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**Meeting of the Executive Members for City  
Strategy and Advisory Panel**

**2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008**

Report of the Director of City Strategy

**Petition against the Proposed Clifton Gate Eco-town**

**Summary**

1. This report considers a petition submitted by Councillor Moore on behalf of the residents of Skelton, Rawcliffe and Clifton Without, opposing the Clifton Gate Eco-town proposal. The report sets out the Council's view that the correct way to consider any longer term major proposals for meeting housing need in York should be in a strategic way, through the democratic planning processes and involving significant public consultation.

**Background**

2. As part of the Housing Green Paper, published in the summer of 2007, the government launched its 'eco-town' initiative to build a new generation of 'eco friendly' towns to help meet overall national housing needs. Eco-towns must be large scale freestanding new settlements. They must be separate and distinct from existing towns. They will need to have good links to nearby towns and cities (either rail or high quality public transport). Each should cater for between 5000-20,000 homes. There is likely to be one or more in each region.
3. The Eco-town initiative was open to bids from private developers as well as local authorities. At the same time the government also announced the roll out the New Growth Points (NGP) programme, seeking accelerated rates of new housing delivery, to include, for the first time, areas in the north. It sought Expressions of Interest for New Growth Points and Eco-Towns by the end of October 2007.
4. The Council, as part of a bid by the Leeds City Region (LCR) authorities, put forward York Northwest to be a key new growth point in the Leeds City

Region. As part of the submission a “statement of intent” was also submitted to investigate potential locations for a new Eco-town in the Leeds City Region. The area of search would be a “potential area” between Leeds/York/Selby/Wakefield. This was to ensure that the appropriate location would be chosen after a strategic local authority commissioned study of all alternative sites, rather than the government just respond to developer-led bids, such as Clifton Gate.

5. The private sector bid submitted by Hallam Land Management and the Commercial Estates Group for the Clifton Gate Eco-town, immediately north of Clifton Moor, was submitted with no consultation with the City of York Council or with local residents or other interests in the city. A number of other bids were submitted in the Leeds City Region by the private sector, mainly between Leeds and Selby.
6. In April 2008 the government announced 15 eco-towns had been short-listed nationally for further consideration with more than 40 rejected as not deliverable. The government supported the Leeds City Region proposal for a strategic study to identify an appropriate location on the basis that an announcement could be made shortly.
7. The Leeds City Region Study has been commissioned and will be reporting its findings in June. As a result the government has not formally ruled out any of the Eco-town bids in the Leeds City Region yet (including Clifton Gate) until it considers the findings of the strategic study. It is likely to then make an announcement on a short listed location (and those sites rejected), in July.

## **The Petition**

8. A petition was submitted to Full Council in February by Councillor Moore on behalf of the residents of Skelton, Rawcliffe and Clifton Without, opposing the potential Eco-town proposal at Clifton Gate.
9. The petition states:

“We the undersigned, believe that to develop the land north of Clifton Moor is completely inappropriate, and call on the government to consider another location for the Proposed Eco-town.”
10. There were 410 forms returned. In the 'Your comments' section of the reply slip the key issues raised were:
  - inadequate highway capacity on the outer ring road and local road network
  - the infrastructure in the area including sewerage, schools and surface

- water drainage could not accommodate this level of development
- concern about urban sprawl and coalescence with villages
- should consider sites within the outer ring road first
- impact on wildlife, countryside and nature conservation
- loss of Green Belt/inappropriate for this development in the Green Belt
- should consider brownfield sites first such as York Central and British Sugar
- concern about lack of consultation with the Council and local people
- not needed now/make decisions later through the Local Development Framework (LDF) process
- it needs to be considered through recognised local planning processes such as the LDF not decided by central government

### **The Council's position on Clifton Gate**

11. The Leader of the Council wrote to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2007 expressing dismay at the lack of consultation with the Council on this Eco-town proposal. The letter sought assurance that if any proposal for an eco-town in York comes forward then it would be subject to the full rigours of the planning process both at a regional and local level. It also clearly set out our expectation that the government should seek the advice of the Local Planning Authority on the appropriateness or otherwise of any proposal before making such a decision.
12. The concerns are that the Clifton Gate bid did not include consultation with ourselves as Planning and Highway Authority, no wider public or stakeholder consultation, and to the best of our knowledge is not supported in any way by evidence to show it is the best location to meet York's future housing needs. We have still not seen the full details of the proposals. In determining the best locations for new development, highway and infrastructure capacity issues are clearly going to be a critical consideration as will be the need to protect the historic character and setting of the city. The range of concerns raised by residents in the submitted petition, and summarised above, clearly illustrate the need for detailed assessment of a wide number of factors before any locations for major development are chosen. We have no evidence that this has been done, and question whether that would be possible within the timescales given for Eco town submissions.
13. It is our view that major new housing proposals for York should be brought forward in a properly considered way through the LDF and Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) processes, considering all alternatives, and not through privately-led bids prepared in haste and without any consultation, or review of alternative options.

14. The Council has put significant resources into the LDF and we are moving forward on both the Core Strategy, Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD), and Area Action Plans for York Northwest and the City Centre. We have commissioned significant 'evidence base' studies on housing, flooding, economy, retail and transport to support this, and carried out a full Green Belt Review as part of the earlier Local Plan process. We have carried out significant city-wide consultation to date, including the joint 'Festival of Ideas 2' programme over the summer of 2007, which joined up consultation on our Core Strategy and the review of the Community Strategy. As part of this approach we are actively engaging with key agencies such as Natural England, English Heritage and the Highways Agency.
15. This is important because the new planning system is very much about 'front loading' evidence base work and community/stakeholder consultation so that LDF plans that come forward are well evidenced and take into account the views of the local community and key stakeholders. It is through this process that we should determine the best location for major new development in York.
16. We also question the extent to which this Clifton Gate proposal meets the criteria in the Eco-towns Prospectus. The guidance says that they should be "new settlements, separate and distinct from existing towns". The Clifton Gate proposal does not fit this description - it would be an 'urban extension' immediately north of the Clifton urban area.
17. The most appropriate way to identify any urban extensions if needed, will be through the LDF process, to reflect the approach set out by the Core Strategy, and in a way that protects the special character and setting of this historic city. To do otherwise would fundamentally undermine the credibility of the LDF process in York.
18. A similar letter to Councillor Galloway's was sent out to from the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly to Hazel Blears in February 2008 expressing concern about the lack of any formal opportunity for the involvement of Regional Planning Bodies and Local Planning Authorities in the consideration of Eco-town bids. It states that this is at odds with the transparent and accountable way that the RSS has to be prepared with full stakeholder involvement, and that all eco-town proposals should be tested through the RSS Review process.

### **The Leeds City Region Eco-towns study**

19. The Council supports the view of the Leeds City Region Partnership that rather than the Government just considering eco-town proposals submitted

by the private sector (an essentially reactive process) it would be better if a strategic local authority commissioned study was carried out to properly review all alternative sites in the Leeds City Region. It is also our view that any final location/s chosen should then be further tested through the RSS Review process. It is our view that suitable non-Green Belt and brownfield sites in the Leeds City Region should be considered first and this is being addressed in the study.

20. The study was commissioned in April and will be reporting in June. Some of the key criteria for the assessment of alternative sites include:
  - consideration of the impacts on relevant spatial policy, including the Green Belt and the focus on brownfield land
  - potential impacts on ecological, landscape, built heritage and other environmental considerations
  - proximity to the strategic highway network and likely impact on traffic flows
  - complementarity with city region New Growth Point proposals including in relation to phasing
  - potential impacts..... on the regeneration of existing urban areas
21. When measured against the above criteria, it is officers opinion that it is unlikely that the Clifton Gate Eco Town will be short-listed, given:
  - its location in the draft Green Belt (given non Green Belt alternatives).
  - capacity issues on the outer ring road.
  - the priority to be given to the regeneration of significant brownfield land at York Northwest as part of the New Growth Point proposals.
  - the potential adverse impacts on York Northwest of a major greenfield 'competitor site' in close proximity
  - the availability of non Green belt and brownfield sites that could accommodate an Eco-town in other parts of the Leeds City Region
22. The government in its national announcement on the 15 short-listed sites placed great emphasis on the significant use being made of previously developed brownfield land and that no new homes on the short-listed sites would be built on Green Belt land.
23. In the consultation paper published in April alongside the 15 short-listed locations there was a section on the Leeds City Region. One of the three highlighted benefits for an Eco-town in the Leeds City Region was: "if on a brownfield location it could have significant regeneration and land restoration benefits." This gives emphasis to the need to look at brownfield opportunities first.

## Next Steps

24. The findings of the Leeds City Region Region Eco-towns study will be reported to Members once published.
25. The Government is likely to make an announcement on the short-listed location/s for and Eco-town in the Leeds City Region in July.
26. For those locations short-listed there is a three stage process:
  - Further consultation this summer on a Sustainability Appraisal, which will provide a more detailed assessment of these locations, and a draft Planning Policy Statement (July to October)
  - A decision on the final list of locations with the potential to be an eco-town and the publication of a final Planning Policy Statement (Nov/Dec)
  - Like any other proposed development, individual schemes in these locations will need to submit planning applications which will be decided on the merits of the proposal (2009 onwards)

## **Corporate Priorities**

27. In deciding where we provide new housing to meet the city's needs this must be through the democratic plan making processes of the LDF if we are to meet the following corporate priorities:
  - Reduce the environmental impact of council activities and encourage, empower, and promote others to do the same
  - Improve the quality and availability of decent affordable homes in the city
28. One of the Council's key 'direction statements' for the next ten years is that "we will listen to communities and ensure that people have a greater say in deciding local priorities." The submission of the Clifton Gate eco-town bid by a private developer with no consultation with local people or the Council does not enable us to fulfil this key Council commitment and we have strongly objected to the lack of local involvement to the Secretary of State.

## **Implications**

29. Implications arising from this report are:
  - **Financial** – None arising directly from this report,

- **Human Resources (HR)** - None arising directly from this report;
- **Equalities** - None arising directly from this report;
- **Legal** - None arising directly from this report;
- **Crime and Disorder** - None arising directly from this report;
- **Information Technology (IT)** - None arising directly from this report;
- **Property** - None arising directly from this report;
- **Other** - None arising directly from this report;

### **Risk Management**

30. The main risk is reputational. If the Council had no direct involvement in selecting such a major new development in York it would fundamentally undermine the credibility of the whole LDF process and the public's perception of its value in shaping future development based on evidence and local consultation.

### **Recommendations**

31. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to:
1. Note the contents of this report.
  2. Re-affirm the Council's view that longer term proposals for meeting housing need in York should be considered in a strategic way, through the democratic planning processes and involving significant public consultation
  3. That the lead petitioner is advised of the outcome of this report.

#### Reasons:

1. So that members are aware of the latest position regarding Eco-towns and the Council's concerns about the Clifton Gate submission as expressed to the Secretary of State.
2. To acknowledge the key role that local democratic processes should play in determining longer term proposals for meeting housing need in York.

## Contact Details

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 19/05/08

**Specialist Implications Officers:** None

**Wards Affected:** Skelton, Rawcliffe & Clifton Without

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

## Background Papers

Report to Executive 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2007 - "Housing Green Paper – New Growth Points/Eco-towns"

## Annexes

None