



Victoria Buildings
Lewin Street
Middlewich
Cheshire CW10 9AT

Tel/fax: 01606 835046
Email: info@cprecheshire.org.uk
Website: www.cprecheshire.org.uk

Chairman
Peter Raynes

President
Lord Grey of Codnor

Patron
H.M. The Queen

Registered Charity no. 248304

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NEWS RELEASE

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Carrington Eco-town: an exciting opportunity lost says CPRE[1]

Following today's[2] announcement of the Government's shortlist of 15 sites to be considered for the development of Eco-towns[3], the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) expressed disappointment that the bid put forward for Carrington has failed to make the grade.

Housing Minister Caroline Flint's shortlist of 15 sites for new eco-friendly developments did not include the plan for the old Shell petrochemical site near the M60, put forward by Trafford Borough Council. The government plans to build ten eco-towns nationally, the first five by 2016 and the rest by 2020.

Commercial confidentiality surrounding the eco-town bids, many of which were generated by local authorities in partnership with private developers and landowners, has meant that few details were made public.

'We understand that the bid may have failed for three reasons,' said Arthur Jurgens, of CPRE's Trafford group. 'Some of the land at the Shell site is very polluted, and would be costly to clean up for residential use. The plan does not seem to have been confined to reusing brownfield land and may have affected Green Belt and a nearby Site of Special Scientific Interest, and access to public transport probably wasn't right.'

But CPRE says that these issues could have been addressed. 'We believe there is additional land available which is not Green Belt, and is not polluted, but after all, the Eco-town initiative is supposed to be all about combining new housing with environmental benefits, so cleaning up polluted land should have been a key part of any bid, not something that would rule it out,' said Mr Jurgens. 'An extension to the Metro could be provided using the old railway line, which could also connect Irlam to the network, and this would be of benefit to residents there too. There is also the potential to offer waterbuses on the Ship Canal.'

'If landowners, planners, developers and communities had been able to work together to get the site and its design right and provide excellent public transport, an Eco-Town at Carrington could have offered an exciting opportunity to create a model of truly sustainable living, and would also have benefitted Manchester and the surrounding area,' Mr Jurgens added.

CPRE has produced 10 tests for Eco-Towns[4], including local consultation, proper consideration of environmental effects and good connection to public transport and local food networks. The environmental charity is keen to support proposals that meet these tests. The group insists such developments should be models of environmentally sustainable development, not just a smokescreen for making house-building on greenfield areas appear more palatable, and that they can only work if they are supported by local communities, not imposed on them.

‘The old Shell site is still in need of redevelopment,’ continued Mr Jurgens, ‘and CPRE will be urging Trafford Borough Council to make any new development come as close as possible to the Eco-town concept and CPRE’s 10 tests’.

For more information on CPRE’s criteria for Eco-Towns, see the charity’s website at www.cprecheshire.org or call the Cheshire Branch Office on 01606 835046.

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Notes for editors:

[1] The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. For more information and archive of press releases see the CPRE Cheshire website at www.cprecheshire.org.uk and the national CPRE website at www.cpre.org.uk

[2] The shortlist was announced in Thursday 3rd March 2008.

[3] Last May, Gordon Brown pledged to build up to 100,000 houses in five eco-towns. Each eco-town would contain between 5,000 and 20,000 homes. Developments would be zero carbon, contain a range of facilities, including schools, shops and leisure facilities and be an exemplar in at least one environmental technology. At the Labour Party conference in September, Gordon Brown as Prime Minister announced a further five eco-towns would be built, at least one in each region, making a total of 10 altogether. In total, 57 bids were considered nationally. Today’s shortlist includes two areas where the Government has agreed to allow further study and review. None of the shortlisted sites is in the North West region.

[3] CPRE’s 10 Tests for Eco-Towns

1. The public and affected communities should be fully consulted on schemes, including the principle of whether or not to have an eco-town in their area.

2. Schemes should be tested through regional spatial strategies and local development framework reviews. These should ensure that decisions on eco-towns take full account of evidence on environmental effects, housing need and alternatives for meeting this.

3. Decisions on eco-towns should be accompanied by evidence that demonstrates a new settlement to be the most sustainable option for accommodating housing growth compared with other options, such as redeveloping an existing urban brownfield site or an urban extension.

4. Schemes should demonstrate efficient use of land, with densities capable of supporting public transport and a high priority given to recycling brownfield land and buildings.

5. They should be genuinely carbon neutral, taking into account potential emissions from transport (domestic, public and commercial) and buildings (in construction and use).
6. They should foster a strong sense of place and community, achieve CABE gold Building for Life Standards, with high quality public spaces, architecture and street layouts that give priority to pedestrians and non-motorised transport, including substantial car free areas.
7. They should be subject to an independent landscape character appraisal, be sympathetic to their setting and clearly enhance the local landscape, built and natural heritage, including through the designation of new Green Belt where appropriate.
8. They should include measures designed to conserve water and other natural resources, minimise soil, air, noise and light pollution and achieve zero-waste.
9. They should be complete communities with homes (with at least 50% affordable), schools, workplaces, shops, recreation, community and health facilities and open space within walking distance and foster active, sustainable lifestyles and civic participation.
10. They should be well connected to surroundings with high quality public transport providing good access to nearby settlements and local supply networks, with sourcing of local produce, such as food, fuel and replenishable building materials.

Further Information:

Clare Lewis
CPRE Cheshire Press & Membership Officer
Mobile: 07731 659 786

Debbie Janney
Cheshire Branch Secretary
01606 835046 (9 - 12 Mon – Fri only)