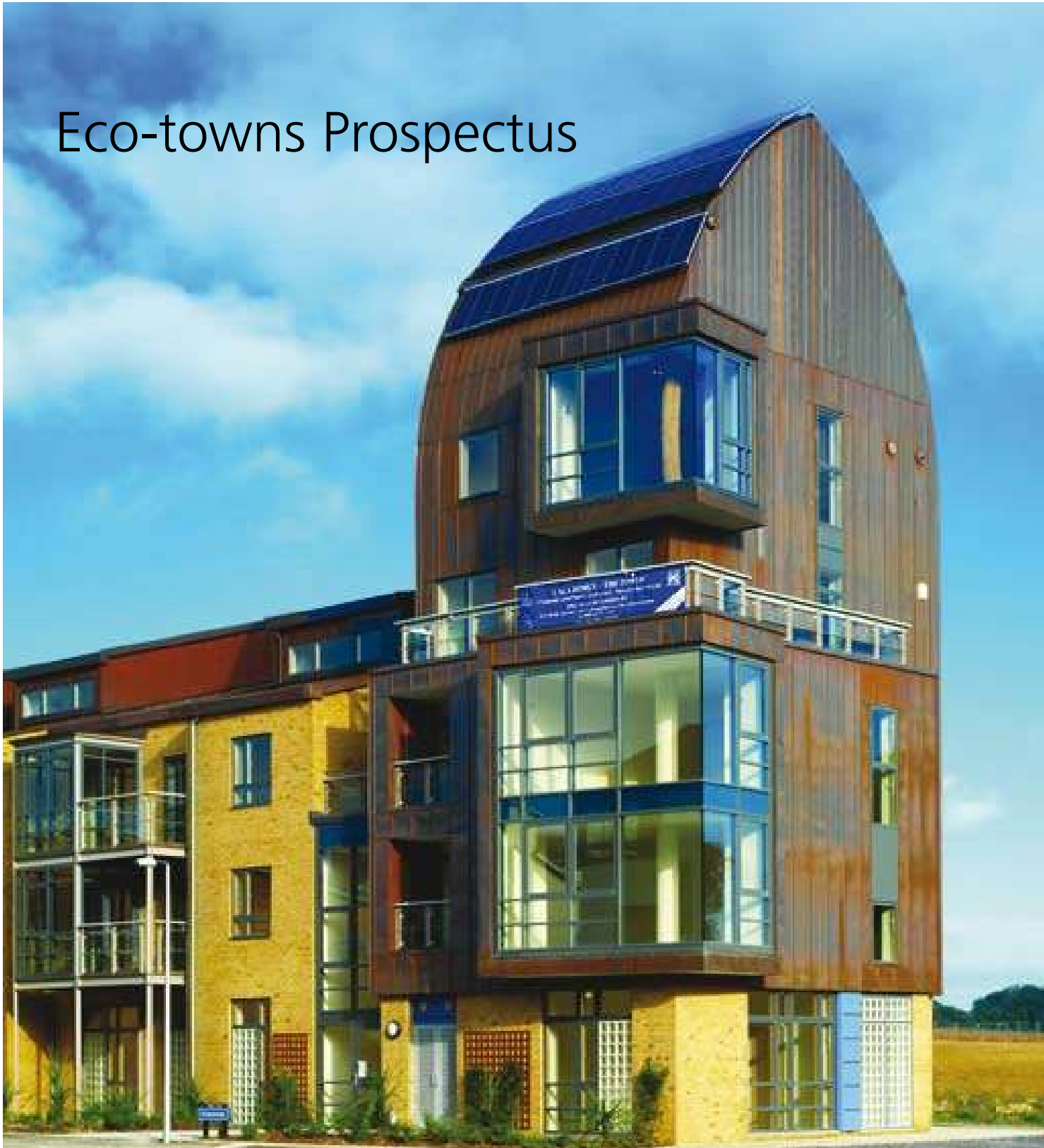


Eco-towns Prospectus



Photograph Acknowledgements

Photo 1 – Front cover: The Chase Tower apartment block by Cala Domus, at Newhall, Harlow. Winner of CABA *Building for Life Gold Award 2005*. A distinctive landmark building in the 74-home development, the Chase Tower mimics a windmill to generate electricity for the communal parts of the building with photo voltaic panels. Photograph courtesy of Cala Domus.

Photo 2. Northstowe masterplan. Northstowe.uk.com

Photo 3 Cranbrook site illustration. David Lock Associates.

Photo 4 & 5 Letchworth photographs. TCPA/Nick Matthews

Photo 6 Hammarby aerial photograph. Infobuild/Lennart Johanssen

Photo 7 Barking Riverside site photograph. London Development Agency.

Photos 8 & 9 Abode, Newhall. CABA/Countryside Properties.

Photo 10 Essen, Germany, Guided Busway. Cambridgeshire County Council

Photo 11 Upton, Northamptonshire. TCPA/David Waterhouse

Photo 12 Newhall. Cala Domus

Photo 13 Upton, Northamptonshire. TCPA/David Waterhouse



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Foreword by Yvette Cooper MP



After the second world war, Britain faced an unprecedented housing crisis. The post-war government led a nationwide consensus in support of new housing and greater environmental protection too. A major programme of house building including New Towns developed alongside the introduction of strong planning controls and the Green Belt. Sixty years ago, the post war generation recognised the importance of promoting economic and housing growth and protecting the environment at the same time.

Like the post war generation we now need to set out a clear and radical programme to increase housing and to protect the environment as well. We have an ageing, growing population with more people living alone, and rising housing demand is outstripping new supply. To help families across the country find affordable, quality housing we need to build far more houses. But we also need new measures to protect the environment. At the beginning of the 21st Century our greatest environmental challenge is from climate change. As housing accounts for 27 per cent of carbon emissions, we need to substantially cut emissions from new homes and work towards zero carbon housing and development.

We need to learn the lessons too from both the successes and the mistakes of previous generations. New developments need to be of the highest design standards as well as the highest environmental standards. Homes need to be built in truly mixed communities with strong economic underpinnings to support jobs and sustainable growth.

We have seen strong support across the private sector, local government and local communities for building more affordable homes alongside higher environmental standards. Now we want local areas to come forward with ideas on how to put these principles and ambitions into practice – with a new generation of eco-towns.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper'.

Yvette Cooper MP

Executive Summary

Eco-towns will be small new towns of at least 5-20,000 homes. They are intended to exploit the potential to create a complete new settlement to achieve zero carbon development and more sustainable living using the best new design and architecture. The key features we want to achieve are:

- (i) places with a separate and distinct identity but good links to surrounding towns and cities in terms of jobs, transport and services;**
- (ii) the development as a whole to achieve zero carbon and to be an exemplar in at least one area of environment technology;**
- (iii) a good range of facilities within the town including a secondary school, shopping, business space and leisure;**
- (iv) between 30 and 50 per cent affordable housing with a good mix of tenures and size of homes in mixed communities; and**
- (v) a delivery organisation to manage the town and its development and provide support for people, businesses and community services.**

Government is looking to encourage and support local authorities and the private sector to bring forward around five new schemes. This prospectus sets out the context for the programme and explains how the Government can support these projects. It outlines the criteria by which they will be assessed, subject to consultation and testing in the planning process.

New growth to help affordability

1. Without a major increase in new housing, homes will become increasingly unaffordable. During the last 30 years of the 20th century house-building rates have halved while the number of households grew by 30 per cent. House prices have doubled in real terms over the last ten years and nearly trebled in the last twenty years, making it ever harder for those trying to buy their first home. The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit has estimated that average home prices are set to reach ten times annual earnings for the next generation if we fail to build more homes.
2. Shortage of housing is a barrier to economic success and a threat to services. Worsening affordability affects the ability of key workers to live near their work, and recruitment. It disrupts families and communities and encourages unsustainable demand on transport systems. This is now an urgent issue in most towns, cities and rural counties.
3. Of course the Government will continue to stimulate the reuse of urban brownfield sites and encourage town centre renewal, together with urban extensions. However in some places the supply of previously used sites in town centres is running low. People need public space, leisure facilities and jobs – not all can go for housing. And there are limits to how far and how fast an existing town can expand without putting pressure on local services.
4. The Government's statement of housing policy, Planning Policy Statement 3, published in November 2006, gives local authorities a greater flexibility in the planning and delivery of the homes needed for their areas. Within that policy framework, there are a number of choices available at a regional and local level to accommodate growth. Where need and demand are high it will be necessary to identify a range of options.
5. New settlements, and urban extensions have the potential for quicker, easier and more ambitious delivery of affordable housing. New eco-towns could play a significant role in easing the affordability crisis by ensuring that between 30 and 50 per cent of the new housing is affordable.
6. Any new settlement must be of sufficient size to ensure a good level of services, jobs and community facilities to create attractive and sustainable places to live. There also need to be adequate and sustainable links to nearby larger towns and cities.

The Cambridge Challenge

Hi-tech companies based in Cambridge make a major contribution to the national economy. The lack of housing in the area is a major inhibitor to economic growth, and around 50 000 new homes are planned to be built there in the next 15 years. This must be achieved through providing **mixed communities** with a good choice of accommodation, including larger homes for families. The headline challenges for housing are:

- **Meeting overall anticipated demand for new homes across all tenures**
- **Meeting affordable housing demand with approx 800 new homes per year**
- **Rising house prices with 68 per cent of working people in Cambridge unable to buy a home**
- **Providing homes for key workers to live closer to where they work**

The '**Cambridge Challenge**' is a pilot scheme to select a single affordable housing partner to develop and manage new affordable homes for three of the major growth sites in the Cambridge sub-region, including the new settlement of **Northstowe**.

The three sites will provide a total of 16,000 homes by 2021 of which around 6,000 (nearly 40 per cent) will be affordable. This Pilot Project is looking at:

- Delivering a larger **volume of housing** at a **lower cost**
- Looking at how **certainty of funding** can speed up building new homes
- Promoting **well-designed communities** with functional and high-quality homes

7. Northstowe and Cranbrook were planned before the full scale of the climate change challenge became clear. However they are already demonstrating how new settlements can stimulate innovation and provide a large scale test bed for some of the new technologies needed to achieve zero carbon. Northstowe will be an exemplar of sustainability in the use of renewable energy sources, the minimisation of carbon emissions and the implementation of environmental best practice on waste and water management. In Cranbrook, housing will be designed to high environmental standards above current building regulations. The first phase includes providing 16.7 per cent of energy from renewable resources, with the use of biomass boilers to heat schools, commercial buildings and community facilities. The steps they are taking will provide many useful lessons for eco-towns.

Northstowe

Northstowe will be a new community of 9,500 homes on the former RAF Oakington barracks and airfield. It is five miles north-west of Cambridge, on the route of the new Cambridgeshire Guided Bus. The new town is being jointly promoted by the national regeneration agency, English Partnerships and private sector developer, Gallagher. They are supported by Cambridgeshire Horizons: the delivery body for local authorities in the Cambridge sub-region.

Public consultation on the draft Northstowe masterplan took place in June 2007. Infrastructure works are due to start in 2008 with construction of new homes planned to start in early 2009. Proposals for a community-based Northstowe Development Trust are also being developed.

Northstowe is intended to include:

- a secondary school, six primary schools and a civic hub including community health and cultural facilities;
- a local business district providing 5,000 jobs;
- leisure facilities; and
- shopping facilities suitable for a small town.



Northstowe is looking to achieve up to 50 per cent reductions in energy and mains water use by using approaches such as:

- microgeneration, photovoltaic panels;
- solar water heating (can supply up to 50 per cent hot water); and
- design for reduced energy and water use.

'Northstowe will be a sustainable and vibrant new community that is inclusive and diverse with its own distinctive local identity, which is founded on best practice urban design principles drawing on the traditions of fen-edge market towns, which encourages the high quality traditions and innovation that is characteristic of the Cambridge Sub-Region.'

Northstowe Area Action Plan (Final Inspector's Report – 4 June 2007)

Northstowe benefits from a £100m Government investment in its guided bus scheme. In addition around £5m Growth Area Funding has already been provided by the Government to Cambridgeshire Horizons, for advance infrastructure at Northstowe.

“Ideas about town and country, urban and rural, and their differences and complementarities, are going through another period of change. In some areas the point will be approaching where existing towns ‘must have stop’, and a bold new step will have to be taken to meet the need for housing and urban development in such a way that the distinction between town and country is not confused by sprawl.”

TCPA Report “Best Practice in Urban Extensions and New Settlements” (March 2007)

Cranbrook, Devon

The Cranbrook new community, will initially provide 3,500 homes by 2016. 40 per cent of these will be affordable. There is a proposed further expansion to at least 5,000 homes.

Cranbrook will have a new railway station to provide a quick connection to Exeter and there will be a comprehensive community infrastructure including a secondary school. There are already some challenging targets for energy efficiency, and the Government and other partners are supporting a strategy for a low and zero carbon future of the site.

“Our vision is to realise the full economic potential of Exeter as a major regional centre, providing a range of employment opportunities and a self sufficient new urban community where people will have the ability to live in close proximity to where the majority of new jobs will be provided. Expansion of Cranbrook will play a major part in this vision.”

Sara Randall Johnson, Leader of East Devon District Council



8. The new eco-towns can also draw on the best thinking and practice from the UK's historic experience of creating planned new settlements. The garden cities are rightly highly regarded across the world. Green Belts have kept places separate and distinct and many of the new towns of the second half of the twentieth century have been highly successful. Ebenezer Howard's vision of garden cities was of places to combine "the health of the country with the comforts of the town". Modern schemes need to be more flexible in design and make more use of different models of financing but many of the lessons of the new towns still apply. For example local trusts to use development profits to endow community facilities as in the Letchworth Foundation or to create and maintain extensive green infrastructure as with the Milton Keynes Parks Trust.

"The government new towns have matured and in large part regenerated, and are mostly highly regarded, but with the perspective of history we can see that there were other types of new town before and since, and a wider legacy on which we can now draw, and to which we can now add."

TCPA Report "Best Practice in Urban Extensions and New Settlements" (March 2007)

Letchworth

The first Garden City (1903), was developed to the principle of Ebenezer Howard's design for new communities. This provided well designed houses with gardens set in tree lined avenues, clean and healthy work places and a pleasant and healthy environment in which to live, work and follow leisure pursuits.



9. There are also good examples from other countries to draw on where they have achieved high levels of sustainability, with outstanding eco-elements. Examples include:
- **Vauban**, a new district of 5,000 homes to the south of Freiburg in Germany. It was developed with the participation of the local community, and devolved much of the decision-making on design and community to local people. There is a strong focus on alternatives to car use – nearly 50 per cent of Vauban's households are 'car free' thanks to promotion of car sharing and strong public transport links with a tram and train line in development. At least 100 buildings produce more energy than they need which is recycled into other areas.

- In **Sweden, Malmö**, a former industrial city has been successfully transformed into a knowledge-based city. The Bo 01: City of Tomorrow is a nine hectare site with 600 homes that are 100 per cent reliant on renewable energy. Features include electricity generation from wind turbine and solar panels, district heating system based on solar panels on buildings and deep bore aquifers which also provide cooling in the summer. Individual buildings have very high thermal performance levels through glazing, insulation, and energy efficient equipment. There is an automated waste collection system, and a sustainable urban drainage system. All residents have a bus stop within 300 metres of their doors with a service every seven minutes.
- **Nieuw Terbregge in Rotterdam, The Netherlands** is a development of 860 homes, noted both for designs sympathetic to existing green space and canals, and innovative energy production and use. There is a private public partnership in which the developer undertakes building to performance requirements agreed with the city of Rotterdam. There are passive and active solar thermal systems, small-scale combined heat and power and a ground heat water pump system. Carbon emissions are up to 55 per cent lower than new housing produced in 1996. The development's second phase is looking to go beyond this. The site is part of an EU programme (RESTART) that aims to provide the host cities with energy and environmental exemplars that can be implemented on a larger scale in the cities.

Hammarby Sjöstad, Stockholm

10,000 homes on a former polluted and semi-derelict industrial and waterside area close to the centre of Stockholm. Its regeneration was the central plank of their bid for the 2004 Olympics, and, despite losing the bid, a commitment was made to continue with the developments in order to regenerate the area.



Environmental issues have been tackled at the planning and implementation stage, and there are a myriad of new technologies, including eco-friendly construction standards, rainwater harvesting, solar cells and panels, and vacuum sorted underground waste removal. The residential districts are designed to allow for maximum light and views as well as providing open access to the courtyards of residential blocks. A network of parks, green spaces and walkways runs through the development, and where possible, the natural landscape has been preserved. Community provision in the area includes a modern glass church building, two

state schools, one pre-school and nursery, a doctors' surgery, a library, a sports centre, and ski-slope.

10. There are a number of other pioneering schemes in the UK such as **Carbon Challenge**. The Carbon Challenge will act as a test bed for the new Code for Sustainable Homes and help to meet the Government target of building zero carbon new homes by 2016. All new homes will be built to Code level 5/6 (see Code for Sustainable Homes box) under the terms of the Challenge. The lessons learned about skills and technologies will be disseminated to the home building industry

helping them gear up to meet the new standards. The first two sites in Bristol and Peterborough are owned by English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency which is running the competition. The successful developer for the first site will be announced in late 2007 with construction starting in autumn 2008.

Zero Carbon and the Code for Sustainable Homes

The Code for Sustainable Homes is an assessment and rating system aimed at improving the environmental impact of new homes. It introduces minimum standards in nine key areas including energy/CO₂ and water. It sets different levels of energy efficiency for buildings. So when people buy a home they know how energy efficient it is and they will have some idea how much it will cost to run it – just like when people buy a fridge. More information is available at www.communities.gov.uk/thecode

Zero carbon means no net carbon emissions from all energy uses in the home – so the amount of energy taken from the national grid is less than or equal to the amount put back through renewable technologies. This equates to Level Six of the energy/carbon aspects of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The vast majority, if not all, of such homes will be eligible for a time-limited relief from Stamp Duty Land Tax.

11. Among the New Government sponsored **Growth Points** Leicester City Council are finalising a masterplan for the Ashton Green zero-carbon new community and construction should start in 2009. Reigate & Banstead Borough Council are committed to investigate and implement sustainable water and energy solutions for new developments planned in the borough and have been awarded £450,000 to take forward proposals, including a pilot rainwater harvesting scheme.

Thames Gateway and Water

The Government is conducting a study for examining the feasibility of moving towards a high level of water efficiency in the Thames Gateway. This would test how to secure major development without increasing overall water use in the area. The study is examining the role of metering, the Code for Sustainable Homes and retrofitting existing homes with water efficiency options towards achieving the goal of water neutrality. The study is due to report its findings in the latter half of 2007 and is timed to feed into the development of the Thames Gateway Plan and the development of water company plans. It will also derive lessons to inform other major housing Growth Areas.



Barking Riverside is the largest brownfield site in London. It will provide around 10,000 new homes, social, education and community facilities, employment, and open space all served by new public transport links. Plans for Barking Riverside include 50 per cent reductions in carbon emission for new homes and high standards for energy reduction.

12. Government is keen to encourage pioneering eco-developments in all types of locations including Growth Areas and Growth Points and eco-town developments will help provide valuable experience for this wider take up.

Key criteria for eco-towns

13. Eco-towns are a major opportunity for local authorities, house builders, developers and registered social landlords to come together to build small new towns. Eco-towns should be well designed, attractive places to live, with good services and facilities, and which connect well with the larger towns or cities close by. Uniquely, they offer an opportunity to design a whole town – business and services as well as homes – to achieve zero-carbon development, and to use this experience to help guide other developments across the country. The **essential requirements** we are looking for are:

- (i) **Eco-towns must be new settlements, separate and distinct from existing towns but well linked to them. They need to be additional to existing plans, with a minimum target of 5,000–10,000 homes;**

- (ii) The development as a whole should reach zero carbon standards, and each town should be an exemplar in at least one area of environmental sustainability;**
- (iii) Eco-town proposals should provide for a good range of facilities within the town – a secondary school, a medium scale retail centre, good quality business space and leisure facilities;**
- (iv) Affordable housing should make up between 30 and 50 per cent of the total through a wide range and distribution of tenures in mixed communities, with a particular emphasis on larger family homes;**
- (v) A management body which will help develop the town, provide support for people moving to the new community, for businesses and to co-ordinate delivery of services and manage facilities.**

14. Schemes should use the Code for Sustainable Homes as a guide on sustainability issues other than energy. The **outcomes** we are looking for, across the whole town, include:

I) Environment and Carbon

- Incorporate renewable energy systems such that, not only homes, but schools, shops, offices and community facilities can reach zero carbon standards, with innovative town scale generation of renewable energy.
- Demonstrate excellence in one particular aspect of environmental sustainability – whether technological (such as more advanced renewable and energy efficiency technologies, sustainable urban drainage or wastewater treatment or grey water recycling, waste management systems) or through adoption of innovative approaches to embedding sustainable behaviours among the community.
- Planned in a way which supports low carbon living and, in particular, minimises carbon emissions from transport.
- Incorporate high standards of water efficiency, particularly in areas of the country defined as severely water stressed.
- Incorporate environmentally sustainable approaches to managing waste, wastewater, drainage and flooding, in line with PPS25: Development and Flood Risk (e.g. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems).
- Integrate green space and features to enhance biodiversity.
- Use construction methods and materials which have a low environmental impact and generate minimum construction waste.

15. The Environment Agency’s report “Hidden Infrastructure – the pressures on environmental infrastructure” (2007) includes some important considerations for eco-development, including location to minimise flood risk and take into account water quality and existing water resources; a long term planning framework for all types of environmental infrastructure – particularly waste water planning by water companies; and demand management, particularly though greater water efficiency.

II) Design

- A commitment to high standards of architecture and urban design throughout the development, across all housing tenures and buildings including commercial and community buildings and extending to the quality of the streets, public realm, parks and open spaces, consistent with planning policy.
- Hold design competitions for key stages – the masterplan and major projects in the town so as to attract the best local, national and international architectural and design talent.
- A high quality masterplan which addresses the complex issues of design at a large scale including the consideration of the wider landscape and urban form.
- Masterplans and building specifications which are clear yet adaptable, as they will be delivered over a number of years, and should encourage continuous improvement over time, as more sustainable patterns of living and working are developed.

16. Good design is about more than looks; well designed places also work well. If they look good and work well, they will be popular and flourish, and so prove sustainable. As national planning policies (PPS1 and PPS3) and CABI's Growth Areas guidance indicates, place-making is about reinforcing local distinctiveness. We will encourage the highest quality through a CABI run Eco-towns Design Review Panel. Government will work with RIBA, CABI and the Prince's Trust to stimulate new architectural thinking, including a design competition on how to achieve a strong vision and identity in a range of illustrative new settlement types, while relating effectively to local character and reference.

Abode, Newhall (Harlow)

Winner of CABI's 'Building for Life' Gold Award 2003 and RIBA Award 2005. This exceptional 82 home project was driven by the desire of the landowners to create a sustainable community with a high quality of design, with a dynamic approach to the uses of space and materials. Design standards extend beyond the houses themselves to the area, to include a target of 40 per cent green space and communal play areas, as well as resident management of key areas including the parkland.



III) Transport

- An area-wide travel plan should be provided for each eco-town scheme, with local targets, setting out how it intends to achieve a significantly higher proportion of journeys on foot, by cycle and by public transport than comparable sized settlements.
- High quality public transport links (and easy access to a wide range of sub-regional employment and leisure facilities) and to reduce car dependency including cycling and walking.
- New design, minimising the need to travel by locating key public services together and taking into account the Department for Transport/Communities and Local Government 'Manual for Streets' (March 2007).
- The management of demand through traffic control measures and giving priority to public transport and high occupancy vehicles.
- Consideration of the impact on roads and congestion when siting the eco-town, and the planning in of infrastructure requirements.



Guided Busway, Essen, Germany

IV) Community

- Community empowerment in both the development and operation of the eco-town to hold those who make the decisions affecting the town to account and give greater power for more people to control their lives with community ownership of assets.
- Encouraging active communities by creating the conditions for community participation and involvement in civic activity, for example residents undertaking formal volunteering on a regular basis. Encouraging participation in cultural and recreational activities.
- Community assets: An eco-town should enable greater community ownership and management of assets, for example through a Community Development Trust.



Upton, Northamptonshire

V) Jobs as well as Homes

- A clear economic strategy for the town relating business potential in the settlement to nearby towns and economic clusters.
- Encouraging working from home through live work units or in local resource centres, supported by wi-fi (wireless) and other Information Technology (IT) networks.
- As part of the management plan, facilitating the social, institutional and professional infrastructure locally for business networking.

VI) Health

- Eco-towns should promote healthy and sustainable environments through design and planning to deliver physical and mental health benefits.
- Offer choices for healthy living, through the “Active Design” principles, community action and encouraging healthy behaviours.
- The proposals for eco-towns should plan for these issues, working with Primary Care Trusts and other Health Trusts to address provision of care and plans for tackling health inequalities.



Cala Domus, Newball

VII) Land Use

- Wherever there are good opportunities to do so, schemes should make use of suitable surplus public sector land, or brownfield land.
- Appropriate use of land in terms of quality and mitigation of impacts on biodiversity.
- Imaginative proposals to create additional green infrastructure.
- Above all, sustainable locations, which relate well to the existing network of surrounding towns and villages.

17. **Surplus Public Sector Land.** Where practicable we want to encourage the development of eco-towns on surplus public sector land. In terms of registered surplus public sector land there are about 4,600 hectares, which provides a potential opportunity for development. A recent exercise to identify additional surplus public sector sites owned by central Government Departments revealed a further 550, with nearly 300 within the wider South-East. These are being examined by English Partnerships for housing development and some of these sites could offer potential opportunities for eco-towns.



Upton, Northamptonshire

Taking forward new settlements

18. We will be establishing a **stakeholder reference group** of environmental bodies, private sector and housing organisations and others to help advise on the implementation and application of the criteria set out above. The group will aim to bring together leading experts in the delivery of sustainable development including low and zero carbon technology, design, community involvement and transport.

19. **Funding.** A large proportion of future investment in eco-towns is likely to be made by the private sector. It is important that both the house-building industry and investors in infrastructure and commercial development have confidence in the overall approach. They will need to be sure that there are good prospects for a strong partnership with the public sector and an effective local delivery organisation. Eco-towns are major projects and will also need infrastructure support from government, local authorities and all the main public sector agencies, to help create a positive climate for investment. They will also need specialist skills on design, planning and delivery.
20. Government Departments' mainstream programmes will play a key role in ensuring that the new communities are well served in terms of schools, health and social provision and other main services. The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07) Policy Review into Supporting Housing Growth will set out how departmental resources across government can support future housing and population growth.
21. To provide additional funding for the infrastructure needed for new settlements, the Government is extending the **New Growth Points Scheme** to help provide support for infrastructure, community facilities, and other key projects, as well as initial studies and delivery capacity. Growth Funding will be available from within the Communities and Local Government growth budget. In addition the Government will look at creating a framework agreement with each eco-town to enable infrastructure investment to be prioritised by the local delivery organisation between private investors, local and regional bodies and central Government Departments.
22. To help provide guidance for promoters and local authorities we are also putting in place further practical guidance from **David Lock and the Town and Country Planning Association** which will build on the recent TCPA Study ("Best Practice in Urban Extensions and New Settlements," March 2007), and draw on experience of similar major projects in the UK and overseas.

Delivery and management

23. We would expect eco-town proposals to include options for a dedicated delivery body which will plan, oversee, and develop (with partners) the major infrastructure needed to establish the town. Options include a local authority-led body, a cross-sectoral trust, or a statutory body such as a new town development corporation which would include local and wider representation. The decision on what is likely to work best will vary according to the scale, complexity and requirements of the scheme. We will be ready to discuss options with local partners including eligibility for Communities and Local Government delivery support and funding.
24. A new town development corporation, established under the New Towns Act, 1981, could be an appropriate delivery option in circumstances where:
 - the task of infrastructure provision and related investment was of a scale where a statutory body would have significant advantages;
 - there was a major task of land assembly and the need for special powers was evident; and
 - the ability of a statutory body to bring forward development more quickly was a significant factor.

25. In other circumstances a local non-statutory partnership or private sector body may well be able to take the lead. Whatever the nature of the delivery body there will be a need to provide for the long term maintenance and endowment of community assets. Community Trusts are an option and there are good models in some of the earlier new towns.
26. English Partnerships is already playing a leading role in delivering the Northstowe scheme, jointly with Cambridgeshire Horizons and the private sector. There is potential for English Partnerships (and the planned new homes agency) to play a major role in helping to take forward a number of these schemes, particularly where former public sector land is involved. Promoters and bidders should make early contact with English Partnerships to see if this is an option.

Planning

27. Just as housing markets are wider than individual local authority boundaries, so identifying and considering potential eco-town schemes will require local authorities to look at the wider area of which they form part, the pattern of clusters and networks of towns, the links between them and the best strategic options for growth for the larger area. These are issues for the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) or for a partial RSS review. These reviews will provide the strategic planning context for consideration of individual proposals and sustainability/environmental appraisal as necessary.
28. In some cases the planning content provided by the development plan as a whole is already sufficiently clear to enable a proposal for an eco-town to be handled directly by a planning application. The Government wants to minimise delay and enable proposals for eco-towns to be dealt with quickly through all aspects of the planning system. We will be committing resources where appropriate to help achieve this.
29. In particular:
 - resources will be made available to facilitate **the minor review of Regional Spatial Strategies** (RSSs) where it is necessary to identify the broad locations of potential eco-towns;
 - we will ensure sufficient resources are available to handle quickly those planning applications for eco-towns which can proceed within the existing development plan, or, where the planning framework is not sufficiently clear, are subject to call-in as a departure; and
 - while some schemes would proceed via usual planning powers, there may be instances where **use of the powers in the New Towns Act 1981** would be appropriate. In these situations, there would still be a need for proposals to be included in an RSS or mini RSS review and to consult on the proposed designation and scheme proposals and to hold a public local inquiry.

Next steps

30. **Local authority views of potential** We expect authorities and groups of authorities to give consideration to the case for higher growth in their areas over the next few months, and the extent to which new eco-towns proposals could contribute to increased housing supply, above that planned to 2016. This process should build on the work that has been undertaken to inform RSSs to date, and the requirements of Housing Planning Policy Statement (PPS3) to maintain a rolling supply of housing, and to undertake housing market assessments of their areas and across sub-regions more generally. We are therefore asking for views on the scope for eco-town proposals from the relevant authorities, individually and collectively, taking particular account of housing market benefits. It will be important for proposals for an eco-town to relate to housing market pressures in the wider area.
31. We will also welcome views from **other stakeholders** on these issues including **joint assessments** and proposals from private sector – much as the work to prepare for RSS revisions has involved local authorities, Regional Development Agencies, and housebuilders in giving thought to, and providing evidence in support of, higher housing numbers, and broad strategic locations of higher growth. We will welcome views from other stakeholders including environmental, housing and business representatives.
32. It will also be valuable for Government to be informed of emerging major proposals and potential schemes with significant infrastructure implications, so that discussion with infrastructure providers and on sustainability can take place at a sufficiently early stage to inform future development of the scheme.
33. As with the recent process to identify New Growth Points, Government will assess schemes with potential in order to carry out a high level **inter-Departmental strategic review** of proposals. This will include DEFRA, DfT, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Highways Agency and English Heritage to ensure that proposals coming forward are sustainable, affordable and realistic in terms of policy and infrastructure investment support. This in no way prejudices the role of the planning process – but it does allow better supported proposals to come forward.
34. **More detailed information for local authorities and potential proponents** is available separately. You can obtain further information from Julie Bishop:

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