

NEWS RELEASE

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ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN EXPRESSES CAUTION OVER ECO-TOWNS

West Midlands Regional Assembly chairman has expressed caution over today's announcement by government of a series of proposed eco-towns; two of which are in the West Midlands Region.

Assembly chairman Cllr David S Smith said: "In the revised West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy we have already stated that all of our proposed 365,000 houses should be built to high environmental standards."

Today's eco-town announcement comes shortly after the Assembly submitted the revised West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy to government. The Assembly's proposal already makes it clear that every new house built in the Region is expected to meet high environmental standards.

Among the 15 locations included in the government's eco-town shortlist, two fall within the West Midlands; Curborough in Staffordshire, part of the former Fradley airfield and Middle Quinton in Warwickshire, a former Ministry of Defence depot near Long Marston.

These 15 sites have been shortlisted for the new low-carbon, environmentally friendly developments as revealed by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The government intends to select 10 locations for its final list of eco-towns, following today's consultation.

According to the government, these eco-towns will make significant use of cutting edge green technologies and brownfield land including disused airfields and industrial sites. The government have also said these sites will contribute to their house building ambitions and will have to go through the normal planning process.

However, the scheme is of concern for the Assembly's Chairman David S. Smith, who said: "We will be looking at the proposals very carefully to ensure that they

will not undermine the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, or its overriding objectives in achieving Urban and Rural Renaissance.”

“We welcome the government’s commitment for these eco-town proposals to be tested through the normal planning process. We would expect Regional Assemblies and local authorities to be given a meaningful opportunity to comment before decisions are made.

“We have recently submitted the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Revision to the Secretary of State. This sets out very high environmental policy standards. For example, the West Midlands is the first English region to require all new housing development to meet the Building for Life standard defined by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. We would clearly expect any eco-town to match these policy requirements of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft was submitted to the Secretary of State by the Assembly in December 2007. This Draft is currently out for public consultation until 30 June 2008 and an Examination in Public into the Draft is anticipated to take place in 2009.
2. The Building for Life standard has been developed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the Homes Builders Federation and others.
3. The West Midlands Regional Assembly (‘the Assembly’) represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
4. The Assembly’s membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
5. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
6. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.
7. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region’s RDA, Advantage West Midlands.
8. For further information, visit our website www.wmra.gov.uk

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