



Sharpness: A sustainable development option for Stroud

22nd March 2010

**Your District, Your Future –
Consultation Response**

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Core Strategy Consultation – Development at Sharpness

This representation is submitted in response to the Core Strategy consultation opened between the 8 February 2010 and 22 March 2010.

This representation promotes the development of land at Sharpness in preference to the options put forward by the Council.

In consideration of the future housing strategy for the District and in particular, the location for an area for future planned growth, consideration has been given to the national planning policy framework contained in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) as well as the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and the extant Local Plan (2005).

Background

The Council's Document, "Your District, Your Future" has been published to stimulate responses to the development of the Core Strategy but primarily to seek opinions on the way to accommodate 2,000 new homes and to encourage the generation of new jobs in the District.

However, listed as being important in the future development of the District is how this future growth can be accommodated sustainably and build the District's resilience to climate change and minimise our contribution to it.

Proposition

This representation offers an alternative option for development which has not been identified within the Council's options documents.

The proposed option is the **development of 2,000 new homes to the south of Sharpness Docks** in order to provide a planned area for future growth for the District for the immediate future, up to 2026 as prescribed by the RSS as well as a logical growth point for the future (beyond 2026).

This document sets out how such a development would:

1. be achieved in compliance with the national planning policy framework,
2. be a sustainable choice for the future of the District; and
3. is an obvious choice for the local population of the District.

Comparison is then made with the Council's options to demonstrate that Sharpness would be the logical choice for the District's future.

Compliance with National Planning Policy

PPS12 entitled Local Spatial Planning sets out the background to the creation and development of Local Development Frameworks.

The development plan is made up of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which covers the whole region, and is produced in draft by the Regional Assembly and Development Plan Documents (DPD) produced by local planning authorities within the local development framework. The Core Strategy is the principal DPD.

The Core strategy is essentially a document produced by the local planning authority (LPA) which sets out the overall vision of how the area and the places within it should be developed. This development vision is informed by an analysis of the characteristics of the area and its constituent parts and the key issues and challenges which face them.

The vision should be in general conformity with RSS and should coincide with a sustainable development strategy.

The Core Strategy should make clear the spatial choices about where developments should go in broad terms. Development locations are expected to be consistent with national planning policy and in general conformity with regional spatial strategy.

Core Strategies are also expected to be justified and founded on a robust and credible evidence base as well as being regarded as the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives. Reasonable alternatives should be realistic proposals and not simply invented to support the adoption of a primary option.

Community engagement is considered to be a central theme in the preparation of Core Strategies

as part of a planned and transparent development strategy for the District.

A Core Strategy should also show how the vision of growth will be delivered and by whom and when.

Primary Growth Considerations

The accommodation of 2,000 new homes within the District will present significant problems within a District which is highly constrained by the physical, historic and natural landscape of the area.

The principal towns of the District are Stroud/Stonehouse and Cam/Dursley. Stroud/Stonehouse is where the main services and employment for the District are concentrated and both towns have reasonably good access to the M5 via the A417.

Both Stroud and Stonehouse are however heavily constrained by the AONB landscape to the east where major development would be unacceptable. Development to the north of Stonehouse would also be undesirable as this would lessen the gap between Gloucester and Stonehouse leading to their inevitable coalescence in due course.

This area also has a scattering of smaller close knit villages which would be absorbed into the Stroud/Stonehouse conurbation if development was concentrated in this area thereby losing their identity and consequently destroying the character of the area. Eastington has been identified as a potential area of growth. Eastington is a small village with relatively few shops and services. The concentration of housing on this village would be entirely inappropriate and un-sustainable and would do nothing more than absorb this village into the Stonehouse conurbation and create further congestion in this area.

It is apparent that the infrastructure in this area is also at capacity during peak times which would only be exacerbated by further growth at this location. Within Stroud and the surrounding hinterland, much of the infrastructure has a historical base which would just not be able to cope with additional 'bolt-on' growth.

Cam is comparatively smaller than Stroud and Stonehouse with only a limited range of shops and services. Cam is equally constrained by the AONB to the south and south west, with land rising sharply to the west and east. Strategic development in this location would struggle relate to the established settlement and would fail to provide any sustainable benefits for the District.

Additional housing 'bolt-ons' to Stroud/ Stoundhouse, Eastington or Cam would fail to have any physical or cultural relationship to the settlements upon which they were attached and equally would be placing development which, whilst physically joined to the settlement would be distant to the main services that the existing settlements provide.

These locations are therefore considered to be inappropriate options for the future development of Stroud District.

AONB Considerations

It is noted that some of the proposed development options comprise of significant numbers of new housing within the Cotswold AONB, especially in the Ruscombe, Randwick and Painswick areas. The Cotswold AONB is a nationally designated landscape area which is afforded the highest level of protection by both national and local planning policy. Any strategic development advanced within these areas within the Core Strategy would therefore be contrary to national and development plan policy especially that contained in PPS7, which relates to Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

The emerging RSS for the South West also recognises that the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the 14 designated AONBs within the region will be given priority over other considerations in the determination of development proposals. This designation therefore excludes the allocation of new housing within the Cotswold AONB especially if alternative options are available.

It is considered that any housing proposals in the AONB would destroy in perpetuity some of the most scenic and beautiful landscape in the country and cause great harm to the character of the remaining landscape character.

In a recent appeal decision on land at Glenfall Way, Cheltenham (ref: APP/B1605/A/08/2067428), the developer proposed the construction of 44 dwellings on the edge of Cheltenham on land designated as AONB. Whilst it was proven that Cheltenham Borough could not demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, the Inspector considered that exceptional circumstances were required in order to demonstrate that the development of AONB land would be acceptable.

With regard to the AONB, the Inspector commented that:

“...the designation is an important constraint to which great weight should be given in considering options.” (para 17)

Whilst he accepted that the appeal site was on the urban fringe of Cheltenham he commented that this did not devalue the landscape character and that in his judgement development of the site would cause significant harm to the landscape quality and character of the AONB.

In refusing the appeal he concluded that:

“Nevertheless development plan policy also affords the highest level of protection to designated landscapes including AONBs. I have no doubt that the current proposal would result in significant harm to the AONB through the change in character and appearance that would be an inevitable consequence of residential development of the site, however carefully designed and landscaped.”

And

“I conclude that the shortfall in housing land supply and the community benefits that would be provided in association with the scheme are of insufficient weight to overcome the significant harm to the character and appearance of the AONB which would flow from development.” (para 58)

There are currently no proposals in Stroud District to review the AONB boundaries and therefore any allocations proposed for these areas would conflict with development plan policies and cause significant harm to the AONB.

The current spatial strategy for the area indicates that the concentration for growth in Gloucestershire should be made at the Gloucester and Cheltenham HMAs and therefore there is no planning justification for development options in the AONB.

PPS3: Housing – Providing housing in suitable locations

In support of its objective of creating mixed and sustainable communities, the Government's policy is to ensure that housing is developed in suitable locations which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure. This should be achieved by making effective use of land, existing infrastructure and available public and private investment.

PPS3 sets out that the priority for development should be on previously developed land, in particular vacant and derelict sites and buildings.

Paragraph 37 of PPS3 sets out that RSS should identify broad locations for growth so that the demand for housing can be addressed in a way that reflects sustainable development principles.

In this paragraph it is accepted that circumstances across the region or sub-regional housing market may be different and where demand is high, it will be necessary for RSS and LDFs to explore a range of options for distributing housing including the consideration of a growth area or even a new free-standing settlement.

PPS1: Eco Towns

It is considered that the only viable option for the allocation of housing in the District would be the concentration of development into one growth location. It is considered that all the other options proposed are tantamount to dispersal where no major sustainable benefits would be achieved and accordingly should be dismissed.

The concentration of 2,000 dwellings in one location has considerable merit and provides a mass of development that could deliver significant

community and infrastructure benefits. This option should also be utilised to ensure that further sympathetic growth could be added to this development in the future to ensure that Stroud District has an identified and appropriate growth centre where subsequent growth, post 2026 can be focused and planned accordingly.

The Government's initiative for Eco-Towns set out in PPS1: Eco-Towns, July 2009 seeks to achieve new development which are exemplars of good practice and provide a showcase for sustainable living which allow communities to develop greener, low carbon living.

Paragraph 1 of this PPS sets out that these policies should be taken into account by local planning authorities in the preparation of local development documents.

Paragraph ET4 of this PPS states:

"Eco-Towns are one of a range of options local planning authorities should consider when determining how to meet their current or emerging housing requirements set out in the RSS. Eco-towns should be allocated as a strategic development option within the Core Strategy, but may also be considered as part of an Area Action Plan or Allocations DPD where the Core Strategy has already been adopted." (our emphasis)

It is considered that the Core Strategy should give detailed consideration to the concentration of growth at Sharpness which could be developed as an Eco-Town which could provide a strategic option to accommodate the RSS housing requirement in Stroud District and to allow for future growth post 2026.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy looks to concentrate most of Gloucestershire's growth towards the Gloucester and Cheltenham HMAs. Policy A of the RSS addresses this growth and prioritises major growth in the Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs).

Outside these areas, Policy B deals with growth at smaller towns. In some districts there may be few or no towns which meet all the criteria of Development Policy B, and in these cases districts should take account of the functional role of settlements beyond their boundaries as well as identifying those settlements with the potential to play a more strategic role locally and allocate development accordingly. Policy B seeks to ensure that growth in smaller towns occurs where there is an existing concentration of employment and business in existence and where this can realistically be expanded and enhanced.

Whilst it is accepted that most of the development for Gloucestershire will be concentrated in and around Gloucester and Cheltenham there is clearly additional growth that will need to be accommodated in Stroud District.

The RSS does recognise that characteristics of each district will vary and that there may be opportunities (in conjunction with the Eco Towns PPS) to explore the role of an expanded or new settlement option.

Development at Sharpness

Both national and development plan policy therefore supports the concentration and expansion of Sharpness to assist in the future development of the District and accordingly the local planning authority has the ability to chose this location for a concentrated centre for planned future growth. The concentration of growth could be achieved by the creation of the elementary phases of an Eco-Town which can be expanded upon post 2026.



The proposed Eco-Town should be designed to be a sustainable community that is resilient to and appropriate for the climate change now accepted as inevitable. It should be planned to minimise future vulnerability in changing climate, and with both mitigation and adaptation in mind.

The proposed homes in the Eco-Town should be in accordance with paragraph ET9 of PPS1. In summary they should be:

1. Built to Code Level 4 and above;
2. Meet life time homes standards;
3. Have real time energy monitoring systems;
4. Have real time public transport information;
5. Access to high speed broadband;
6. Provide for an element of affordable housing;

7. Demonstrate high levels of efficiency in the fabric of the building; and
8. Achieve carbon reductions of at least 70% relative to the current Building Regulations.

The proposal should also be a genuinely mixed community with approximately one employment opportunity per new dwelling. Transport options should prioritise public transport as well as walking and cycling and other sustainable means of travel.

Development at Sharpness would provide:

1. The regeneration of significant areas of brownfield land;
2. The re-provision of a rail connection to the Bristol-Birmingham rail line;
3. Assist in providing housing next to existing employment;
4. Allow for the creation of new sustainable employment opportunities;
5. Allow for the provision of community based energy supplies;
6. Provide for sustainable modes of transport by rail and water;
7. Provide development on flat, unconstrained land; and
8. Provide areas for future planned growth.

In providing a growth spot for the future, unacceptable development pressures would be removed from more sensitive parts of the District and would ensure that uncharacteristic 'bolt-ons' are avoided.



The un-wanted expansion of smaller settlements, such as Eastington would also be avoided and the character of our existing towns and villages would be maintained.

The threat of development in the Cotswold AONB would also be removed.

Sympathetic organic growth in the District's towns and villages could continue to provide for local need but the main strategic growth for the District could be sensibly planned and developed around Sharpness where an exemplar development could be achieved.





Sharpness – background

Sharpness is Stroud District's largest operating dock. The site currently benefits from an allocation of approximately 18 hectares of employment with additional employment land currently being sought by Howard Tenens to accommodate their future growth.

The employment allocations at Sharpness are one of the largest in the District and have struggled to be developed successfully since the 1980s. British Waterways, who are one of the major landowners in the area are committed to providing employment in this area and have continued to rigorously market the site for new employment development. However, the take up of employment land in this area has failed to be successful as there is a limited amount of housing in the immediate vicinity to support the employment growth. The framework to achieve a balanced community can only be achieved through addressing the planning policy situation relating to Sharpness and ensuring that there is a balancing supply of housing to support the employment growth.

The proposal for Sharpness therefore seeks to further promote the employment use of Sharpness by creating new housing development to the south of the docks as well as create new employment opportunities. This provision of housing will need to be carefully phased to enable a community to develop and the employment to grow. However, the provision of housing alone is not considered to be sufficient to create a balanced community in which people can both live and work. It is recognised that all new development will need to be carefully integrated into the existing settlement at Newtown and Sharpness. Although there is an existing level of shops and services in these settlements, it is considered that a new local centre will be created with the Eco-Town proposal to support the expanded growth of the settlement.



Transport and Highways

An Eco-Town at Sharpness will provide the opportunity to develop a transport infrastructure that will serve a balanced community that will be largely self-contained, thereby reducing the need to travel, especially by car. New housing will be built close to areas of employment, local shops, recreation and leisure facilities. As the main day to day facilities will be provided within the settlement, there will be a reduced need to travel outside the immediate area which will help contain the number and length of vehicular journeys.

The settlement will be planned from the outset to enable as many journeys as possible to be made on foot or by cycle. With the provision of improved public transport facilities, the proposals will result in a settlement that is not dependant on the private car and will support a transport infrastructure which will achieve sustainable development principles. The provision of an expanded settlement at Sharpness would therefore compliment the transport objectives of the County.

The County Council have previously identified proposals for providing a new route to replace the un-modernised 1.7km long section of the B4066 between the A38 and the roundabout at Mobley. This new route would comprise a 1.5km section of road between Heathfield on the A38 and the roundabout at Mobley. A new roundabout would be provided on the A38. Although the route has previously been safeguarded, there are no funding proposals identified to complete the by-pass in the foreseeable future. The proposed Eco-Town at Sharpness would help fund the completion of the by pass and allow it to be introduced at an early stage.

Alternative Modes of Transport

In developing a land use strategy, the settlement will be designed to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use, so that there will be a genuine choice of travel other than the private car. The development will be based on the principle of sustainability by reducing the need to travel and thereby reducing resource consumption and environmental impact and increasing safety and accessibility for all. Measures will be introduced to provide safe and convenient conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Route networks will link residential areas with the areas of employment, shopping, education and leisure.

Bus

The provision of the first phases of an Eco-Town will allow the re-appraisal of the number and frequency of the bus service provided for Sharpness and Berkeley. The proposal will be able to support an increase in the frequency of services and allow existing routes to be diverted and new routes established. This will be to the benefit of existing residents, employees and visitors to Sharpness and Berkeley.

Rail

The existing rail line is capable of being brought back into use and it would be possible to introduce a sprinter shuttle which could be linked to the existing sprinter service between Bristol and Gloucester. The initial phases of this infrastructure would be investigated with the development of the first 2,000 homes, with a fully operational service in place with subsequent phases of the Eco-Town.

Pedestrian and Cycle Access

The settlement will be designed to ensure that residential areas will be linked to areas of employment, recreation, leisure and the neighbourhood centre, by a network of cycle ways and footpaths. A hierarchy of pedestrian and cycle routes will be established at an early stage to ensure that easy access on foot and cycle will be available. It is intended that the footway and cycle path system will be extended to connect the new development with surrounding settlements.

The first advantage of having a mix of land uses is that the need for trips to be made outside the settlement will be greatly reduced. Whilst it is anticipated that some residents will have employment outside the settlement, the existing and expanded employment areas will provide the opportunity for all residents to live and work in the same place.

The second advantage of designing a planned new settlement around an existing employment base is that the primary infrastructure can prioritise public transport, cycling and pedestrian routes to encourage greater movement by alternative modes of transport.

The third advantage of having a planned new growth centre is that subsequent phases of growth can be designed and managed from the outset rather than being bolted-on to infrastructure that has reached its capacity and erodes the quality of life for those who it is imposed upon.



Energy Options

A major goal for the designers of Sharpness will be to provide a development that will not rely on fossil fuels for its power. This allied to high standards in energy efficient design and construction, will ensure that the new settlement can become established as a leading example of sustainable development.

It is unlikely that it will be possible to achieve complete independence of supply and connection to the local power grid will remain essential to ensure continuity of supply in all eventualities. However, if it is possible to build and operate a generation facility within the scheme that provides a total annual output in terms of units of electricity that exceeds the gross requirement of the development, this aspiration will have been achieved. In basic terms, while the availability of conventionally generated electricity via The National Grid, will remain essential to cover spikes in demand and periods of interruption of supply from the local system, the completed development can be designed to operate without requiring an increase in the overall demand for fossil fuels for power generation.

Accompanying Measures

In addition to power generation, suitable heating systems for the houses, businesses and community facilities will be provided, which can be linked to the power generation or may be “stand alone” systems. The provision of sustainable means of transport both within the village and to link to other areas, will also part of the overall strategy for the development.

Generation Options

There are a number of different methods of non-carbon based power generation that can be considered within the scheme including:

- Solar power generation.
- Wind Power.



Solar

The most common form of solar power with the most proven technology available to domestic customers utilises photovoltaic cells to generate electricity with peak outputs of the order of 1 to 4kW. The systems are best suited to installation on a south facing roof, pitched at between 30 and 40 degrees. Typically, in the UK on unshaded sites a solar PV system will require between 8 and 12m² of roof space per KWp and each 1KWp unit will generate around 800-1000 kWh of electricity a year. The initial cost of installation is likely to be in the region of £6000/KWp – which can be reduced by grants of around £2,250 per household.

The average power consumption of UK homes is of the order of 3300kWh per annum. Assuming the Sharpness development incorporates energy saving measures equivalent to level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, this could result in a reduction in consumption to perhaps 2800kWh. This would require initial expenditure of the order of £18,000 per dwelling to provide sufficient capacity using this approach.

Wind Power

The two realistic options are firstly local generation with domestic roof or pole mounted turbines and secondly the inclusion within the scheme of a large scale commercial turbine. It is unlikely that the constraints of the site will allow the provision of spaces for pole mounted turbines in rear gardens, which leaves either roof mounted turbines or the larger turbine located outside of the main development area.

One of the most widely available roof mounted wind turbines is the Swift 1500, which is 2m in diameter and has an estimated annual yield of 1753kWh for a site with a 5m/s average wind

speed, producing a mean output level of 200W.

The cost of the turbine plus installation is likely to be in the region of £8,000, which again can be supported by a grant of up to £2,500. However the installation of more than one turbine per property is unlikely to receive planning consent and therefore even at higher mean wind speeds this option is unlikely to achieve the aim of providing a net power surplus. A single rooftop turbine could be supplemented by a PV installation, which would result in initial expenditure of a similar order to that for a PV only installation.

The alternative to individual turbines or PV installations would be a large scale wind turbine which would generate power centrally and distribute to the settlement, with surplus power exported to the grid. An area of unobstructed open space will be required, along with a suitable means of access for component delivery plus a means of connection to the National Grid.

The site at Sharpness includes an area of open farmland to the south of the proposed development area, which is of sufficient size to accommodate turbines with a rotor diameter of 80-90m, without impinging on any of the public open spaces or the development zones. The site has an existing mains supply and distribution network and dedicated direct access route from the by-pass. As such, the physical attributes of the site are suited to the installation of a large scale turbine.

The projected annual output of a turbine is the other key factor in determining its viability on a particular site. Commercial turbines begin to produce significant output at wind speeds of 5 m/s – around 10 miles an hour and are designed to reach maximum power output at around 12 m/s. At very high wind speeds, i.e. gale force

winds of 25 m/s the turbines shut down. The choice to design the turbine to shut down in very high winds is not the result of shortcomings in the technology or the engineering design and actually ensures the maximum possible generation when taken over the lifetime of the turbine.

The theoretical maximum energy which a wind turbine can extract from the wind blowing across it is just under 60%. This is known as the Betz limit but is of little relevance given the fact that the wind is in effect a limitless free resource and the fuel is free. More relevant is the intermittency of generation – i.e. how much of the time is any one turbine likely to produce electricity - which is on average between 70-85% of the time. However as with PV and rooftop turbines the power output varies over the course of a year and on a site with a mean wind speed at ground level of 5 m/s, typical annual output is about 30% of the theoretical maximum (a load factor of 30%). For a 1.8MW turbine such as a Vestas V90 the annual power output is likely therefore to be of the order of 4.7MWh, which is equivalent to 1400 homes at current average levels of consumption or 1670 homes built to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

The development cost of a 1.8MW installation is likely to be of the order of £3M-£4M, depending on the ground conditions, wind survey results and the proximity of the grid connection. For a development of two thousand houses, the initial cost per dwelling would therefore be £1,500-£2,000.

As such, the use of a 1.8MW turbine on the site would ensure that the development would meet the aim of avoiding any increase fossil fuel usage.

Ownership Options

As highlighted above, the costs of developing local power generation are considerable and therefore a means of supporting the initial expenditure without risking the viability of the scheme by raising proposed purchase costs to an unrealistic level, needs to be found.

Local power generation will attract grants of the order outlined above but even allowing for this, the impact on the build cost and ultimately the selling price is likely to be of the order of £10,000-£12,000. Whilst many purchaser's may be prepared to accept this premium given the potential future savings in electricity costs, the introduction of such a cost may be a commercial penalty that a developer would not be prepared to carry.

Similarly the development cost of a large turbine scheme would also be likely to prevent a commercial housing developer funding such a proposal. However there are other funding streams that would be available to allow the scheme to progress. The options that warrant further consideration are:

- A Community Wind Generation Scheme backed by a commercial partner under a structured scheme such as that offered by The Co-Operative Bank.
- Development of the scheme by a commercial electricity generation company, with the funds raised by the leasing agreement (likely to be of the order of £25,000 pa) donated to community funds, with the residents having the option of purchasing the power from the chosen renewable energy company.

- Sale of the land and to a commercial partner for them to build and operate the turbine and sell commercially, with the proceeds going into funding other energy saving measures on the site.

Landscape Context

The area of docks, existing settlement and farmland which is the subject of this study is focused on Sharpness itself.

Sharpness is located on the bank of the River Severn at the end of a low north-south sandstone ridge and at the edge of the Vale of Berkeley. This is a broad landscape on a bold scale with certain drama arising from the Cotswold escarpment to the east and the rolling hills of the Forest of Dean to the west, contrasting with the low lying and gently undulating Vale and the wide horizontal expanse of the River Severn. There are many visual detractors along the banks of the River, including the power stations and bridges further down the estuary but these give focal points and points of reference within the mainly level Vale.

Although generally level, within the Vale there are many subtle variations in topography that provide interest and some subdivision of the landscape, reinforced by hedges and small but infrequent woods.

Sharpness is a promontory into the Severn, severed from the adjoining land by the construction of the dock basin and the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal. Many of the dockland buildings are of a very large scale and are clearly visible from across the Severn and from adjoining high ground. Others are of smaller, more domestic scale, notably around the old dock basin, along with a scattering of terraces of housing and new, distinctive small office buildings.

The landscape of Sharpness consists of separate cells. The contrast is striking between the northern and western shorelines of small cliffs and adjoining small woods and fields and dramatic views of the Severn, with industrial southern and eastern parts with large buildings, dock basin, vehicular infrastructure, and empty grass plots.



Newtown is built on the west-facing slopes of the sandstone ridge looking down onto the docks, and includes a primary school, shops, a village hall with adjacent public house and a small green. Along the foot of the slope runs a narrow corridor containing the B4066, the railway and derelict land on the former sidings and allotments. This narrow corridor extends to the small but prominent hillock to the north, defined by the bend of the approaches to the old Seven railway bridge.

The farmland surrounding Sanigar and Panthurst Farms is set on the western foot of the sandstone ridge and gently slopes down to the flat meadows behind the flood bank, with the Severn beyond. The farmsteads are concentrated clusters of dwellings and agricultural buildings on slightly rising ground.

There is a complex pattern of field boundaries, mostly defined by low hedges with a scattering of standard trees. The fields rise up to a shallow ridge which then drops southwards to Hook Street and Berkeley Pill, with the town of Berkeley and its Castle beyond.

To the west and beyond the grassed flood bank are salt marshes, mud flats and the river, which are designated as being of international conservation importance as the Upper Severn Estuary SSSI/SPA and RAMSAR.

Development and the Landscape

Sharpness is relatively free from landscape and physical constraints. The development is remote from Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other national landscape designations where there is a presumption against development.

The farmland is a small part of the much wider landscape protection area which is of local significance and must be respected. If Sharpness is developed in the way that is being promoted,

reflecting its character and scale in landscape terms, it is considered that the landscape can sustain a large development.

Although the landscape is of some character, it does not accord with the quality associated with the landscapes of national status such as the Cotswold AONB. Development at Sharpness will therefore be entirely appropriate. It is already partly a brownfield site owing to areas of industrial dereliction. There is already a core settlement on a hillside at Newtown, which has a significant visual impact on the surrounding landscape which is clearly visible in many views, especially from the south and west. Development of areas within and around the existing built area would not have a discernible impact on the broad landscape. On the land to the south west, beyond the existing housing and employment there is potential for further development, visually and physically related to the existing, but which can be contained with defensible landscape boundaries.

The main boundaries of development will be screened by the natural landform. Development to the south west will be below the crest of the ridge and maintain the stretch of open countryside between Berkeley and the new development. It is intended that this separation will be reinforced by planting of new copses and hedgerow trees across the ridge to ensure that there is no coalescence in the future.

RAMSAR Designation

The development proposal places considerable emphasis on the protection of the RAMSAR site along the Severn Estuary. In consultation with English Nature, it is intended to produce management plans which will mitigate the effects of any development on this area. From the outset, the proposals will identify the important habitats and ensure that these are protected and managed.

The broad principle of the proposal will be to keep the development separated from the shoreline and to accommodate the recreational needs of the population within the designated areas. Development will be separated from the foreshore by a strip of fields that will continue in agricultural use. This will be reinforced by belts of willow and alder planting against the development which will provide a strong boundary and would be of nature conservation value. There would be no more public access points to the shoreline.

The proposal will also seek to investigate the possibility of creating new wetland areas on the southern boundary of the development area to further enhance the habitats of indigenous and visiting species.

The proposed development will not compromise landscape or wildlife interests. It will be contained within existing boundaries which will be reinforced to emphasise the separation of Berkeley. Its visual impact will be limited. It will integrate development in both Newtown and Sharpness. It will enhance the setting and environment of both these areas by providing open space, new landscape infrastructure, linking footpaths and removing dereliction.

Beyond 2026

It is an unrealistic prospect to consider that Stroud's existing settlements will be able to absorb further bolt on developments now or beyond 2026 and it has previously been recognised that Stroud District may need to accommodate a new settlement.

If the dispersal strategy continues, urban sprawl will encroach further into sensitive countryside locations which will destroy the character of our landscape and settlements. The dispersal strategy will also erode the spaces between settlements which will lead to further coalescence. As a consequence of this strategy, settlements will lose their individual identity and there will be further congestion on the existing infrastructure.

An opportunity now exists to provide a framework for an Eco-Town at Sharpness which will have the capacity to provide for the District's future growth up to and beyond 2026 in a planned and managed way that will deliver many sustainable benefits for the District.

Sharpness is relatively free from environmental and physical constraints and is more able to accommodate the District's growth over and above other more sensitive areas.

The ability to plan such a settlement more comprehensively from such an early stage will relieve future uncontrolled development pressures in Stroud District. This will provide greater certainty on the District's growth area and enable a more balanced community to be created.

It is therefore considered that the concentration of new development for Stroud District should be focused at Sharpness where the preliminary phases of an Eco-Town can be constructed to accommodate the future growth of the District. This development option will remove unwanted development pressures from our Towns and villages, where such development would be unacceptable.

