

Our Ref:EW/070409

Mrs LC Ross
Leicestershire County Council
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicester
LE3 8RA

7 April 2009

Dear Mrs Ross

Without Prejudice

The Co-operative Group Response to the Report of the Chief Executive to Leicestershire County Council Cabinet, on the Draft Planning Policy Statement on Eco-towns – Feedback on Consultation on the County Council Response and Proposed Comments on the Financial Viability Study (7th April 2009) (the Cabinet Report).

The Co-operative Group (the promoter) would like to raise a number of concerns, in order to assist Leicestershire County Council's Cabinet in its further consideration of the County's response to the draft Planning Policy Statement on Eco-towns, at its Cabinet meeting scheduled for 7th April 2009.

The promoter considers that the Report of the Chief Executive to the Council's Cabinet refers to documents which the promoter has previously demonstrated to contain factual inaccuracies and misunderstandings, relies on an unrepresentative response to public consultation, and contains unsubstantiated opinion.

Pennbury Strategic Assessment (December 2008) and Scrutiny Panel Report

The Cabinet Report refers to a previous Cabinet on 10th February 2009, at which the Cabinet resolved to object strongly to the eco-town process and objected to Pennbury as an eco-town location. The promoter would ask the Cabinet to note its concerns which were set out in its Summary Response to the Pennbury Strategic Assessment (Halcrow Report) (December 2008), its response to the Scrutiny Panel

Report and its response to the Chief Executive's Report to Cabinet on 10th February 2009.

Public Consultation on the County Council's Response to the Pennbury Proposals

The promoter has concerns regarding the unrepresentative nature of the responses received to the leaflet survey. For example, the survey achieved a response rate of less than 10% and the age, tenure and ethnicity profile of respondents is not representative of Leicestershire as a whole. Whilst the views provided enable the Cabinet to understand the views of the survey respondents, they cannot be considered representative of the county as a whole. Paragraph 15 of the report is also noted, as it comments that a number of respondents misunderstood a survey question.

Item (d) in paragraph 19 refers to transparency, probity and credibility. The promoter would ask the Cabinet to note that the Co-operative Bank provides an array of services and banking facilities to a wide range of political groups and organisations. For example, around 30% of local government authorities, which include Councillors drawn from across the political spectrum, have some form of banking relationship with The Co-operative Bank. All these facilities, including the existing relationship with the Labour Party, are transacted entirely on a commercial basis.

The Co-operative Group, which is the parent organisation to The Co-operative Bank, makes an annual, voluntary, declaration in its statement of accounts about any donations, in cash or kind, made to registered political parties.

The Electoral Commission, which is the regulator of UK party and election finance, publishes public registers containing information submitted, under the terms of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, by political parties about their finances, including donations and loans. Its website can be accessed at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

Financial Viability Study of the Eco-towns Programme (PwC Report)

The Cabinet Report criticises the lack of detail contained within the PwC Report, for example in paragraphs 42 and 43 of the main report, requiring a level of detailed financial information that would normally only be available at a much later stage in the process. This criticism appears to be a misunderstanding of the eco-towns process, failing to understand that the Eco-towns Planning Policy Statement and the shortlisting of potential eco-towns is a very early stage and that eco-town proposals are intended to be further refined and undergo scrutiny

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through the normal planning process before they reach the planning application stage.

The Cabinet Report criticises the assumptions made in the PwC Report regarding site constraints such as rights of way and easements. It is normal practice in assessing major development sites with a long timeframe for development to make such assumptions.

The Cabinet Report also contains unsubstantiated opinions regarding the value and cost of land and infrastructure and the nature of the investment return, for example in paragraphs 52, 55 and 57. As unsubstantiated opinion, the Promoter considers that these comments should be given little weight.

Yours sincerely

Ruairidh Jackson
Head of Planning and Property Strategy