

News release from The Co-operative Group

CONVENIENCE, AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE: ECO-TOWN PROPOSALS ON TRANSPORT UNVEILED

The Co-operative Group is putting convenience, affordability and choice at the heart of its transport strategy for the proposed eco-town for Leicestershire, making walking, cycling and using public transport the norm.

This, the Group argues, is no 'wild ambition' – it is achievable. Its proposals explain how and the public is being asked for its views on them.

“People need to be given realistic alternatives to the car that are attractive, reliable, safe and affordable,” said Graham Ramsbottom, Head of Land Development and Ventures for The Co-operative Estates. “We know that we need to design the eco-town so people do not need to drive on a daily basis. Car use can no longer be considered ‘care free’: with the cost of fuel, carbon emissions and increasing congestion, it is not the route to achieving quality of life in the future.

“Providing attractive travel choices and the knowledge of how to get the most out of them is fundamental – this will encourage positive and healthier decisions. People can’t just bury their heads in the sand and pretend that it does not affect them. We all have to be part of the solution.”

The Co-operative Group is drawing up transport proposals that put people and public transport first. The Group will be working closely with the local authorities on transport solutions but the feasibility of a high-quality, fast, regular and efficient bus system has already been tested and would work. All dedicated routes would be future-proofed to allow the introduction of a tram system.

The Group’s “best practice” design approach means that cars will not be given priority on roads in the eco-town. Innovations could include a community service charge which could be rebated to residents using public transport and designating important routes onto the local road network ‘car free’ during peak times.

It is not just eco-town residents who will benefit from more travel choices but also those living along routes from the town and key destinations in the area, such as Leicester city centre, Fosse Park, Oadby and Wigston and Market Harborough.

The Group is also investigating the option for a new railway station on its land at Great Glen with capacity for passengers and freight.

More details on the proposals are in the second of the Group’s consultation papers which will be published in the run up to public exhibitions in June. The paper, entitled “Transport – making better choices” sets out a range of proposals and invites people to provide their views, opinions and feedback.

The Group's proposals include:

- Making buses easier and more convenient to use by providing 'real time' information. Not only will people be able to see when the bus is arriving displayed on electric signs at stops but information can also be accessed in people's homes and on their mobile phones. This information will reduce the amount of time people have to wait at bus stops, making journey times shorter and more comfortable.
- A dedicated travel company, established and funded by the Co-operative Group, responsible for making sure that our transport proposals are put in place and developed appropriately. This approach will ensure that the transport solutions for the town evolve as the town's needs change and are always standard setting.
- Park & Ride facilities on the A6 and A47 that will be 'dry in, dry out', meaning that people park under cover and do not have to chance getting wet when transferring from their car to the Park & Ride bus. To make Park & Ride even more attractive, the Group is also looking to provide helpful services like childcare, a convenience store, dry cleaning, internet access and a recycling centre at the Park & Ride site. This way, people can combine several errands into a single journey.
- Expanding existing cycle and footpaths into and across the eco-town as part of making walking and cycling easier and safer. Many cycle and footpaths will be physically separated from roads to keep people and bikes apart from traffic and there will be covered, secure and well-lit cycle parking throughout the eco-town. The proposals also include linking new cycle routes into the National Cycle Network which crosses the site and making more of the network.
- Designing transport hubs in the town close to shops, schools, community facilities and the destinations people want to get to. The opportunity to plan from scratch means that the town can be designed with people and transport in mind.
- Car sharing schemes and car clubs to provide a vehicle for those journeys that will only ever be most convenient by car. Car clubs, for example, provide people with access to a car on demand on an all-inclusive, pay-by-the-hour basis without the hassle and overheads of owning and running a car. It is unlikely that households will become completely car free but it would mean that car ownership would no longer be a necessity.
- Developing integrated ticketing with the local authorities and partners in Leicester to make it easier and more affordable to reach local and regional destinations using just one ticket, available at stops or electronically via mobile phones.
- Gas and hybrid buses with clean fuel engines and minimal CO2 emissions. The modern bus fleets would also have the latest in security systems, making bus journeys a safe and convenient choice at all times of day and night.

"Some people fear the impact of our eco-town on the local road network – this is an emotive issue and addressing it head-on is central to the development of our transport strategy," added Graham Ramsbottom. "It is important for us to enable people to get around quickly and conveniently. Our strategy starts with

designing the town to reduce the need for people to regularly travel long distances, putting jobs, homes and services close together where people can easily access them by bike, bus or on foot.

“We will be improving the road network and public transport to the east of Leicester for all residents, not just those living within the eco-town. As part of this ‘bigger picture’ solution, the Group is talking to local authorities and its partners about how this can be best achieved.

“We must get the transport solution for the town right,” he added. “We will need to keep ahead in our thinking, continually evolving best practice. The right solution now may not be the right solution in twenty years time: we must be able to respond to changing circumstances. These plans have to be right in terms of a successfully planned and delivered eco-town – we need to provide evidence that we can manage traffic levels and provide workable public transport alternatives.”

The Group is encouraging people to find out more about its proposals on transport and mobility, as well as on other ‘themes’ for the eco-town, by visiting the consultation website (www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop) and by attending the public exhibitions, which start on Tuesday 10 June.

The Group is partnering with English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency, on the project. English Partnerships owns a proportion of the total landholdings covered by the eco-town submission.

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Notes to editors:

1. Further background on the Co-operative Group is available at www.co-operative.coop.
2. Other useful websites with information about sustainable communities include:
The Town and Country Planning Association
<http://www.tcpa.org.uk/>
The Academy for Sustainable Communities
<http://www.ascskills.org.uk/pages/home>
The Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment
<http://www.princes-foundation.org/>
3. The Group is an acknowledged leader in sustainable development. Voted Britain’s most ethical brand in 2006, we have also received the Queen’s Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development, the Renewable Energy Association’s Pioneer Award and Business Commitment to the Environment’s Peter Parker Award for Environmental Leadership.
4. English Partnerships is the national regeneration agency, supporting high quality sustainable growth in England. A non-departmental public body, it is sponsored by the Communities and Local Government

department (CLG). English Partnerships owns around 80 hectares of land to the south of Great Glen which is included in the proposals.

5. Midlands Co-operative Society, which operates stores in the Leicester area, is an independent Co-operative business, which is not involved in the eco-town proposal.

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