



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
OXFORDSHIRE

## Press Release

### **'Weston Otmoor' a smokescreen for making house-building on green fields appear more palatable?**

**3 April 2008**

A new town called 'Weston Otmoor' has made it onto the Government's shortlist of 15 proposed 'eco-towns' it was announced today. As many as 15,000 new eco-homes could be built on 800 acres 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 5 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 [1]. Dr Helena Whall, Campaign Manager said: 'We do not believe the proposals for Weston-on-the-Green meet these criteria.' [2]

Housing Minister Caroline Flint recently announced that eco-towns 'would have to fully involve local communities in planning, and show people would benefit from better transport, education and health services', [3] but Dr Helena Whall says: 'The Weston-on-the-Green site has never been in any Regional, County or District plan. By inviting a bid direct from the developers Parkridge Holdings Ltd for this scheme the Government has circumvented normal planning processes and has sidelined local communities.' [4]

Dr Helena Whall continued: 'Apparently all travel to and from the new town will be by train, yet the nearest railway is some way to the east of the already fully loaded A34. Even if the Minister's ambitious target of 50% car use is met, which is most unlikely, there will be a minimum of 7,500 extra car movements a day on to the A34 and M40.' [5]

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, but this has a coherence in that it has long been discussed and planned. Dr Helena Whall said: 'Plonking up to 15,000 new homes a few miles away in the countryside beggars belief when Bicester itself is trying desperately to keep up with its new infrastructure requirements.'

CPRE Oxfordshire believe the so-called eco credentials of this proposed town near Weston-on-the-Green are a smokescreen for making house-building on green fields appear more palatable.[6]

Dr Helena Whall concluded: 'There are many significant disadvantages associated with the proposed eco-town at Weston-on-the-Green: the new town would have adverse effects upon the character of the Green Belt; already congested roads would be made worse, agricultural land would be lost; the BBOWT (Bucks, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) natures reserve at Wendlebury Meads would be ruined and it would impact upon the regeneration of existing towns.'

'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.'

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#### NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. CPRE National Office 'News Briefing - Eco-towns: threat or opportunity? 14 February 2008. For more information see CPRE National Office website: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/news/view/471>
2. CPRE Oxfordshire promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural Oxfordshire by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. We are part of the national CPRE charity. For more information see: [www.cpreoxon.org.uk](http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk)
3. 'Transparency vow over eco-towns' Financial Times, 28 February 2008.
4. Residents of Weston-on-the-Green and those from surrounding parishes have set up an association 'The Western Front' to oppose the proposed eco-town. For more information see: <http://www.the-weston-front.org/>
5. Rt Hon. Caroline Flint MP, 'Quality of life, not just quantity of homes', speech devliered at Ecobuild 2008 Conference: Innovate and Green, Earls Court, London, 27 February 2008.
6. CPRE National Office 'News Briefing - Eco-towns: threat or opportunity?'

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