

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Government Draft Policy on Eco-towns threatens sustainability approach**

The government's recently published draft planning policy statement (PPS) which opened for consultation yesterday undermines regional and local planning to date and threatens the sustainability approach of the Regional Spatial Strategy claims the West Midlands Regional Assembly .

The government's stated intention for Eco-towns is to tackle the combined challenges of climate change, the need for more sustainable living and the shortage of housing. The draft PPS sets out the government's proposed standards for an Eco-town and the planning policy context.

It also published a Sustainability Appraisal of its short-listed sites, one of which - Middle Quinton (six miles south-west of Stratford upon Avon) - is in the West Midlands Region. The Sustainability Appraisal attempts to identify and evaluate the likely impact of the Eco-town proposals on the local economy, community and environment.

Cllr Rex Roberts, Chair of the Regional Assembly's Planning Partnership, said: "Any new or expanded settlements should be identified through the proper regional and local planning processes to ensure that development is in sustainable locations. By proposing sites, such as Middle Quinton, which is inconsistent with the Regional Spatial Strategy and local plans, the government's Eco-towns programme risks undermining regional and local planning to date.

He added: "The Assembly recommends that high environmental standards should be the norm rather than the exception and policies contained within draft revisions to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy would ensure the wider application of Eco-standards across all new developments".

In relation to Middle Quinton, Cllr Roberts said: "An Eco-town at Middle Quinton could draw people out of the major urban areas and undermine our efforts to support urban renaissance. An Eco-town at this location could become little more than a dormitory settlement leading to increased travel demand which would erode any 'Eco' benefit secured through other means such as carbon neutral building design".

## **ENDS**

### **Note for Editors:**

1. West Midlands Regional Assembly acts as both the Regional Planning Body (RPB) and the Regional Housing Board for the West Midlands and is responsible for developing the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The Assembly promotes the interests of the West Midlands by speaking out on important issues and events affecting the Region and speaking up for the social, environmental, cultural and economic interests of the Region. The Assembly has a membership of 100 and is made up of representatives from the Region's local authorities, business community and other interest groups including health, trade unions, environment, community and voluntary organisations.

2. 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 8 December 2008 and an Examination in Public into the Draft will take place in Spring 2009.

3. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.

4. On 3 April 2008 the government issued a consultation paper on how it intended to take forward its eco-towns programme. The government has stated that the intention of eco-towns 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 were short-listed to 15 which went forward for further assessment. Eco-town proposals for three of the locations, including Curborough (near Lichfield), were not taken forward as a result of the promoters withdrawing schemes from the programme.

5. 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.

6. For further information on the Regional Assembly, visit our website [www.wmra.gov.uk](http://www.wmra.gov.uk)