

Preamble

The eco-town developers Parkridge have recently posted a page on their website which purports to refute “myths” (their word) about the potential impact of the Weston eco-town. We take this opportunity to respond to their statements: the issues are real and serious.

<p>PARKRIDGE - SOME MYTHS EXPLAINED</p>	<p>We at CPRE say:</p>	
	<p><i>There is a growing list of legitimate concerns from a wide range of bodies about the enormous environmental impact of the Weston eco-town. We feel it is trivialising these important issues to term them “myths”. The Parkridge proposals are lacking in key details and impartial technical assessments have yet to be carried out.</i></p>	
<p>The development is in the Green Belt</p>		
<p>Parkridge says:</p>	<p>We at CPRE say:</p>	
<p>Only part of the developed area of Weston Otmoor is Green Belt - about 6.5%. This represents about 0.125% of the Oxford Green Belt (less than 1/8 of 1%).</p>	<p><i>In fact 24.5 % (203 hectares) of the proposed eco-town site is within the Oxford Green Belt and at this stage it is simply not certain how much of that might be eventually be “developed” i.e. for housing and other uses. However, based on Parkridge’s masterplan, this would still mean that 16% of the developed area is in the Green Belt. Significant infrastructure will need to be located in the existing Green Belt, namely the new station facilities, the tramway, car parking, plus various roads and service areas. The proposed Park and Ride, accommodating 6,000 cars, could cover 120 acres (50 hectares) of the Green Belt, and is larger than all the existing Oxford Park and Ride sites put together. So the total lost to urbanisation will be far greater than that claimed.</i></p> <p><i>The Green Belt is designated to act as a permanent safeguard from urban encroachment for the city and its environs. All of the above will do irreparable damage to the character and function of this part of the Green Belt.</i></p> <p><i>Offering other land as a form of “compensation” is not adequate or appropriate.</i></p>	
<p>The development is on a flood plain:</p>		
<p>Parkridge says:</p>	<p>We at CPRE say:</p>	
<p>Please see the draft master plan which shows the very limited extent of the Gallows Brook flood plain which, in turn,</p>	<p><i>The Environment Agency has already expressed important concerns about the site in general – aside from flooding. There is a degree of flood risk affecting</i></p>	

<p>will be incorporated into the master plan as an environmental feature.</p>	<p><i>the site, but we understand the extent of that risk has yet to be determined.</i></p> <p><i>The Environment Agency has stated that the eco-town site is within an area of serious “water stress”. Eco-towns should aspire to “water neutrality” (where post development water use is equal to or less than usage pre-development). Proposals should provide details of sustainable drainage solutions, rainwater harvesting, and the creation of wetlands and use of permeable surfaces. There are no details on how this issue would be addressed. There is no information currently available in relation to water use, drainage and flood risk and a Water Cycle study is yet to be prepared.</i></p>	
<p>The development will add 25,000 cars to the A34:</p>		
<p>Parkridge says:</p>	<p>We at CPRE say:</p>	
<p>Vehicles added will balance with vehicles removed. Weston Otmoor's emphasis on high quality (FAST, FREE & FREQUENT) public transport will deliver substantial modal shift away from cars.</p>	<p><i>The proposals have been heavily criticized already for the unrealistic aspirations for (heavily subsidised) bus/rail usage and draconian restrictions on car use. The eco-town will be the same size as Bicester and will put considerable pressure on the existing road network if public transport incentives and demand management fail. The Eco Challenge Panel has termed it a potential “commuterville” because of the location on the M40/A34 junction, the site layout and the inevitable need for many inhabitants to travel to other towns for work, shopping, education, leisure etc. The proposed modal shift relies entirely on the success of the proposed rail and bus provision; there are serious technical and financial questions about these aspirations and their deliverability.</i></p>	
<p>The development will completely choke J9 on the M40:</p>		
<p>Parkridge says:</p>	<p>We at CPRE say:</p>	
<p>Junction 9 will be re-built to improve all movements, especially to Bicester.</p>	<p><i>There are longstanding problems with the M40 and A34 around Oxford and the Highways Agency has expressed serious concerns in relation to future capacity. The eco-town site will be the same size as Bicester and very close to a major strategic road junction - a fundamental drawback with potentially damaging consequences. Even if there is some modal shift to public transport, there is still a huge potential for car and vehicle usage on a heavily congested road network. The County Council considers that traffic</i></p>	

	<i>generation could affect other key junctions such as M40 junction 10. Trying to “fix” junction 9 is not an answer to the many complex issues this raises.</i>	
The development will destroy an SSSI:		
Parkridge says:	We at CPRE say:	
Please see the page on the SSSI buffer zone ; the SSSI will be protected and enhanced.	<p><i>Lying within the site are two nationally designated SSSIs. To the south-east is Woodsides Meadows Nature Reserve, which is part of the Wendlebury Meads and Mansmoor Close SSSI, one of the largest complexes of increasingly rare species-rich wildflower meadows left in the country.</i></p> <p><i>To quote the Natural England citation for the SSSI – “Wendlebury Meads consists of a series of traditionally-managed unimproved neutral meadows supporting a complex variety of plant communities that have developed in response to varying management, drainage and soils. The meadows are amongst the few surviving examples of calcareous clay pasture communities which were widespread throughout southern England at the turn of the century, but now rare owing to agricultural improvement and urbanisation.”</i></p> <p><i>We are aware that RSPB have strongly criticised the proposals and BBOWT have described the site as one of the most important grassland SSSI complexes in Britain. Without a properly detailed assessment of the potential impact on this sensitive SSSI ecosystem, it is misleading to suggest that the SSSI can be protected in this manner from the urbanisation this large new town will create.</i></p> <p><i>To the north-west is Weston Fen SSSI, a species rich calcareous fen of particular interest for its wetland flowering plant communities and its invertebrate fauna, including a number of Red Data Book beetles and flies.</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, we now understand that Natural England raised serious concerns in reports that were not published but which have been uncovered by the BBC. The reports from Natural England on the environmental impact of the 15 eco-towns identify Weston as Category 1 (highest category of risk), which means development on the site will create significant impacts that cannot be satisfactorily mitigated.</i></p>	