

News release from The Co-operative Group

## **ECO TOWN WILL BRING HOMES AND COUNTRYSIDE TOGETHER TO BOOST BIODIVERSITY**

An eco-town for Leicestershire will bring homes and countryside together with a series of initiatives which will boost the area's biodiversity and create new opportunities for sustainable living.

The Co-operative Group, which has a strong track record in sustainable development, has outlined a series of environmental initiatives under consideration for the planned settlement on its land to the south east of Leicester which will put sustainable living at its heart.

The Group has adopted the theme "Design for Sustainability" for the philosophy which will drive the planning and implementation of the community. The objective is to make people and the environment interdependent on each other so that both can flourish.

Creation of the eco-town will see the establishment of between 12,000 and 15,000 houses on the Group's agricultural estate with only 40 per cent of the site being used for the town itself – 30 per cent of the built area will itself be open space. The rest of the land will be made available for farming and countryside uses.

Proposals being put forward on eco-town environment include:

- The protection of important views around the eco-town, including historic landscapes and particular aspects of the countryside in Harborough; protection of sensitive views both of and from villages in the area, some of which include conservation areas.
- Adding to the rural landscape of the area through plans for new habitat creation, woodland planting and the location of farmland next to existing settlements.
- Using the land around the town to grow vegetables and fruit for direct supply to the community.
- Re-introducing livestock to the area for the same purpose and using the overall farming facility to enhance children's knowledge of food production, in line with the Group's well-established and highly successful "Farm to Fork" scheme. The Group is the UK's leading farmer and has both the experience and resources to make this happen.
- Setting up facilities to research and develop new sustainable farming methods for the production of food using waste heat and carbon dioxide from the energy generation facilities in the community.
- Providing an informal recreational environment around the town – easily accessible green spaces for walking or cycling.

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- Enhancing biodiversity in the area through a series of initiatives which will transform what is currently agricultural land. These include the creation of a new area where local rare species can be reintroduced, protected and used as a resource for education and training.
- Bringing flora and fauna right to the heart of the town through the creation of green corridors and a series of green “stepping stones”. These could include for example “green roofs” with plants grown on special rooftop environments on homes which provide habitats for wildlife and absorb air pollutants.
- Providing gardens for every home on scale ranging from window box gardens to large plots, designed both to encourage wildlife and to give all residents the opportunity to contribute plant life to the town.
- Providing additional open water areas as a by-product of the town’s “closed loop” water system which would collect and reuse water from a variety of sources including streets and rooftops. These would provide new habitats for species such as the great crested newt.
- Substantial enhancement of woodland and hedgerows which would encourage the population growth of species including the dormouse, skylark, linnets and nightingale.

Graham Ramsbottom, Head of Land Development and Ventures for The Co-operative Estates, the Group’s land and property arm, commented: “There is a massive amount we can do to achieve the very best environment standards in the eco-town.

“Because we are starting with a blank canvas – and because of the scale of the site and the significant amount of land that will not be used for the development – we can produce really exciting proposals that push the boundaries for sustainable development. We believe that many people are looking for a way to live more sustainably - the eco-town will provide a clear way forward.

“We hope that the wildlife organisations in the area will see the opportunity to do something special in the eco-town and will want to help us to develop our ideas further.”

The Group will be providing information on a series of further themes, including transport & mobility, homes, employment and economic vitality, in the run up to a series of public exhibitions next month.

Dates and venues are as follows:

- Tuesday 10 June, The Three Swans, High Street, Market Harborough
- Wednesday 11 June, Parklands Leisure Centre, Wigston Road, Oadby
- Friday 13 June and Saturday 14 June, Exhibition Marquee (being set up on the "Christmas Party site"), off Gartree Road
- Monday 16 June, Leicester Tigers Rugby Club, Ayleston Road, Leicester

The exhibitions will be taking place from 11.00am to 8.00pm.

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