



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

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“WESTON OTMOOR ECO-TOWN”

We are aware of the full Council debate on the above scheduled for 17 June, and your Cabinet meeting on 24 June. We are also well aware that you will have a complete professional briefing from your officials on all aspects of the scheme.

The purpose of this short letter is to register with you that CPRE, after 10 weeks reflection and research, is convinced the proposal has no merit.

As recorded in Hansard in its report of the parliamentary debate on Eco-towns which took place on 3 June, CPRE feels strongly about: “the unwarranted level of secrecy surrounding the initiative so far; that it appears to lie outside the planning system; and the lack of evidence demonstrating that these schemes will offer truly sustainable models of living and working”.

In the case of Weston Otmoor our response to the DCGL consultation centres on:

1) **Intrinsic site-specific problems and constraints in terms of sustainability** - The fact that a quarter of it lies in the Oxford Green Belt, including a wildlife site of national importance, and the rest is essentially green fields; the RAF Weston airstrip, even by the interpretation of the appendix to PPS 3, can hardly be termed “brownfield”. We argue that the beauty and character of this part of rural Oxfordshire deserves protection in its own right. Further, transport and water issues present special difficulties which are compounded by the position and nature of the site.

2) **Lack of local engagement on such a significant proposal** - Elsewhere in the country it would appear that some of the short listed schemes are backed by their local councils,

however in the case of the Weston proposal it is important to note that in recent years there has been extensive detailed consultation on key planning documents but no support for such an idea. Neither previous Structure Plans, nor the Oxford sub regional component of the draft South East Plan, nor the emerging LDF for Cherwell support the idea of new settlements. Moreover none of the local communities feel they have been involved in the process; small wonder therefore that there is a widespread feeling of hostility to the proposal.

3) Lack of proper examination of alternatives in Oxfordshire which might offer a more effective “eco” solution and better strategic planning “fit” - The Council has a well thought-through policy to 2016 of focussing new development on existing towns, predicated on the existing infrastructure being grown to support the housing increases in the most sustainable manner. To construct a new town of similar size to Bicester midway between Oxford and Bicester out of the blue is bound to divert new physical and social infrastructure from existing settlements in future. If further major growth is being called for over and above that envisaged in the draft South East Plan, the judicious expansion of Kidlington and Bicester would be a better strategic “fit” and work more with the grain of the existing infrastructure.

In short, we urge the Council to join with Cherwell in condemning the proposed “eco-town” at Weston as wholly unsuitable.

A copy of this letter has been sent to all Cabinet members.

Bruce Tremayne
(Chairman)