



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
OXFORDSHIRE

Stephen Joseph  
Executive Director  
Campaign for Better Transport

May 22nd 2008

Dear Stephen Joseph

CPRE Oxfordshire is writing to you to express our concern about the shortlisted 'eco-town' of 'Weston Otmoor'. As many as 15,000 new 'eco-homes' could be built on more than 800 hectares (approximately 2,000 acres) of farmland between the village of Weston-on-the-Green, lying within Oxford's Green Belt to the north of the city, and the A34/M40 junction, creating a town bigger than Bicester just 3 miles away.

While CPRE Oxfordshire is sympathetic to the 'eco-towns' initiative, it believes that they should be exemplars of environmentally sustainable development. For them to succeed they must be well integrated into existing settlements and agreed with, not imposed on, local communities CPRE Oxfordshire do not believe the proposals for 'Weston Otmoor' meet these criteria.

We are wholly in agreement with the Campaign for Better Transport that one of the main criticisms of this initiative, is that 'Weston Otmoor' will become a car dependent commuter town. Any proposal for a new settlement which is sited next to a motorway (and while residents will be discouraged from using cars, they will presumably be allowed to own them) is a non 'eco-town' by definition.

In Oxfordshire's case the intersection of the county's two biggest roads – the M40 and the A34 – which is already seriously congested, is the worst possible place for a new town from the point of view of minimising car travel, and hence additional traffic and pollution. Parkridge's promised rail station and tram system will not deter prolific car commuting.

It is unlikely that more than ten per cent of the resident's of the new town will commute by train. What matters is how and where the other 90+ per cent travel to. With the M40 and A34 next door it will be particularly attractive to people predisposed to car commuting and it is likely that their average journey distance will be very long. Oxford County Council statistics show that Cherwell District has the highest proportion of long distance commuters, a fact that is thought to be linked to the M40 bisecting the District.

Even if Housing Minister Caroline Flint's ambitious target of 50% car use is met, (ie) the highest standard observed in Continental Europe, which is most unlikely, there will be a minimum of 7,500 extra car movements a day on to the A34 and M40.

In addition we should like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the letter sent by Roger Williams (ex Head of Transport Planning at Oxfordshire County Council) to Caroline Flint on the transport difficulties associated with the Weston proposal (copy attached for your interest).

There are many other significant disadvantages associated with this proposed 'eco-town': the new town would have adverse effects upon the character of the Oxford Green Belt – 24.5% of the proposed site lies within the Green Belt; agricultural land which should be preserved to grow food will be concreted over – only about 16% of the site is brownfield - an old MOD airfield; the BBOWT (Bucks, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) nature reserve at Wendlebury Meads, an SSSI, would be ruined; and it would have a huge impact upon Bicester, which is trying desperately to keep up with its new infrastructure requirements (Bicester is one of the fastest growing towns in Europe - 1,585 new dwellings have just been approved for its South West extension on green field land).

Housing Minister Caroline Flint said that 'eco-towns' "would have to fully involve local communities in planning, and show people would benefit from better transport, education and health services", but 'Weston Otmoor' has never been in any Regional, County or District plan. By inviting a bid direct from the developers for this scheme the Government has circumvented normal planning processes and has sidelined local communities.

CPRE Oxfordshire believe the so-called eco credentials of this proposed 'eco-town' are a smokescreen for making house-building on green fields appear more palatable.

We support the idea of 'eco-towns', but they must be in the right place and developed in the right way. The most effective approach would be to use the concept to regenerate previously used or run down urban areas in full consultation with affected communities.

We welcome this opportunity to share our concerns about the proposed 'eco-town' in Oxfordshire with the Campaign for Better Transport.

Regards

Helena Whall

Dr Helena Whall  
Campaign Manager  
CPRE Oxfordshire  
Punches Barn  
Waterperry Road, Holton  
Oxfordshire OX33 1PP  
Tel: 01865 874780  
Mobile: 07766 624990  
Email: [campaign@cpreoxon.org.uk](mailto:campaign@cpreoxon.org.uk)  
Website: [www.cpreoxon.org.uk](http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk)