

ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

16 March 2005

ecoSE ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND HOUSING

Contact Officer: Teresa Kennard Tel No: 01962 848116

RECENT REFERENCES:

None.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

ecoSE is a partnership of public and private sector agencies aiming to create more sustainable housing in the South East.

Organisations can join the partnership as Associate Members. To do this, Winchester City Council would need to take action on the commitments within the ecoSE manifesto. The sentiments and aims of the manifesto are in line with those of the Council on Sustainability and link well with work on our planning policies and Local Development Framework.

However, Associate Membership of ecoSE would have implications for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as it would require works to the housing stock that could not be accommodated with the already stretched repairs budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

That it be recommended to Cabinet that the aims of ecoSE be supported by the Council in its work on sustainability, but that Associate Membership not be pursued due to the impact such an approach would have on the Housing Revenue Account.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 ecoSE is a South East partnership initiative launched in December 2003 by the Environment Agency and consisting of a 14 organisations from the public and private sector (see Appendix 1).
- 1.2 The ecoSE partnership states its common objective as ‘ensuring that future housing development in the South East takes place in a planned, sustainable and environmentally friendly manner.’
- 1.3 The partnership has developed a manifesto outlining how it will work towards its objective (see Appendix 2). The manifesto has five main commitments:
 - i) Ensuring high quality design in new developments;
 - ii) Promoting and encouraging the raising of construction standards for all new buildings;
 - iii) Raising design standards for new homes by encouraging the ecohomes “very good” standard as a minimum;
 - iv) Promoting the retrofitting of existing stock to raise energy and water efficiency standards;
 - v) Promoting the development of mechanisms, skills and financial incentives to encourage better design, construction and retrofitting to secure the environmental improvements needed.

2 The City Council's involvement with ecoSE

- 2.1 Councillor Bidgood attended the Better Buildings Conference in December 2003 at which ecoSE was launched. He passed on information to the relevant departments and in April 2004 raised a Council question:- “Will Cabinet at the earliest opportunity consider making an application to ecoSE to become an associate member?” (See Appendix 3).
- 2.2 In her reply the Leader committed to “consider the approach ecoSE has adopted and explore further the advantages associate membership would provide.” At the time, ecoSE had not fully developed the criteria for associate membership required to investigate the issues involved, so work was postponed until these were set.

- 2.3 The City Council has now received ecoSE's first newsletter, which outlines the criteria for becoming an associate member, and lists the organisations that have already done so (also included in Appendix 1). This provides the framework by which to make further investigations.
- 2.4 The subject of ecoSE membership was also discussed during consideration of the Sustainability Strategy at a meeting of the Environment and Access PIC on 20th October 2004. The issue required further investigation, which is the subject of this report.

3 ecoSE Associate Membership Criteria

- 3.1 It is free to join ecoSE, but they have set criteria to:
- i) "Assist ecoSE in delivering 'Better Buildings in the South East' through your business activities and policies, by using the approaches (relevant to your organisation), within the ecoSE manifesto.
 - ii) Advocate the wider work of ecoSE by publicising your organisation's involvement, both to your staff and clientele/stakeholders.
 - iii) Demonstrate this on-going commitment by submitting a 1 page report, annually, on your activities and progress in relation to the work of ecoSE.
 - iv) Allow ecoSE to publicise your Associate Membership in its publications, correspondence and website."
- 3.2 Point (iv) should have no resource implications, and for points (ii and (iii) the resource implications should be low, with little impact on current policies and programmes. The complex area is that in point (i), which has required a detailed look at how the manifesto commitments will impact on the Council's current practice.

4 Commitment (a): Ensuring high quality design in new developments

- 4.1 The City Council currently has local plan policies requiring high quality design and submission of design statements with planning applications. It encourages and funds Village and Neighbourhood Design Statements, Development Briefs and Local Area Design Statements, and has adopted the Winchester District Landscape Assessment as Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- 4.2 With the change from the Local Plan to a Local Development Framework, officers are currently defining the documents to be included. Sustainability will be a theme running through the framework, in accordance with national planning policies. The requirement for Sustainability Appraisal should ensure that the issue is fully integrated. It is also proposed to develop a 'Natural Resources' Supplementary Planning Document, which could include further detail sustainable building design.
- 4.3 Current National Government focus on Sustainable Communities supports this ecoSE manifesto commitment and will probably lead to further local authority actions over time to meet this commitment.
- 4.4 It seems, therefore, that this manifesto commitment can be met through the work that is already being done or is planned.

5 Commitment (b): Promoting and encouraging the raising of construction standards for all new buildings

5.1 The City Council currently has local plan policies requiring developments to maximise energy efficiency, reduce water consumption and support waste minimisation, which will be carried forward to the future Local Development Framework.

5.2 Currently, no Local Plan policies exist to promote reduction of construction wastes. This could be included in the Local Development Framework, in the same manner as the policies above. There is, however, an issue with the Council's powers to enforce these policies, which would need to be solved at a higher level (regionally or nationally).

5.3 Therefore, meeting this commitment will require some additions to the Local Development Framework, but these should not require additional resources.

6 Commitment (c): Raising design standards for new homes by encouraging EcoHomes "very good" as a minimum standard

6.1 The EcoHome standards are not currently used by the Council. However, the draft South East Plan includes a policy (CC3) stating that "authorities should require EcoHomes 'very good' as a minimum standard for all new housing". It is therefore likely that a policy for this will be needed in the Local Development Framework in the future.

6.2 This commitment has potential resource implications, as EcoHomes assessments are carried out by trained and licensed assessors, and carry a cost. It is unclear whether developers are expected to bear this cost, and what the impacts might be on negotiations for Section 106 agreements.

6.3 It is therefore unclear at this stage what the resource implications are for this commitment, although it looks likely that regional policy will soon be requiring the Council to meet it.

7 Commitment (d): Promoting the retrofitting of existing stock to raise energy and water efficiency standards

7.1 This commitment has implications for two areas of Council work: its housing stock and the work to influence change in homes under private ownership.

7.2 For the Council's housing stock, this commitment links to the refurbishments required to meet the Decent Homes Standard. This standard includes "thermal comfort" criteria for efficient heating and effective insulation. It should be noted that recent stock condition surveys show energy efficiency in Council owned housing stock (and private stock) to be above the national average.

7.3 Water efficiency is not covered at all in the Decent Homes Standard, and is outside the current work of the Council, although it is likely that this area becomes more important over time, with housing growth putting additional demands on the water resource. The ecoSE manifesto asks social housing providers to retrofit both water and energy efficiency measures during refurbishment programmes and this would therefore incur additional costs.

- 7.4 This is something that is beyond the current ability of the Housing Revenue Account to fund. The report on Delivering Decent Homes (HO56) being considered by the Housing PIC and Cabinet this month refers to ways in which the HRA strategy on repairs could meet a £400,000 per annum shortfall. Reductions in a number of repair and reinstatement works programmes are being proposed to address this funding gap and there is no scope, currently, to incorporate additional works.
- 7.5 The Council's influencing work for private homes on energy efficiency is delivered through HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act) work. The Act, and subsequent Government guidance, set a target for local authorities to achieve a 30% reduction in energy consumption on 1996 levels by 2010.
- 7.6 An independent report on Winchester City Council's HECA work, commissioned by the Energy Savings Trust, concluded that current resources put into this area are low, and achievement of the target would require expenditure of £200,000 per year for promotion and marketing activities. It should be noted that ecoSE does not require achievement of HECA targets, although it can be reasonably assumed that they would expect some work to be undertaken in this area.
- 7.7 Achievement of this commitment would need additional work, both for our own housing stock and for influencing private sector housing. This would require significant additional resources, which are unlikely to be available in the near future.
- 8 Commitment (e): Promoting the development of mechanisms, skills and financial incentives to encourage better design, construction and retrofitting to secure the environmental improvements needed
- 8.1 The major impact of this manifesto commitment requires work at national level, and is therefore not within the Council's influence. The one exception is advice on energy grants and participation in local schemes, which takes place through HECA work. More could be done in this area but has resource implications (see section 7).
- 9 Conclusions
- 9.1 ecoSE's aims are generally sensible in that they try to ensure that the negative impact that homes have on the environment is minimised, and tie in with national agendas on Sustainable Development, Sustainable Communities and Climate Change. They are in line with the stance the City Council takes on Development Control and with policies on Sustainability.
- 9.2 Associate membership would show the City Council's commitment to work towards sustainable buildings in a more visible way, and communicate this to the community, its partners and inspectors. This area of work also meets corporate strategy aims, as well as mitigation of Climate Change.
- 9.3 However, to take action on this issue, more work is needed for some of the manifesto commitments, which will have resource implications as identified in the body of this report and brought together below.
- 9.4 Most particularly, the specific requirements of Associate Membership would put an undeliverable demand on the Housing Revenue Account. This budget is being reviewed to try and meet the requirements of the Government's Decent Homes Standard and ecoSE's requirements go beyond that and could not be resourced in the current financial climate.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

10 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 10.1 Membership of ecoSE would relate to the corporate values of acting in a sustainable way and encouraging others to do likewise; delivering in partnership; and learning from others and seeking creative and innovative ways of working.
- 10.2 It is also linked to the 'homes' priority to address the longer term aim of providing decent affordable homes for all sectors of our community; and the 'Green Agenda' priority to minimise pollution and waste and to make efficient use of resources.

11 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 11.1 If the City Council were to join ecoSE as Associate Members, the major resource implications relate to its own housing stock where additional resources of £400,000 are already required to meet the Decent Homes Standard, and where further resources would be needed to meet ecoSE expectations. This looks to be unfeasible in the current financial situation.
- 11.2 Financial resources would also be needed to increase work on HECA for private households, and possibly to fund ecohomes assessments.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

ecoSE manifesto issues papers: give further detail to the actions relating to each of the commitments. Available from the Chief Executive's Department or at <http://www.ecose.org.uk/manifesto.php>

APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1 Current ecoSE membership
- Appendix 2 ecoSE manifesto
- Appendix 3 Council question 14 April 2004: "Will Cabinet at the earliest opportunity consider making an application to ecoSE to become an associate member?"

Appendix 1**Current ecoSE Membership****Core Members:**

- Environment Agency (Southern and Thames Regions)
- South East England Regional Assembly
- Government Office of the South East (GOSE)
- South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)
- Countryside Agency
- Southern Water
- Mid Kent Water
- Pavilion Housing
- National Housing Federation South East
- WaterVoice
- Woking Borough Council
- Energy Savings Trust
- Building Research Establishment Ltd
- Town and Country Planning Association

Associate Members:

- Worcester Heat Systems Ltd (Bosch Group)
- Surrey County Council
- South East Water
- Southampton City Council
- Ecoconsulting UK Ltd
- Gillcrest Homes
- English Nature
- Kent County Council
- RSPB
- South East Climate Change Partnership

Appendix 2



The Manifesto

Mission Statement

To improve the 'Quality of life' for all in the SE by enhancing our existing built environment and raising standards in all proposed developments, making the South East the national "showcase" for sustainable development.

Approach

EcoSE is committed to working towards a prosperous region that understands the need to balance economic, social, and environmental issues.

Focusing on the proposed growth in the South East, EcoSE is working towards sustainable development by;

1. Ensuring that the highest quality of design in new developments and their surrounding communities is achieved, creating spaces that can meet people's changing needs, minimise the impact on the environment and are places where people want to live and work.
2. Promoting and encouraging the raising of construction standards for all new buildings, regeneration and maintenance to achieve high levels of energy¹ and water efficiency coupled with waste minimisation.
3. Raising the design standards of new homes, by encouraging the following groups to adopt ecohomes "very good" as a minimum standard:
 - public and private developers who commission, design and build all new houses
 - local authorities in all their local planning policies and practices.

This standard will need to be supported by the Regional Assembly and the Regional Housing Board in their policies, in the Regional Spatial strategy and in the Regional Housing strategy respectively.

4. Promoting and encouraging the retrofitting of existing stock to raise energy and water efficiency to EcoHome standards "very good".
5. Working together to establish new mechanisms, ensuring the industry has the right skills, and promoting financial incentives to encourage better housing design, construction and 'retro-fitting' to secure the environmental improvements needed.

¹ All new developments to reach Energy Efficiency Best Practice standards as developed by EST with Government funding.



COUNCIL MEETING – 14 April 2004

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Bidgood

To: The Leader of the Council

“Will Cabinet at the earliest opportunity consider making an application to ecoSE to become an associate member?”

Reply

“The ecoSE partnership, whose inaugural meeting took place in December 2003, has launched a Manifesto whose Mission is to improve the Quality of Life for all in the South East by enhancing the existing built environment and raising standards in all proposed developments, making the South East the national showcase for sustainable development. The ecoSE partnership also has a common objective in ensuring that housing development in the South East takes place in a planned manner. This will allow sustainable economic growth, which will create a better quality of life through addressing social issues, while also protecting and enhancing the environment.

The Manifesto has five main themes:

- 1 Ensuring high quality design in new developments;
- 2 Promoting and encouraging the raising of construction standards for all new buildings;
- 3 Raising design standards for new homes in relation to environmental efficiency;
- 4 Promoting the retrofitting of existing stock to raise energy and water efficiency standards;
- 5 Promoting the development of mechanisms, skills and financial incentives to encourage better design, construction and retrofitting to secure the environmental improvements needed.

The Council already has a good record in a number of these areas. It prides itself on the attention given to the quality of design in new developments and recent stock condition surveys show energy efficiency in both private and Council owned housing stock to be above the national average.

However, we are not complacent about these important issues. The Council is currently developing the Local Plan and its Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan, when we will look to strengthen our performance on most, if not all, of the above themes. The issue of further improving the energy efficiency of the Council’s housing stock was raised in the recent house condition survey and will be part of the work required to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

The Local Plan Review promotes efficient use of resources and energy (Proposal DP.8), although planning powers are currently quite limited in this topic. Nevertheless, the Council is seeking to ensure that sustainable development and construction principles are incorporated into new development, particularly in large schemes such as the Major Development Area at West of Waterlooville.

It would seem eminently sensible therefore, to consider the approach ecoSE has adopted and explore further the advantages associate membership would provide.”