

## ECO-TOWNS: SITTING TARGETS FOR CUTBACKS

EVEN THE GOVERNMENT ADMITS THAT ONLY a fraction of its 10 proposed 'eco-towns' (right) is now likely to be built.

'We've always said we are hoping to build up to 10. But we are going for quality, not quantity, and the final number will ultimately depend on the quality of proposals,' says a spokesman for Communities and Local Government.

Last month the government confirmed that only one of the 12 shortlisted sites meets its criteria. Designer Wayne Hemingway, who was a member of the Eco Towns Challenge Panel, says: 'The idea of building 10 was far too ambitious. If you're pushing to build way above existing environmental standards, you're better off doing one and getting it right.'

He adds: 'I believe at least one should be built and there's a few that are capable of getting to the stage where they could and should be built, but they've got a lot of work to do.'

Housebuilders have suffered a slump in sales, falling share prices and mass redundancies. Paul King, chief executive of the UK Green Building Council, says the state of the economy means expectations have to be adjusted.

'There are some realistic prospects on the eco-towns shortlist, but we are going to have

to rethink the government's target of 3 million new homes, and I think that has a knock-on effect for eco-towns,' he says.

Hemingway, who was lead designer for 1,100 homes under construction by Taylor Wimpey as part of Dartford's the Bridge scheme, suggests that registered social landlords may join with local authorities to deliver the first eco-towns.

'The world will go more towards state funding,' he says. 'I don't think a lot of the big developers are going to be able to do it, but who says they have to? There could be another way.'

A spokesman for the Home Builders Federation says the industry cannot meet all of the government's demands: a target of 3 million homes by 2020, zero-carbon homes from 2016, affordable housing quotas of around 40% and paying the forthcoming community infrastructure levy.

The federation estimates the zero-carbon target will add £30,000 to the average cost of building a home, while affordable housing and



planning gains already add £50,000 per unit.

'The powers that be need to decide what their priorities are,' says a spokesman.

'We have got to be sensible about what you can expect housebuilders to deliver.'

He adds that the federation is 'in discussion with ministers on a daily basis' about how it can

meet the government's target of 3 million homes by 2020, while also supporting its environmental and social goals.

The spokesman refuses to say whether federation members want the 2016 zero-carbon target to be watered down.

'The new housing minister [Margaret Beckett] is clearly very committed to the zero-carbon objective and we will work with her,' he says.

Communities and Local Government is expected to publish a consultation on the definition of zero-carbon development by Christmas.



Campaign trial: Middle Quinton, near Stratford-upon-Avon, the site of a proposed eco-town, is being challenged in the courts by campaigners