

# **EDUCATION & SKILLS**

## **'INVESTING IN LEARNING'**

### **An Eco-town for Leicestershire**

#### **A consultation paper**

## Overview

A sustainable community will, by definition, provide the facilities and support that people need for a successful education.

Whether this is pre-school, professional training, lifelong learning or anything in between, it is clear that investing in the right educational facilities and providing appropriate assistance and management structures will be vital for the eco-town.

In this consultation paper we set out our thinking on how we can create the best conditions for education within the eco-town itself and, importantly, how we can link to and enhance existing facilities. We are looking at this from a number of angles but understanding the relationship between educational facilities in the eco-town and across the wider area is fundamental.

We would welcome your views, comments and opinions on our proposals. With your input, we intend to develop our proposals further and to ensure that, as well as meeting the needs of the new community within the eco-town, we can be part of a wider success story and deliver the investment, skills, experience and know-how to help strengthen education provision in Leicestershire as a whole.

The Co-operative Group has a thorough understanding of education. It is a generally less well known part of our business but we are involved in establishing, running and supporting schools across the UK. Whether this is through specific education programmes like our 'Farm to Fork' initiative which takes children onto farms and helps them to understand where their food comes from, or through direct development of educational provision like our sponsorship of a city academy for Manchester, we are involved right across the spectrum.

This does not mean that we expect to impose our thinking and approaches onto established local arrangements, but it does mean that we bring experience, our co-operative approach, new ideas, and significant resources to bear. We believe that this can make a positive difference.

Through direct experience, we know the value to communities of getting education right – and we know the cost involved when opportunities are missed. For that reason, we are working with the local authorities and will do so increasingly as we bring forward our ideas.

In our approach to delivering the highest standards of education provision, we will be working closely with stakeholders in the region, including Leicester City Council and Leicestershire

County Council and we expect to complement their visions for how education can be best provided for all.

We are proposing to invest in putting the right educational facilities in place from the outset. This starts with local primary and secondary school provision and, from there, could expand into a wide range of facilities including an academy for sustainable technology and virtual adult education college.

Please let us know your views on the priorities for education provision locally and what you think about the proposals outlined in this consultation paper.

### **The education and skills issues facing the region today**

In terms of professional training, and according to the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA), the region is characterised by high levels of low-skilled jobs paying low wages. EMDA is focusing on initiatives to support training providers to help people improve their skills, as well as encouraging the creation of higher skilled jobs.

Our approach to developing the eco-town fully supports these aspirations. We will help create a dynamic local community and economy, providing local opportunities for future residents to achieve and surpass their aspirations.

In Leicestershire, as across the UK, the Government is looking to do more to provide incentives and facilities that support people and their educational needs at all stages of life.

We believe that, in the way we establish and operate educational facilities in the eco-town, we can bring direct benefits to young families with pre-school needs, to children in full time education, to 16+ students looking for opportunities in further education or professional training, and for mature students and people wanting lifelong learning.

### **The Government's call to eco-town developers**

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

- Provide for a good range of facilities within the town, including a secondary school.

The Government's broader aspirations for sustainable educational facilities include the requirement that all new school buildings should be zero carbon by 2016.

In its Eco-Town consultation paper, *Living a greener future*, the Government stipulates that eco-town providers should:

- Develop new schools that are exemplars of sustainable design and operation.
- Encourage new schools to have a curriculum that specialises in environmental issues.

We are responding to these challenges in the way we are developing our proposals.

### Our initiatives

The Co-operative Group is committed to developing a sustainable eco-town, and this must be reflected in how we provide facilities for education and training.

We are proposing an eco-town which we believe will be an attractive place to live. Getting education right is a core part of that ambition.

Some aspects of our approach are physical – the location of these facilities is important and we intend to build them in central locations where people can reach them easily. Not only does this offer wider choice in terms of walking to and from schools and colleges or using public transport but it will also help to reduce the numbers of cars used in the school runs and, therefore, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Other aspects are more about the community, about management, and about social issues and we have a wide breadth of knowledge in creating management structures for schools which give parents and the community ‘ownership’ of how the school is run. In our experience, this provides direct benefits in terms of strengthening communities and also in terms of driving up standards of attainment in schools.

In our proposals for the eco-town, we are aiming to:

- Provide an **integrated approach to learning** for residents in the eco-town and for the local community by linking facilities from pre-school to adult education
- Develop an **academy for sustainable technology** and work in conjunction with Leicester to position this in the right location to provide the biggest benefits regionally
- Establish **new primary and secondary schools** to meet the needs of a community based on the potential of the town to accommodate up to 15,000 new homes
- Use technology to underpin greater **opportunities for virtual and remote education** – our proposed hi-capability broadband network for the eco-town (100MB ‘Fibre to the Home’ connectivity) will support e-learning
- Forge positive **links with local universities and tertiary education providers**

- Use the opportunities associated with development and construction of the eco-town to **enhance professional learning programmes** and help local and UK businesses to become market-leaders in sustainable construction and design
- Enhance the overall provision of education by developing schools in the eco-town with a co-operative model and, therefore, a potential high degree of local ownership

We are looking right across the educational spectrum and believe that our proposals can deliver wider opportunities as well as support existing facilities.

**In line with the eco-town's sustainability objectives, we will also use local education and training to raise awareness among residents and businesses of how to develop more sustainable lifestyles.**

**Question 1** - What do you think are the most important aspects of education and skills that we should be looking at? Do you agree with the aims we have listed here? Do you have others to add?

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

**We bring experience of education – backed by the wider involvement of our businesses – and can help provide educational facilities in a way which no other developer could.** Put simply, we know about education. From primary schools to City Academies and lifelong learning, we are involved in initiatives across every age group and right across the UK. We bring experience and expertise, and the understanding of how to work with local partners to achieve the best results. We want to support the development of a successful academy for sustainable technology for Leicestershire.

**We will build new schools at the start – having the right schools in place from the outset is a fundamental part of building a successful and cohesive community.** We will invest in new facilities and ensure that they are built to the right size and in the right locations to meet the needs of residents in the eco-town and also to complement existing facilities in the wider area. The buildings will support the learning and development of children in the town to provide fun, health and safe environments.

**We will help to establish successful co-operative ownership and management structures for schools and educational facilities, empowering communities to have responsibility for the way schools are run.** This will ensure that schools match local needs and that education and learning is at the centre of the community. The Co-operative model for managing schools is proven and effective.

## A more detailed look

### Primary and secondary schools

We will provide **primary and secondary education at the earliest point** in the development of the new community with a commitment to offering primary education at the outset. We will use our experience of establishing schools to help set up a primary school to meet the needs of the first phase of development (we are proposing phases of development to achieve the eco-town's 15,000 homes potential).

We will develop details on appropriate catchment areas with the local education authority and ensure that, as the town grows, catchment area boundaries reflect the needs of new residents in the eco-town while also complementing existing schools and their boundaries.

**Question 2** - What do you think about primary and secondary education services locally? What do you think should be our priorities in terms of providing new primary and secondary

### Academy for sustainable technology

We see vast potential for an academy for Leicestershire which specialises in sustainable technology. Firstly, this complements the principles of the eco-town – the opportunities for linked learning between the academy and the businesses and operation of the town are significant. Secondly, we see this as an extension of Leicester's 'Environment City' status and a natural way to help expand that initiative and to give it greater impact.

**We want Leicester and the eco-town to become a UK centre of excellence for sustainable and environmental technology.** The need to do something to tackle climate change – and the political and commercial pressures being applied – are generating significant opportunities for business. We believe that an academy for sustainable technology can help equip local students to seize opportunities in this sector.

**Question 3** - Do you agree with our ambition to make Leicester a 'UK centre of excellence for sustainable technologies'? Do you have any opinions on academies?

### Federation structure

We have had great success by **linking local schools together into a co-operative trust federation structure**, enabling smaller primary schools to be part of a larger network and to feed into a single secondary school. This brings the benefits of having small schools – which can often then be located closer to home for their pupils – while also bringing the strength and benefits of being part of a wider network.

Our experience also shows that this structure greatly assists pupils with the transition from primary to secondary education. The ‘destabilising’ affect that can upset children as they move from one school to the other is significantly reduced and, overall, this leads to happier children and better performing pupils.

### **Curriculum**

Learning about sustainable living will, we are proposing, be an important part of the curriculum within the eco-town’s schools. Being part of the eco-town community will, naturally, help people to become better informed and more aware of sustainability issues – and we expect education to be a core component in achieving the changes in behaviour that the eco-towns are trying to encourage.

Alongside the sustainability specialism, learners will also have access to a wide variety of curriculum subjects taught in innovative and accessible ways to inspire all learners in the town.

At the same time, we will look to provide pupils with specific access to environmental and sustainability initiatives which help to increase their knowledge. Our own ‘Farm to Fork’ initiative (explained earlier) and programmes like ‘Waste Works’, which helps children learn about recycling and how to use waste more effectively, will add practical support to education in these areas.

We are also proposing to build an ‘environmental information centre’ to help people learn more about sustainability and the eco-town. This matches the Government’s aspiration that eco-towns can be ‘exemplar’ developments where learning can be shared. Through the information centre, we believe that we can help to educate and inform people about making more sustainable lifestyle choices and, ultimately, to help encourage people to more sustainable ways of living.

**Question 4** - What do you think about our ideas for encouraging people to learn more about the environment and sustainability within the eco-town? Do you think this is important?

### **Management of schools**

Through our experience across the UK, we understand the benefits of a wide range of different management and governance structures for schools. We believe that our co-operative approach, which gives the local community ownership and participation in how schools are run, is an effective model.

We would bring our expertise to bear in helping the community to establish the right management and governance structures for schools within the eco-town.

**Question 5** - What opinions do you have about how schools are managed and governed? What are your priorities in terms of community participation in how schools are run?

### **Schools as part of the community**

Because of the emphasis we are putting on community participation in schools and across the wider breadth of public services for the eco-town – empowering residents to have more say in the matters that are important to them – we believe that this approach will make the eco-town a more attractive place for people to live. We are clear on our commitment that we want the town to be somewhere where people will want to live and will want to stay. We are looking at the way education is provided in the eco-town as a core aspect of what makes an attractive community of which people will want to be a part.

### **Virtual and e-learning**

The quality of the IT connectivity we are proposing – ('Fibre to the Home' with future proofed 100MB capacity) – will provide an excellent platform for e-learning. By embedding this technology into the eco-town from the outset, we intend to create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy high-speed, high-capacity internet access. This will deliver a wide range of benefits in terms of education.

It help primary and secondary schools to link up with their full time pupils, making it easier to manage homework and to keep up to speed on classes if children are off sick/absent. It will also provide a system for linking part-time or mature students back into education where being physically 'in the classroom' is a problem. We see this having direct benefits to a wide variety of people, including stay-at-home parents who are looking after young children but want access to opportunities in education, as well as older students for whom travelling to college could be more challenging. Overall, we are talking about making it easier for people to access education.

**Question 6** - Do you think virtual and e-learning is important? What do you think of our proposals for 'Fibre to the Home' internet/IT connectivity? What else do you think could be done to improve learning opportunities locally?

### **Further and higher education links**

We will establish education and training links with schools and tertiary providers locally.

We believe that we can complement existing higher education colleges and universities and build a stronger overall centre for education in Leicestershire.

### **Professional training and skills**

We believe that the eco-town can support professional training and skills development for the region. By creating a UK centre of excellence for sustainable technologies, and supporting this with an academy specialising in this sector, we are proposing to make the eco-town a hub for developing skills and expertise for people and businesses focused on this area. Just as the construction requirements of the eco-town mean that we will support training to give people the skills they need to build the town, so too will this help these construction businesses to develop market-leading skills which will give them competitive advantage in the industry.

We are committed to the principle that everyone working in the town will have the opportunity to be skilled in what they do – to be properly trained and therefore valued.

We will work together with other employers in the eco-town to provide effective professional training and, by doing this, to increase the opportunities available to people living and working in the eco-town and the wider city region.

**Question 7** - How do you think the eco-town can help with professional training? Do you have any views on what type of training is most needed for the region?

**Question 8** - Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper or other issues to do with education and skills which you do not feel are addressed here?

## **How to Respond:**

Please direct any comments or responses to [www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop](http://www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop) and complete the online response form in the “your views” section, with ‘**Education & skills**’ 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,

homes, community, health and employment in response to the consultation documents that we are publishing. 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.

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