



THE ECO TOWN DEBATE

To make sure the Society is completely up to date on the plans for an Eco Town at Long Marston, the General Committee invited St Modwen/Bird Group and BARD to make presentations to committee members so that both views could be presented to the Society.

This *Update* presents a brief summary of the major points made by both groups.

THE CASE FOR:

Presented by Tony Bird, John Deegan and Jeff Downes for St Modwen/Bird Group.

The proposal is for 6,000 homes, 2,000 of which will be 'affordable'. This will contribute to the District's potential requirements for 10,100 dwellings by 2026 and, as the 258 hectare site is brownfield, it will relieve pressure to develop greenfield sites elsewhere.

The development includes three new primary schools, one new secondary school and a Further Education establishment.

The intention is to provide 4,724 new jobs on site, including opportunities for home working.

The site is former Ministry of Defence land and has existing utilities which were used to support the former military accommodation for around 2,000 personnel.

There is an existing operational recycling facility on site which will be enhanced to provide state of the art recycling collected via an underground vacuum system.

The developers will make contributions to local infrastructure which will include the provision of the Stratford Western Relief road and a guided bus link running south from Stratford and connecting to the Long Marston to Honeybourne rail line.

THE SITE PLAN

The area is divided into five districts, all of which have some housing.

1. **The Town Centre** is divided into three - Town Centre South, Edge and Core. It is scheduled to have townhouses and

apartments, 15,000 square metres of office or employment space, a health centre, a health and fitness club, 2,500 square metres of community facilities - a primary school, library, a market hall and square, a civic hall, and 9,000 square metres of retail space.

2. **The Station Quarter**, next to the railway line and proposed guided bus station, is the focus of commerce, business and light industry with street frontages three and four storeys high. It will consist mainly of workshop/studios, amounting to 880 dwellings.
3. **The Allotment Village** in the centre of the site is principally a residential area with 496 dwellings. Not all will have private gardens, so instead there will be a belt of traditional allotments.
4. **Woodside** makes use of an established woodland area and is intended as 'a lower density, informal village' with two storey houses built of sustainable materials with wood cladding and sedum roofs. A second primary school will be in this area.
5. **Lakeside** has large areas of open water as part of the flood protection strategy for the North of the site. 857 dwellings are scheduled for this area with a primary and secondary school to the south east.

TRANSPORT

To minimise car use at least 10% of residential units will not be allocated parking. There will be car free zones round schools and other areas to encourage walking; there will be car clubs and car share

schemes. The typical travel distance within the town will be 800m, or a ten minute walk. Bus services will serve within 400m of all areas and there will be a free bike with each home and free cycles for use within the town.

It is expected that 35% of the resident workforce will work within the Eco Town, at on-site businesses and at home. The jobs expectation is 1,537 in retail and education, 1,875 in offices plus 1,312 homeworkers. although there will still be residents who travel outside the town to their places of employment.

A package of measures is intended to result in only 40% of daily travel by car outside the town. Discounted public transport services, running every 15 minutes, will be provided to link with Stratford and Evesham.

THE ECO INPUT

Among other innovations, rainwater will be collected from roofs and fed into tanks for use in domestic appliances.

An automatic waste collection system will enable people to deposit separated waste into an underground vacuum system.

Solar thermal collectors on roofs will help to produce up to 40% of the town's energy needs, which are expected to be 60% lower than current national averages.

It is obviously impossible to include here every aspect of the 76 page report, 'A Vision for Middle Quinton Eco-Town'. To view the complete document go to www.middlequintonecotown.co.uk/vision.htm

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THE CASE AGAINST:

Presented by Councillor Izzi Seccombe, Councillor Mike Brain and Andy Murphy, for BARD.

From a regional point of view, the development of Long Marston on such a scale is against the West Midlands strategy and is not defined as a new growth area. This will be a new town with no regional importance from an investment point of view.

Some development is recognised in the Local Plan, but should be commensurate with local need and should be in the low hundreds, with some small employment and leisure facilities.

The proposed creating of 4,724 new jobs will inevitably mean a good deal of travel to and from the new town.

There is a need for affordable housing in the district, but 33% is no higher than the existing District Council targets and the current strategy is to provide those houses where they are needed.

Long Marston has poor links with other major towns in the district and will inevitably mean high levels of car ownership and movements. Public transport links will be convoluted.

WILL MIDDLE QUINTON FIT?

This is not just a brownfield site. Only one third of the total area is brownfield, the rest is greenfield with potential importance for nature conservation.

The site is the same size as Alcester, which has 3,400 dwellings. As a further comparison, the 'eco village' Cambourne in Cambridgeshire, which the Government uses as an exemplar for potential developers to follow, has 4,200 dwellings on 417 hectares and with considerable green space which gives a sense of spaciousness. Middle Quinton will be much denser.

The proposals are uncharacteristic of the surrounding villages, where the context is open fields.

There are already 700 jobs on site, most of which will be lost. The proposed new jobs will benefit people from outside the local community, rather than local people, and the amount of homeworking

cannot be guaranteed.

Government requires a minimum of one employment opportunity per new dwelling and to achieve this office buildings will have to be between two and four storeys high. Result: A cramped and uncharacteristic appearance.

The new town won't stop - it will continue to grow. It will always be a commuter town and will urbanise the rural character of the area.

EFFECT ON STRATFORD

Local needs of Stratford should be met with add-ons close to existing infrastructure. The building of the eco town will not prevent future development at Shottonery.

The opening of the Greenway is essential to the plan. To allow for walkers and cyclists side by side with a guided bus, embankments and trees would have to be destroyed.

There will still be considerable traffic movement. People will still want to come to Stratford to shop and enjoy themselves.

Huge amounts of public money will be needed to provide infrastructure. A high school costs £30 million, primary £6 million, Fire and police £6 to 8 million each.

A good eco town should be built on a well linked site with (a) good roads and infrastructure to reduce level of car use and (b) with good quality open space.

There are serious questions about the current procedures. Instead of going through the normal processes, the Government asked 'has anyone out there got a site?'

"If we had been asked," said Councillor Seccombe, "the County would have said a site would be suitable between Nuneaton and Coventry, where there is a lot of housing need. That area needs regeneration, new schools, money to be pumped in.

"A community needs to evolve. The Long Marston site would be suitable for a major leisure village with some employment and some residential use, including lakeside lodges and a caravan park, leaving large areas of green open space."

Two alternative plans are being considered with local parishes and Councillor Brain pointed out that 15,000 people had signed a petition objecting to the proposals, as had six local authorities, 20 parish councils and 40 professional bodies.

THE SOCIETY'S VIEW

The Society has previously maintained that it will not take sides in this debate until there is a specific planning proposal on the table. However, in view of the Government's statement that it may side-step the normal procedures, the Society supports the view of Planning Group chairman, Leon Tanner, who says: "The eco-town proposal goes against all procedures of regional planning, in which developments are located where required, rather than where land-owners are able to gather the resources to make a bid.

"Secondly, trying to make a settlement at Long Marston into a larger, newly created town, artificially linked into the existing mesh of employment, education, transport and tourism patterns, is increasingly unjustifiable. The costs - not only financial - are too great and the benefits dangerously speculative.

"There are three principles that should underpin future planning. First, major proposals should not be added in from outside the planning system; second, growth of any size should be appropriate to existing settlements; third, if the government wants to get ecological measures adopted, there must be incentives to include more rigorous eco standards in all new developments."

Brian Wright, chairman of the Strategy Group, adds: "We have to remember that Stratford District is going to have to accommodate 8-10,000 new houses between 2010-20 and probably the same number again in the following decade, so a limited amount of housing at Long Marston has to be an option."

Chairman Ian Prosser concludes: "The Society does not oppose the principle of eco towns and we have always supported some housing at Long Marston to meet the District's housing targets. However, the Government should follow correct planning procedures when identifying sites for potential new towns and we do not believe this has been done in this case. The housing numbers are too high - and the infrastructure too limited - to enable a large new eco town to function efficiently on this site.

"Before formally saying yes or no to a planning application, we would also need the Government to clarify how the infrastructure will be financed and the amount of public investment which will follow."