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- [Working](#)
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- [Sitemap](#)
- [FAQ's](#)
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Dismay at Eco-Town Announcement for Ford

Dismay has greeted the announcement today (Thursday) that Ford is among the fifteen locations being considered by government for an eco-town of 5,000 new homes.

The Leader of Arun District Council, Cllr Mrs Gillian Brown, signalling the start of a Council-led community campaign against the proposal, said she was appalled that no account had been taken of the Council's consistent and overwhelming objections to an eco-town at Ford.

"Our arguments against this are sound. A development like this cannot possibly achieve the principles of sustainability, delivering local employment, developing on brown field land and adequate provision of affordable housing. Nor does Ford have the necessary infrastructure to support an eco-town - we believe that is a simple and irrefutable argument."

The Secretary of State for Housing and Planning, Caroline Flint, has said proposals for eco-towns will be subject to a planning application and full local consultation with each application to be decided on its merits. The local planning authority, she says, will need to take into account all the impacts of the proposals.

But Arun's Cabinet Member for Planning, Councillor Ricky Bower, said: "I feel absolutely no sense of reassurance that we will be listened to as a planning authority. The Minister has completely ignored our grave concerns that such a development would be diametrically opposed to locally agreed planning policies. Those policies have been developed in partnership with local communities, taking into consideration local needs. The Minister's announcement says, in effect, that local policies meeting local needs mean nothing to central government."

An emergency meeting of the Council's Cabinet has been called for Monday 14th April to kick-start a community campaign against the proposal. Members of

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Parliament, Town and Parish Councils and other partners will be invited to attend the meeting which will be held in the Council Chamber at the Arun Civic Centre in Littlehampton starting at 6 p.m. The meeting will be open to the press and public.

Councillor Bower said: "Our focus now must be to galvanise public opinion, initially during the three month consultation period. We must work to influence the further evaluation of the short-listed sites. We have to ensure that proposals are not allowed to bypass the normal planning process and that local people have every opportunity to comment."

Two separate proposals for an eco-town at Ford were submitted to the Secretary of State. They were among 57 bids received by central government last October following an invitation for expressions of interest. Today's announcement short-listed fifteen potential locations which will now be subject to more detailed Sustainability Appraisal work, including further evaluation of the locations. The government's objective is to get up to 10 eco-town schemes underway with the potential to deliver up to 100,000 homes.

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