

EMPLOYMENT & ECONOMIC VITALITY

'DEVELOPING A STRONG & SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY'

An Eco-town for Leicestershire

A consultation paper

Overview

A clear economic strategy is essential for the eco-town. Our proposals are for a community of up to 15,000 new homes. This represents significant investment in itself and our priority is to ensure that this investment – and the full range of broader investment needed to make the eco-town a success – complements the economic and employment strategies for Leicester, the county, and the region as a whole.

Our proposals mean that the eco-town has the potential to provide at least 14,000 jobs. This is significant in its own right. We are also keen to ensure that these jobs should be high-quality jobs and available to local people. That is why our economic strategy is linked closely to our education strategy, published separately in our 'Education & Skills' consultation paper.

The single biggest priority for us if we are to make the eco-town a success is to work with the local and regional authorities and those organisations that set the agenda for economic development in the region. We are, therefore, working with Leicester City Council, Leicestershire County Council, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and Harborough District Council as we develop our proposals. At the same time, we are working – and we expect to work increasingly closely – with the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) to ensure that our approach dovetails with its wider ambitions for the region. Crucially, this will also help to focus investment specifically on those areas where it can make the greatest difference.

Central to the success of the eco-town will be ensuring that people living in the town have suitable access to employment, goods and services.

Our proposal is based on the premise that the town will be self-supporting, with its own primary retail and services centre, but with strong links to nearby centres and a logical place in the established hierarchy. The eco-town will complement and support the economic development of Leicester while being separate and distinct from it.

Addressing the economic and retail hierarchy between the eco-town, Leicester, Market Harborough and other local centres is an issue requiring furthering investigation and discussion. At this early stage, we do not suggest that we have the optimum solution and that is why we are consulting and using people's views and input. In this way, through discussion with all of the relevant stakeholders, we hope to ensure that a balanced solution is reached.

We believe that the eco-town can make a major contribution to the local and regional economy. It can be a catalyst for wider improvement and help to support a culture of innovation and excellence.

The economic and employment issues facing the region today

According to EMDA, *“the East Midlands is characterised by a combination of high employment and a predominance of jobs demanding low skills and paying low wages.”*
(Source: EMDA website).

One of the key opportunities that the eco-town brings is to drive up standards in environmental technologies and the sustainable business sector and it is our ambition that the eco-town can make Leicester a UK centre of excellence for environmental business. We see this as a natural fit with Leicester’s position as a Britain’s first ‘Environment City’.

Leicester has created a role and a direction for itself with the ‘Environment City’ approach – we believe that the eco-town will reinforce this and take it to the next level.

In terms of other identified trends, Leicestershire has a fairly contained labour market and poor transport infrastructure which has been noted as a barrier preventing people from accessing employment.

Our proposals for linking homes and jobs within the eco-town – as well as for providing fast and convenient public transport access for people working in Leicester city – mean that we can help to break down some of these established barriers.

Just as with our approach on transport (see ‘Transport’ consultation paper), we believe that the eco-town can be a catalyst for more comprehensive and wide-ranging investment and change which helps the regional economy to grow stronger.

This desire to deliver successful overall improvement underpins our approach of working closely with Leicester City Council and the Leicester Urban Regeneration Company (URC). The Leicester URC is focused on making Leicester city a stronger and more sustainable economy. We believe we can work together to achieve more significant results overall.

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 a clear economic strategy for the town relating business potential in the settlement to nearby towns and economic clusters

- Encourage working from home through live work units or in local resource centres, supported by wi-fi (wireless) and other IT networks
- As part of the management plan, facilitating the social, institutional and professional infrastructure locally for business networking

In its response to our original submission, the Government has also highlighted the need for further work to be done on the economic and retail hierarchy aspects of the scheme ('Eco-towns – living a greener future' (April 2008)).

The Government has also re-stated the need for the eco-town to complement work to regenerate Leicester, including initiatives on training and linking adult education to employment.

Our initiatives

We believe that the eco-town can help to create a culture of innovation and excellence which will put Leicester at the forefront of the Science, Technology and Research & Development (R&D) sectors.

This will attract inward investment from established companies and serve as a catalyst for new business growth in the region, helping the eco-town to achieve a high quality, highly skilled employment base whilst also acting as an economic driver for the three cities sub-region (ie Nottingham, Leicester, Derby).

We believe that Leicester and the eco-town have an opportunity to become the pre-eminent UK centre for sustainable and environmental business technologies and that, as well as delivering direct economic and employment benefits, this can also enhance Leicester's reputation on the national and international stage.

As well as creating and stimulating jobs in the environmental and sustainability sectors, we will also develop office space and facilities to suit a wide range of occupiers. Our proposals are for a town which has a vibrant and successful commercial core.

Importantly, the eco-town will also generate a need for jobs to service the needs of its residents. This means jobs in retail, community services, health, education, leisure, maintenance and town centre management. It also means jobs linked to our ongoing farming of the surrounding land and we want to reinforce the connection between food grown locally and food purchased in the eco-town.

We are also proposing to design the eco-town so that people can get to work as easily as possible. A live/work environment which makes it easier for people to travel from one place to the other is at the centre of our proposals, reducing travel times and helping to provide a better work/life balance. The way we position commercial buildings alongside homes and access to transport can make a big difference.

We are also proposing ‘**community working hubs**’ to act as central points where individuals can work effectively and according to their own needs but, at the same time, access shared resources and benefit from the environment which is created when enterprising people come together. This is an established benefit recognised in the way that many business centres and serviced office providers operate. It brings people together and creates a sense of community to help overcome feelings of ‘isolation’ which can be a negative side-effect of home/remote working.

The relationship between jobs in the eco-town and jobs in Leicester – and in other places locally – is also important. **Our goal is that at least 60% of economically active residents in the eco-town will work locally.** We will seek to achieve this by providing sufficient opportunities for employment within the town and ensuring that, where people need to travel outside of the town for work, they have sustainable transport choices available to them. Such levels of local employment will ensure that improvements to existing transport infrastructure will provide the extra capacity for the minority of journeys taken for work outside of the town.

Because we are also looking at the long-term economic strategy – and because the Co-operative Group will be involved in the eco-town into the future – we are also proposing a series of education and training initiatives. More details on these are contained in our ‘Education & Skills’ consultation paper.

What we are quite clear about is understanding the connection between jobs and education. We are looking at this collectively and, as a result, believe that our proposals are the stronger for it.

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

The eco-town will be a focal point for sustainable and environmental technologies and businesses. Building the eco-town will create a need for skilled construction and maintenance jobs. Once built, the town will then provide significant opportunities for leading edge businesses across a range of sectors, including energy, construction and waste. The eco-town can help put Leicestershire on the map as a UK centre for environmental businesses, making it more attractive for inward investment and supporting Leicester’s ‘Environment City’ status and strategy.

The eco-town will have a vibrant and successful commercial and retail centre so that people living in the town can access work and services close to home. Jobs will be provided in the town, reducing the commuting need and enabling people to achieve a better work/life balance. We will develop a clear economic strategy, working with the local authorities, and make sure we complement commercial growth in Leicester and contribute to a wider regional economic success story.

We will support the wider development of the economy across Leicestershire by creating new jobs, providing homes linked to jobs, and making Leicestershire an increasingly attractive place to live and work. We will develop commercial facilities within the eco-town which fit with wider regional needs and ensure an appropriate balance between the town and Leicester city. We will be a supporter and enabler of more comprehensive economic development for the county. We will also bring our expertise to bear in supporting start-up and entrepreneurial business in the eco-town and where we can make a difference.

With our retail expertise and experience, we will ensure that the eco-town has community shopping facilities from the outset. No other developer would be likely to work this way. We will build in shops and essential services from the start, helping to provide the retail heart that the community needs to get established and become sustainable.

We will develop the retail centre and facilities within the eco-town to fit within the local and regional retail hierarchy. This means complementing and underpinning Leicester city by providing a balance of shops in the eco-town which serve different needs. We are also proposing innovative approaches for improving local deliveries and believe that we can help achieve more efficient local supply chains.

We are proposing retail facilities to promote local sourcing and products (not just our own) and to help support a climate of entrepreneurialism. The eco-town will provide shops and markets for local foods and products, as well as facilities and support to encourage independent traders and start-ups. We believe that a diverse local High Street will enhance the vitality and community of the town. We will design the buildings to match these commitments and to give the town a retail identity in keeping with the wider local retail hierarchy.

Question 1 - What do you think are the main issues affecting the region in terms of jobs and the economy?

A more detailed look

Employment and job creation

The eco-town has the potential to create at least 14,000 jobs in total. This is a significant number in its own right and would provide a boost to employment for Leicestershire as a whole.

Although we cannot control this process, we can create the right environment and conditions to attract employers, to support business development, to foster entrepreneurialism, and to ensure that people and businesses are given the right support.

We will encourage small businesses by developing incentives for small and start-up businesses which could include a community hub in the town centre. This would enable people to have access to information/communications systems, shared business support, and work space to suit their needs.

We will also encourage people to develop their own businesses to complement and support the eco-town. The Co-operative Group, together with our partners, have considerable experience in helping groups and individuals to develop social enterprise businesses by providing financial and business advice through the Group's own financial services team.

We also believe in the eco-town's potential to help Leicester become a UK centre for environmental and sustainable businesses.

Question 2 – Do you think that prioritising the development of small businesses is important? Do you have any ideas or views on how more can be done to support small businesses?

Capitalising on opportunities for 'green business'

The challenge of responding to climate change is creating opportunities for business. Companies that can help reduce CO₂ emissions through the products and services they provide, or can help people to improve their carbon footprint in other ways, are seeing significant growth.

We believe that **the eco-town can become a centre for UK excellence** in this respect – and realise the commercial benefits.

The eco-town will **create jobs in areas including energy, waste management, ecological initiatives, and environmental Research & Development**. We intend that other companies will see the opportunities involved in being part of a community that puts environmental issues first.

Question 3 - What are your views on developing Leicester as a centre of excellence for environmental and sustainable business?

Flexible and home working

The opportunity to start with a blank sheet of paper means that we can plan the eco-town with the right infrastructure in place from the start. Part of the benefit of installing high-quality IT and communications systems from the outset means that both **homes and workplaces can be networked with modern fibre and broadband connectivity**.

This **connectivity is fundamental to the way we see the town working**, with people enjoying the freedom to work from home, from offices, and remotely through wi-fi access across the town.

Home working will be actively encouraged to reduce the need for people to travel outside the area for work. For this reason, we will be designing the new homes to the highest possible standards of IT connectivity.

Question 4 - What do you think the most important issues are in terms of communications technology and flexible/home working? Are there any specific ideas that you think we should be looking at?

A vibrant local centre and an attractive choice of shops

We are proposing that the eco-town has its own retail centre and facilities to meet the needs of its residents, while also complementing the broader range of retail facilities in Leicester.

We are proposing that the town should have a traditional High Street, with a mix of shops and facilities. We want to **encourage choice and diversity on the High Street** and, by retaining the freeholds of retail buildings, we can control how these are leased and to which businesses. This means that we can look at options for short-term and subsidised leases for local start-up businesses, for example, helping them to become established in their first years of trading.

Our proposals also include linking local food production to local shops and markets. We are looking at the option to **establish a Farmers' Market** as a location where the produce and

goods we grow locally can be sold, as well as being a hub for other like-minded retailers who want to be part of this approach. We are proposing to create a 'market square' within the eco-town which will also act as an important community hub. At the same time, we would also look to use our support to help establish a Farmers' Market for Leicester itself, helping to bring fresh and locally sourced products into the city centre.

Question 5 - Do you agree with our approach for wanting to create a vibrant High Street and mix of shops? What type of shops and retail facilities do you think are important?

Shops and services from the start

Just as we recognise the need to put essential service infrastructure in place from the start, so too we appreciate the value of having shops in place at the outset. **Because of who we are, we can establish Co-operative Group businesses from the outset, in a way which other developers would not be able to achieve.**

For example, this means putting a Co-operative foodstore, bank and pharmacy in place from the outset and accepting that these could be loss-leading ventures until the town has grown further (within the planned phased development). We will do this because we see the value for the community – and for the town – in creating a local High Street and encouraging people to use it from the start. The eco-town will then develop with a mix of retail and services, not simply offering a co-operative choice.

Jobs in construction

Building the eco-town will demand a significant amount of labour and resources. As well as this generating economic benefits locally, it will also provide the opportunity for these building, engineering and construction companies to develop skills and expertise which they can use more widely.

We see this as **an opportunity for local businesses to gain a springboard from the eco-town and be able to establish market-leading experience and skills over competitors working in the sector.**

Jobs in maintenance

A town of up to 15,000 homes will generate significant demand for maintenance-related jobs. Whether that is in maintaining homes or, more widely, in maintaining commercial and community facilities, there will be a significant number of jobs created locally. We want to see local people filling those jobs so that, alongside the high-technology jobs linked to

environmental Research & Development, there will also be a wide span of jobs and opportunities for people in facilities management (FM) and other maintenance-related areas.

Jobs in farming

The Co-operative Group is the UK's biggest farmer and we will continue to farm our land south east of Leicester. Part of the uniqueness of the way we are proposing to develop our land is to combine development of homes alongside use of the land for agriculture. More details can be found in our 'Environment' consultation paper.

Because we will continue to farm our land – and because we are proposing to expand the variety of crops and produce that we grow here to suit the needs of the eco-town – we will be expanding jobs in agriculture.

The approach we are proposing, which includes new methods of farming in order to achieve a better relationship between local food production and local food consumption, is also one we believe will deliver significant benefits in terms of jobs and the economy.

We believe that new jobs can be created in the 'agricultural supply chain', by which we mean more local markets/retail facilities, more people involved in food production, preparation and retailing, and more overall economic value from the land we will continue to farm within the eco-town.

Question 6 - What views do you have on creating jobs locally? Do you think we should be looking to support job creation in specific sectors? If so, which ones?

Question 7 – Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper or other aspects of employment and economy which you do not feel are addressed here?

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 '**Employment**' 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 climate change 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.
