Chairman advised that this session would be primarily for the Select Committee to hear the views of local residents and a number of statements and questions were made/asked by members of the public.

117. CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Chairman acknowledged the amount of time and work that had been put into setting up this process by everyone concerned and he thanked all relevant parties for their input into what had been an extremely useful exercise. He advised that a report on the findings of the Select Committee would be considered at a meeting on Tuesday 17th June 2008 at 6.00 p.m. at the Civic Centre, following which a recommendation would be put forward to a Special Full Council meeting on 30th June 2008. The Council would then forward its response to the Government in answer to the consultation process that had been set up with regard to the shortlist of eco towns that had been put forward for consideration.