

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**14 January 2009**

**Consultation on Draft Planning Policy Statement on Eco-towns and  
Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations  
Assessment of Middle Quinton**

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**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To inform the Assembly of the Government's consultation on the Draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Eco-towns and Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Middle Quinton location. Also, to seek views on the emerging Regional Assembly response to the consultation.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Assembly consider this report and provide views on the emerging draft Regional Assembly response to the Government's consultation.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 On 4 November 2008, the Minister of State for Housing, Margaret Beckett MP, launched the second stage of the eco-town consultation programme with the publication of a number of key documents aimed at ensuring that the proposed eco-towns are well designed and built to the highest possible environmental standards.
- 3.2 The PPS on eco-towns, when finalized, will supplement PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development. CLG are also proposing to make a consequential change to PPS 3: Housing to add eco-towns to the list of options regions and local planning authorities should consider when planning the distribution of needed housing. PPS3 (paragraph 37, 1st sub-bullet of the 4th bullet) requires the consideration of new settlements as part of this process, so the change would be to add "(including eco-towns)" as an example of a type of new settlement.
- 3.3 The draft PPS sets out the green standards for development in eco-towns. The PPS also pledges that individual eco-towns will need to

submit planning applications in the same way as any other major development proposal.

3.4 The sustainability standards proposed in the Planning Policy Statement include:

- Achieving **zero carbon status** across all the town's buildings, including commercial and public buildings as well as homes.
- Allocating **40 per cent of the area within the town to be green space**, at least half of which should be open to the public as parks or recreation areas.
- Requiring individual homes to reach the Building for Life silver standard and also achieve **70% carbon savings** above current building regulations in terms of heating, hot water and lighting.
- Providing a minimum of **30 per cent affordable housing** to provide more homes for social rent and assist those struggling to get on the housing ladder.
- Creating more options for travel so that residents are able to make the **majority of their journeys without a car**, such as by public transport, walking and cycling.
- Ensuring a minimum of one **job per house** can be reached by walking, cycling or public transport to reduce dependence on the car.
- Locating homes **within 10 minutes walk** of frequent public transport and everyday neighbourhood services.
- Raising the threshold for individual homes so that they must all **achieve at least level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes**, which includes standards for household waste recycling, construction waste, water efficiency measures and reduced pollution.

3.5 In comparison with CLG's April 2008 consultation on the principles of eco-towns and proposed process for taking the concept forward (Eco-towns: Living A Greener Future), there now appears to be a slightly greater emphasis in the draft PPS on the opportunity to trial green technologies rather than the contribution that eco-towns can play to meeting housing need. The full draft PPS can be found at:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/ppsecotowns](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/ppsecotowns)

3.6 A Sustainability Appraisal on each of the 12 short-listed eco-town locations was also published which identifies and evaluates the likely impact of the proposals on the local economy, community and environment. The short-listed locations include "Middle Quinton" (6 miles SW of Stratford upon Avon).

3.7 Sustainability Appraisals were undertaken for three further locations which had originally been short-listed (including Curborough near

Lichfield) but these sites are not being taken forward in CLG's Eco-town Programme as a result of the promoters withdrawing schemes from the programme. In the Leeds City Region, CLG have agreed to pursue separately the local authorities' proposal for an urban "eco-community" which would pilot eco-town standards.

- 3.8 The Sustainability Appraisals assessed 10 of the 12 short-listed locations (including Middle Quinton) as Grade B sites, which would "be suitable for eco-towns subject to meeting specific planning and design objectives". One location (Rackheath in Greater Norwich) has been rated as Grade A, which is considered generally suitable for an eco-town, and one location as Grade C, which is only likely to be suitable for an eco-town with substantial and exceptional innovation. The individual Sustainability Appraisals are available from: [www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns](http://www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns)
- 3.9 The current shortlist of 12 potential eco-town locations, together with their CLG Sustainability Appraisal grading is as follows:
- Rackheath, Greater Norwich: Grade A
  - Middle Quinton, Warwickshire: Grade B
  - Newton-Bingham (Rushcliffe), Nottinghamshire: Grade B
  - Ford, West Sussex: Grade B
  - Bordon-Whitehill, Hampshire: Grade B
  - St Austell (China Clay Community), Cornwall: Grade B
  - Rossington, South Yorkshire: Grade B
  - North East Elsenham, Essex: Grade B
  - Pennbury, Leicestershire: Grade B
  - Marston Vale, Bedfordshire: Grade B
  - Weston Otmoor, Oxfordshire: Grade C
  - North West Bicester (Cherwell) - alternative to Weston Otmoor: Grade B
- 3.10 A judicial review has been granted to opponents of the Middle Quinton scheme (the BARD - Better Accessible Responsible Development – Campaign) and the Court has now listed this for hearing on 22 and 23 January 2009. In line with commitments which the Secretary of State made to the claimants and to other interested parties in the case, the deadline for responses on the draft Planning Policy Statement and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal on Eco-Towns has been extended from 19th February 2009 to 6th March 2009.
- 3.11 Following the end of the consultation, the Government will announce a final shortlist of locations with the potential to site an eco-town. Government has said that schemes in those locations will then need to apply for planning permission and go through the local planning process. The eco-town standards set out in the PPS, and the

assessment work on locations, will be a material consideration for decision makers.

3.12 CLG have advised, in a letter to Stratford-on-Avon District Council, that if the Middle Quinton location were to be endorsed in the eco-towns process then Government would expect it to be considered in the current West Midlands RSS Phase 2 Revision together with the NLP options for delivering higher housing growth. CLG have advised that “within that context, the forthcoming RSS Examination will need to consider the strategic implications of this general location and the role which it might play in the final RSS”. In the absence of an indicative date when the Government is likely to publish the final PPS and final list of locations in the Eco-towns Programme, the implications for the West Midlands RSS EiP, which commences in April 2009, are currently unclear to all parties.

#### **4. Developing A Regional Assembly Response – Key Issues**

4.1 To develop the Assembly response, views and comments are being sought from the Middle Quinton Eco-town Joint Officer Group comprising officers from the County and District Council areas potentially directly affected (Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Stratford-on-Avon, Wychavon, and Gloucestershire), the RSS Coordination Group, Policy Leads, Regional Planning Officers Group and Regional Housing Advisory Forum. An initial draft Assembly response to the draft PPS consultation is being prepared by your officers.

4.2 Key issues in the emerging draft Assembly response include:

(a) WMRA support the general principle of putting environmental sustainability and responding to climate change at the core of the eco-towns concept. These principles already underpin draft overarching policies SR1, 2 and 3 in the WMRSS Phase Two Preferred Option which would support making all new development in the region have an eco approach. WMRA consider that these principles should be the norm, not the exception.

(b) WMRA concerns about the draft PPS include the:

- Lack of regional and local planning context for many of the existing short-listed eco-town locations (including Middle Quinton).
- Unsustainable location of many eco-town proposals which are separate and unlinked to higher order centres (including Middle Quinton).

- Potential lack of viability and deliverability of new eco-towns which are separate and distinct from existing settlements.
- (c) To address the above concerns, it is suggested that the WMRA recommend that the final PPS should:
- Recognise the need for eco-towns to be consistent with, or identified through, Regional Spatial Strategies and developed in alignment with and through the Development Plan process.
  - Apply the principles of eco-towns more widely to include opportunities for smaller eco-communities in or adjacent to existing urban areas which link opportunities and utilise existing infrastructure more efficiently.
  - Ensure that eco-towns do not divert resources away from other regional priorities by clarifying what funding for eco-towns would be secured from the developers or from additional national resources.
  - Clarify that housing associated with eco-town proposals would contribute (rather than be in addition) to RSS and local authority housing targets.
- (d) In terms of the short-listed sites, it is suggested that the WMRA advise CLG that the Middle Quinton location would not be in alignment with the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy or the submitted Phase Two Revisions Draft Preferred Option.
- 4.3 In light of comments received at the Assembly meeting, the draft response will be developed by your officers in liaison with the Joint Officer Group and a final draft submitted to meetings of the Regional Planning and Environment Executive and Regional Housing Executive (on 30<sup>th</sup> January and 18<sup>th</sup> February respectively) for their joint endorsement.

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