

Chadderton North Ward councillors

30 July 2011

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK/FOXIDENTON

You will recall that I became involved in this as your representative on the now defunct Oldham steering group. At the inquiry I had no remit to speak and just corrected inaccurate statements by the council eg claimed distance by the council Moston-Mills Hill by rail 4 miles when it is in fact 1 and three-quarters by the railway timetable. 4 miles is the Moston to Manchester distance.

You received your briefing from the council about Foxdenton on 14 July. I received the attached correspondence today which I discussed with Cllr Houle at his surgery. A reply is required by 19 August and the District Partnership does not meet until 20 Sept. Cllr Hudson alluded to this new legislation at Wednesday's planning meeting, but there was no actual discussion about it.

My view on the matter is that the plan should be withdrawn or paused whilst the council gives the matter further thought in the light of professional advice, otherwise councillor x will suggest that development should take place in councillor y's ward instead and vice versa.

1. I have been following this plan since the public were invited to vote on the three possible options in 2007 when Donaldson's first assessed the Foxdenton site. It is now very difficult to assess the implications of a fresh lot of assumptions unless you are part of a planning team. Cllr Brownridge has professional expertise in this field as well as being deputy cabinet member for economic affairs, so we are perhaps best led by her.

2. The salient points we need to consider are as follows;

2.1 Mr Clark (Minister for planning) introduces the proposals by saying "we are allowing people and communities back into planning". However the plan then sets targets and goes on "national incentives and relevant local charges will help ensure local communities benefit directly from the increase in development that this Framework seeks to achieve."

How then do you go about involving local communities who are opposed to development in their area. How local is local? Option C "urban concentration including planned expansion" was heavily outvoted, but now there seems to be no alternative. "under this option most development would be within the existing built up areas of the borough, including the Saddleworth villages. Development would also take place on some open countryside."

How is it possible to put the options in simple terms to the community as a whole when decisions have to be taken within national parameters? The section on the Community Infrastructure Levy says quite clearly "neighbourhood forums should assess the likely cumulative impacts on development in their area-----the cumulative impact of these standards and policies should not put implementation of the development plan at serious risk and should facilitate development throughout the economic cycle". So you can only assess in a positive direction. Stopping Foxdenton would clearly put the development plan at serious risk as Foxdenton is number one in the reordered priorities for Primary employment zones or BEAs as they now are.

2.2 The government's buzzword is sustainable development which is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." I would be stumped to provide an example. Once open land goes, how does a future generation get it back? "there is no necessary contradiction between increased levels of development and protecting and enhancing the environment".

The planning process should "operate to encourage growth."

Neighbourhoods should "plan positively to support local development, with the power to promote more development than is set out in the local plan".

How then can planning control work? If a carefully worked out plan decides there is a need for ten thousand houses, then planning policy will ensure the figure is not exceeded. If neighbourhoods can add (but not subtract) how is control maintained? Councils should "set their own approach to housing density". Currently it is 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare. Any change needs to be reflected in the amount of land allocated.

2.3 Turning to Foxdenton.

The directive says that "planning should proactively drive and support the development this country needs"

It says we should "promote mixed use developments." It is therefore no longer possible to argue that Foxdenton is not needed. We are effectively being told to operate like a new town by allocating land in the hope that growth will be stimulated, rather than planning for the amount of growth bodies like the Local Economic Assessment carried out for the association of Greater Manchester Authorities which says that 2,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing since 2009, more jobs will be shed between now and 2015 and that employment will not return to pre-recession levels until 2018. Although p8 states that the local plan should be based on "adequate, up to date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area", the remainder of the report seems to ignore any negative evidence.

P6 states that "planning policies and decisions should enable the reuse of existing resources." This is particularly relevant to BAE as a possible alternative to Fox Denton. The planning committee only discussed four items and I did not think it would have been too taxing to add a fifth. However the planning application was decided by officers, the six year request being reduced to three.

Transport for Greater Manchester minutes show that our chief executive (Charlie Parker) is in discussion with an unnamed company to provide an electric vehicle/battery manufacturing plant. This requirement is written into the LDF, but the planners said they could not take it into account because the inspector had not approved the plan. The BAE site gives an opportunity to manufacture the vehicles and store them prior to distribution on the car park which has now been given over for offices. I would have thought it would be a sufficiently large site to warrant a planning brief. The employment it can provide is as follows. Using the council's figures of one job per 19m<sup>2</sup> for office, one per 32m<sup>2</sup> for manufacturing and one per 50m<sup>2</sup> for warehousing gives the following employment totals

1. Car park area "erection of 15 office units (B1) totalling 8562 m<sup>2</sup>" granted 27 July = 450 jobs
2. Existing brand new unused warehouse advertised as 30,000sq metres (huge high bay warehouse) = 600.
3. Uprturned boat art deco office building (estimate) 9,500m<sup>2</sup> = 500 jobs
4. Manufacturing plant (estimate) 10,200m<sup>2</sup> = 300 jobs.

Total job potential = 1050 known  
800 estimated

Total 1850.

Bearing in mind that 2,000 were employed at the site in 2005 and 11,000 during the war, 1,850 seems a reasonable estimate but needs to be verified by the experts.

The government proposes that B1, B2, B8 premises can be converted into housing without planning permission. What is to stop the 15 offices being built like apartments and so the whole nature of the site changes. P7 states authorities should "identify areas where it may be necessary to limit freedom to change the use of buildings". This perhaps should be one of those sites.

To what extent BAE offsets the need for Foxdenton requires further study.

A further aspect is P10 a requirement on authorities for "planning strategically across local boundaries." The planners did consult with Rochdale about BAE, but not with Manchester which this site also adjoins. To some extent Foxdenton is billed as a competitor to Kingsway and Central Park with each local authority having its prestige offering. However p13 states "unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities should be considered". This cuts both ways and if Rochdale have the space at Kingsway, should we be promoting a rival at Foxdenton? Could Rochdale/Tameside and Manchester meet our unmet requirement without exploiting open land in the borough.?

A further requirement is to form p9 "a clear understanding of business needs". N. Brown complained about this at the Shaw warehouse inquiry. Within the LDF they challenged the assumption that landless growth was not possible and now have permission for their development. Basically, Williams have a warehouse in Rochdale for storing seasonal items, a place at Hadfield for non standard pallet items and Shaw for BDCs (bulk delivery cartons). The planning permission enables them to meet 40 times the current workload should they wish to do so. (Each square foot of the warehouse takes 10 times the number per sq ft in their former cotton mill premises and they will have four units on their site i.e. New unit, High bay unit, Lilac and Briar). Technical advances in racking and craneage mean that job growth does not necessarily equate to land growth. This may apply in other areas of manufacturing. For example Rufflette make those ruffles at the top

of curtains that you put the hooks into. They have taken delivery of a machine which takes up the same floor area as the existing machines but produces 6 times the number of ruffles. Replacing the other 5 machines would give 36 (6x6) times the current capacity in the same square footage. This would become 108 times capacity if the single shift working were replaced by three shift working. (The factory is in Wyhenshawe) The plan does not seem to address the issue of increased production capacity and therefore enhanced jobs by landless growth. This calls into question the viability of existing mill premises and the need to convert into residential units. Conversion costs and contaminated land are problems here, but currently the LDF seems to have no plan for these mills and what they may contribute to residential need. We certainly cannot assume a continuing long term role for mill order purposes.

As an aside, the applicant made clear that they favoured the idea of a hub office in Manchester (MEN arena) with others working from home. This was because transport focused on Manchester and gave them the opportunity to harness the best talent for their operation from greater Manchester as a whole rather than the labour force just in Oldham. The plan aims to reduce reliance on the city centre for employment whilst technical advances render the satellite office in surrounding towns less relevant. The directive for "a clear understanding of business needs" seems not to have been met and a formulaic approach adopted instead. To summarise therefore, I cannot write my own alternative plan although I would hope to give a better performance than the officers did at the inquiry. At least I know where the regional science centre is located.

In the minerals section I am not sure what view of CBM (coal bed methane) we are taking. There are plenty of coal bed deposits and the fracking which has caused the earthquakes in Blackpool is less powerful than in the shale deposits being exploited there. It is a resource which other towns will not have, but there are no grants for it because it is not a renewable.

#### CONCLUSION

The implications of this policy development for the core strategy examination seem to be quite extensive. I think therefore that councillors need a briefing on the extent that the plan needs to be changed to conform to the new policy.

Eric Trigg

Cooptee Chadderton North ward