Whitehill Bordon
Eco-town – the facts
Whitehill Bordon Eco-town, East Hampshire

Summary

Whitehill Bordon is one of the proposed new eco-towns. The eco-towns debate has generated plenty of media interest, and Shelter has written a series of leaflets to help clarify the facts. This leaflet sets out the key housing issues for East Hampshire, and looks at the impact on housing that an eco-town could have locally.

- There are around 2,760 households on the housing waiting list in East Hampshire. It is estimated that an additional 340–440 households each year will find themselves no longer able to afford their home on the open market, and in need of subsidised housing.

- Over the ten-year period from 1997/98 to 2006/07, there were an additional 950 social rented homes provided in East Hampshire. However, around 500 social rented homes were lost, mainly through demolitions and the Right to Buy scheme.

- House prices are rising far more quickly than earnings in East Hampshire. In 2007, an average-priced home cost almost 11 times average earnings – whereas in 1997 this figure was more than 5 times average earnings. Although house prices are falling, mortgages are harder to secure and more expensive, and the situation has not improved.

- In the South East, 357,000 households are constantly struggling to pay, or falling behind with, their mortgage or rent payments. People faced with high housing costs tell Shelter that these costs cause them depression and anxiety, forcing them to sell possessions and reduce spending on essentials, such as clothing for their children.

- The proposed Whitehill Bordon Eco-town would provide up to 5,500 homes, of which approximately 40 per cent (or 2,200 homes) would be affordable, including social rented homes and low-cost home ownership.

We hope you’ll use the information in this booklet to decide whether the Whitehill Bordon Eco-town proposal could help meet local needs.

Make your voice count. Take part in the consultation processes and help shape the new town proposed for Whitehill Bordon.
Introduction

In July 2007, the Government made an historic commitment to tackle Britain’s housing crisis by delivering three million additional homes by 2020. The proposal to build a series of eco-towns is part of the government’s strategy to achieve this housing commitment and deliver the homes that are needed. Eco-towns are not the only option for increased housebuilding, but they offer the potential to develop sustainable homes within mixed communities that respond to the core challenge of climate change, while also helping to tackle high utility bills. However, for these towns to achieve their potential, and to avoid the many mistakes made in the past, it is essential that serious social and environmental concerns are addressed.

Eco-town consultations are now underway and it is vital that local people take the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions, so that a wide range of perspectives are considered. Very often, members of local communities know far better than the developers what new housing developments need to include, and what type of public services, particularly transport links, need to be provided. These views need to be heard.

What is an eco-town?

When the Government set out proposals for eco-towns, it outlined how these new towns should be different from previous developments.

Significant requirements are that the eco-town should:

- have a zero carbon impact as a whole
- contain employment opportunities and a full range of amenities, such as schools, health clinics and public transport, to ensure that it is as self-contained as practicable
- achieve high standards of architecture and urban design
- empower the new community; for example, through ownership of community assets and active involvement in the life of the town
- contain a full range of housing by size, tenure and type, so that residents can continue to live affordably in the town throughout their life, helping to maintain a sustainable community.
Whitehill Bordon: the proposal

The proposed eco-town of Whitehill Bordon would be located within the existing settlements of Whitehill and Bordon which lie in the eastern part of East Hampshire District – see Figure 1, below. In the 1970s and 1980s these previously separate communities were linked by a large-scale development of residential and industrial estates. Their combined population numbers are over 14,000, but the two settlements are not joined up, and lack a shared town centre with a full range of amenities.

Do we really need more homes in East Hampshire?

The number of households in East Hampshire keeps growing, mainly due to longer life expectancy, people choosing to live alone, and smaller family sizes. In addition, it is also anticipated that more households will move into the area from other parts of the South East and further afield, and an insufficient number of homes are planned to meet this growth. In recent years, house prices have risen, and an increasing proportion of households cannot afford to pay market prices, but there are not enough affordable homes being built as an alternative. As a result, local housing waiting lists remain long, and homelessness is a constant worry for those households with the least resources.

But aren’t there enough homes already planned?

It is projected that the number of households forming in East Hampshire will increase by 15 per cent (or an estimated 7,000 households) between 2006 and 2026. This projection suggests that around 350 additional homes may be needed, on average, each year between 2006 and 2026 to accommodate these new households.

The Draft South East Plan (a 20-year plan for housing and other developments, decided in consultation with people across the region) set a target of building an average of 260 new homes per year in East Hampshire over the period 2006–2026; this amounts to 5,200 homes in total. This target is below the current anticipated household growth per year and will need to be revised in light of new household projections. The Government has responded by raising the housing target for the region as a whole by 15 per cent. So far, this increased target has not led to a rise in the housing target for East Hampshire. However, it has been recommended that Whitehill Bordon should be designated as a ‘strategic development area’ with a housing provision target of 5,500 homes – in line with the proposal developed by Whitehill Bordon Opportunity. If for any reason the MoD does not move, the 5,500 homes would not be allocated elsewhere in East Hampshire, and there would not, therefore, be enough homes for the projected number of households.
Sites for around 2,000 new homes have already been identified elsewhere in East Hampshire through planning permissions and local plan allocations. Sites for an additional 3,200 new homes are being identified by the new local development framework process elsewhere in East Hampshire to meet the existing target in the Draft South East Plan.

How many more affordable homes are needed?

Significant numbers of affordable homes are needed in East Hampshire because the cost of housing has increased steeply over recent years, but the stock of affordable homes has failed to keep pace with need. While it is now more expensive to obtain your home on the open market, the lack of supply of affordable homes means it is also harder to get subsidised housing should you need it.

In 1997, a mortgage of 5 times the average earnings would have enabled a family to buy an average-priced house in East Hampshire. Ten years later, prices have risen so steeply that the ratio has more than doubled to nearly 11 times the average earnings – see Figure 2, below. Although house prices are falling, mortgages are increasingly harder to secure and more expensive, and the situation has not improved.

Figure 2: Average* earnings compared with average house prices

![Graph showing the ratio of earnings to house prices from 1997 to 2007 for East Hampshire, South East, and England.]

This is a snapshot of April 1 for each year.

*Average median is the mid-point of the house price/earnings distribution.

Source: CLG Live Tables

As home ownership has become less affordable, the need for affordable housing has increased, yet there are not enough affordable homes to meet this need. A study for Central Hampshire published in 2007 (the Strategic Housing Market Assessment) estimated that around 340–440 households each year find themselves no longer able to afford their home on the open market, and need subsidised housing. This study also estimated that there was already a substantial backlog of unmet housing need. To address this backlog and meet newly arising need, over the next five years, an additional 275–660 affordable homes (above projected supply) is needed each year in East Hampshire.

The number of households on the local housing waiting list gives further insight into the level of existing need for affordable housing. In East Hampshire, the housing waiting list has been rising steadily – see Figure 3, overleaf. In March 2007, there were around 2,760 households on the housing waiting list.
Not everyone on the waiting list represents a need for additional housing. For example, some will be looking to move from one rented property into a larger one. Nonetheless, where people are living in unsuitable properties, or are forced to share with other households, these are real needs that can only be addressed through additional homes being made available.

At the most severe end of the spectrum, are those who are actually homeless. Between 2003/04 and 2007/08 an average of 120 households per year approached the council and were accepted as homeless in East Hampshire. While these people are typically given priority for vacant homes over those on the waiting lists, the shortage of vacancies means that homeless households sometimes have to be accommodated in temporary accommodation. As a result, at the end of June 2008, 116 homeless households were living in temporary accommodation in this district.

Every day, Shelter sees first hand the impact that living in this situation has on people’s lives. A recent study by Shelter found that, in the South East, there are 357,000 households who are constantly struggling to pay, or falling behind with, their mortgage or rent payments. People faced with high housing costs tell Shelter that these costs cause them depression and anxiety, forcing them to sell possessions and reduce spending on essentials, such as clothing for their children. Living in temporary accommodation can be particularly unsettling, especially for children, as it can cause health problems, affect schoolwork, and sometimes lead to family breakdown.

The district council has been working hard with its housing association partners to accommodate those in need by managing more effectively the stock of social rented homes available, but annual lettings in East Hampshire have fallen over the last three years. In 2006/07, social lettings were only just over 300 homes, despite the fact that there were more than 2,750 households on the housing waiting lists (i.e., there were nearly nine households for each vacancy) – see Figure 4, below.

Part of the problem is that, while additional social rented homes are provided to let, other homes in the sector are being lost. Over the ten-year period from 1997/98 to 2006/07, 950 social rented homes were produced in East Hampshire (see Figure 5, below), but 500 were lost, mainly through demolitions and the Right to Buy scheme.

If any impact is to be made on the backlog of need for affordable homes, including social rented homes, there needs to be a significant increase in the supply of homes available at subsidised prices.

For those who cannot afford to buy their own home, or who face a long wait for a social rented home, or who are concerned about the security and cost of renting in the private rented sector, intermediate housing, including low-cost home ownership, may be a solution. East Hampshire District Council has sought to increase the supply of housing available for low-cost home ownership. As Figure 5 (above) shows, their efforts have met with some success, but the total provision of intermediate housing has never exceeded 100 homes per year, and the average is closer to 50 homes per year. A further increase in the supply of intermediate homes would help meet local need, and provide more choice for people who cannot afford to buy on the open market, notably key workers and first-time buyers.
How can we be sure that local people will be able to get a home in an eco-town?

The proposed eco-town could help to accommodate the projected household growth within the area. This growth is based on a continuation of the present trends, which include people moving both into and out of the area.

If the numbers of new homes are not sufficient to meet total need, the pressure to move into the area would be likely to continue, and the competition for housing in the market would be even keener – pricing local people out of the market even further. The intention of the eco-town proposal is to increase the amount of housing that is affordable for people working locally. By ensuring a sufficient housing supply in the future, the competition for housing is reduced and the opportunity for local people to find an affordable home in the area can be maximised.

How can we be sure that affordable homes will be provided?

The Draft South East Plan states that 35 per cent of new housing should be affordable: 25 per cent for social rent and 10 per cent for intermediate housing. The proposal for the eco-town development in Whitehill Bordon goes further with provision for 40 per cent affordable housing (or 2,200 affordable homes).

If planning permission was granted for the present proposal, the affordable housing element would be split 50:50 between housing for social rent and intermediate housing. These homes would be available for households with incomes that do not allow them to obtain a suitable home on the market by buying a house outright or by renting privately.

If an eco-town was built over ten years, it would provide over 220 additional affordable homes, on average, each year. This would help address the current backlog of affordable housing needed in East Hampshire. Whether there would be enough affordable housing in the district to meet newly arising need as well would depend on the supply of affordable housing from other developments.

If planning permission was granted for the development of the Whitehill Bordon Eco-town, it would be subject to a lengthy list of conditions, including an agreement by the developer to fulfil formal obligations relating to the provision of facilities, infrastructure and affordable housing. This agreement would usually include a commitment of money from the developer to fund the affordable homes.

You can help ensure this happens by getting involved in the consultation processes.
What will make Whitehill Bordon an eco-town?

This will mainly be determined in the detailed stages of future planning. The framework through which this proposal has come forward would seem to ensure that it is in accordance with the broad criteria laid down by the Government. With the information currently available, it is possible to make some observations now on any future housing in Whitehill Bordon.

- Efforts will need to be made to ensure that the significantly higher standards of design and materials to meet eco-standards do not result in housing in the eco-town being less affordable than existing homes in the area.

- The environment outside the home is as important as the one within. Therefore, the design of residential areas and their residents’ access to employment and amenities in the town must receive as much attention as the eco-friendly status of their individual homes. Residents need to look upon the town itself as their home too, with all the sense of place and belonging that goes with this.

- The proposed share of affordable housing in Whitehill Bordon, at 40 per cent, is in the middle of the 30–50 per cent range indicated by the Government. It has been shown that this will help address the current shortage of affordable housing, though the needs of the area are such that it would benefit from a higher proportion of social rented homes. It will also be important to ensure that the intermediate housing is affordable for people on lower incomes.

Why are homes unaffordable?

- The rate of housebuilding has not kept pace with rapidly increasing demand, and, in conjunction with easy-access mortgages, has led to steep house price rises.

- The amount of affordable housing, such as local authority and housing association homes, has been gradually reduced by the sell-off of council housing under the Right to Buy scheme, and by successive governments’ failure to replace these homes.

House prices are now falling, but the underlying issues have not changed. There are still too few homes being built.

The impact of the affordability crisis

The lack of affordable homes in Britain has hit millions of people hard. People are struggling to meet housing costs and, in some cases, are at severe risk of homelessness as a result. Many more are trapped in overcrowded, dilapidated, damp or temporary housing, unable to afford to rent or buy a secure, comfortable home. The consequences can be devastating. Children living in bad housing are almost twice as likely as other children to suffer from poor health, nearly twice as likely not to get any GCSEs, and more likely to be bullied and excluded from school. Parents fear that things may be much harder for their children.

Does the rest of the country have these problems?

Home ownership out of reach for many

Over the last ten years, the cost of the average home in England has tripled, to more than £200,000. This has left most first-time buyers priced out of the market. Although house prices are now falling, the credit crunch means that home ownership remains out of reach for many, largely because it is getting harder to secure mortgages. In addition, mortgage repossessions are expected to rise – more than 45,000 homeowners could lose their homes in 2008.

Cost of renting homes too high

The lack of affordable housing hasn’t just been felt by aspiring homeowners. People living in the private rented sector are more likely to struggle to pay for housing costs than those with a mortgage. In turn, the lack of affordable homes on the market has put mounting pressure on the social sector. Nearly 1.7 million households in England are currently on housing waiting lists (an increase of almost two-thirds in the past ten years). Unfortunately, those lucky enough to have a social rented home are more likely to be overcrowded, because there are an insufficient number of family-sized homes in this sector.
What happens now?

There is general acknowledgment that for a number of years the UK has consistently failed to build enough homes. With the fall in house prices, housebuilders are limiting production even further, and empty homes will not be sufficient to satisfy housing need.

In April 2008, 15 potential eco-town locations were selected for detailed consideration. Only when all aspects of each town have been carefully scrutinised will any decision be taken to go ahead with the development, and even then the proposals will be fully vetted through the local planning process.

It is vital that local people take the opportunity to have their say and actively participate in the consultation process.

- A national government consultation on the general principles of eco-towns and initial reactions to the 15 suggested locations closed on June 30.
- Several events, meetings, exhibitions and discussions have been held over the past four years by the Whitehill Bordon Opportunity team to engage with the local community and ensure as many local people as possible have helped to shape the ‘Green Community Vision’.
- EDAW have recently been commissioned as masterplanners for the Whitehill Bordon Opportunity, and a series of consultation events and exhibitions will commence in November 2008. Masterplan proposals are programmed for the summer of 2009.
- There are plans for a series of consultation events to be held by the Government in the region of each potential eco-town location – including Whitehill Bordon. These consultations will coincide with the publication of the Draft Planning Policy Statement in the Autumn and sustainability assessments for potential locations.
- There will also be the opportunity to provide feedback on the Whitehill Bordon proposals online.

If the plans for Whitehill Bordon move forward and enter the local planning system, there will be additional meetings and further online opportunities for people to express their views.

How can I get involved?

- Attend a local consultation event and help shape the eco-town proposal.
- Discuss this information with your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues at work.
- Contact Shelter to find out more about our work in this area and other ways to help.
Further information

Whitehill Bordon Opportunity and East Hampshire District Council:
wendy.bray@easthants.gov.uk, or call 01730 234011, or go to
www.easthants.gov.uk
Communities and Local Government: www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns

Glossary

Affordable housing This includes social rented homes and intermediate housing.

Brownfield Previously developed land, includes anything from old factory sites, to suburban gardens.

Draft South East Plan A 20-year plan for housing and other developments, decided in consultation with local people.

Green belt A land use policy which retains areas of largely undeveloped, wild, or agricultural land that surrounds urban areas.

Greenfield Undeveloped land, either currently used for agriculture, or left fallow.

Household projections The household projections are an indication of the likely increase in households, given the continuation of recent demographic trends. Note: sub-regional household projections are not as robust as regional projections.

Housing shortfall This indicates too few homes being built, and is the difference between the number of homes built and the number of homes needed or planned.

Intermediate housing Homes offered for shared ownership, shared equity, purchased at a discount, or available at a below-market rent.

Low-cost home ownership This includes homes available under shared ownership and shared equity schemes. Shared ownership homes are offered to people who cannot afford to buy their own home; individuals purchase a portion of their home and pay rent on the rest. Under shared equity schemes people take out a mortgage loan for the majority of the property, with a low-cost equity loan from a mortgage lender or the Government covering the remainder.

Social rented housing Formerly called council housing, these homes are provided by councils and housing associations to people in housing need at affordable rents.

Strategic development area A geographical location identified as an appropriate place to focus on development.