



**CABINET – 7 APRIL 2009**

**DRAFT PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT ON ECO-TOWNS -  
FEEDBACK ON CONSULTATION ON THE COUNTY COUNCIL  
RESPONSE AND PROPOSED COMMENTS ON THE FINANCIAL  
VIABILITY STUDY**

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this supplementary report is to report the receipt of:
  - (a) further consultation replies in respect of the County Council's response to the Pennbury Eco-Town proposal; and
  - (b) the Halcrow Report (commissioned by the County Council) on the review of the DCLG Report entitled "Financial Viability Study of the Eco-Towns Programme".

**Supplementary Consultation Responses**

2. Since the Cabinet report was drafted a further 88 responses have been received taking the total number to 1004. All of the responses received since the completion of the main report strongly agree with the County Council's position taking the overall percentage figure for those agreeing "very strongly" or "strongly" to 98.1%.
3. One persistent theme explored the issue of lost food production capacity. The County Council's Scrutiny Review Panel accepted from the evidence submitted to it by the Co-op and the National Farmers' Unit that the levels of agricultural production can be sustained if not increased under the Pennbury proposals. However many respondents (about 1 in 5) were unconvinced by this. Some pointed out that if the same improved agricultural techniques were applied across an additional 600 hectares, (equivalent to the amount of farmland lost to development) then food production would obviously increase even more. So in their view the Eco Town would inhibit the capacity of the land to maximise its agricultural or bio fuel potential. At a time of climate change and international uncertainty, they said, food supply is likely to become a much more

important issue in the future and as such any lost production capacity was to be regretted and should therefore be resisted.

4. Set out below is a small selection of responses verbatim. These give an idea of the quality of responses and illustrate some of the main themes:-

*"I strongly agree with the County Council's decision and would add the following comments. Pennbury will obliterate 5000 acres of historic farmland dating from the Domesday Survey of 1068. As a nation we need our own food production, but Pennbury will convert some 64 acres of this into roads alone, producing more and more emissions. This is far from eco-friendly. As the world renowned architect and Labour Peer Lord Rogers says, "The Eco-towns are the worst thing that the government could do. If you drop large numbers of people in the countryside you are providing a car-borne community. This goes against everything that we have learned about sustainability." The town is too big and in the wrong place, being so close to Leicester. This unacceptably puts the lovely conservation village of Stoughton with its 14 listed buildings between a rock and a hard place. Stoughton already has speeding problems with traffic between Leicester and the A47/Houghton, despite some calming measures. This would be increased to an impossible level by vehicles cutting through the village in both directions between large parts of the new town and Leicester City and environs. Beautiful narrow lanes like Thurnby Lane and Stoughton Lane would be submerged by the torrent of through traffic. This would not just be commuters going to the City and proposed major car parks and transport hubs, but would be whole fleets of service and delivery vans and lorries, which escalate annually. It would be unsafe and environmentally unacceptable for the characteristic narrow lanes leading into the historic estate village of Stoughton to be at the mercy of such an inevitable onslaught of through traffic. There is more than enough alternative land and property within the City & County to cater for their needs without the monstrous notion of the so-called Pennbury, and these must be given a full and comparative appraisal before any decision is made."*

*"Thank you County Council for putting so coherently and persuasively what we are all thinking about the Co-Op's proposals. The concept is fundamentally flawed, the location is completely inappropriate, the transport strategy is unworkable and the economic and housing strategy non-existent. Please help remove this blight from our lives."*

*"FOOD IS NEEDED. BEFORE THE FAMINE. A farm has won a national prize after beating competition from 16 other large farms and packing sites. The 4,500-acre Co-Operative Farm site at Stoughton, near Oadby, was named "business of the year" at the Co-Operative Farms annual conference. The site was praised for its overall performance in 2008, its teamwork, work on environmental issues and the continuing success of its programme of school visits. Farm manager Nick Padwick, who collected the award at The Co-Operative Farms conference in Gloucestershire, started the From Farm to Fork project with his wife, Michelle. The scheme invites schools to Stoughton, an arable farm, to find out how cereals are produced and explore where the food they eat comes from. The project has been rolled out to six other Co-Operative farms and thousands of children have been on trips. The farm has also been recognized for its contribution to the*

*environment after planting new hedges and restoring others. As a Natural England demonstration farm, it hosts tours for the general public. Mr Padwick said: "The standard of the Co-Operative Farms' businesses is very high, so to win this award is a real achievement which reflects well on the hard work of everyone at Stoughton. "we are delighted, and very proud, to have won." The Co-Operative Farms is the UK's largest farming business. It farms about 60,000 acres at sites across Britain."*

*"I feel the County Council's assessment of the situation is spot on. Thank you for a lucid and reasoned critique of the proposal. As a resident, I feel very concerned about the impact of Pennbury on this area in terms of congestion and sustainability. The roads do not give up cars easily. As well as the other drawbacks you point out, the government has not listened to the groundswell of opinion when this development will have a massive negative impact on current residents and their environment. Please do your utmost to make them listen."*

### **Pennbury Eco-Town: A Review of the DCLG Report "Financial viability study of the Eco-Towns programme, March 2009"**

5. A report from the consultants Halcrow (referred to in paragraph 40 of the main report) has now been received and is attached as an Appendix to this supplementary report. It endorses the findings of the County Council's partial financial appraisal as set out in the main report. In addition it has provided answers to the three questions posed by DCLG. These are briefly summarised below:

Q1 - Do you consider that as a high level strategic assessment this study has identified the main issues affecting viability?

A1 - **We have no confidence in the conclusions reached on viability....**

Q2 - Are there major areas of cost of infrastructure provision and funding or other issues affecting financial viability which are not identified and could be considered at this stage?

A2 - **There are many areas of concern around costs which have not been included.**

Q3 - Are you aware of evidence which would lead you to different conclusions set out here? For example, where the assessment shows a negative financial outcome are there additional public policy reasons (e.g. regeneration or site restoration) which would justify an alternate approach?

A3 - **We have serious reservations that the Study has underestimated the likely costs involved and has made a number of questionable assumptions about financing and market absorption, as set out in our report, although these cannot be properly tested because of a lack of transparency and detail in the Study**

**methodology. Consequently we have no confidence in the conclusions reached on viability.**

**Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

A copy of this supplementary report has been circulated to all members of the County Council under the Members' Information Service.

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