



Leicester  
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED**  
**Castle Ward**

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:**  
**Cabinet**

**2 June 2008**

**Details of the Government's Eco Town policy and process**

**Report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Culture**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the Government's timetable and process in relation to Eco Towns and to provide details of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the Co-ops consultation arrangements.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 The Government published, 'Eco Towns – Living a Greener Future' in April 2008 seeking views by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008 on the Eco-Towns concept and preliminary responses to 15 potential Eco-Town sites. This included a proposal for 12-15,000 homes on a site known as Pennbury to the East of the City at Stoughton.
- 2.2 The Pennbury Eco-Town scheme proposes to create a largely freestanding settlement with ambitious environmental and sustainability standards. 40 percent of the 750 hectare site would be built on for a combination of new homes (including 4,000 affordable housing units), new land for employment use, schools and healthcare provision. Innovative transport and energy solutions are also proposed.
- 2.3 The consultation document identifies key challenges for Pennbury, firstly relating to impact on the environment and conservation, transport infrastructure and congestion, employment provision and impact on the regeneration of Leicester.
- 2.4 The City Council is currently engaged in discussions with the Coop, local authorities and other stakeholders to examine these key issues and challenges and to identify the potential impacts on the City.
- 2.5 Following the current consultation exercise ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008 responses will feed into a more detailed Government consultation exercise on individual locations and the development of a national planning policy statement, a draft of which would be issued in July of this year.
- 2.6 The Government proposes that all Eco-Town schemes would be subject to a planning application to be considered by the Local Planning Authority, Harborough District Council in this case. The national planning policy

statement is expected to be adopted in the Autumn (October) which would identify a preferred list of 10 Eco-Town sites. The Government's ambition is to see the first schemes underway by 2010. In addition the views of Leicester residents will also be sought to help the Council formulate its conclusions on the project.

### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the government process for determining both the Planning Policy Statement on Eco Towns and for assessing bids including the Coop's at Pennbury.
- 3.2 Cabinet is asked to agree to the launch of the micro website at [www.leicester.gov.uk/pennburyecotown](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/pennburyecotown), which includes a contact and resident feedback facility. Also to agree to the Link magazine being used to consult the residents of Leicester in its Summer edition which is distributed in July.

### 4. Report

#### The Government Process

- 4.1 The Government has announced plans for five Eco-towns by 2016 and up to ten by 2020, as part of plans to build 3 million homes by 2020.

The following criteria has been set for selecting Eco towns:

They should be new settlements of between 5,000 and 20,000 homes, separate and distinct from existing towns, but well linked to them - building in existing towns and cities cannot provide enough new homes; the development as a whole should reach zero carbon standards - each town should be an exemplar in at least one area of environmental sustainability and promote leading edge green technologies; it should include a good range of facilities - a secondary school, a medium scale retail centre, good quality business space and leisure facilities; between 30 and 50 per cent of the housing should be affordable, in particular for first time buyers and families; there should be a management body to help develop the town, support people and businesses moving to the new community, and to co-ordinate service delivery.

- 4.2 What happens next?

**Stage One:** current consultation seeking preliminary views on the Eco-towns concept, proposed benefits and the potential locations short listed - by end of June. It is not expected that any sites will be knocked out of the process at this stage unless something like massive land contamination issues are discovered.

**Stage Two:** further consultation on a Sustainability Appraisal, providing more detailed assessment of these locations, and on a draft Eco-towns Policy Statement - later in the summer;

**Stage Three:** a decision on the list of locations with the potential to be an Eco-town as part of the final Planning Policy Statement - the autumn;

**Stage Four:** like any other proposed development, individual schemes will need to submit planning applications, which will be decided on the merits of the proposal.

4.3 Where can I go for further information?

For the Eco-towns web page and FAQs go to:

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

For copies of the government's consultation document go to:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/ecotownsgreenerfuture>

Please send your response to the consultation no later than 30th June 2008 to:

Eco-towns Team  
Housing & Growth Programmes  
Department for Communities and Local Government 2/H9 Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

Or email to: [ecotowns@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ecotowns@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

**The Coop's Proposal**

4.4 The paragraphs 4.5 to 4.11 below are how the Coop describe what they want to do at Pennbury.

**Land**

4.5 They are proposing the Eco-town for Leicestershire to be developed on land owned by The Co-operative Group and their partner, English Partnerships in southeast Leicestershire. They own over 4000 acres (1700 hectares) of land in this location but at most only 40 percent of the land will be needed for the town itself; Of the 40 percent used, a significant amount of land will be used for open spaces and gardens; This will leave 60 percent of the land for countryside uses including farming and recreation. Farming and food production will be central to the future of the land: They will continue to farm the land themselves and provide opportunities for local people to grow their own food. Working closely with local interest and environmental groups, They will enhance biodiversity on land within and around the town and expand public access to the countryside.

**Homes**

4.6 Their proposals involve between 12,000 and 15,000 homes of different types and tenures. 30 percent of the homes will be affordable - delivering between 4000 and 5000 affordable homes. These homes will be built over a period of at least 15 years using advanced sustainable building techniques to deliver a zero carbon community, and catering for all community needs from start up homes, to 4/5 bed family homes, to assisted living.

**Community**

4.7 They will build the facilities required to ensure that the Eco-town has everything it needs to become a fully functioning community. These facilities will include schools, health centres, shops and community buildings. The

retail centres will be vibrant and mixed, catering for a range of shopping requirements and designed to encourage new and independent businesses. They aim to create a place where residents are empowered to shape their own town supported by a management body which delivers core service functions such as the management of transport and the upkeep of public open spaces: a place where residents have a sense of belonging.

#### **Education and schools**

- 4.8 School places will be provided in the Eco-town for every child in the community and they will provide education for all ages and abilities from pre-school age to adult education. The creation of a new community provides a unique opportunity to plan a new and integrated system of education, which will be of maximum benefit to young and old alike, and they will be discussing these opportunities with local authorities. The Co-operative Group has an established track-record of developing innovative partnerships with the education sector, as an existing sponsor of an Academy, member of the UK's first co-operative trust school, sponsor of ten Specialist Co-operative Business & Enterprise Colleges and inspiration for a range of materials for use across the curriculum.

#### **Transport and mobility**

- 4.9 The Co-operative Group will bring major investment in transport to the south east of Leicester as part of the project and we will work with local authorities to deliver new transport innovations in the town and surrounding area with the key objectives of reducing reliance on the car. There are a number of transport solutions that can be provided including an advanced high frequency bus service, which will be closely scrutinised in order to provide the best solution not just for the community but for all those living in this part of Leicestershire. They are committed to ensuring that whatever transport solutions are proposed, they are "future proofed" to allow for additional initiatives (e.g. a tram) to be incorporated in the future.

#### **Employment and economy**

- 4.10 The Eco-town will deliver significant employment and economic benefits not just for the immediate area, but for the wider communities. In particular, the Eco-town will provide an environment in which businesses seeking to provide sustainable solutions in sectors such as energy, waste and construction can flourish. These will be jobs which will not only enhance the regeneration of the city itself but will bring new industries to the county which otherwise would go elsewhere. They will support local businesses and facilitate new business ventures in the town.

#### **The environment**

- 4.11 They have said they will champion solutions for energy, waste and water and aim to devise environmentally sustainable technologies which can be adopted in mainstream developments elsewhere. Biodiversity will be enhanced both in and around the town through the protection and creation of habitats in which wildlife will thrive. They want to make it easy for people to live a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle.

### **Coop Consultation**

- 4.12 One way to find out more about the proposals is at the eco-town website - [www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop](http://www.ecotownforleicestershire.coop)

### **The Coops First Phase Consultation**

- 4.13 The Coop are running a series of public exhibitions, where more details on their ideas will be available and members of their development team will be available to discuss these and any potential ideas the public may have. The exhibitions will be taking place from 11.00am to 8.00pm, as follows:

- Tuesday 10 June, The Three Swans, High Street, Market Harborough
- Wednesday 11 June, Parklands Leisure Centre, Wigston Road, Oadby
- Friday 13 June and Saturday 14 June, Exhibition Marquee (being set up on the "Christmas Party site"), off Gartree Road
- Monday 16 June, Leicester Tigers Rugby Club, Aylestone Road, Leicester

### **The strategic planning of the Leicester conurbation in the long term**

- 4.14 Officers initial assessment if Pennbury is selected as a potential Eco town is that at a 40/50,000 population it would be similar to Blaby or Oadby or Syston/Thurmaston/Birstall; and would therefore have its own local services but rely on the City for its higher employment/retail/health/education/leisure needs.
- 4.15 The long term aim should therefore be to ensure that Pennbury faces into the City and that its population support City facilities, rather than travelling to Peterborough or Corby or the M1. This implies a very high degree of connectivity between Pennbury and the City Centre.
- 4.16 Although in strict Local Planning Authority terms the City Council has no jurisdiction, it is fundamental to everyone's interests that Pennbury is planned strategically within the current and future Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA).
- 4.17 In the short term, the greatest risk posed to the City by Pennbury is that it could slow down our regeneration efforts in the LRC Waterside and Abbey Meadows Intervention Areas, and threaten the success of the Ashton Green development, by attracting prosperous families away from the City to an exciting new suburb. This would accelerate current problems of City Flight, which have symptoms such as the high number of City children attending County schools. For this reason we also need to discuss with the Co-op a joined up education strategy and/or offer
- 4.18 To counter this immediate threat, we need a policy of complementarity in our own plans, so that Pennbury is not the best offer for families. Waterside, Abbey Meadows and Ashton Green need to offer the same good schools, modern health and community centres and local amenities PLUS the buzz of city vibrancy with a great retail, leisure and employment offer, without the commute or the teething troubles of a new community.

- 4.19 These higher standards of infrastructure need to be financed from a strategic pot which could come both from our regeneration funding and potentially from developer contributions (including the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy) from Pennbury. As such it is very important to work with the Co-op and the other Local Authorities to produce an infrastructure plan that Pennbury will fund.
- 4.20 In the medium term, it would be highly desirable to establish a permanent public transport link between Pennbury and the City Centre transport interchange, that will be the transport mode of choice. Light rail or tram is a favoured solution, although much more expensive than buses, because it can be made to deliver extremely frequent services (say every three minutes in peak time) without being affected by congestion elsewhere on the network. Identifying a suitable route is likely to prove technically difficult however given the constraints on accommodating the necessary transport infrastructure.
- 4.21 The degree of self containment will influence transport provisions/options and their deliverability. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will be directly related to this issue and to the provision of truly sustainable transport options. This has to be seen in the context of the many new trips predicted in the Leicester PUA, due to growth and increasing wealth, on a network with little spare capacity in the peak periods. As such a substantial package of sustainable transport infrastructure will be required on an evidential basis in addition to a full range of softer measures.
- 4.22 Because of their interdependence it is clear that Pennbury could only reach its full potential if Leicester too is successful. To this end particular attention would need to be given to risks to the successful regeneration of the City and how these would be mitigated. This is particularly important at a time when the City is poised to move to higher levels of regeneration activity off the back of recent successes and the impending completion of major investment projects including the Highcross retail centre, Curve, city centre public realm investment and a number of housing projects in the intervention areas. However, Leicester's regeneration also needs to be viewed in the changing economic and investment climate.
- 4.23 Initial thoughts about the likely mitigation and actions that would be required to offset any risks to the City regeneration strategy are as follows:
- Accelerated and expanded NGP, EP/Housing Corporation and emda financial and expert support for delivering the LRC Masterplan in Waterside, Abbey Meadows and New Business Quarter. Access to new funding opportunities e.g. Community Infrastructure Fund.
  - Support for accelerated provision of the infrastructure required at Waterside and Abbey Meadows to encourage prosperous families to live in the city – schools, health centres, green infrastructure – sufficient to change housing type and mix from the predominantly 1 and 2 bed apartments in the planning pipeline, to more family housing.
  - Support for the provision of quality employment land and premises, promotion of inward investment and local labour and training policies and investment to diversify the local economy.

- Support for the “form and function” work in the City Centre, to help bring forward strategic economic and employment opportunities; and solve our “gateway” issues.
- Commission a joint strategic approach to infrastructure needs and investment across the Leicester conurbation, in the context of our long term ambitions for Leicester and Leicestershire.
- Expert assistance to bring forward Ashton Green possibly to Eco-Town standards.
- Expert, in-kind and joint procurement assistance to deliver zero-carbon across the wider area (especially renewable energy generation, CHP etc).
- Strategic Green Infrastructure to provide substantial informal recreation to the East and South-East of Leicester.

4.24 On Transport there are a number of major issues and related infrastructure investments that would be required to work alongside delivery of the Central Leicestershire Local Transport Plan. There is a significant difference between what the promoter has advised us they are proposing to include and the transport measures we believe will be required on a sustainable basis. There would need to be a very substantial package of both hard and soft transport measures in order to make the proposal work. There would have to be comprehensive analysis but the package is likely to cover the following areas which together are likely to comprise a transport package in excess of half a billion pounds:

- An integrated sustainable transport solution that benefits the whole of Central Leicestershire
- Reduced traffic on A6 (from current level)
- Reduced traffic on A47 (from current level)
- Any strategic orbital road link between A47 and A6 should be designed so as not to encourage car commuting to other centres
- Excellent public transport connectivity between Pennbury and Leicester city centre, which also benefits Oadby, including the assessment of a tram
- Strategic funding pot to provide accelerated public transport infrastructure across Central Leicestershire – Leicester station improvements and public transport interchange; Blaby station, Park & Ride sites
- Immediate CLG/DfT funding to commission the strategic transport studies which will be required to establish the sustainable transport links between Pennbury and the City Centre
- Retain future option of Pennbury train station when East Midlands Main Line capacity increases.

#### **Leicester’s Five Tests for Pennbury**

4.25 Paragraphs 4.14 to 4.24 above distill down to five tests that officers believe Leicester should judge Pennbury against and the satisfaction of these tests should help determine the City Council’s support or otherwise of the Coop’s proposals.

**Test 1** – Will the Coop’s proposals help to address the housing shortage currently being experienced in the City and the general area. This should be viewed in terms of house types and affordability as expressed by demonstrable housing need.

**Test 2** – Can the Coop’s proposals generate sufficient capacity for transport to cope with the extra journeys Pennbury would create, without adding significant pressure to our road network that is already close to capacity at peak times.

**Test 3** – Pennbury should be an exemplar of the highest environmental standards, with an overall effect of carbon neutrality, Pennbury should also be used to reduce the carbon footprint of the general area including in the City.

**Test 4** – Pennbury needs to complement the City’s regeneration endeavours and significantly increase the number of net jobs for City residents. This will require an undertaking from the public agencies, the Coop, other involved investors, developers and builders to work with the City in pursuit of its regeneration goals. EMDA, the Homes and Communities Agency, Department for Transport and CLG must renew their commitment to the Regeneration of the City.

**Test 5** – Pennbury has to provide the required social and community infrastructure to enable it to be sustainable and for that infrastructure to be provided with regard to the City’s sustainability.

#### **Keeping Leicester Informed and Involved**

- 4.26 A micro website [www.leicester.gov.uk/pennburyecotown](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/pennburyecotown) has been developed, which as well as displaying all the latest information on Eco Towns and Pennbury will enable comments to be posted to the Planning Service. Also we will use LINK as the primary communication vehicle to inform the community about Pennbury.
- 4.27 At the moment there are no plans available (except for the statements above from the Co-op) to carry out detailed consultation on. However the Council will be able to provide feedback to Government with regard to their consultation process on the Planning Policy Statement that is anticipated.

#### **5. Financial Implications**



- 5.1 There are clearly significant financial implications from any future development both in terms of our existing regeneration work and finding sufficient funding to develop new linkage infrastructure. We have already made applications worth £17m to the Community Infrastructure Fund to progress the regeneration work in the Waterside area.
- 5.2 In relation to future infrastructure funding some guidance has been issued on how the Community Infrastructure Levy may work and its interaction with the current system of negotiated section 106 agreements. The Planning Bill which introduces the levy is still going through its committee stages before going to the House of Lords.

*Martin Judson, Head of Finance, extension 297390*

## 6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The proposal for an Eco-town in Leicestershire is in an area called Pennbury in southeast Leicestershire. Although Market Harborough District Councillors are likely to be the primary decision-makers, if the scheme does go ahead, there will be implications for the city which may require planning applications to be determined by City Councillors. This means that a degree of care has to be taken by City Councillors who may be involved in the planning and development control process when making any statements that might suggest they already have a predetermined view on what is being proposed.

*Dina Nathwani - Legal Service, extension 296345*

## 7. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References Within the Report
Equal Opportunities	No	
Policy	No	
Sustainable and Environmental	Yes	Whole report
Crime and Disorder	No	
Human Rights Act	No	
Elderly/People on Low Income	No	

## 8. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

- 8.1 See Government background papers at

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

Also visit the Council's micro site for copies of the inter Authority and Coop Technical Group action points and other briefing material at:

[www.leicester.gov.uk/pennburyecotown](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/pennburyecotown)

**9. Consultations**

9.1 Officers from within Regeneration and Culture and Legal Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**10. Report Author**

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<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Reason</b>	N/A
<b>Appeared in Forward Plan</b>	N/A
<b>Executive or Council Decision</b>	Executive (Cabinet)