



Councillor Barry Wood
Leader
Cherwell District Council
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The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP
Minister for Housing

**Department for Communities and Local
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Dear Councillor Wood,

WESTON OTMOOR ECO-TOWN : CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL VIEW ON SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF ALTERNATIVES

Thank you for your letter of 1 October to Caroline Flint setting out your Council's views on potential alternatives to the Weston Otmoor eco-town.

It is very helpful to have your Council's thinking on this issue and I recognise that this is closely linked to your work on the Local Development Framework and considering the best alternative options for growth across the district.

I very much welcome the proposal for an alternative eco-town option at North West Bicester, that you have put forward as part of the Sustainability Appraisal. A key part of the Sustainability Appraisal is that it should look at reasonable alternatives which would have the necessary critical mass to deliver and test eco-town principles and criteria. North West Bicester scores well in this regard and also fits well with your work on the LDF.

I should also make clear that we are not, as a result of the eco-towns programme, requiring authorities to increase their housing numbers by the size of the eco-town. The housing numbers for Cherwell will, as you know, be set in the framework of the South East Plan and eco-towns will need to fit with that. It also remains our approach, as you indicate, that a local authority has the option, as part of its core strategy, to adopt an eco-town or not in order to meet its housing supply requirement.

I would very much welcome working with your authority on the further development of the Bicester proposal. While the Sustainability Appraisal we have commissioned will identify the strengths of the location at a strategic level, we will need to see a more detailed conceptual study which would evaluate how the site can work as an eco-town in the light of the criteria and standards we will shortly publish.

You will appreciate that we also need to complete the assessment of the Weston Otmoor proposal and other schemes before coming to a final view on locations including North West Bicester, but in any case where a local authority is prepared to support and help deliver an eco-town I would envisage making available growth area funding on a similar basis to that which we have offered New Growth Points and for example the opportunity to bid into the Community Infrastructure Fund. As with the growth areas I would expect to make available support for delivery, which I agree is an area that will require new models and approaches. We will be setting this out in more detail as part of the next phase of work on eco-towns. I know that this issue of delivery mechanism is an area which your authority has highlighted as critical and I am keen that we do more work on it with you.

Sincerely

Margaret Beckett

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