



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
CABINET

Held: WEDNESDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2008 at 5.00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Willmott- Chair

Councillor Aqbany	Councillor Bhatti
Councillor Connelly	Councillor Cooke
Councillor Dempster	Councillor Draycott
Councillor Kitterick	

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Coley – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
Councillor Mugglestone – Leader of the Conservative Group

* * * * *

112. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

113. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda and/or declare that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

Councillor Kitterick declared that he was a member of the Co-Operative Party and had a Co-Operative bank account.

Councillor Aqbany declared that he had a Co-Operative Bank account.

Councillor Willmott declared that he was a member of the Co-Operative Party, had a £1 share in the Co-Operative Retail Society and had a Co-Operative Bank account.

Councillor Connelly declared that he had a Co-Operative Bank account, and that he was a Trade Union Official for the Communication Workers' Union, and that, if the Eco Town development went ahead, this could lead to the creation of more postal worker positions.

114. LEICESTERSHIRE ECO TOWN UPDATE

The Corporate Director, Regeneration and Culture, submitted a report that informed Cabinet that a Draft National Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Eco-Towns was expected in late October 2008, and updated Cabinet on the contents of the new "Vision" for the Leicestershire Eco-Town that was made available on the Co-Operative Group's (Co-Op's) website on 10 October 2008.

Councillor Willmott thanked Councillor Kitterick and all officers involved in preparing the report and stated that the report was being considered by Cabinet following an undertaking made at Council in response to Members' questions on the issue. He also stated that all political groups had been offered presentations by the Co-Op and there had been extensive coverage in the media. He stated, therefore, that it was the right time for Cabinet to formulate an opinion, based on current knowledge about the proposal.

Councillor Kitterick gave an outline of how the current proposals related to the five tests previously set out by Cabinet. He stressed that comments made related to opinion at this stage only, and that Cabinet reserved the right to change this opinion at a later stage, if strict conditions could not be met. He stated that discussion had taken place on whether to postpone consideration of the matter, due to the delay in production of the PPS, but it was clear that there was a need for a resolution at this stage. He also stated that neighbouring authorities may have differing priorities and views from Leicester City Council.

With regard to the five tests, Councillor Kitterick stated that the assurance that at least 30% affordable housing would be provided was welcome, and that the Council would ask Government to increase this number in order to address need in the city. Previous experience of new developments in the surrounding area had highlighted the need for the new Eco-Town to contain adequate community facilities. Regarding the impact on the environment, the contribution of at least 68% of open space, in the form of a Great Park, was a welcome contribution, and a development of 15,000 homes would enable large scale environmental technologies to be developed, and an opportunity for the town to be a net exporter of energy. Regarding transport issues, Councillor Kitterick stated that the ambition for one parking space for every two houses was welcomed and a tram system into Leicester City was essential. He stated that the scheme would have multiple advantages for the regeneration of the city, including the development of a tram system, creation of construction jobs and affordable housing provision. More work was required on assessing the employment benefits of the proposed town.

He stated that Cabinet noted the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board that the development could have a serious effect on the traffic on the A47, and would ask the Co-Op to reconsider this issue.

Councillor Kitterick stated that English Partnerships would be requested to assess the proposal through the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). This was because it would impact on other potential developments, such as Ashton Green and Thurcaston. It was important that the scheme did not reduce the

number of homes to be provided, as this would reduce the likelihood of it being able to deliver the required infrastructure. It was also important that they were required to carry out all their undertakings in line with the vision for the Eco-Town.

Councillor Kitterick, seconded by Councillor Willmott, moved that the Cabinet should support the scheme as per the comments above, and conditional on all five of Cabinet's tests being met, recognising that further work was required to achieve this.

Councillor Willmott stated that the proposal presented a responsible way of meeting housing need in the vicinity of Leicester. He also stated that it would allow local villages and towns to retain their character. The addition of a tram system, which was a requirement of Leicester City Council in order to retain its support, was a transformational opportunity, and would enable the City and the Eco-Town to work together in a beneficial way.

Opposition Leaders made the following comments regarding the proposed scheme. The recognition by Cabinet of issues surrounding the A47 were welcome, as this was a potentially serious issue that had caused the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board some concern, as it was felt that congestion would become unmanageable. The cost of the tram system had not been verified as the real cost, and caution was urged, as 25% of the cost was to be raised locally. Poor radial public transport links around the city would hinder the vision of people using the tram, and could increase car usage and the resulting pollution and use of fuel. A large open area in the latest plans was to be welcomed. A greater need for job creation existed in North West Leicestershire, rather than around the proposed site, so demand for jobs there may not be sufficient. The potential passenger station at Great Glen was now not possible, as this would delay trains to London. Leicester City Council plans for Ashton Green may be harmed by the development, but this land could be released for sale instead to raise funds for further regeneration work in the city. Care was required that sale of brownfield sites in the city would not be harmed. Although presentations had been given to political groups, there had still been insufficient debate on the issues. Although 90,000 homes were required in Leicester, it was questioned whether this was the right place to meet that demand. A development in Charnwood of a further 10,000 homes was near to the site, and there was concern that this was likely to reduce the number of homes provided in the Eco-Town. Lessons should be learned from the Hamilton development regarding the need for a full infrastructure.

Councillor Draycott stated that the scheme was not being approved at this time, Cabinet was being asked whether or not it would support it in principle, and that there were many issues that had to be resolved prior to approval. The impact on facilities within the city was also to be taken into account, such as schools, health services and leisure facilities. Discussions with the Government would take place to resolve certain issues to the Council's satisfaction.

Councillor Aqbany stated that he welcomed the report and the five tests, and stated that assurance was required regarding employment opportunities.

Councillor Kiiterick stated that the homes were likely to be built over a period of 15-20 years. He also stated that a financial package had to be devised to facilitate a tram system, and that it was hoped that the amount to be provided by the Co-Op would form part of the local contribution. With regard to brownfield sites in the city, he stated that discussions would take place with English Partnerships and the Co-Op in order to receive early funding for affordable housing in the city.

Councillor Willmott reiterated that the resolution of Cabinet would only be an indication of their support, based on current information provided, and that it was appropriate for Cabinet to formulate a view at this stage, so that future discussions could be influenced appropriately.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet agrees the following:

Having considered the issues in the Council report and having studied the documents related to this matter, Leicester City Council's Cabinet resolves that the Co-Op/English Partnership's proposal on their land south east of Leicester (known as Pennbury) is a suitable site for an Eco-Town at this stage and is supported by the City Council subject to the following conditions related to five tests set out earlier this year.

1. Housing

That there is at least 30% affordable housing brought forward as part of the scheme. We would welcome discussions with the Co-Op/English Partnerships on bringing affordable housing funding into regeneration intervention areas of the city as a means of increasing the viability of the regeneration schemes and producing a better social mix of housing. In this respect we would ask Government to contribute towards delivering additional affordable housing provision to help meet identified housing needs.

2. Community Facilities

We believe the Pennbury proposal produces the necessary community provision and the advantage of the Eco-Town concept is that it is potentially more likely to produce the necessary level of community facilities than the Sustainable Urban Extension model. The Council would look forward to discussions as to how the community facilities in Pennbury and the city can work together in the long term.

3. Environment

The City Council welcomes the commitment to retain the vast majority of the total site area for open space and countryside uses including the creation of the Great Park. The Council further

recognises that the size of the proposal presents an exciting opportunity to create a critical mass for the development of environmental technologies in house building and community development. Leicester City Council wishes to be at the cutting edge of the development and the use of these 21st Century technologies in partnership with the Co-Op/English Partnerships. The City Council welcomes the Co-Op/English Partnerships' commitment to firstly Code 4 and eventually Code 6 sustainable homes and the vision for Pennbury, as a community, to eventually become a net exporter of energy.

The City Council recognises that by providing for a sustainable amount of the housing need in Leicestershire that this proposal will help to combat unplanned and undesirable housing "creep" in towns and villages across the county.

4. Transport

We welcome the planned park and ride site in Oadby and the other public transport contributions. Leicester City Council welcomes the ambition by the Co-Op and English Partnerships in developing new attitudes to transport but believe that only by putting a tram system as the "Jewel in the Crown" of transport measures will Pennbury truly be able to achieve the change in attitudes to transport necessary for the 21st Century. We would also ask that there is further examination of the impact of Pennbury and other Sustainable Urban Extensions on the A47 corridor into the city.

5. Regeneration

We believe that the combination of introduction of a tram system, building and construction jobs, spin offs from environment house building technologies and potential for affordable housing support for regeneration schemes in the city means that there is great potential for Pennbury to boost the regeneration of Leicester and surrounding areas. Furthermore we would want to see that Pennbury is developed in such a way as it faces towards the City of Leicester and grows as a sister town to the city. We do believe that as they stand there needs to be further work on the employment models for Pennbury and they need to be refined and co-ordinated with proposed employment development in the City in order to be suitable robust.

Planning

The City Council in its conditional support for Pennbury would ask that Government takes this proposal through a Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy process so that the figures and assumptions behind Pennbury can be examined in detail and that equal rigour is applied to Pennbury and the potential Sustainable Urban Extensions in Leicester and Leicestershire.

The City Council further believes that the proposal should not be reduced from its current level of 15,000 homes as the number is necessary to address housing need and any less would reduce the viability of the provision of the community and transport infrastructure necessary for the Eco-Town to thrive.

Leicester City Council would welcome discussion with Government and the other local authorities involved to set up robust joint governance of planning arrangements. The nature of these arrangements will determine whether the conditions stated above are adhered to and therefore are crucial towards any continuing City Council support for the Pennbury scheme

115. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 5.46pm.

