

Committee:	Environment	Agenda Item
Date:	18th November 2008	7
Title:	Eco-Towns Consultation – Stage 2	
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Summary

The report recommends how the Council responds to the next stage of Government Consultation on Eco-Towns. The Government has addressed concerns about eco-towns not being assessed through the preparation of local development frameworks.

Recommendation

That the Committee resolve the Council responds to the Government's Eco-towns Planning Policy Statement (PPS) consultation as follows:

- (i) The Council welcomes the arrangements outlined in the Draft PPS to overcome the objections that the Council made at the previous consultation stage. The decision about the suitability of an eco-town to meet housing needs within the District should be for the Local Planning Authority to consider through the Local Development Framework.
- (ii) The eco standards outlined in the Draft PPS are supported but the Council remains to be satisfied that they could be achieved and that the national policy is capable of delivery. There is no assessment of the implications of the standards for viability in the documentation which has been provided and the feedback from the Department of Communities and Local Government consultants Price Waterhouse Cooper on the feasibility of the eco-town model should be made available for comment.

Background Papers

Letter from Department for Communities and Local Government dated 4 November 2008

Statement from the Minister for Housing (Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP)

Draft Planning Policy Statement: Eco-towns –Consultation

Eco-towns Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Draft Eco-Towns Planning Policy Statement and the Eco-towns Programme (Non technical summary)

Assessment of the Eco-towns Programme – North East Elsenham

Impact Assessment

Relevant documents can be accessed from

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/ecotowns/>

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Consultation on and Sustainability Appraisal of new plans, policies and programmes is a statutory responsibility. DCLG has put in place a three month programme of consultation on this second stage of its proposals
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	Consultation being undertaken in accordance with the Government's Code of Practice.
Finance	N/A
Human Rights	N/A
Legal implications	N/A
Sustainability	Sustainability Impacts are assessed as integral part of the process.
Ward-specific impacts	Elsenham with potential transportation impacts over wider area.
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

- 1 The Council made its response to the Government's Eco-towns-Living A Greener Future consultation document following a report to this committee in June. The council objected to the consultation primarily on the basis that LPA's should determine through the LDF whether there were any local circumstances that would favour an eco-town as an appropriate way of delivering housing to identified needs and achieve a quality and sustainable development.
- 2 On 4 November the housing minister launched the second stage of the eco-town consultation programme with the publication of a number of key documents including the draft Eco-towns Planning Policy Statement (PPS), the sustainability appraisal and an updated shortlist of locations under consideration. A 13 week consultation on the documents will now run until 19 February 2009. This will be followed by publication of the final PPS and a list of locations with potential to be an eco-town. DCLG are planning a series of consultation events in November and early December and local events will be

held at Bishops Stortford on the 10 November and Saffron Walden on the 11 November. People can also make comments via the DCLG website.

- 3 The draft PPS includes in annex A the shortlist of locations that are still being considered for the Eco-towns Programme. North East Elsenham is included, but Hanley Grange is not being taken forward because the promoters have withdrawn the scheme from the programme.
- 4 The draft PPS sets out the standards that all eco-towns will be expected to meet. These include:
 - Zero carbon (ie net CO² emissions from all energy use within the buildings will be zero or below)
 - Carbon reductions in homes will be 70% relative to current building regulations
 - 40% of the land area will be greenspace, of which half should be publicly accessible
 - No home should be further than 800m from a school for children under 11
 - Design will enable over half the trips originating within the town to be made without a car.
 - At least 30% affordable housing
 - Ambitious in terms of water efficiency
 - Reduce and avoid flood risk

Schemes are not expected to be entirely self sufficient but as a minimum there should be access to one employment opportunity per new dwelling that is easily reached by walking, cycling and/or public transport. How well the development is meeting these eco standards will need to be monitored through indicators in the Annual Monitoring Report.

- 5 The government will decide in a parallel exercise which schemes will get backing or financial support from Government through funding of associated infrastructure or partner public bodies. The Government does not consider that the availability of financial support is a factor that LPAs should consider when making a planning decision on a particular scheme.
- 5 The draft PPS clarifies how the government sees eco-towns sitting within the current planning framework and also how LPA's should consider planning applications for this type of development. Where a Core Strategy is in preparation, LPAs will specifically address the distribution of housing, and where an eco-town location is in the eco-town programme they should include it as an option for consideration. However, there is no requirement to allocate an eco-town if a better way of meeting future needs exist. The adopted plan should set out the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives.
- 6 If an application is submitted for a site which is not allocated then it should be considered in the usual way. The development plan remains the starting point

and PPSs including the Eco-towns PPS will be material considerations. Where a development plan is up to date the LPA may refuse the application on the grounds that the plan provides for all the housing needed and has been found “sound”. The LPA is not required to approve an eco-town application because it has been identified as a suitable location, but the fact that it has been identified should be given material weight. There will need to be an approved master plan for any scheme and it is suggested that there should be a presumption in favour of the original master plan especially where subsequent applications materially alter or negatively impact on the integrity of the original scheme.

- 7 The Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Eco Towns programme focussed primarily on the 15 shortlisted locations. Hanley Grange has been included in the assessment although it is acknowledged that this has been withdrawn by the promoter. The sustainability of each location is graded A-C with reference to a series of sustainability indicators. North East Elsenham, is graded B – location might be suitable subject to meeting specific planning and design objectives. Its key strengths are identified as: the green ring and its role for amenity, nature conservation, food production and drainage; proposals for new bus services linking adjacent settlements; high sustainability standards for new housing; and innovative proposals for community management. The key weaknesses identified are: location within a water stressed area; greenfield location; capacity constraints on local roads; unsuitability of local roads for walking/cycling and potential to change setting and character of historic villages. Only two of the locations are graded A – generally suitable for an eco-town (one of these: Manby is not longer being promoted), most are graded B. There are some technical points in the sustainability appraisal relating to water resources and water quality and possible impacts on the Colne Estuary and Blackwater Estuary SPAs under the Habitats Assessment which need some clarification. Officers will discuss these further with the consultants who carried out the assessment.
- 8 The Impact Assessment includes estimates of the costs and benefits of the proposed policy requirements but further information is needed on how these impact on viability.

Conclusions

- 9 The arrangements outlined in the Draft PPS overcome the objections that the Council made at the previous stage because the decision about the suitability of an eco-town to meet housing needs within the District is now left to the LPA to consider through the Local Development Framework.
- 10 The eco standards outlined in the Draft PPS are supported but the Council remains to be satisfied that they could be achieved and that the national policy is capable of delivery.

11 Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Eco-town PPS is not soundly based	3. Information still required on viability and deliverability	3. LPA will need to carry out further assessments	Respond to DCLG, including advice on the obligations that would be needed to support any proposal Technical assessments as part of LDF Appraisal of Transport Assessment, Environmental Statement, Flood Risk Assessment that would accompany any planning application

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

