

SELECT COMMITTEE

17th June 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Tyler (Chairman), Bence, Mrs Briggs, Chapman, Mrs Smee, Dr Walsh and Wensley

Councillors Bower was also present at the meeting.

162. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Buckland.

163. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

164. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Select Committee held over 27th May to 4th June 2008 were agreed by the Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Mrs Smee's name in the list of those present.

165. REPORT FOLLOWING THE INQUIRY INTO ECO TOWN PROPOSALS

The Select Committee had now concluded its Inquiry into the proposal for an Eco-Town at Ford and the purpose of this meeting was to consider the report prepared following the Inquiry and agree the recommendations to be made to the Special Council Meeting on 30th June 2008. The Chairman introduced the report from the Committee and commended that this be submitted to the Council.

The report set out how the Inquiry had been run and the evidence heard. Each day had focussed on a series of topic discussions, with invited participants providing a range of expertise to assist the Committee. The topics covered had been:

- Impact on Arun and the Sussex Coast
- Roads and Transportation
- Economy
- Housing
- Physical and Community Infrastructure
- Sustainable Living
- Environment – Biodiversity, Flood Risk and Drainage : Landscape and Heritage
- Existing Land Use and Deliverability

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Each session had included 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. In addition, the final session had been held at Yapton and Ford Village Hall to allow for local groups to contribute to the Committee's considerations.

At the close of each session, the Select Committee had retired to assess the debate and the Chairman had shared a summary of the Committee's findings with those present.

The Committee had generated extensive documentation throughout the process. To keep all interested parties informed, this information had been published on the Council's website, together with submissions made to the Council by participants or other third parties, and the summary of each day's proceedings.

The Committee's report took each of the topics considered in turn and presented the findings that had been reached based on the evidence and views presented. Overall, the Select Committee had been 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. It had also been concerned that there was a lack of information from key partners and that, without this supporting evidence, the proposals lacked credibility. The Committee was of the opinion that the proposals were deeply flawed and should not be supported and, therefore, its recommendations to Full Council proposed an appropriate response to be made to the Government's consultation.

In commenting on the report, the independent planning consultant, Jim Redwood, was thanked for his support, particularly in pulling together the final report. Councillor Dr Walsh raised his particular concerns on firstly, the retraction by the promoters of the Ford Enterprise Hub and the consortium of builders that the Ford Eco-Town proposals were not dependent on the building of an A27 Bypass and the link road to Ford. It had emerged from the Inquiry that this was no longer the case, even though this had been part of the proposals put forward in the bid by the promoters. Secondly, he referred to the waste-to-energy proposals, and expressed his concern that the evidence gained had shown that they would be entirely dependent on bringing in greater quantities of waste from outside of Ford to be successful. He gave his full support to the recommendations.

The Chairman then referred the Committee to an additional report from the Chief Executive, which was circulated at the meeting, which suggested a method of taking forward the final recommendation being made by the Committee. This proposed that the Council should be able to examine, as an evidence based assessment, the key alternative strategic locations to the Government's Ford Eco-Town proposal to comply with the likely housing

delivery requirements of the South East Plan. The Chief Executive explained that whilst it would not be possible to rework the Council's current Local Development Framework (LDF) proposals in the time available, it was thought practical to engage a consultant to consider the current proposals for sustainable urban extensions to Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, together with development assessments of other options eg. Barnham, Aldingbourne. Each of these options' promoters could be asked to provide evidence as to whether their proposal was sustainable, viable and deliverable against the same criteria which the Select Committee had used to assess the Ford Eco-Town proposal.

In addition to this, the Chief Executive outlined work being undertaken to consider the Economic Impact Assessment of the Ford proposal on Littlehampton and Bognor Regis by consultants commissioned jointly by the Council, SEEDA and the Eco-Town promoters. He was also proposing to engage a consultant to review Arun's Corporate Housing Strategy. It was considered that these two studies could inform the wider strategic work.

The Chief Executive considered that all three studies should be completed by the end of August 2008 which would give sufficient time for the Council to come to a decision in September 2008 ahead of the Government announcing their decision on Eco-Town sites in October 2008.

The Chief Executive therefore proposed that if the Committee agreed to recommend to the Special Council on 30th June 2008 that this further investigation should be commissioned, that the Committee should reconvene in early September 2008 to examine the findings of these investigations with a view to making further recommendations to the Council, and the Government, before the end of September 2008.

In considering this report, a question was asked about the housing figures that now applied to Arun, and whether this was 11,000 homes. The Chief Executive explained that the figure which had been recommended by the Panel for Arun within the South East Plan was 11,300 which was 2,000 more than what SEERA had agreed should be the figure for Arun of 9,300. However, at this stage the final figure was still to be confirmed. It was suggested, therefore, that a higher benchmark should be set of possibly an additional 1,000 homes. The Chief Executive accepted that the Select Committee might wish to consider this in their deliberations but that the purpose of the examination of alternative sites would be about establishing the capacity of these sites and not finding the exact housing number.

Having concluded the discussions, the Chairman proposed that the recommendations within the Committee's report should be accepted, with the addition of those in the Chief Executive's report.

The Committee therefore

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL - That

- (1) 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:
 - (a) 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;
 - (b) 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;
 - (c) 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;
 - (d) The energy generating proposals are considered to be unacceptable as:
 - i. they depend on the town becoming a net importer of waste from a wide area;
 - ii. the waste-to-energy proposals subvert the County Council's waste strategy which has been subject to substantial community participation across the County;
 - iii. 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
 - (e) 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.
 - (f) 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 West Sussex

County Council Education, Waste and Highways Departments, the Highways Agency, Water Authorities/Companies, Rail Authorities/Companies and bus operators, and this severely undermines the credibility of the scheme;

(2) the Council be urged 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) in order to best consider the most sustainable options for the Council to meet the South East Regional Plan requirements, particularly related to meeting the Council's housing needs, that further consultancy work is contracted to examine the key strategic alternatives to the Ford Eco-Town proposals;

(4) together with the Economic Impact Analysis and work on reviewing the Council's Corporate Housing Strategy, that these studies are complete by the end of August 2008;

(5) the Select Committee is asked to reconvene in September 2008 to examine such issues and make a further report to the Council on the merits of the strategic alternatives to the Eco-Town proposal; and

(6) agreement be given, in principle, to fund such further work with a supplementary estimate, to be agreed when the detailed costs are known.

(This was the unanimous decision of the Committee)

(The meeting concluded at 6.20 p.m.)