

News release from The Co-operative Group

ECO-TOWN - A NEW DIRECTION IN LEARNING FOR LIFE Community will create up to 14,000 jobs – and boost city's environment status

The Co-operative Group has set out the learning, employment and economic structures that will make its proposed eco-town for Leicestershire an asset to the region – and provide a major boost for Leicester's environment city status.

A new co-operative model for education will provide a school place for every child in the community and an integrated school curriculum will unite primary, secondary and adult learning provision in the town to improve educational effectiveness. The Group is also exploring ways to establish effective pre-school facilities and ways to encourage flexible working by locating pre-school places near to key employment sites and transport hubs.

The Group plans that the town itself, which will have between 12,000 and 15,000 homes, will create up to 10,000 jobs (of the 14,000 total). A significant proportion of these jobs would be in the sustainable sector including energy, waste management, ecology and environmental research and development. The balance of the 14,000 jobs is expected to be created through linked opportunities.

The proposals are set out in two new eco-town consultation theme papers – on education/skills and employment/economic vitality – being published this week on the eco-town website, www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop.

And, in the run-up to a series of public exhibitions on the eco-town held in the area next week, the Group has also published its initial submission document, which was provided to the Government eight months ago as the selection process for eco-town sites got underway.

The two consultation theme papers set out a range of proposals which will play a key role in building a successful community. They include:

- Developing the town in several phases, establishing schools, shops and other services from the beginning and expanding them as the town grows. This will ensure, from the beginning, that it is a self-supporting community with facilities which complement those in surrounding urban areas.
- Providing up to 14,000 jobs in total, approximately 60 per cent of which will be filled by residents of the town, at the same time making places of work in the town easily accessible to the community to minimise travelling time.
- Using the construction of the eco-town itself to help local businesses establish market-leading skills and experience in sustainable technologies.

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- Attracting inward investment to the town by creating a culture of innovation and excellence in sustainability through the design and construction of the town itself. The community will provide skilled employment to complement and support that already supplied in the region.
- Encouraging small businesses and entrepreneurs through the use of incentives and adaptable business premises.
- Providing the town with a multi-function, high-capacity broadband network which will support businesses and home-working and provide a community learning facility, supporting education at all ages and giving access to training and study resources for the adult population.
- Providing a school curriculum at all stages which puts emphasis on the science and practical application of sustainability and underpinning this with an academy of sustainable technology which would share, through a co-operative structure, its teaching expertise in this field with other schools in the area.
- Providing an environmental information business support and networking centre in the town to help people learn more about sustainability and inform them about making more sustainable lifestyle choices supported by a Smarter Choices transport and management business.
- Empowering parents to have a major input into the way schools are run through the co-operative structure, which helps to give communities responsibility for school management.

Graham Ramsbottom, Head of Land Development and Ventures for The Co-operative Estates, the Group's land and property arm, explained: "Between ourselves and our partners, we have the practical experience and expertise to make all these things happen. We need now to know from local people what they think our priorities should be in these important areas of community life.

"What may not be recognised is that the Co-operative Group is already heavily involved in educational initiatives of many kinds, not least of which is the establishment of the UK's first Co-operative Trust school and other programmes such as 'Farm to Fork' which runs on our Stoughton estate and teaches children about where food comes from.

"What is clear is that the eco-town represents a major opportunity for the city and the region to seize the initiative and to establish the area as an international leader in sustainable development."

Explaining the Group's publication of its initial submission document, he added: "Now that we have developed our thinking around the eco-town vision, as we will illustrate at the public exhibitions next week, we are happy to put our initial submission document into the public domain.

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“We still have much development work to do in advance of producing a final masterplan for the eco-town and this document must be set in context as our original vision of how a new sustainable community could be developed on our land.

“That said, we have made significant progress since these submissions materials were put together as we hope to explain to people at the exhibitions. For example, the maps included in the document, which were entirely indicative then, do not reflect what people are telling us they would like to see through our ongoing consultation.

“There is a lot more work that we will be doing – and which our public consultation will support – in order to start developing spatial plans and actual ideas for how the eco-town might be laid out. We have to understand more about people’s priorities before we can put forward any realistic illustrations of what the town could look like. It’s important for people to understand this process and how the exhibitions will influence our proposals.”

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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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