

*promoting better local government*

*From the Chairman of the Association  
Sir Simon Milton*

04 April 2008

Dear Leader

### **Eco-Towns**

I write to let you know our reactions to the contents of today's Government announcement on eco-towns.

I believe it is imperative to build the additional homes that this country needs and that the eco-town concept could lead the way in getting this to happen with lower carbon emissions and other environmental benefits. It is good that the Government has apparently abandoned some of the more far-fetched schemes which developers had been promoting, and I know that some of the schemes in play are being supported by their local councils. However, my concern is that the CLG document contains some extremely ill-conceived proposals about how such schemes might be delivered through the planning system. Our strong representations over recent days have resulted in some aspects of those proposals being dropped, but the Government has unfortunately not as yet accepted that it cannot bypass normal planning processes.

Today's announcement leaves the option open that eco town proposals that are not currently envisaged in or compatible with local or regional plans may nevertheless go forward as planning applications. A new national planning policy statement on eco towns is to be produced allowing eco towns to be approved despite the absence of a local or regional plan context for them. However, the criteria the Government may adopt to decide whether or not to bypass local democratically accountable decision-making in this way is not clearly stated. This is in breach of the Central Local Concordat signed by myself and Hazel Blears in December 2007, and clear undertakings a CLG made to a meeting of the Rural Commission on 11 March.

I do not think that the infrastructure and wider economic and social considerations for new settlements of up to 20,000 homes can be dealt with in this way, above all if they are to be exemplars of sustainability. The government's intended approach carries a strong risk that eco towns will not be the sustainable communities we all wish to see.

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If you are supporting a scheme in your area, I wish you well with it, and we would like to publicise it as an example of councils driving environmentally sustainable new development. If you are opposed to a scheme in your area, rest assured that LGA will be mounting a vigorous campaign to persuade government to drop its fundamentally misconceived notion that development applications on this scale could ever be considered outside a proper plan context. We would be interested to hear from you if you wish to join us in campaigning against such proposals. The officer contact for this is Sandra Brown, Policy Consultant (020 7664 3231) [sandra.brown@lga.gov.uk](mailto:sandra.brown@lga.gov.uk). Matt Nicholls in our media team (020 7664 3053) [matt.nicholls@lga.gov.uk](mailto:matt.nicholls@lga.gov.uk) would be glad to talk about our national media activity and co-ordinating it with any local activity you may be undertaking.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Milton', written in a cursive style.

Sir Simon Milton  
Chairman of the Local Government Association