

CABINET

12TH JUNE 2008

**ECO-TOWNS: LIVING A GREENER FUTURE – RESPONSE TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES & LOCAL GOVERNMENT
CONSULTATION**

(Report by Head of Planning Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2007 the Housing Green Paper announced the Government's intention to deliver 10 new 'eco-towns' as part of its ambitious initiative to build an additional 3 million new homes by 2020. At the same time the Government published the 'Eco-Town Prospectus' setting out specific criteria that would be applied to consideration of these proposals and invited landowners and developers to make appropriate submissions for further consideration. The Government received a total 57 bids in response to this initiative and it has subsequently reduced those down to a current short-list of 15 proposals from which 10 'winning' bids will be selected later this year.
- 1.2 The Government is now consulting in respect of the short-listed proposals and as one of the short-listed sites is within Cambridgeshire, on a Greenfield site at Hanley Grange near Hinxton in South Cambridgeshire, it is important that this Council now considers the strategic planning issues related to the initiative and responds to the consultation on that basis.
- 1.3 Because of the potential implications of the proposals for the adopted planning strategy for Cambridgeshire, and for the delivery of growth within the Cambridgeshire Sub-Region, all of the Cambridgeshire Council's, and Cambridgeshire Horizons, have worked in partnership to prepare a joint response to the consultation.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Government considers that eco-towns initiative will deliver increased housing numbers in sustainable ways. The specific criteria for eco-towns stated that;
- They must be new, identifiably separate, settlements that can deliver, in addition to existing plans, at least 5,000 new homes;
 - The overall eco-town development should reach zero-carbon standards and be considered to be an exemplar in at least one aspect of environmental sustainability;
 - 'Affordable' housing should make up at least 30 to 50% of the total range and distribution of new home tenures;

- The development should deliver a good mix of other associated and related uses (including retail, business, leisure and educational facilities); and;
- A dedicated management body should be established to help develop the eco-town and support and co-ordinate the delivery of community based services.

2.2 Overall 57 national 'bids' for new eco-towns were submitted, 20 of which were located in the East of England, 6 were located in Cambridgeshire (including proposed sites at Hanley Grange, Six-Mile Bottom, Mereham and Waterbeach) and 2 were located in Huntingdonshire (in respect of proposed sites at Alconbury Airfield and Connington Airfield). This Council, and in partnership with the other Cambridgeshire Council's and Cambridgeshire Horizons, made representations to the Government regarding the potential unsuitability of all of these 'bids' and those submissions have mostly been successful with only the Hanley Grange proposal being taken forward to the short-listing stage.

2.3 Accordingly, whilst none of the short listed sites are located in Huntingdonshire, it is considered important that this Council continues to be aware of the progress of the eco-town selection process, in case subsequent further or previously rejected 'proposals' should come forward in Huntingdonshire, and to continue to work in partnership with our colleagues within Cambridgeshire in order to effectively respond to this consultation and to take forward the delivery of a more coherent strategy for longer-term sustainable growth within Cambridgeshire.

3. ISSUES IN RESPECT OF THE SHORTLISTED PROPOSAL

3.1 Whilst the proposed site at Hanley Grange is located in South Cambridgeshire it is considered that its potential designation as an 'eco-town' would have related negative implications for Huntingdonshire in terms of the impacts of that upon the planning strategy for Cambridgeshire and growth strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region.

3.2 It is considered that the designation of Hanley Grange as an eco-town would;

- Unacceptably undermine the basis of the current and emerging regional, sub-regional and local planning processes. Because of the scale and scope of the development pressures facing Cambridgeshire all of the authorities in the area have combined to take forward coherent strategies for assessing and delivering sustainable forms of growth. The proposed by-passing of this 'plan-led' sustainably focussed approach, and in particular the forthcoming review of the Regional Spatial Strategy, would seriously devalue that joint approach and create unacceptable uncertainty about the strategic planning process. It is considered that the upcoming early review of the RSS will be the appropriate vehicle, within which, all of the various competing sub-regional new town and settlement proposals can be realistically evaluated.

- Inappropriately divert scarce public and private resources away from the delivery of the already committed and extremely challenging strategy for delivering sustainable growth within the Cambridge Sub-Region. Whilst significant progress is already being made in terms of meeting the challenges associated with the delivery of the required scale of new growth in Cambridgeshire there are both limited capacities within the local authorities and indeed with the housing market itself. The risk of non-delivery of the already agreed upon/committed growth strategy would obviously have serious knock-on effects, in terms of housing delivery and development viability issues, for all of the local authorities within the area.
- It is considered, that to date, a particular positive feature related to the issues of further large scale growth within Cambridgeshire has been the overall 'public acceptance' of the need for that further growth and a desire to deliver that growth in the most environmentally friendly and sustainable ways. Therefore the potential imposition of unwarranted eco-town developments, against the expressed opinions of the host community, would seriously damage and undermine that consensus.

3.3 All of the Cambridgeshire authorities, strongly supported by Cambridgeshire Horizons, have worked together in preparing a suggested joint response to this consultation (copy to follow).

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The Government's stated twin policy objectives for the eco-town initiative are to deliver additional housing growth in demonstrably sustainable ways. Having regard to the situation currently pertinent in Cambridgeshire it is considered that this rather hap-hazard response to dealing with issues of delivery would both undermine confidence in the adopted local plan-led approach, negatively impact upon existing delivery programs and therefore actually be unsustainable because of those impacts.

4.2 Whilst Huntingdonshire has, to date, been successful in terms of fighting off inappropriate and unsustainable proposals for 'eco-towns' it is important that this Council continues to positively address all of the pertinent issues because it is considered likely that those unwarranted development proposals may at some point in the future resurface.

4.3 It is important that Huntingdonshire continues to work with its partners in order to present a robust Cambridgeshire wide response to these important strategic planning issues.

5. RECOMMENDATION

5.1 That the Cabinet notes the current situation in respect of the eco-towns selection process and endorses the suggested joint Cambridgeshire response to this consultation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Eco-Towns Prospectus – DCLG July 2007

HDC response to DCLG – February 2008

Eco-towns: Living a Greener Future – DCLG April 2008

Proposed Joint Cambridgeshire Response – May 2008

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