

Tony Dixon

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Sent: 07 January 2009 20:08
Attach: Derek Waller reference to blind copies.pdf; E-mail to Cllr. Mrs Brown - concerns on impartiality 8.12.08.pdf; Cllr Mrs Brown response on blind copying.pdf
Subject: Public Questions

Dear Ian,

I would like to submit the following public questions, to Cllr. Mrs Brown as Leader, for the Council meeting on 14th January.

1. Eco-Towns and housing additionality

The LDF sub committee minutes state:

"Questions were then put forward by Members and responded to at the meeting which covered: Whether the government was including the 5,000 homes for the Ford Eco Town in the 11,500 housing allocation figures in the South East Plan or whether this was an additional amount. In responding the Chief Executive stated that advice from Government had been contradictory and ambiguous and so an answer could not be given one way or another."

On her visit to Arun in July the Minister made it crystal clear that Eco-Town housing numbers could be "banked" against SE Plan housing targets. This is recorded on MP Nick Herbert's web site in the following way:

"Mr Herbert also pressed the Minister on the question of whether 5,000 houses at Ford would be in addition to, or part of, the recently announced housing numbers for Arun District Council. The Minister said that the eco-town housing could be "banked" against the Council's allocation, clearly indicating – for the first time – that the 5,000 houses could be part of the 11,300 allocated for Arun over the next two decades, not additional housing."

I cannot find any evidence that the Minister's clarification has been conveyed to those Arun members who were not in attendance at the meeting, and so, I am concerned that some members may not be in full possession of the facts when called upon to recommend a spatial option to the district.

Have all members been fully briefed on this important clarification by the Minister?

2. SE Plan and Report of the West Sussex Structure Plan EiP Panel

SE Plan policy SCT1 states that local authorities should *"Provide for sustainable urban extensions in Arun, Chichester, Rother and Wealden Districts"*

On the other hand, the report of the Structure Plan EiP panel states:

"Paragraph 7.21 We accept the argument that strategic scale development is required to assist in further regeneration in the Arun part of the coastal plain, and that constraints on the peripheries of Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and Arundel make undesirable any further developments there beyond existing commitments."

Paragraph 7.28 There are no obvious sustainable or acceptable opportunities for peripheral development around the existing towns in Arun."

Would the Leader agree that there is considerable doubt over the sustainability of urban extensions in Arun District?

3. Will Conservative members be allowed a free vote?

The Conservative Party at national level has withdrawn its support for the national Eco-Towns programme. In spite of this, Conservative councils at East Hampshire (Bordon/Whitehill) and Broadland (Rackheath) have decided to put local needs ahead of national party politics and support the Eco-Towns programme.

In an ordinary non-political LDF council officers compile evidence on an impartial basis and present it in a report along with recommendations to councillors, who then have the opportunity to interrogate the evidence, agree or disagree, vote etc. However, any recommendations from the Arun LDF Project Board to the LDF sub committee and subsequently Full Council are, in effect, from the Leader, Leader of the Opposition and the discredited Cabinet Member for Planning (who recently resigned from the LDF sub committee because his impartiality was compromised) plus the Chief Executive.

The recommendations are, in essence, from the political leaders and so are subject to party political influences - this raises serious questions about the impartiality of Arun's LDF process.

Members of the LDF sub-committee and Full Council may feel that they have been made an offer they cannot refuse! They may have to choose between supporting their political leaders or damaging their own political careers! Such considerations may prejudice their decision. Will they even dare to raise any questions on behalf of the people they represent?

Will the LDF recommended option be subject to a party political decision, like ASDA, or will Conservative councillors be given a free vote?

4. Planning Officers blind copying e-mails to CAFE

My purpose in writing to you recently was to bring to your attention the fact that planning officers are blind copying e-mails/information to CAFE and to give you the opportunity to look into this matter. Your response makes it perfectly clear that you consider this practice to be acceptable. The extent of the blind copying, and whether it has the support of Arun's members remains unclear.

How can residents in locations like Angmering, Lyminster, Toddington, Bersted, Pagham, Barnham, Eastergate and Westergate have confidence in the impartiality of the Council's LDF when its officers are known to be favouring CAFÉ in this way - and with your full backing?

(I have attached copies of our recent correspondence in case any members were unaware of this practice).

5. SQW Consulting report on the economic impacts of the proposed new Ford Eco-Town and the Eco-Town final bid submission

I note that the SQW Consulting report on the economic impacts of the proposed new Ford Eco-town (which I believe was jointly commissioned by Arun and SEEDA) and the Eco-Town final bid submission and appendices are not listed amongst the Core Strategy Background Studies. I note also that the Eco-Town Select Committee has not met to consider the final bid submission.

Have these documents been taken into consideration in arriving at tonight's recommendations and have copies of these documents been made available to members in order to inform their decision making?

I realise that time may not allow for all of these questions to be put, and of course there may well be a number of other questioners, but through this e-mail they are at least now on record.

If there is not enough time on the night perhaps the Leader might consider providing a written response?

Yours sincerely

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