

The Co-operative Group
Response

Draft Planning Policy
Statement: Eco-towns

Document 6

**The Co-operative Group Response to Leicester City
Council Full Council Report, 26th March 2009**

April 2009

an **ECO-TOWN**
for **LEICESTERSHIRE**

The Co-operative Group response to Leicester City Council Full Council Report 26th March 2009: Consultation on Draft Planning Policy Statement on Eco-towns.

The Draft Planning Policy Statement on Eco-towns (EPPS) was considered by Leicester City Council (the City Council) at a full Council meeting on 26 March 2009, This followed on from the Council's resolution on 29th October 2008 to support the proposal subject to it meeting five tests. The purpose of this response by The Co-operative Group (the promoter) is to make some detailed comments in respect of the eco-town five tests set out by the City Council and a number of transport and financial matters set out in the Report Addendum.

The Five Tests

Appendix 2 of the City Council Report sets out five tests which the Council require the promoter to meet in order for the proposed eco-town for Leicestershire to be acceptable. The five tests are set out in bold below along with the promoter's explanation of its intention and commitment to meeting them.

Leicester City Council Test 1 Housing

That there is at least 30% affordable housing brought forward as part of the scheme. We would welcome discussions with the Co-op/English Partnerships on bringing affordable housing funding into regeneration intervention areas of the city as a means of increasing the viability of the regeneration schemes and producing a better social mix of housing. In this respect we would ask Government to contribute towards delivering additional affordable housing provision to help meet identified housing needs.

Promoter Response

The Co-operative Group has committed to providing 30% of the total number of homes as affordable homes. With a scheme of 15,000 homes, this would amount to 4,500 affordable units. The tenure and size would be designed to meet identified requirements: current analysis of housing need within the Leicestershire Housing Market Area indicates that 75% of the units should be for rent with the remainder provided as intermediate housing, including shared equity homes.

The Group is keen to investigate innovations to deliver permanently affordable homes in support of wider regeneration priorities in Leicester. It would be willing to provide a proportion of these units in Leicester city instead of the eco-town and explore mechanisms to enable these units to be delivered faster than the eco-town in order to support city centre regeneration if this approach was supported by local authorities and relevant stakeholders.

Leicester City Council Test 2 -Community Facilities

We believe the Pennbury proposal produced the necessary community provision and the advantage of the Eco-town concept is that it is potentially more likely to produce the necessary level of community facilities than the Sustainable Urban Extension model. The Council look forward to discussion as to how the community facilities in Pennbury and the city can work together in the long term.

Promoter Response

The eco-town will contain the full range of community facilities required to support a growing community, including schools, shops, restaurants, leisure facilities, health centres, community orchards and gardens, community centres, faith buildings and

civic buildings. The template Section 106 requirements for the eco-town are set out in the Financial Viability Study undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers on behalf of the Government. These provide an indication of the facilities that would be included within the eco-town but the promoter looks forward to undertaking further masterplanning work and to continuing discussions with local authorities and a wide range of stakeholder groups such as Sport England and the Council of Faiths, to identify particular local or sub-regional requirements, existing shortfalls in provision or overprovision and appropriate mechanisms for delivering and managing this infrastructure. It is the promoter's intention that community facilities will complement those in adjoining areas and that, in order to optimise the use of facilities, residents in existing local communities will be able to access eco-town facilities using sustainable travel choices. The opportunity for the location of sub-regional, regional or nationally important facilities in the eco-town will be explored, particularly in view of potential regeneration benefits to the Leicester City region.

Leicester City Council Test 3. Environment

The City Council welcomes the commitment to retain the vast majority of the total site area for open space and countryside uses including the creation of the Great Park. The Council further recognises that the size of the proposal presents an exciting opportunity to create a critical mass for the development of environmental technologies in house building and community development. Leicester City Council wishes to be at the cutting edge of the development and the use of these 21st Century technologies in partnership with the Co-op/English Partnerships (now Homes and Communities Agency).

The City Council welcomes the Co-op/English Partnerships' (now Homes and Communities Agency) commitment to firstly Code 4 and eventually Code 6 sustainable homes and the vision for Pennbury, as a community, to eventually become a net exporter of energy. The City Council recognises that by providing for a sustainable amount of the housing need in Leicestershire that this proposal will help to combat unplanned and undesirable housing "creep" in towns and villages across the country.

Promoter Response

The Co-operative Group intends that the eco-town will pioneer innovations and deliver new benchmarks in many areas of development including: environmental technologies, housing delivery, education, regeneration, food and farming, health and wellbeing, community development and transport. It recognises that in order to optimise their benefits, these innovations should be capable of replication in the mainstream and shared with a wider community than just the eco-town. It will share its intellectual capital in the development of a new settlement, including new environmental technologies with the the City Council.

Leicester City Council Test 4. - Transport

We welcome the planned park and ride site in Oadby and the other public transport contributions. Leicester City Council welcomes the ambition by the Co-op and English Partnerships in developing new attitudes to transport but believe that only by putting a tram system as the "Jewel in the Crown" of transport measures will Pennbury truly be able to achieve the change in attitudes to transport necessary for the 21st Century. We would also ask that there is further examination of the impact of Pennbury and other Sustainable Urban Extensions on the A47 corridor into the city.

Promoter Response

The Co-operative Group's transport team prepared a transport strategy which was subsequently tested by Leicestershire County Council and its consultants, with input from Leicester City Council, the Highways Agency and The Co-operative Group. The County Council tested a number of different scenarios for its own purposes. The scenario, which included the Co-operative Group's full range of transport proposals, indicates that the proposed bus-based transport system supported by parking restraint and Smarter Choices transport innovations offered a potentially viable public transport solution for the eco-town. Notwithstanding this, The Co-operative Group considers that it is appropriate to seek the optimum benefit for the Leicester city region from the eco-town proposal and, if shortlisted and supported by the on-going regional and local plan reviews, has committed to providing £5 million to support the funding of a sub-regional transport study to explore the best solution not just for the eco-town but the Leicestershire sub-region as a whole. This sub-regional study will determine the most viable and optimum solution and therefore it is too early to say whether this will involve a tram system. However, The Co-operative Group is committed to transferring the funding for the bus rapid transit system from the eco-town into an alternative solution if an alternative is assessed to be deliverable and more appropriate. Further examination of the impact of the eco-town and other Sustainable Urban Extensions on the A47 corridor would be carried out as part of the sub-regional study. It is also anticipated that significant transportation assessment work would be undertaken by the Regional Planning Body as part of Options testing for the East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Partial Review.

Leicester City Council Test 5.- Regeneration

We believe that the combination of introduction of a tram system, building and construction jobs, spin offs from environment house building technologies and potential for affordable housing support for regeneration schemes in the city means that there is great potential for Pennbury to boost the regeneration of Leicester and surrounding areas. Furthermore we would want to see that Pennbury is developed in such a way as it faces towards the City of Leicester and grows as a sister town to the city. We do believe that as they stand there needs to be further work on the employment models for Pennbury and they need to be refined and co-ordinated with proposed employment development in the City in order to be suitable robust.

Promoter Response

The Co-operative Group in its response to Tests 1 to 4 has indicated its commitment to working with the City Council to optimise the regeneration benefits of its housing, employment and transport solutions for the eco-town. The proximity of the proposed scheme to Leicester city centre provides a great opportunity to deliver these benefits and reinforce a close relationship between the city and a new town within its catchment. The proposed rapid transit system from the eco-town to the city will not only provide for anticipated journeys to work into the city but will facilitate and encourage leisure-based journeys for shopping and recreation. Facilities in the eco-town will be designed to reflect its lower order role in the settlement hierarchy and both formal and informal links will be created between the eco-town and the city in order to reinforce their relationship: for example federation will be sought between the eco-town schools and those in the city as a means of sharing educational benefit but also building a relationship between young people in the two locations.

The employment strategy for the eco-town has been based on the priorities of the East Midlands Regional Economic Strategy, focusing on inward investment from knowledge-based sectors, and the construction sector in particular, with a strategy for local procurement, encouraging innovation and promoting entrepreneurship. It is

estimated that around two thirds of the eco-town jobs will be generated by the town itself, with the remaining third being targeted at the sustainable construction sector. However, The Co-operative Group recognises that further work is required on this employment strategy in order to demonstrate that the inward investment in the sustainable construction technology sector is deliverable and to ensure that it dovetails with successful education and employment strategies for the sub-region. The promoter is committed to working in collaboration with the new Economic Development Company, the Regional Development Agency, local planning authorities, educational establishments and businesses to ensure that the potential of the eco-town to act as a catalyst for new jobs, skills and opportunity is fully realised – bringing benefits across the City Region.

Leicester City Council Additional Test - Planning

The City Council in its conditional support for Pennbury would ask that Government takes this proposal through a Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy process so that the figures and assumptions behind Pennbury can be examined in detail and that equal rigour is applied to Pennbury and the potential Sustainable Urban Extensions in Leicester and Leicestershire.

The City Council further believes that the proposal should not be reduced from its current level of 15,000 homes as the number is necessary to address housing need and any less would reduce the viability of the provision of the community and transport infrastructure necessary for the Eco-town to thrive. Leicester City Council would welcome discussion with Government and the other local authorities involved to set up robust joint governance of planning arrangements. The nature of these arrangements will determine whether the conditions stated above are adhered to and therefore are crucial towards any continuing City Council support for the Pennbury scheme

Additional Test - Promoter Response

This additional condition is directed towards the Government and not the promoter, however, The Co-operative Group supports the Council's request that the scheme be properly scrutinised and that all alternative options, including the eco-town, are assessed on an equal footing. The promoter considers that 15,000 homes is an appropriate scale for the proposal and that by default a smaller settlement would require a reduced level of community and transport infrastructure and that inevitably development will be phased over a number of different plan periods. The planning system will therefore have an effective control on the proposal to ensure that it is delivered successfully, phase by phase.

Report Addendum

Joint Halcrow Strategic Assessment

The Council Report refers to the Strategic Assessment undertaken for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston, Leicester City and Leicestershire County Councils by Halcrow (the Halcrow Report). The promoter notes that the City Council do not consider that the Halcrow Report raises any substantive issues which would alter its conditional support. The promoter has set out its concerns with the Halcrow Report in a separate document.

Transport Issues

The Council Report refers to a Transport Assessment Report (check name) produced by White Young Green (the White Young Green Report). Again, the promoter has set out its concerns with this report in a separate document.

In response to paragraph 3.1 and the City Council's Position Statement as Highway and Transport Authority in Appendix 1, the promoter would reiterate its position with regard to a tram. Transport modelling work undertaken by Leicestershire County Council with input from Leicester City Council, the Highways Agency and The Co-operative Group indicates that the proposed bus-based transport system supported by parking restraint and Smarter Choices transport innovations offered a potentially viable public transport solution for the eco-town. Notwithstanding this, The Co-operative Group considers that it is appropriate to seek the optimum benefit for the Leicester city region from the eco-town proposal and, if shortlisted, has committed to funding £5 million for a sub-regional transport study to explore the best for solution for not just the eco-town but the Leicestershire sub-region as a whole. This sub-regional study will determine the most viable and optimum solution and therefore it is too early to say whether this will involve a tram system. However, The Co-operative Group is committed to transferring the funding for the bus rapid transit system from the eco-town into an alternative solution if an alternative is assessed to be deliverable and more appropriate.