

Agenda Item 10b

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

23 April 2008

Consultation on Eco-towns – Living A Greener Future

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Assembly of the Government's consultation on "Eco-towns – Living a Greener Future" and arrangements to develop a Regional Assembly response.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Assembly notes the consultation and arrangements to develop a Regional Assembly response.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 3rd April the Government issued a consultation paper on how it intends to take forward the eco-towns programme, including a shortlist of 15 potential locations – the consultation document is available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/ecotownsgreenerfuture> and a full list of the short-listed locations is attached as Appendix A. Two of the short-listed locations are within the West Midlands region - Curborough (7km NE of Lichfield) and Middle Quinton (6 miles SW of Stratford upon Avon). A brief description of the two short-listed locations in the West Midlands are attached as Appendix B.
- 3.2 Eco-towns would be the first new towns since the 1960s. The intention is to tackle the combined challenges of climate change, the need for more sustainable living and the shortage of housing. The Government received 57 initial proposals from developers and local authorities across the country and these have now been short-listed to 15 which are going forward for further assessment with the intention to select up to 10 locations later this year.

- 3.3 The Government has stated its wish that five eco-towns be built by 2016 and up to ten by 2020 as part of ambitious plans to build 3 million homes by 2020. The eco-towns would have to reach zero carbon standards by promoting leading edge green technologies, provide high levels of affordable housing, demonstrate how they would deliver key infrastructure such as good public transport, schools and health facilities and safeguard local wildlife. The Government's key criteria for eco-towns were set out in the *Eco-towns Prospectus* published in July 2007 and are outlined in Appendix C.
- 3.3 The consultation, which closes on 30th June 2008 seeks views on:
- The way in which the eco-towns concept is being developed and the different potential benefits that an eco-town could offer;
 - How particular features such as greenspace or innovative approaches to housing can best be developed in an eco-town;
 - Preliminary views on the 15 locations going forward for further assessment.
- 3.4 The consultation is the first of four key stages in the eco-towns process:
- (i) Three month consultation on preliminary views on eco-town benefits and the short-listed locations;
 - (ii) Further consultation during the summer on a Sustainability Appraisal, which will provide a more detailed assessment of the locations, and a draft Planning Policy Statement.
 - (iii) A decision on the final list of locations with the potential to be an eco-town and the publication of a final Planning Policy Statement, later in 2008.
 - (iv) Like any other proposed development, individual schemes in the proposed eco-town locations would need to submit planning applications which would be decided on the merits of the proposal.
- 3.5 Related to the Curborough location, Lichfield District Council have recently received a planning application for a new community comprising up to 5,000 dwellings and associated community infrastructure. The Assembly will be responding to this application in due course as part of the conformity process.

4. Arrangements For Developing A Regional Response

- 4.1 To coordinate the preparation of a Regional Assembly response the secretariat are convening a Working Group comprising officers from the County and District Council areas affected (Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Stratford-on-Avon, Wychavon, Staffordshire,

Lichfield and Gloucestershire), RSS Policy Leads and representatives from the business and other sectors. GOWM and AWM will also be invited to participate in the Working Group as observers.

- 4.2 A draft regional response will be developed for consideration by the Regional Planning Executive (4th June) and Regional Planning Partnership (21st June).

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15 Locations Short-Listed For Next Stage Of Eco-towns Programme

Extract from CLG – Eco-towns: Living A Greener Future

Pennbury, Leicestershire: 12-15,000 homes on a development incorporating brownfield, greenfield and surplus public sector land. Four miles south east of Leicester. This proposal could include 4,000 new affordable houses in an area of high affordability pressure.

Manby and Strubby, Lincolnshire: 5,000 homes put forward by East Lindsey District Council on two sites, with large elements of brownfield land including a former RAF base. The proposal complements the strategic plan for the phased relocation of communities on Lincolnshire coast because of high flood risk, and could include 1,500 affordable homes in an area of very high affordability pressure.

Curborough, Staffordshire: 5,000 homes on the brownfield site of the former Fradley airfield, ten miles from Burton. The proposal could include 2,000 affordable houses in an area of very high affordability pressure.

Middle Quinton, Warwickshire: 6,000 homes on a former Royal Engineers depot which has a rail link to the Worcester-London rail line. Six miles South West of Stratford upon Avon. The proposal could include 2,000 affordable houses in an area of very high affordability pressure.

Bordon-Whitehill, Hampshire: 5-8,000 homes on a site owned by the Ministry of Defence. A significant number of ex-MoD homes are already on the site, west of Whitehill-Bordon. The proposal could include 2,000 affordable houses in an area of very high affordability pressure.

Weston Otmoor, Oxfordshire: 10-15,000 homes on a site adjoining the M40 and the Oxford-Bicester railway. Three miles south west of Bicester, the site includes a current airstrip. The scheme could include between 3,000 and 5,000 affordable homes, in an area of extreme affordability pressure.

Ford, West Sussex: 5,000 homes on a site which includes brownfield land and the former Ford airfield. Close to rail line linking London and the Sussex coast. The scheme could include 1,500 affordable homes, in an area of very high affordability pressure.

Imerys China Clay Community, Cornwall: Development of around 5,000 homes on former china clay workings, industrial land and disused mining pits no longer needed by owner Imerys. Close to St Austell. The scheme could include 1,500 affordable homes, in an area of extreme affordability pressure.

Rossington, South Yorkshire: Up to 15,000 homes regenerating the former colliery village of Rossington, three miles south of Doncaster. The scheme could include 1,500 affordable homes, in an area of moderate affordability pressure.

Coltishall, Norfolk: 5,000 homes on a former RAF airfield, eight miles north of Norwich. The scheme could include 2,000 affordable homes in an area of very high affordability pressure.

Hanley Grange, Cambridgeshire: 8,000 homes on land adjacent to the A11 designed to improve the severe lack of housing in and around Cambridge. The scheme could include 3,000 affordable homes in an area of extreme affordability pressure.

Marston Vale and New Marston, Bedfordshire: Up to 15,400 homes on a series of sites, including former industrial sites, along the east-west rail line to Stewartby and Millbrook. The scheme could include 2,000 affordable homes in an area of high affordability pressure.

Elsenham, Essex: A minimum of 5,000 homes north east of the existing Elsenham village. Close to M11 and the London to Cambridge rail line. The scheme could include 1,800 affordable homes in an area of extreme affordability pressure.

Rushcliffe, Nottinghamshire: An eco-town proposal was submitted for Kingston-on-Soar, to the south of Nottingham. In response to representations from Rushcliffe Borough Council, this site is not to be pursued. However, the Government is proposing to carry out a further review in partnership with RBC

to consider whether there is a suitable alternative location with the potential to be viable within the Rushcliffe local authority area.

Leeds City Region, Yorkshire: A number of eco-town proposals were submitted for locations within the area of Leeds City Region partnership of 11 authorities and principally between Leeds and Selby. The Leeds City Region Partnership has indicated support in principle for an eco-town within the sub-region. The Partnership has proposed a further study to compare the best alternative locations across the Leeds City Region partnership area. The Government has agreed to support this approach, on the basis that it will allow a further announcement to be made shortly of one or more sites for consultation

Extract from CLG – Eco-towns: Living A Greener Future

CURBOROUGH

Lichfield District Council,
Staffordshire County Council

Description The eco-town proposal is for a 314ha site, 7 km NE of Lichfield, part of former Fradley airfield and is 15km from Burton and 35km from Birmingham. Two existing residential communities lie to north and east – Fradley Village and South Fradley. A brownfield site with hardstanding and old airfield buildings. The potential for major new development in this broad location was previously identified in the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011 although the relevant policy was not saved.

Proposed benefits A new community comprising 5,000 dwellings, secondary and primary schools, commercial, retail and community facilities; a new A38 junction, two new road links to Lichfield, a park and ride, and pedestrian/cycle provision; Eco-energy Park, and sports facilities.

Housing Affordability Pressure – Very High. An eco-town scheme would supply around 2,000 affordable houses over 10 years in comparison with recent annual supply in Lichfield of 100 and a housing waiting list of 3,000 households.

Initial summary of challenges and constraints

Environment There are high existing environmental pressures in the area which transport infrastructure for the scheme would need to take into account. Some flooding issues (two watercourses run through the site). Issue with water quality. Lichfield waste water treatment infrastructure would need upgrading.

Transport The scheme will need to develop proposals for sustainable and high quality public transport links to the eco-town, particularly taking account of existing congestion. The A38, in particular, would require a strategy to cope with additional traffic generated from the development.

Employment 7,000 jobs will be achieved from development at Fradley Park employment area (one of the largest employment areas in West Midlands), with potential for further growth which could reduce travel to work problems.

Conservation and historic constraints Airfield and listed buildings. Historic canal features bordering the site will need to be safeguarded.

MIDDLE QUINTON

Stratford-upon-Avon,
Warwickshire

Description The eco-town proposal comprises a 240ha brownfield site 6 miles to the SW of Stratford upon Avon between Long Marston and Lower Quinton. It is a former MoD Engineers depot with extensive warehousing, a rail system and a rail (freight use) connection to the main Worcester-Oxford-London line.

Proposed benefits A scheme of at least 6,000 zero carbon homes on previously developed land, with substantial employment opportunities, affordable housing and community infrastructure, including up to four schools, health care and retail facilities and high quality public transport links to surrounding towns and villages, all supported by leading edge environmental technology. [*Housing Affordability Pressure – Very High.*]

The scheme would deliver 2,000 affordable housing units in comparison with current delivery of 170 annually and 3,000 households on waiting list. Stratford experiences very high levels of demand for rented accommodation in relation to its role as an international destination – an issue recognised in the Stratford World Class vision initiative.

Initial summary of challenges and constraints

Environment The scheme will need to be developed with design sensitivity to its setting close to Cotswolds AONB and suitable mitigation measures. Would look for an SFRA to make sure there is no flood risk on site. Capacity of existing sewage network unlikely to be able to cope. The scheme will need to include a contaminated land survey and to carry out remediation sustainably.

Transport No major issues regarding the strategic transport network but the scheme would need to develop and support a substantial improvement to public transport links to surrounding centres and particularly Stratford upon Avon.

Employment The site is already a significant employment centre with scope for expansion around proposed eco-town technologies including recycling and sustainable construction.

Conservation and historic constraints Historic settlements, listed buildings and landscape issues would need to be safeguarded and enhanced as the scheme is developed.

National criteria for eco-towns

The Government prospectus set out the following key criteria:

(i) Eco-towns must be new settlements, separate and distinct from existing towns but well linked to them. They need to be additional to existing plans, with a minimum target of 5,000 homes;

(ii) The development as a whole should reach zero carbon standards, and each town should be an exemplar in at least one other area of environmental sustainability;

(iii) Eco-town proposals should provide for a good range of facilities within the town – a secondary school, a medium scale retail centre, good quality business space and leisure facilities;

(iv) Affordable housing should make up between 30 and 50 per cent of the total through a wide range and distribution of tenures in mixed communities, with a particular emphasis on larger family homes;

(v) A management body which will help develop the town, provide support for people moving to the new community, for businesses and to co-ordinate delivery of services and manage facilities.

The Prospectus also sets out a range of broad **outcomes** including:

- intensive application of **environmental technologies**, resource efficiency and environmental design, using the Code for Sustainable Homes as a guide on sustainability issues other than energy;
- high standards of **design** including a commitment to design competitions and a clear but adaptable masterplan;
- **travel** plans for each eco-town to show how the scheme would achieve an increased proportion of journeys on foot, by cycle and by public transport. Schemes would need to be based on high quality public transport links, including employment and leisure facilities and reduce the need to travel by co-locating services;
- **community empowerment** in both the development and the operation of the eco-town, encouraging active community participation and creating local trusts to manage community assets;
- an **economic strategy** relating business potential in the settlement to nearby towns, encouraging working from home and providing for local business support;
- promoting **healthy and sustainable environments** through 'Active Design' principles and healthy living choices;
- imaginative proposals to create additional **green infrastructure** and, where appropriate, making good use of brownfield and surplus public sector land.