

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION

'CREATING A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY, BUILDING A POSITIVE LEGACY'

An Eco-town for Leicestershire **A consultation paper**

Overview

As a co-operative society owned by its democratic membership and strongly rooted in the community, the Co-operative Group is uniquely placed to understand and deliver what it takes to create a successful eco-town.

We believe that we have the skills, experience and vision so that, with the support of our partners and with input from the community, we can build an eco-town where people genuinely want to live, can afford to live and will want to stay.

One of our partners is English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency, which owns a section of the land designated as the intended site. English Partnerships helps the Government to support high quality sustainable growth in England by:

- Unlocking and increasing the supply of land – particularly surplus public sector sites – to meet housing and other growth needs; minimising greenfield development and tackling visual and economic blight.
- Creating and sustaining well-served mixed communities where people enjoy living and working, using its skills and expertise to help local authorities and other partners deliver their vision.
- Increasing quality of life and improving the environment through innovation and raising standards, and promoting the importance of good design, planning and build in underpinning the well-being of communities.

In Leicester, English Partnerships is a founding partner, together with Leicester City Council and The East Midlands Development Agency, of Leicester Regeneration Company (LRC), the Urban Regeneration Company dedicated to delivering the new masterplan for central Leicester.

We believe that we have the right team and experience to deliver an eco-town for Leicestershire. However, we do not underestimate the scale of this endeavour.

Building an eco-town is a serious undertaking. We recognise the challenge that the Government has laid down for helping the UK to address its housing needs and to do more to tackle climate change.

This document sets out our proposals for how, in creating the eco-town, we can build a new community, strengthen existing communities and, importantly, help to support the continuing regeneration of the city and the wider area.

In supporting consultation papers, we look at linked themes including 'employment & economic vitality', 'education & skills', 'transport, 'environment', 'energy & climate change', 'health & wellbeing' and 'housing'. In this paper, we explain our commitments to community and regeneration and why we believe that, by evolving our proposals with input from all stakeholders, we can create an achievable plan and a successful eco-town.

To ensure such success, our proposals are based on partnership working and early and meaningful community participation. The design and creation of the eco-town will include input from people with a range of skills and technical expertise; and the involvement of local stakeholders, existing and future residents and business owners.

We are developing a framework to ensure that everyone with a stake in the success of the eco-town has an opportunity to be informed on, and contribute to, the development of the eco-town.

Together, the Co-operative Group and English Partnerships have experience of shaping communities through mutual agreement, and the Group's values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equity and solidarity. This means that the Group is in a strong position to demonstrate a genuine commitment to community involvement and empowerment.

The issues facing the region today

The demand for eco-towns comes, in large part, from the pressure being placed upon existing communities where a lack of access to affordable or appropriate housing is restricting opportunity, constraining choice, and reducing standards of living.

Ultimately, we are talking about a combination of physical, social and economic issues which mean that people are not given the opportunity to achieve their potential and to aspire to a better quality of life.

In Leicestershire, as across the UK, communities are changing as people live longer, as more and more people live in single-person households, and as people aspire to a higher standard of living. There is also a recognised need for more large family homes in Leicester to suit the preferences of its mix of communities and to address local needs.

We can, we believe, design the eco-town in a way which promotes a more cohesive model for community living with benefits for future development in Leicestershire and the wider region. We believe that, because we are starting with preliminary consultation and a site with

tremendous potential, we can establish a community in the eco-town which will thrive and be successful.

In terms of regeneration, Leicester will require inward investment in a range of different ways to be successful. This involves creating jobs and building a strong economy through to providing high quality transport infrastructure and offering the services which local people need.

There is also more that can be done to support education locally, and our proposals include an environmental technology academy in Leicester. We are also proposing a wide range of initiatives to support education, from pre-school right through to lifelong and professional learning. Part of our approach will be to explore ways to support existing local schools which might involve linking them with the proposed academy. We see this as part of the wider opportunity to support regeneration in the city and for the county.

The eco-town can complement Leicester city, supporting its own plans for regeneration and, through our investment, help Leicester compete against other cities in the East Midlands. Leicester City Council and LRC have strategies for the ongoing regeneration of the city. We are working to link our emerging plans to theirs and to ensure that, through collaborative working and shared planning, the eco-town can be part of a bigger and broader regeneration success story locally.

The Government's call to eco-town developers

In line with the Government's Eco Town Prospectus, the Co-operative Group and English Partnerships' proposals for an eco-town in Leicestershire needs to:

- Encourage community empowerment in both the development and operation of the eco-town to hold those who make the decisions affecting the town to account
- Give greater power for more people to control their lives with community ownership of assets
- Encourage active communities by creating the conditions for community participation and involvement in civic activity
- Enable greater community ownership and management of assets through, for example, a Community Development Trust

In its 'Eco-towns: living a greener future' document (April 2008), the Government also identified the need for the Co-operative Group to ensure that the eco-town proposals complement work to regenerate Leicester, including initiatives on training and linking adult education to employment.

Our initiatives

The Co-operative Group's core values and principles are founded on community empowerment and opportunity for all. We believe that the development and operation of the eco-town for Leicestershire should be the same.

To help us achieve the best possible results, we are developing a number of pioneering initiatives which include:

- **A Design and Development Advisory Panel** – to ensure the eco-town is designed in line with local wants and needs and that it continues to match these over time
- **Active and meaningful community engagement** – to engage and empower people to have responsibility for and make decisions over the things that matter to them
- **Accountable and participatory governance** – involving and including the community in decision making
- **Community Fund** – to raise and direct investment to where the community needs it most
- **Community 'intranet'** – to support community communications and cohesion by making it easier to share information

The single biggest contribution this scheme can make to **regeneration** is to support the economic development strategies and plans for investment which Leicester City Council and LRC have. We will do this by developing our own proposals to complement theirs. The eco-town will also strive to be a centre of excellence for eco-industries, which would assist with maintaining Leicester City's long held "first environment city" status in Britain, awarded in 1990.

We believe that the scale, type and location of the development we are proposing can help unlock wider infrastructure, investment, employment and educational benefits locally. It can deliver investment where it has been lacking for many years.

We believe that the eco-town can be a catalyst for a more comprehensive and successful programme for regeneration in Leicester city and across the county.

Question 1 - What do you think are the most important things for creating a successful community? Do you agree with our headline initiatives? Do you have others to put forward?

Headline commitments – what can we do that's different?

We can build a successful community by using our business expertise – and the strength of our partners – to design and build a place where people want to live, work and stay. We will achieve this by careful planning and by being involved for the long term. We are committed to this site and to achieving the very best development of it in the longer term. No-one else can bring such a breadth of experience and business skills.

Our investment will support wider regeneration in Leicester city and across the county. We will invest financially and we will invest in terms of our expertise, values and skills. The eco-town will encourage active citizenship with residents empowered to determine and manage the services and facilities within the town and provide community linkages into the city.

We can help to unlock existing barriers to regeneration. Whether in terms of transport investment or education, we can be an active part of a solution to existing challenges in Leicester and across the county, extending the benefits and creating opportunities for the wider community. We can help stimulate change and improvement.

Question 2 - What do you think are the biggest priorities for regeneration in Leicester and across the county? Do you have any views on existing barriers to regeneration and how things might be done differently than at present?

A more detailed look

Design and Development Advisory Panel

We will establish a Design and Development Advisory Panel to ensure that the eco-town would be developed in line with local requirements and aspirations. This Panel would set parameters for how the new homes and buildings might look and work to ensure that the principles of an agreed masterplan can be faithfully applied. We believe that this is important, not only for the quality of development that ultimately takes place, but also **to give local agencies authority and engagement** in the process.

The Panel will be chaired by the Co-operative Group and be made up of representatives from local housing organisations, environmental groups, the local resident community (new and existing) and the private sector. Panel members will be chosen for their leading-edge expertise and experience in specialist areas such as sustainable transport, design, zero-carbon technology, waste management, landscaping and community involvement.

Active community engagement

By working with partners with expertise in co-operative forms of participation, we will be able to create a management model which will empower the local community. As the first stage in the design process, we are developing a **wide range of exciting and pioneering initiatives** to assist this process. This includes public exhibitions and feedback; technical consultation with key stakeholders; consultation with media forums; newsletters, websites, radio and television; and informal discussions with interested organisations. The next stage in the process will be to look at community management models.

The eco-town will create opportunities for all and encourage a diverse, multi-cultural community in keeping with this part of Leicestershire. We will seek to establish the right methods of community engagement which ensure that everyone has a voice and everyone can be meaningfully involved in community decision-making.

We will also **encourage voluntary involvement in public services** (eg fire brigade, civil emergency services, home care networks and community support groups) and we are looking at ways to incentivise and support those people who choose to invest their time in helping others.

Accountable and participatory governance

A successful eco-town involves creating an ethos that extends to all members of the community, both residential and business. This culture will be created from the start, through **community empowerment and management**. For example, the governing body, evolved from the Design and Development Advisory Panel, could take a share in the town's infrastructure, such as the community heating system, leisure facilities or open spaces. Importantly, we will also work with existing agencies and authorities to determine how best to take forward our initiatives and to make sure that they complement and strengthen existing set ups.

The advisory panel we create will help define the appropriate management model and governance structure for the town. We will offer **flexible forms of participation**, empowering residents to take up opportunities for increasing their level of involvement.

Question 3 - What views do you have on community ownership of local utilities such as heating systems or open spaces? Do you agree / disagree with the proposals we have for 'active citizenship'?

Community Fund

We will establish a Community Fund to assist residents who wish to set up their own interest groups. In 2007, the Co-operative Group gave £7.1m to local community projects in the UK, including grass roots sport, credit counselling and community health funds. We commit to assisting the eco-town community to develop its own chosen priority areas. The Co-operative Group will work with communities to deliver this funding and on legacy planning for funding activities.

Question 4 - Do you think a specific eco-town community fund is a good idea? What other ideas do you have for helping to invest in and support community initiatives?

Community facilities

Having effective community facilities in place which complement those available in the wider area but also give people what they need close to home will be an important part of how we develop the eco-town. We will provide **facilities locally so that people are not dependent on travelling elsewhere** for culture, leisure, recreation and education. These will be planned carefully and in conjunction with the four local authorities so that they give people what they want and to support existing facilities in the wider area.

Community 'intranet' system

As part of the proposed 'virtual hub' for the eco-town, there is the potential to set up a community 'intranet' system direct into individual homes. This would help to share information across the community, pulling people together and making it easier for people to get involved in initiatives and activities where they want to. At a helpful and functional level, the intranet would also provide information about 'what's on in town' and help to promote local events and initiatives. The high-capacity fibre network (potentially a 100MB connection) would also 'future proof' the system by providing significant capacity for intranet traffic to grow.

Overall, we see the system as a means to fully integrate the community, making it easy and straightforward for people to find out everything that might matter to them. From real time bus information, details on local food production, and information on local wildlife monitoring and training initiatives to tracking information on home deliveries to providing links to education, the intranet will deliver a wide range of benefits. In terms of local democracy, it could also increase people's involvement in decision making.

Question 5 - Would you use a community intranet if one was available to you? Do you think this is a good idea? What other ideas do you have for sharing information within communities?

Education

Education and the facilities to provide education are at the centre of any community. We publish more details in our 'education & skills' consultation paper, but it is important to recognise the link between education, community and regeneration.

There will be new schools in the eco-town, delivering a place for every child, together with facilities for lifelong learning. We are also proposing an academy for sustainable technology to link to existing educational facilities and position Leicester as the centre for environmental learning and Research & Development in the UK.

Where schools are built, how they relate to the wider town, how they are managed and run, and how the people can have their say – these are all issues that affect the success of the community. With our expertise and experience right across the education sector, we believe that we can bring innovative solutions as well as a strong track record.

Supporting regeneration in Leicester city

English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency and our land partner for this project, has a key role in the regeneration of Leicester. With its expertise and working with Leicester City Council, **we will develop our proposals for the eco-town to support planned investment and development in the city.** By working together, we will ensure that our shared objectives are aligned and, ultimately, achieve more.

We also believe that, by developing high-quality and low-carbon homes in the eco-town – and creating an attractive place to live – we can support the profile of Leicester as a location where employers want to be and where people want to live and stay. We see a role for the eco-town in helping to promote Leicester as a more attractive city and in improving perceptions of the city region nationally and internationally.

Leicester has a thriving intellectual base with two higher education institutes and an expanding college network. Like other cities it suffers from intellectual 'flight' – many highly qualified and skilled graduates choose not to stay in Leicester and instead look elsewhere for employment to support their careers or aspirations for home ownership. This is damaging for both investment in and perceptions of Leicester.

An eco-town on our land, as opposed to other cities, could deliver both the affordable homes and communities that people wish to live in, along with new sustainable technology industries. It would also directly benefit the regeneration of Leicester and the wider population.

Community & regeneration:
creating a successful community, building a positive legacy

An Eco-town for Leicestershire

An eco-town would link to the existing business and science park facilities to create an intellectual 'hub' for the city and allow Leicester to compete on a level playing field with other East Midlands cities.

We will be consulting again during the Sustainability Appraisal process post June 2008 and regeneration will be central to this. As we develop our proposals further, we will also be taking advice from relevant experts and organisations. Your views on how the city's wider aspirations can be met are crucial at this stage of our thinking.

Question 6 - How do you think Leicester is perceived both regionally and nationally? What do you think can be done to improve the competitiveness of the city and its larger neighbours eg. Derby and Nottingham?

Question 7 - Do you have any other ideas on community and regeneration issues that you think we should be looking at?

How to Respond:

Please direct any comments or responses to www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop and complete the online response form in the "your views" section, with '**Community & Regeneration**' in the subject heading. In order to help with the feedback process, please make clear to which questions you are responding in your feedback.

Due to the volume of submissions we are receiving, it may not be possible to respond to each individual submission at this stage. However, all comments are noted and are very important to the development of a best-in-class eco-town.

This is just one of a number of consultation themes which we are exploring in the early phase of consultation. You can share views that you have on specific elements of transportation, environment, education, health and employment in response to our wider range of consultation documents. Any other views that you have at this stage can be submitted to the website.

We are also holding a series of local events at which we would be delighted to hear your thoughts on the specific questions posed in this consultation paper. You can also submit written responses to this and future consultation papers to members of the team at the events. Please check our website and news releases for the latest dates.