

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Eco-towns

The Minister for Housing (the Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP): I am today announcing the second round of consultation on eco-towns, based on the draft Planning Policy Statement on eco-towns, and the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal which has been carried out for the policy and the shortlisted eco-town locations.

Eco-towns have been developed in response to two major challenges – the threat of climate change and the national housing shortage. They will pioneer more sustainable living so that we can learn the lessons for future developments and help meet housing need in areas where this shortage is particularly acute.

In April, we published a short-list of proposed locations, alongside a consultation document “Living a Greener Future”. A progress report was published in July, to set out our emerging thinking on eco-town standards. The documents being published today are the next stage of consultation in delivering eco-towns successfully. They include an updated programme of shortlisted locations and a summary of responses to the earlier consultation. Copies of these documents will be deposited in the Library of the House and made available on the department’s website at www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns.

The Sustainability Appraisal indicates that there remain some important outstanding issues which need to be addressed before the draft PPS and list of locations can be finalised. Issues of sustainability, viability and deliverability remain. The eco-town requirements are challenging and I do not expect that all locations will be endorsed. I have no fixed view on the number of locations that will go forward from this process and the next stages in this ongoing assessment and consultation process will ensure that the necessary further work is completed before decisions are taken.

Draft Planning Policy Statement

The draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) sets out the standards for an eco-town and the planning policy context. The standards set out in this draft PPS are consistent with other relevant planning policies – including PPS1, PPS3 and PPS Planning and Climate Change. However, given our higher expectations for eco-towns, it goes further and sets the highest ever environmental standards for new development, reflecting the aspirations we described in the consultation document “Living a Greener Future.”

The standards set by the eco-towns PPS, on which we are now consulting are, as a package, considerably more stretching than existing standards for development. Eco-towns will be the UK’s first zero carbon towns: over a year the net carbon dioxide emissions from all energy use within the buildings (homes, commercial and public sector buildings) on the developments will be zero or below. Achieving zero carbon status across all the town's buildings, will represent a significantly tougher threshold

than current national targets, pioneering the way for our policies that new homes in England should be zero carbon from 2016, and our ambition that new non-domestic buildings should be zero carbon from 2019. For homes the eco-towns standards go further, in requiring that they achieve carbon reductions (from space heating, hot water and fixed lighting) of at least 70% relative to current Building Regulations. At least 40% of the area of an eco-town will need to be greenspace – half of it publicly accessible and there are ambitious targets on waste and water. These 'hard' green targets are supported by targets designed to support and promote sustainable development and sustainable living more widely; for example, eco-towns will be unique in being built so that, except where there are natural barriers, no home will be further than 800m from a school for children aged under eleven and the design of the town will enable over half of all the trips originating in the town to be made without a car.

The draft PPS also sets out the planning process for eco-towns. Applications for eco-towns are to be considered in the same way as any other major development proposal. The development plan remains the starting point for the determination of these applications. However, where the plan is out of date then any application should be treated on its merits, taking in to account all material considerations which include the PPS.

Sustainability Appraisal and the Eco-towns programme

An Eco-Towns Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report covering the draft PPS, and the programme, including the proposed eco-town locations is also being published today. The SA report, which has been carried out by consultants Scott Wilson, identifies and evaluates the likely impact of the proposals on the local economy, community and environment and considers reasonable alternatives. It also suggests measures for improving the proposals. Taking account of the Sustainability Appraisal, and of the effect of promoters withdrawing their schemes from the programme, we will be consulting on the following 12 shortlisted locations in this next stage. They have been assessed in the Sustainability Appraisal in three bands:

A: locations that are generally suitable for an eco-town;

B: locations that might be suitable subject to meeting specific planning and design objectives;

C: locations that are only likely to be suitable as an eco-town with substantial and exceptional innovation.

- A Rackheath (Greater Norwich)
- B Pennbury
- B Newton-Bingham (Rushcliffe)
- B Middle Quinton
- B St Austell
- B Rossington
- B North East Elsenham
- B Marston Vale
- B Ford

- B Bordon-Whitehill
- B North West Bicester (alternative to Weston Otmoor).
- C Weston Otmoor

The shortlist includes two local authority schemes, proposed as reasonable alternatives in the course of the Sustainability Appraisal, at Rackheath (Norwich) and North West Bicester (Cherwell). In the case of the two areas of further review identified in April, in Leeds City Region we have agreed to pursue separately the local authorities' proposal for an urban eco-community of similar scale which would pilot eco-town standards, while at Rushcliffe, the Newton/ Bingham scheme has been included for consultation and assessment.

Communications

Public awareness and involvement is crucial to success in this programme. We want to make it as easy as possible for people to have their say in shaping these towns, particularly the first-time buyers, key workers and young families who will particularly benefit from the affordable housing. We have therefore set up a website at www.directgov.uk/ecotownshaveyoursay. This both explains the eco-town concept, and invites comments and ideas through the consultation process. We will also be holding a series of roadshows in public spaces like shopping centres near to the proposed locations. These will be interactive exhibitions and will provide the chance for people to offer their comments and views.

Both the website and the roadshows will concentrate on explaining the national standards and policy. Local scheme promoters are responsible for carrying out full consultation on the individual schemes.

Corrections

The papers published today provide an updated list and description of sites. In this context I wish to correct errors made in the written ministerial statement of 3rd April 2008, *Official Report columns 70-72WS*, made by my Rt Hon Friend the Member for Don Valley. This stated that the majority of development planned for the proposed Curborough development (now withdrawn) would take place on brownfield land. This is incorrect – the majority of the site is on greenfield land. The statement also incorrectly referred to the Weston-Otmoor site as brownfield when it is mainly greenfield. I apologise to the House for these errors.

Finally I want to make clear that while eco-towns have a unique potential for innovation they are only one part of a much wider programme of creating more sustainable communities which can respond to the challenge of climate change. Shortly we will be consulting on the definition of zero carbon for the purposes of the Government's policy that all new homes will be zero-carbon from 2016. The Government also recognises the urgent need to tackle the energy efficiency of existing homes and will shortly be consulting on measures that could help develop this market as part of its review of energy efficiency strategy overall.