

ECO-TOWNS – PROGRESS REPORT (PAPER B)

COMMENTS OF DR. R. K. A. FELTHAM CC

1. The timing of the Government decision on the final eco-town Planning Policy Statement (PPS), currently out to consultation, is running in parallel to the mini-review of the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the generation of the Local Development Strategy (LDS) from Harborough District Council. The European/County elections and purdah period fall within the “decision making” timescale. There is a risk that the Government could be seeking to over-ride the established planning process to support this eco-town proposal, because the final eco-town PPS, when enacted in 2009, could take precedence over the LDS or RSS if neither has included sufficient assessment about the eco-town. What is the potential for the PPS to disrupt the rules regarding the normal planning process?
2. The Sustainability Appraisal documentation by Scott Wilson, released at the same time as the draft PPS, includes a number of areas where they consider the current proposal by the Co-operative Group is lacking in sufficient detail. Some ideas have been proposed by the Co-op, especially for dealing with transport, but even these are lacking in solid facts. Just some of these points are listed below with my own observations:
 - a. **Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE)** - the southern part of the eco-town is now proposed to link onto the existing Chestnut Drive (Stretton Hall) estate of Great Glen. There will be no separation. As one of the principal criteria for an eco-town is that it should be "separate and distinct", does this latest design breach this fundamental criterion, and if so, should this latest proposal by the Co-op be considered as a SUE and not an eco-town?
 - b. **Employment** - there are no clear details of the kind of employment which could be provided, nor the timescales for achieving the proposed 14,000 jobs. What measures are proposed to prevent jobs being sucked from Oadby and Leicester? Why would employers wish to use this site, which is some 30 mins from the M1?
 - c. **Transport infrastructure, water supply and waste disposal** should be in place before the first building is occupied - where are the agreements with Severn Trent and the local transport and waste authority (Leicestershire County Council) that the proposals conform to strategic plans for these services? Severn Trent is already predicting severe water supply problems in the Harborough District without major infrastructure improvements over the next 25 years, and that was without an

additional 36,000 people. The transport modelling work to date indicates the eco-town could only be sustainable if draconian traffic reduction schemes are enforced - all way beyond any form of traffic restriction seen in the UK before. What evidence is there that these measures will actually work? e.g. restricting car parking to one space per two houses, park & ride at racecourse.

- d. **Flood risk** - Great Glen is prone to flooding from the Sence. Although alleviation measures are hinted at, no specific plans or details have been provided to demonstrate the eco-town will not increase the risk of flooding to this adjoining village.
 - e. **Great Glen railway station** is a possible proposal for freight and possible future passenger use, yet there is no confirmation that this could be supported by Network Rail or East Midlands Trains, nor any idea of timescale. If this railway station was to be constructed, it lies some 3km from the northern edge of Pennbury and is the other side of Great Glen so would necessitate some form of transport to access it; Leicester railway station is only 4km from the site, and Market Harborough station is 8km to the south. If a railway station is not feasible, it should be removed from the proposed transport infrastructure.
 - f. **Education** - 7 primary schools and 2 secondary schools are proposed. Parental choice means the existing highly successful primary and secondary schools in Oadby could be flooded with children from Pennbury before the new schools achieve any measure of competence. What measures are proposed to support Oadby's and other local schools during this period?
 - g. The **airfield** is planned to form the site for the new town centre and yet there is an existing legal lease with 13 years left to run, and the site has not been confirmed as being "previously developed land" by the planning authority. PPS3 makes it clear that it is up to the local planning authority to consider whether airfields should be considered as brownfield or not. This was confirmed by Yvette Cooper when she was Housing Minister. Even if the airfield is considered brownfield, the extent of greenfield development is massive, and the effect on **landscape character** could be devastating with a density of upto 75 homes per hectare.
3. Finally, the Co-op are holding a series of invitation-only workshops currently on various elements of their proposals, yet refusing to take part in open meetings with the general public. This prevents communities from engaging with the latest plans, and I would like the Cabinet to consider condemning this action by the promoter as being contrary to open consultation.

COMMENTS OF MR. S. J. GALTON

Having read this report I would like to request that Cabinet considers an additional recommendation to the paper:

- (d) That the County Council make a formal request to the Department for Communities and Local Government for a meeting at ministerial level to present the accumulated research and evidence into Pennbury and to make representations on the conclusions reached.'

This suggestion is based upon a comment made recently at an Eco-Town debate at Beauchamp College, and upon my continuing view that documents submitted directly to government through its standard consultation process are being given insufficient weight. Instead I believe that direct and personal action by the County Council could achieve a similar impact to that achieved in Oxfordshire.