



### **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL ON THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF AN ECO-TOWN**

#### **MEETING WITH CO-OPERATIVE GROUP/ENGLISH PARTNERSHIPS ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2008**

*The Panel met with the following representatives of the Co-operative Group and English Partnerships in order to gain a detailed understanding of their proposals for the scheme:*

*Mr. R. Jackson (Co-operative Group)  
Ms. K. McGrath (English Partnerships)  
Mr. G. Ramsbottom (Co-operative Group)  
Ms. E. Watts (Co-operative Group)*

*The Panel NOTED the following points that arose from that meeting:*

- The proposals within the Co-op's 'Masterplan' document had been designed to match the Regional Economic Strategy and be compatible with the Regional Spatial Strategy;
- The Co-operative Group explained the way in which eco-towns will be dealt with through the planning process. It was highlighted that the proposals were at an early stage in that process. The level of information available is considerably more than would be available for a normal allocation of land in a strategic assessment process such as an RSS . However, it was acknowledged that considerably more work would be required ahead of a planning application.
- The Co-operative Group confirmed their desire to work with the County Council to evolve and improve its plans further. However, it had not yet been possible to arrange with the Council all of the meetings required
- It could become necessary to consider whether covenants or planning conditions could be used to prevent future development on the open space around the land proposed for development at Pennbury. It was acknowledged that if the town grew larger then it could become unsustainable as it would become less able to support itself. However, it was felt to be important over the 25 year development period that the Co-op was able to engage with Local Authorities in order to be able to adapt and evolve over time to meet the needs of the community;
- For the Eco Town to achieve it's carbon ambitions it would require a high level of self-containment to reduce CO2 levels, for instance residents

travelling on foot/by bicycle to in-town amenities;

- A key transport proposal was for a Bus Rapid Transit/potential future tram link from the proposed development to the City Centre. It was believed this serve the needs of residents and there was a willingness to work with Local Authorities on such a scheme in order to provide social-inclusion and well-being benefits;
- Nearly 100,000 houses were to be built in the sub-region up to 2026 and the Co-op felt confident that, as part of this process, the development of the Eco-Town would not cause significant issues in relation to transport. The Co-op were currently in discussions with Network Rail over the possibility of transporting much of the building materials via rail;
- The Co-op were looking to work with the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) and others in order to encourage start up businesses, including those from the European renewable energy market, and there would be a strategy for local procurement – the provision of guaranteed contracts would enable businesses to invest in the area and companies investing in the area would be directed towards using local labour. This would create a different employment mix from that which currently exists. It was clear that not all those living in Pennbury would work in Pennbury – the Co-op's master plan required a 60% retention rate. Others would likely be working in the City or surrounding towns and transport infrastructure would be required to meet their needs;
- The Co-op were hopeful that the proposed development and its employment infrastructure would enable local skills established through the two universities to be built upon;
- The Co-op noted that previous developments established in the 1960s had focused primarily around car users. However, the proposed Eco-Town would have a focus on good housing and a good environment with car use minimised – for example by having only one car parking space for every two houses and providing an alternative to car use in the form of high quality public transport and convenient routes for walking and cycling;
- The Co-op was aiming to achieve 30% 'affordable housing' within the development. 75% of this would be for rent with the remainder as shared ownership. It was highlighted that very few developments elsewhere were meeting the 30% target, however the Co-op were treating this as non negotiable;
- The proposed development's housing would be slightly skewed toward larger housing for young families to reflect demand;
- The Co-op felt that there were several 'unique selling points' for the Eco-Town:

- Its close proximity to the City meant that Pennbury could bring wider benefits to the surrounding areas;
  - The Co-operative Group owned a substantial area of land around the site of the proposed development and this would mean that they could limit development in the surrounding area. The Eco-Town would have a very generous provision of open space and could also be integrated into the surrounding green space;
  - The Co-operative brand and reputation was strong and able to carry through a project of its size;
  - There was an opportunity to empower communities through the proposed governance arrangements;
  - There was an opportunity to develop local farming in the area to create a sustainable local food supply;
  - Pennbury would meet the highest possible environmental standards.
- 32% of the landholding was intended for the Eco-Town development, with the remaining 68% intended for the 'Great Park', countryside and farming;
  - Adaptable accommodation was needed for retail employment. It was suggested that some of the retail business within the proposed development would be done online. Retail floor space figures were being re-examined;
  - The Co-op believed Pennbury would be an attractive place where people would want to live and that it would be easier to develop than some of the housing sites already allocated.

## **MEETING WITH CO-OPERATIVE GROUP ON 11 NOVEMBER 2008**

*The Panel met with the following representatives of the Co-operative Group and English Partnerships in order to further discuss their proposals for the proposed Eco-town:*

*Mr. R. Jackson*

*Ms. E. Watts*

*The Panel received a presentation from the Co-op which covered the following topics:*

- *The Master Plan;*
- *The approach to Sustainability.*

*Arising from the presentation and discussion the following points were made:-*

### Food and Farming

The Co-op would look to retain commercial farming in the area surrounding the eco town and expand the type of foods grown. Within the town itself there would be community gardens and orchards. The Co-op were also looking to reopen Farm World as a Rural Interpretation Centre.

### Energy

The aim would be to be minimise energy use through designing and building energy efficient homes. The energy requirements would be met by way of renewable energy, a CHP plant, wind turbines and an anaerobic digester. There was likely to be an energy surplus.

### Environment

There were 5 key strands to the approach to the environment. There would be a focus on landscape heritage; protecting and enhancing wildlife and biodiversity, making the best of the existing cultural heritage, water and waste.

### Water

The proposals envisaged:-

- Proposals to reduce water demand by 45%;
- Water efficiency measures built in to the design of homes;
- New surface drainage systems (sustainable drainage systems) which would reduce and regulate run off;
- Creating a wetland area east of Great Glen which would help to deal with existing flooding problems.

These measures would reduce the impact of the development.

On the issue of water treatment and sewage facilities the options were to develop a scheme to deal only with the impact of the eco town or to join with Severn Trent to address the needs of the eco town and the surrounding area. At this stage it was too early to confirm which option would be pursued.

### Waste

The Panel was reminded that Biffa were the possible waste partner in putting forward the proposals. Whilst initial discussions had been held with them again, it was too early to give a definitive view as to whether the waste treatment facility that would be developed would cater for the eco town alone or the wider area. Whilst the aim was to reduce waste and have nil waste to export this would ultimately be dependant on the final solution agreed. A biomass plant could require the importation of materials to burn. The Co-operative Group were keen to engage with the waste authority but these meetings had not yet taken place. The County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority would be involved in the discussions as it was important to ensure a tie in with the overall waste strategy for the County.

The Panel also discussed in detail 'Transport Issues' and the questions, responses and points raised in the discussion are summarised below:-

- *What road widening and junction improvements will be needed to accommodate the bus rapid transport system into the City?*

Copies of 1:500 plans of the proposed BRT and Tram Improvement Plans were now available and would be provided to officers.

There would need to be a number of improvements to junctions but at this stage it was not envisaged that London Road would need to be widened. The bus lanes would be shared lanes within the existing carriageway.

- *How could a tram system be accommodated on the route proposed? Have any assurances been given by the Government about possible public sector funding towards a tram?*

The transport modelling suggests that the tram could be accommodated with minimal additional land take required. If the proposals proceed, the Co-op were proposing to make available up to £5million for sub regional transport feasibility study that could include a tram. If this demonstrated that an alternative more optimal solution was available offering wider benefits to the region, then funding proposed for the bus rapid transit would be diverted into provision of a tram – this would be in the region of £40million. The majority of the funding for a tram would need to be sought from Central government.

- *The original plans showed the completion of the outer ring road. If it was deemed to be necessary then, why has it now been dropped?*

*Without it, there is a concern that other surrounding roads in the area will suffer from congestion/rat running?*

The Eastern District Distributor Road was identified as an option in the initial stages. However, following further modelling and after receiving objections from the first stage consultation it was not pursued as it did not deliver the benefits needed.

- *A lot of movement will be to places other than the City Centre. What measures are proposed to deal with this?*

The proposed BRT system would help to mitigate the impact of Pennbury but the Co-op would be willing to enter into discussions with the City and County to develop solutions for the wider region.

Bus services would be provided to key destinations around the city – the General Hospital and Evington, Fosse Park and Oadby and Wigston.

The Co-op would also look favourably at subsidising some bus orbital routes.

- *Where will the A6 park and ride site be located? Does the Co-op own the land in question? Why was the A47 park and ride abandoned?*

The proposed preferred site would be adjacent to the racecourse and golf course. The land is owned by the racecourse. No agreement has been reached on the Co-op acquiring the required land.

The modelling undertaken showed there to be marginal benefits for a park and ride on the A47 but the Co-op would look to work with the City Council to make improvements to the A47.

- *Where any land is needed but not in the ownership of the Co-op, does the Co-op expect one of the local authorities to exercise their compulsory purchase powers to acquire land?*
- It is too early in the process to give a definitive answer to the question.
- *Promoting walking, cycling and public transport and restricting car usage are important components of Pennbury and very commendable in many ways. What evidence is there that 15,000 households are prepared to adopt this life style and manage with a much reduced use of their cars?*
- The 2001 census showed that 38.2% of households in the City do not have a car. The corresponding figure for the County was 16%.

Given this the challenge facing the Co-op was to move the figure to 50% and the proposed transport solutions would encourage greater usage of public transport. This coupled with the commitment to provide jobs locally would enable the Co-op to go a considerable way to achieving this ambition.

- With car parking, half the houses would have a space, the other half would not. On the issue of enforcement of parking restrictions this would depend on whether the roads were adopted or not – controlling parking may be easier if the roads are not adopted. The Panel was advised that although the proposal was for 1 car per two households (ie 7500 car parking spaces) the total number of spaces within the whole development would be just over 10000 as there would be some provided for business use which could potentially be shared by residents.. The service charges for homes with parking spaces would be significantly higher thus making homes without parking attractive.
- *How will construction traffic be managed to minimise disruption to those in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development? Is there an approximate measure of the scale of construction traffic? Have any assurances been received from Network Rail that a rail freight siding can be provided near Great Glen? Experience elsewhere in the County has shown there is insufficient capacity on the MML to allow for this. Would not some materials such as sand and gravel be sourced locally and logically transported by road?*
- The Co-op has considerable experience as a mineral and building materials extraction company and has systems in place to ensure lorry movements are properly managed using GPS systems. It is intended to apply similar techniques to the movements of building materials into the development. Discussions are currently being held with Network Rail on the issue of a railhead but no agreements have yet been made. These discussions are taking place within the context of improving the signalling of the line and the possibility of a siding. Members of the Panel commented that their understanding was that there was no spare capacity even allowing for resignalling.
- The Panel was also advised that the Co-op was in discussion with a number of European companies specialising in new sustainable building technologies and enquired about the possibility of locating in the east midlands. Given Pennbury's central location in the region, the links with local universities, the size of the proposed development and potential market of the other developments identified in the RSS as required in the area, the Co-op was hopeful of attracting such companies to the area. This would provide significant local employment.
- *How does the Co-op intend to secure the commitment and cooperation of the diverse range of bodies required to deliver its transport strategy?*

The Co-op have indicated throughout the process its willingness to engage with all parties in finding appropriate transport solutions.