

## Statement from The Co-operative Group

### **LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITIES URGED TO DISCOUNT FATALLY FLAWED HALCROW ECO-TOWN REPORT**

The Co-operative Group has published a paper today (Monday 19 January) urging members of Leicestershire local authorities to ensure they have a true understanding of the facts before they form a view on the eco-town.

The call responds to a report by consultants Halcrow and aims to correct misleading and erroneous claims contained in its assessment on the Group's proposals for the Eco-town for Leicestershire.

The Group is concerned that the four local authorities who commissioned the report will be misled into reaching an ill informed decision ahead of the Government's eco-town consultation which closes on 6 March.

A comprehensive review carried out by the Group has revealed a series of fundamental flaws in the report – resulting in a misleading and incomplete assessment on the viability of the eco-town.

Commenting on the report, Ruairidh Jackson, Head of Planning and Property Strategy for the Co-operative Group, said:

“Our close look at Halcrow's work has uncovered a host of misleading inaccuracies, errors and omissions. It's essential that people forming opinions on the proposals have access to full and accurate information. We are publishing our response to clarify matters and to ensure that people are properly informed.

“We would have welcomed the opportunity to meet the Halcrow team to answer their questions and assist with their research but Halcrow was denied this chance by the commissioning authorities. We genuinely welcome constructive criticism and any feedback to help us improve the eco-town's design but have been very disappointed with this report. Obviously, we support the rights of local authorities to make any representations they see fit, but we do not believe that these should be based on misinformation or hearsay.”

The Group has also highlighted misconceptions about the level of detail required at this stage of the planning process. The Halcrow report criticises a lack of information in the Group's Masterplan Vision. This criticism ignores the fact that the proposals are at the earliest stage of the planning process and in fact include significantly more detail than proposals for 90,000 houses in Leicestershire considered through the last Regional Spatial Strategy – a stage beyond where the eco-town presently sits.

The assessment by the Co-operative Group shows that key inaccuracies include:

- **Rapid Transit Route (RTR)** – analysis by Halcrow is based on the incorrect route for the bus and tram options. The report also assumes that massive road widening will be required on the A6 with an impact on ‘hundreds of properties’. Work undertaken by the Group has proved that the scheme is deliverable without the need for such road widening.
- **Transport modelling work** – the Halcrow report appears to be based on out of date, interim studies carried out by the Group. As a consequence, conclusions reached by Halcrow are invalid.
- **Smarter Choices** – the Halcrow report fails to take into account the Smarter Choices programme (which includes personalised travel planning and management ideas) – a key element of the eco-town for Leicestershire transport strategy.
- **Housing** – the report assumes that housing provided in the eco-town would be additional to that provided through the normal planning process. Government has made it very clear that this is not the case. Housing delivered in eco-towns will form part of the regional housing requirement.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment** – the Halcrow report claims that the Masterplan Vision document is not supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment (ES), demonstrating a failure to understand the nature of the eco-town process as set out by the Government (an ES is not required as part of the eco-town short-listing process). The Group is committed to the preparation of an ES at the appropriate stage in the planning process.
- **Ecology** – the report incorrectly states that the Group’s work is only based on desk-based analysis of the main environmental assets of the sites. This is incorrect. In 2008, the Group carried out a series of ecological surveys at the site.
- **Landscape and design** – the report makes a number of sweeping and unsubstantiated claims about the potential landscape impacts of the eco-town.
- **Employment** – the report ignores the adopted policies in regional and sub-regional economic strategies, on which the eco-town proposal is firmly based. As a consequence, the Halcrow study findings contradict approved city and county plans.

end

#### Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the Co-operative Group’s response to the Halcrow report will be available on Tuesday 20 January on the eco-town consultation website at [www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop](http://www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop)

#### For further information contact:

**Paul Browne, Ben Copithorne**  
**Camargue PR**  
**Tel: 0207 636 7366**

**Dave Smith**  
**PR Manager – Corporate**  
**The Co-operative Group**  
**Tel: 0161 827 5614**

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