

27 April 2009

The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP
Minister for Housing and Planning
Dept for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Dear Minister

Proposed 'Middle Quinton' Eco-town

We write to you in our capacity as Leaders of the six local authorities most affected by the Eco-town proposal known as 'Middle Quinton'. Indeed we wrote a similar letter to your predecessor Caroline Flint in June of last year, a copy of which is enclosed.

Since government launched its Eco-town programme we have worked jointly as local authorities to assess the Middle Quinton proposal and to respond to the consultations undertaken by your department. As local authorities we have never objected to the principle of Eco-towns, but have objected to the development of such proposals in the absence of any regional and local development plan context for them. Eco-towns, because of their scale are of strategic significance and should be considered within the wider strategy for the local area, sub-region and region rather than being viewed as isolated proposals. This wider consideration can only be effectively achieved through the statutory development plan, i.e. by the testing of eco-town proposals through the RSS and LDF. This would ensure that any eco-town proposal is rigorously tested against all the alternative spatial options for meeting future development needs, and as such would only be allocated where it was proven to be the most sustainable option for meeting those needs. **In our view Eco-towns should only come forward where they have been identified in and supported by the development plan for an area.** This is certainly not the case as regards Middle Quinton.

In responding to the 'Eco-towns – Living a Greener Future' consultation paper the Councils made clear their opposition the proposed Eco Town development known as Middle Quinton, based on the information then available. Notwithstanding the additional information that has been produced as part of the second stage consultation, the Councils remain **unanimously opposed** to this proposal. This opposition is reflected in our Joint Response which has been submitted to your department in respect of the draft Planning Policy Statement and Sustainability Appraisals.

The key elements of the joint response are summarised below:

- Because of their strategic significance the PPS should include a clear statement that eco-towns would only be acceptable where they have been considered within and supported by the development plan process.
- Changes are sought to the proposed locational principles set out in the draft PPS which would enable the consideration of smaller eco-communities within or adjacent to existing urban areas.
- Detailed comments are provided on the proposed Eco-town standards set out in the draft PPS seeking clearer, more robust standards and the use of performance phasing to ensure compliance with the standards.
- The remote rural location of the Middle Quinton site, where accessibility is constrained by physical features such as the River Avon and the Cotswolds AONB, is such that it cannot be considered to be a sustainable location for the development of an Eco-town. Detailed comments are made on the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Middle Quinton proposal. These conclude that the weaknesses of the location are such that the SA should have rejected the Middle Quinton location outright.
- Should the proposal proceed, contrary to the strong objections of the local authorities, then the provision of sustainable transport links and the impact of the proposal on the local road network will be critical. This requires a much more thorough assessment than the Strategic Transport Assessment undertaken to date, and the proposal would need to deliver a step change in the provision and utilisation of all forms of public transport in the local area.
- The independent viability assessment commissioned by the local authorities concludes that the development is not viable with a deficit of £373 million. Substantial public subsidy would be required to support the development. Such public expenditure would be better directed to sustainable urban locations where needs can be matched with opportunities and existing infrastructure can be utilised more effectively.

The comprehensive assessment work which we have undertaken has served to strengthen our opposition to the proposal as expressed in our previous letter to Caroline Flint MP. Indeed our work has raised even greater doubts about the potential to deliver a sustainable settlement in this remote rural location and the viability of the infrastructure package required to support such a settlement.

Our Councils have consistently expressed concerns regarding the process by which the proposals for eco-towns have come about and the lack of democratic engagement in the whole programme. The proposals are against existing national, regional and local planning policies and, as such, the process is considered to be fundamentally flawed. Notwithstanding these concerns we have chosen not to engage in legal action or threats of such action. Instead we have relied on the strength of our planning case against the Middle Quinton proposal, based on the repeated assurances from your department that Eco-towns would only be progressed through the planning system.

In reaching your final decision on the locations to be included within the Eco-towns Programme we would ask that you pay close regard to the Joint Response that we have produced. We urge you to **reject the unsustainable Middle Quinton proposal**, which is contrary to the planning strategies for the area at regional, sub-regional and local level, and is widely opposed by the local communities which we represent.

The imposition of this proposal by Government would be widely regarded as an attack on the planning system and local democracy.

Yours sincerely



Lynden Stowe
Leader of Cotswold DC



Barry Dare
Leader of Gloucestershire
CC



Les Topham
Leader Stratford-on-Avon DC



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