

Eco-towns draft PPS – Response to CLG consultation – February 2009

1 Response to Consultation Part 3 Questions

DRAFT PPS ECO-TOWNS-CONSULTATION	KEY POINTS	
Q1	Does the draft Planning Policy Statement provide sufficient guidance on the consideration of eco-towns through the plan making process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No; the draft PPS should state clearly that eco-towns should be progressed through the RSS and LDF process since this is the best means to ensure that proposals are thoroughly tested and alternatives considered. Paragraphs 2.7 - 2.9 are ambiguous on this point and should be clarified. Site specific proposals should not be identified in a national PPS. • The PPS should give clear guidance as to exactly how eco-towns should be dealt with in development plans – for example in core strategies where they are out of sync with the regional planning process. • The PPS should be clear that the ET programme sites should be tested against other options for meeting additional housing growth and the final sentence of paragraph 2.2 amended accordingly. • Para 2.4 suggests that Core Strategies should include the option of an eco-town to meet future development where a new town has been identified in the ET programme in order to meet current or emerging housing requirements. However they are not to be finally allocated if better options to meet housing need exist. In circumstances where the level of current housing requirement can be met through options which conform with current regional policy and do not require a new settlement, there appears no need to include the eco-town option even if in the ET programme. The relationship with RSS and Core Strategies needs better setting out since there is a clear issue here of a planning policy statement which appears at odds with the principles of PPS 11 and 12.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also this draft PPS simplifies these processes and focuses significantly on a narrow aspect of sustainability - principally home energy/water production/consumption and building performance as a delivery mechanism and primary determining indicator for building new eco-towns. This is an unbalanced approach and should consider other critical demographic, economic, and environmental, place making, community requirements and consequential impacts.
<p>Q2</p>	<p>Are the locational principles for eco-towns sufficiently clear and workable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Eco-town prospectus and locational requirements as outlined in the draft PPS do not take into account complex interdependencies and regional/local conditions and circumstances within which an eco-town is expected to function. • Hence the guidance concerning locational requirements for eco-towns is neither clear nor workable. The possible consequences or impacts of large scale new town planning on local, sub regional and regional spatial and economic strategies are not clearly explained, nor highlighted. • In paragraph 3.2, the criteria listed for optimal location for eco-towns refers to the eco-town programme itself becoming a planning consideration. The programme however has only been based on those sites being promoted by developers and some sites have already been withdrawn. It is not clear how the programme itself can serve to provide locational guidance and the PPS should be clear on how other eco-town locations which regional authorities might wish to propose and which are not currently in the programme might be promoted. • It is illogical and inconsistent not to include housing need as one of the locational requirements for eco-towns in paragraph 3.2. All the DCLG statements on eco-towns have emphasised their important role in housing delivery and the links to the Housing Green Paper and the concept of new settlements is introduced in PPS 3 in the context of areas where “the need and demand for housing is high” (paragraph 37, PPS 3). Paragraph 7, Part 1 Introduction of the draft PPS uses the same language as PPS 3 and paragraph 14 states that PPS 3 will be amended to make it clear that eco-towns are one type of new settlement. Housing need is an important criterion which will have a direct bearing on the size and location of any new settlement, including potential eco-towns,

		<p>and the draft PPS should recognise this. Paragraph 3.2 on page 13 should be amended, by the addition of a point (e), to reflect this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of point (b) in paragraph 3.2 on page 13 is ambiguous. It is not clear whether this refers just to on-site employment or also to employment opportunities at a nearby higher-order centre.
<p>Q3</p>	<p>Taking overall the standards set out in draft PPS do you think they achieve a viable eco-town concept?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eco-towns are a move into uncharted territory. There are uncertainties and risks in the far-reaching requirements for an eco-town which may affect the marketability and saleability of them, hence undermining their viability. • It is questionable whether the consequences of such developments have been fully explored or understood. Many of the examples used in the Eco-Town prospectus and reflected in the draft PPS have been developed in a different set of cultural, social, economic and funding institutional circumstances. Consequently the PPS should be clear that more detailed and relevant contextual work is required to demonstrate viability of the proposed Eco-town sites and how the potentially negative consequences of establishing Eco-towns in the UK would be viably mitigated and overcome. • The question simplifies a complex issue. In a UK market context, it is difficult to see how in direct market terms viability can be achieved without significant public sector investment. Given the current emphasis on spatial planning dealing with funding infrastructure and delivery, the Government's approach in relation to this issue and specifically how RSS / LDFs should deal with this matter should be set out in the PPS. Past experience from English Partnerships' (now part of the Homes & Communities Agency) delivery of its Millennium Communities programme on seven sites in England to high environmental and building performance standards suggests off-setting development costs either through subsidy or direct delivery of infrastructure through servicing and other provisions. The Cyril Sweet Report commissioned by English Partnerships has also highlighted exclusions and increases in cost for housing units against the various levels of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Funding for eco-towns must not be at the expense of funding for current growth points elsewhere.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viability in the terms of built environment is also questionable as the draft PPS focuses on particular aspects of building performance and energy/water/waste service delivery, all of which have strategic design influences and as a consequence has significant implications for place making and master planning. For example to achieve the high standards highlighted, high density development may well be a response many promoters will take. • The question also concerns the viability and sustainability of the communities that will live there. This is greatly influenced by housing mix/type, employment opportunity and demographics. Evidence suggests that large scale development such as that proposed attracts younger, more economically active individuals and as a consequence higher child densities and demand for services. A consequence of creating a “specialist type of new settlement” Part 2- Para 2.1, may very well be an unbalanced community.
ECO-TOWN STANDARDS		
Q4.1	Do you consider the planning standards for eco-towns provide a clear basis on which to make decisions on planning applications for eco-towns?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are reasonably clear but will be tested when a planning application is submitted. • However much more work is required particularly around the modelling and profiling of these new communities over time, say over 50 years; and their likely impact and requirements on existing communities and public services/investment required.
Q4.2	Do you consider that the cost of implementing the standards will undermine the viability of eco-towns?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the UK market context, it is difficult to see how direct market viability can be achieved without some form of public sector intervention, particularly given the high costs of meeting Eco- town standards. • The high cost of meeting eco-town standards will potentially undermine their viability. Also, as new stand-alone settlements, the costs of providing new infrastructure and facilities will be high. • Where potential eco-towns could reach significant size and require appropriate

		<p>investment such as at Pennbury , the PPS ought to clearly state that an RSS process and public examination will look at infrastructure and issues around viability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However it is recognised that economies of scale will provide opportunities to offset some costs and high volume modern methods of construction will also lead to efficiency and cost savings.
<p>Q4.3</p>	<p>Are there any standards that you feel are missing? (That are not covered in other Government policy or guidance)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a number of standards missing, as set out below. • Master planning and urban design benchmarking and qualitative assessment and monitoring processes are required. • The draft PPS should expect a full and honest commitment to open book access to development and economic appraisals in going forward, this will enable respective authorities to make considered judgements about services and requirements. • Should be a requirement for a full impact assessment on likely and future public sector interventions across a range of service provision to determine effects on forward regeneration programmes, housing and employment provision within a sub regional context. This should also explore those inter-dependencies within which a proposed eco-town would be located. • Inclusive access assessment requirements based on walking times rather than prescribing distance for access, i.e. paragraph 4.16, should reference maximum walking travel times which take into account gradients, obstructions, road crossings etc.. • Equalities impact assessments concerning race/gender/disability/older people/employment and skills/ are required at an early stage in the process. The Draft PPS should reflect this as a key consideration. • Landscape characterisation and assessment is likely to be required in all greenfield locations.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of embodied carbon in the building construction process as part of the definition of zero carbon. • Inclusion of transportation in carbon emissions as part of the definition of zero carbon. • Requirement for all housing to meet code level 6 energy performance targets. • Robust economic development strategies. • Robust new community population forecasting and modelling and sensitivity testing. • House type/mix/tenure linked to employment-occupation/s salaries. • Prescribed processes for forward and future proofing. • Where possible schemes should encourage achievement of negative carbon levels.
Q4.4	Are any of the standards not essential?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No.
Q.4.5-Zero Carbon	The zero carbon standard attempts to ensure that carbon emissions related to the built environment in eco-towns are zero or below. Have we specified the calculation of net emissions clearly in away that avoids perverse incentives and loopholes? Is this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No; the zero carbon standard in paras 4.3-4.5 excludes carbon embodiment in the construction process and carbon emissions from transport. There is no reasonable explanation for these exclusions. This is considered to be inconsistent with the overall objectives of Eco-towns as exemplar projects. • According to the Stockholm Environment Institute, transport accounts for 23% of all UK carbon emissions - the same as home energy use. It is noted that the Code for Sustainable Homes (unlike its predecessor BREEAM standards) excludes transport from its assessment. Whilst this may well be acceptable for individual buildings it is not acceptable to exclude the impact of transport carbon emissions as part of a new town wide development process. • A consistent and clear definition of zero carbon development should be applied across

	standard the most cost effective way to do this?	<p>government departments and agencies to avoid confusion and loopholes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It should also be noted that Page 63 Paragraph 2.8.5 of the CLG/Scot Wilson Eco-towns SA/HRA of eco-towns Programme for Pennbury states “achieving genuine zero carbon development can only be met if construction and embodied impacts are considered”.
Q4.6-Climate Change Adaptation	The climate change adaptation standard, alongside existing planning guidance, aims to ensure that eco-towns will be more future proof. Is it sufficiently clear and workable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No; the statement concerning climate change adaptation is superficial and does not highlight the need for flexibility in master planning, design and construction process. Solar gain/wind access through good orientation and microclimate assessment is critical to this process. Whilst building for life standards and internal space standards will ensure some internal flexibility this also needs to be applied to the overall massing and scale of development as a whole. It is possible that eco-town development will take the form of higher density development of a scale, size and massing not seen in the local vernacular. Development should not restrict further opportunities to adapt over time and maximise access to natural resources.
Q4.7-Homes	<p>Should the PPS be more prescriptive than set out in paragraph 4.9 (e) in relation to energy efficiency?</p> <p>Do you agree that 70% is an appropriate level of carbon mitigation through on site means?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, an eco–town should be delivering to a stretched target beyond mere compliance with planned Building Regulation requirements that are due to be imposed on all forms of new residential development. It is only by exceeding the regulatory standards that the eco-town can distinguish itself as an exemplar development. No, the minimum level of carbon mitigation through on-site measures should be 80% if eco-towns are to be the national exemplars government wishes to achieve and to be consistent with one planet living principles.
Q4.8-Employment	Is this employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is vital that the phasing of delivery of jobs and housing are dovetailed together

	<p>standard sufficiently clear and workable?</p>	<p>from “day 1”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The employment standard as highlighted in the draft PPS is weak. Ideally for a development to be sustainable, growth should be employment led rather than housing led. • In this context relating employment provision to employment standards will result in a prescription process which will bear little or no resemblance to the local or regional economic circumstances in which an eco-town will sit. • There must be a greater commitment in this draft PPS to a sustainable balance between jobs and housing provision and a greater emphasis should be placed on economic development which reflects regional and local needs and circumstances. • This should directly link housing provision to forecasting of jobs/occupations/salaries, referenced back to housing type/mix and tenures. Otherwise unsustainable development may occur with adverse economic and environmental impacts. • The employment strategy should be produced at an early stage in the development of the plans, and not left until the planning application.
<p>Q4.9-Transport</p>	<p>The transportation standard attempts to support people’s desire for mobility whilst enabling low carbon living, is it sufficiently clear and workable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is clear and workable; however using an accessibility matrix approach may give a more robust assessment of mobility needs.
<p>Q4.10-Local Services</p>	<p>The local services standard allows for flexibility to reflect existing service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principles of Paragraph 4.17 are supported, subject to the following: • Local service provision should be linked to detailed demographic and robust population modelling which recognise issues concerning the make up and dynamic of the new

	<p>provision and the size of development. Does it cover essential services which will be needed in eco-towns?</p>	<p>community, which will not be the same as the host community in which it sits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importantly for social cohesion, community and local services should also be available to those who live/work nearby or are linked to the new community to avoid a split level of service between the “old and new community”. Capacity and impact studies of community and local services should be undertaken across a range of sensitivity testing and costings, and funded by the promoters. • Inclusive access assessment for all members of the community should be undertaken, and an Equalities Impact Assessment should also be required.
<p>Q4.11-Green Infrastructure and biodiversity</p>	<p>The standards proposed on green infrastructure and biodiversity aim to ensure that development is undertaken in such a way that it protects and enhances the best features of local landscape for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Are these standards reasonable and deliverable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principles of the green infrastructure and bio-diversity proposals are supported, subject to the following: • As with our comment on local services, this should be strengthened by capacity and impact assessments on accessibility and equalities. These impact assessments should also consider the impact/effect proposals may have on other green infrastructure in the locality and their management and resource implications. Options should explore the ability to link and provide networks of spaces which respond to the needs and functions of the local communities.
<p>Q4.12-Water and flood risk management</p>	<p>The water and flood risk standard aim to sure that eco-town developments are planned so that they will minimise water use and flood risk, and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst standards themselves are clear significant questions remain about their deliverability. • Particular points are in terms of adoption, management and maintenance, likely revenue support required and viability arising from up-front costs. Much evidence exists about the unwillingness of statutory bodies and the appropriate industry regulating bodies to adopt services which are outside of their agreed operating procedures and processes.

	<p>raise quality. Are the standards proposed clear and deliverable?</p>	<p>Questions therefore remain about the management and maintenance of such functions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paragraphs 4.27-4.28 reflect much of the material contained within PPS25 and are therefore unnecessary. • The concept of water neutrality should apply to all sites, not just those in areas of severe water stress.
<p>Q.4.13 Waste</p>	<p>The waste standard aims to ensure that eco-towns manage their waste effectively, from construction onwards. Is the proposed waste standard a clear and workable way of doing this?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Draft PPS should set overall stretch targets and milestones in percentage terms for the re-use of construction, domestic and non-domestic waste. • There should be a presumption in favour of these targets unless there are very exceptional circumstances as to why this cannot be achieved. It is recognised that to be consistent with national policy the Draft PPS should not specify technologies and delivery mechanisms but targets should be applied to all eco-town proposals and should explicitly require the re use of waste material as a fuel source for district wide or micro CHP generation.
<p>Q4.14-Transition and Development</p>	<p>The transition and development standard should ensure that initial residents will not live in un-serviced and isolated building sites. Does it get the balance right between supporting initial residents and enabling developers the flexibility they need to build and grow the town?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The requirement for an overall masterplan for an eco-town is welcomed. • Paragraph 4.31 ought to better set out the status of any masterplan relating to an Eco-town and its relationship to the statutory development plan process. In view of the significance which the Statement gives to the integrity of the masterplan, the PPS ought to be clear that every Eco-town should ideally be the subject of a specific DPD, where this is appropriate. • A defined process for open dialogue should be agreed between the promoters and the local planning authority. • If there are significant changes in the development and Masterplanning processes then the sustainability and environmental impact analyses should start again.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PPS should set out much clearer parameters for the consideration of what social, economic and environmental infrastructure should be provided, at the commencement of development, at first occupations, and in respect of successive phases of development. It is critical that the eco-town is an attractive place within which to live and work from day 1 as well as ensuring that the desired eco standards are delivered.
<p>Q4.15 Community and Governance</p>	<p>The community and governance standard attempts to ensure that eco-towns will be successful communities, that residents will have a say in how their town is run, and that standards are maintained. Is this standard clear and workable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a broad and complex issue, the principles of the proposal are supported however it is not clear as to how such functions will develop, be supported and function over time. Community capacity building will be an important feature in any new community and as with many of the issues raised above will need to be accessible and inclusive. As it stands it is unclear as to how this would work. The relationship between the local governance structures in the eco-town and the relevant local authorities and parish councils needs to be clear.

Draft PPS consultation – HDC draft response.

1. Sustainability Appraisal of the PPS

The stated purpose of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is unclear. The SA seems to imply that it has accepted the principle of the eco-towns programme and has been used simply to “suggest ways in which their impact could be rendered more sustainable.” (Para. 1.5.5) This is inadequate and unsatisfactory. The SA should be more than “an input to the eco-towns Programme”, it should be the mechanism to determine whether specific locations and development proposals are acceptable in principle to go forward to further evaluation through the LDF process.

The approach to the consideration of alternatives in the SA is fundamentally flawed. The SA deals with alternatives simply by considering the situation with the draft PPS (i.e. developing eco-towns) versus the situation without the draft PPS (described as “business as usual”). The SA should have considered the option of “Sustainable Urban Extensions” as an alternative to the free-standing eco-town concept and appraised this alongside the do-nothing option. In the East Midlands there are a number of existing and potential SUEs which represent very realistic alternatives to Pennbury, including those put forward in evidence by the County Council to the Public Examination of the draft RSS, as well the Panel Report recommendation that the Burton-Leicester corridor was worthy of consideration.

The SA fails to provide any convincing explanation as to why Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) have not been considered and appraised as viable alternatives to the eco-town concept. It also fails to contain any convincing evidence that Sustainable Urban Extensions could not be designed to achieve the same sustainability benefits as eco-towns, if the eco-towns criteria are applied to them. The SA for Pennbury should have evaluated the potential SUEs in the East Midlands as viable alternatives to Pennbury, particularly since the SA evaluates a number of alternatives elsewhere, including urban extensions (at Bicester).

Section 3.7 summarises the benefits that are planned to flow from eco-towns and Table 6 identifies whether the proposed eco-towns standards would represent an improvement on business as usual. Note that all of these supposed “improvements” could also apply to Sustainable Urban Extensions, which would not represent “business as usual” if the eco-towns criteria were applied to them.

Table 6 identifies an eco-town transport standard that “*key connections around the eco-town do not become congested*”. This is a welcome criterion against which schemes should be evaluated. Given the importance of this issue it is not sufficient, as suggested by the SA, that this criterion is applied at planning application stage. This is too late in the process and decisions in principle may have been taken. The DCLG and local authorities should be satisfied that proposed eco-towns will not lead to congestion on key connections around the site, before any decisions in principle are taken.

The SA states that the requirement that there should be access to one employment opportunity per new dwelling represents a clear improvement on business-as-usual in terms of policy. The SA should also have gone on to consider how easily this objective may be delivered and monitored, before attaching any significance to this criterion.

The DCLG has not accepted the recommendation that one of the locational criteria should be that eco-towns be located in an “*area of high housing and affordable housing demand*”. This is illogical and inconsistent since the whole programme is so clearly related to the government’s objectives to increase the delivery of housing. The government has also not accepted the recommendation that eco-standards be developed for urban extensions. This is a major wasted opportunity since urban extensions are an important category of development which are likely to provide a major delivery vehicle for new homes around the country.

2. Sustainability Appraisal of the Pennbury location

The SA is split into three different documents. Even within the locational chapter there is a further split and the sustainability effects of the location are considered separately from the sustainability effects of the development proposal. This disaggregated approach is unhelpful and makes it difficult to form a holistic view of the overall sustainability effects of the Co-op’s proposals at local, sub-regional and national levels. The different elements of the SA should be integrated into a coherent whole.

The stated purpose of the SA is unclear. It appears to be being used simply to “*explore the benefits and disadvantages associated with each of the locations and development proposals as an input to the eco-towns Programme*”. The SA should be more than “an input to the eco-towns Programme”. It should be the mechanism to determine whether specific locations and development proposals are acceptable in principle to go forward to further evaluation through the LDF process.

The SA has been undertaken at a strategic level and it is broad in its assessment, conclusions and recommendations. However, it is sometimes too broad to be very useful. Para. 2.4 describes the key sustainability objectives which need to be considered, and these essentially form the sustainability framework against which both the location (Table 6) and the developers proposals are evaluated (Table 7). However, none of these objectives include factors which are typically considered in an SA, including soil resources (particularly important in the case of a greenfield location), health, education and equality. The treatment of “spatial issues” is also incomplete. The assessment of locational issues should surely include the extent to which it is capable (or not) of accommodating a free-standing settlement which is “separate and distinct, but well linked to a higher order centre”. This is one of the key eco-town criteria that has been re-iterated though all the various consultation documents, and is repeated again in para. 4 of the draft PPS. These issues are not dealt with in the SA, which is a major omission.

The environmental baseline section places too much reliance on regional analysis (e.g. regional bio-diversity issues). There is a lack of detailed understanding of local issues and priorities and Oadby and Wigston SA for example is not referred to at all.

The Habitat Regulations Assessment concludes that “*It did not prove possible to say with confidence that development at Pennbury under the Eco-towns Policy Framework will not lead to adverse effects on Rutland Water SPA & Ramsar site as a result of recreational pressure or on European sites as a result of increased abstraction or on the Humber Estuary as a result of cumulative deterioration in water quality*”. A number of mitigation measures are recommended, including application of Natural England Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) to open space provision within the eco-town and additional measures, including site management, which may be required at the European sites, to be specified at the detailed project-based Appropriate Assessment stage. Given the specialist ornithological interest at both international sites affected by Pennbury, it is unclear whether “similar recreational functions” can actually be achieved at Pennbury. Moreover, it would seem logical that the PPS Appropriate Assessment should be satisfied that all the potential effects on European sites are capable of being managed and mitigated before it is approved, and not leave residual effects to a project level Appropriate Assessment, by which time the policy context may be fixed.

In the assessment of the situation with the eco-town, the SA is unbalanced by an uncritical acceptance of Co-op aspirations and objectives. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy identifies five guiding principles, including Using Sound Science Responsibly. This includes taking into account scientific uncertainty through the precautionary principle. The SA should be based on the precautionary principle and should not be influenced by unsubstantiated assertions for which there is no evidence.

The SA uncritically repeats the Co-op’s assertion that the “*compact nature of the development is likely to minimise the impact upon the character and setting of existing settlements*”. In fact, the most recent Masterplan Vision document, October 2008, has changed the distribution of the proposed development blocks from the Compact 50 option. The development now extends further to the north, to the south and to the west. In addition to being highly visible from Houghton on the Hill, Kings Norton and Illston on the Hill, the development boundary is now very close to settlements at Great Glen, Oadby, Little Stretton and Stretton Hall. The SA is therefore based on out of date information.

The statements regarding access to rail services appear contradictory. If access to rail services is essential, it is unclear why this is not one of the key recommendations of the SA. It is not mentioned for example in section 2.8.5 which summarises issues that require further consideration and elaboration. No consideration appears to have been given to the fact that the location of any rail station at Great Glen would be some 5km from the town centre, and would presumably need a connecting bus service to facilitate easy access. The SA should not attach any weight to the possibility of a rail service to Pennbury without much greater certainty that it can be delivered.

The SA does not accord sufficient weight to employment matters in the appraisal of either the eco-town location or the development proposals. This is a fundamental weakness that undermines the credibility of the appraisal process.

Para. 2.8.4 summarises the issues which require further consideration and elaboration. All of these are relevant and necessary. Note that reference is made to the need for “*further analysis and development of the economic and commercial role of the proposed eco-town*”. This element cannot be emphasised too much.

END