



Position Statement on Eco-Towns

Background

1. In March 2007 the Housing Minister Yvette Cooper announced that the Government would consider plans for eco-towns put forward by local authorities as part of the New Growth Points scheme, and that new small zero-carbon eco-towns built on brownfield land could lead the way. The Minister also announced that she had appointed Prof. David Lock, Chair of the Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA), to report to Government on further developing the criteria for eco-towns.
Source: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/planningandbuilding/401185>
2. In September 2007 the Prime Minister announced that 10 finalists would be selected as eco-towns from the many submissions.
Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7010888.stm
3. In July 2007 the TCPA published the “eco-towns: scoping report; helping to deliver a step change in the quality and availability of homes for the people of England.” Amongst the many recommendations the report highlighted that “no one need be surprised or caught unawares by an eco-town being built in their local area: each proposal will need to have been assessed under the relevant regulations, and fully publicised and consulted on, although they may be subject to accelerated planning processes.”
Source: page 7 of http://www.tcpa.org.uk/downloads/20070727_TCPA_ecotowns.pdf
4. In February 2008 “only eco-towns with the highest ecological standards will be chosen for construction”, Housing Minister Caroline Flint announced; although it was recognised that proposals for the eco-towns have provoked public opposition, with action groups calling for them to be scrapped.
Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7266701.stm>
5. On 3rd April 2008 Caroline Flint announced 15 potential locations to go forward to the next stage for identification as eco-towns. CLG indicated that it will consult widely for three months to get preliminary views on the benefits of eco-towns and the shortlisted locations. A final shortlist of locations is to be published later this year.
Source: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/planningandbuilding/737728>
6. On 9th April 2008 CLG announced that a panel of leading figures was being set up to provide expert advice and support.
Source: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/planningandbuilding/742197>

Commentary

7. In its response to the Housing Green Paper POS raised concerns about some of the proposals coming forward for eco-towns. It was felt that some were in less than sustainable locations and that, as a result, any environmental benefits that resulted from the specification of the houses would be offset by unsustainable patterns of commuting. The first test of an eco town should be the sustainability of it as a location. There was also a feeling that 5,000 dwellings might be at or below the very lowest limit for a sustainable community.

Source: <http://www.planningofficers.org.uk/article.cp/articleid/240>

8. POS trusts that the Government will provide clarity on the criteria by which the final shortlist of 10 will be selected. The Society is, however, concerned that the selection of the final eco-towns will not follow the guidance contained within the July 2007 TCPA report, i.e. that the normal planning process of identification and approval via the development plan process will not be adhered to; thus there is reason to believe that local citizens and the local planning authority is likely to be disadvantaged.
9. The following TCPA recommendations are highlighted as ones that the Government should adhere in order to maintain public confidence in the decision-making process:

- **The need for regional and sub-regional planning rather than national specification.** The lesson from our modern history is that the choice of new town or major urban extension is one that should be made through strategic design at the regional or sub-regional level, not by application of fixed theory or sequence set at national level.
- **Longer-term time horizons.** There needs to be a long lead time. It is not possible for a major urban extension or new town to yield completed homes or other development for a number of years, and implementation is almost certain to continue beyond current statutory development plan periods.
- **The need for consensus.** The project needs cross-party support. The implementation period will last longer than several electoral cycles.

Source: page 8 of http://www.tcpa.org.uk/downloads/20070727_TCPA_ecotowns.pdf

10. Elected members are champions of their local community and they can, and should, get engaged in shaping the future of their local area. Thus, provided they follow the prevailing guidance on positive engagement regarding major development proposals, they can, and should, undertake a full role in the creation of future eco-towns.

11. As a community leader and local representative elected members will want to be involved in public meetings and pre-application discussions. However, this may create some risks for Councillors, particularly those who are members of the planning committee, and for the integrity of the decision making process. In such cases the member should familiarise themselves with guidance found in the LGA guides “Probity in Planning (update) – the role of councillors and officers” and “Members Engagement in Planning Matters”; guidance from the Standards Board for England which provides an overview of the Model Code of Conduct which applies to all members and co-opted members of local authorities and may have some important implications for conduct of planning councilors; and the ACSES Model Good Practice Guide.
12. Elected members are not fettered from making public their views on such proposals provided that they recognise that to do so may curtail their ability to be part of the decision-making process.

Source: <http://www.standardsboard.gov.uk/Publications/OccasionalPaper>

Further Information

Eco-towns Prospectus:

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

Members and Planning: <http://www.planningofficers.org.uk/article.cp/articleid/176>

Planning at the Heart of Place-Shaping <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/21891>

Pre-Application Advice for Town and Country Planning:

http://www.natplanforum.org.uk/NPF_2_F322_pre-app_advice_Layout_1.pdf