

Executive

Eco Bicester a Garden City of the Future?

28 May 2012

Report of Head of Public Protection and Development Management

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To enable Members to consider the potential to explore garden city designation for Bicester.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To agree that DCLG are contacted to explore the identification of Eco Bicester as a next generation garden city.

Executive Summary

Eco Bicester stemmed from the identification of NW Bicester as a location for sustainable development in accordance with the Eco Town PPS standards. Eco Bicester has been used as a banner covering the diverse range of projects taking place within the existing town and as part of the expansion of the town. However the latest government guidance on planning (the National Planning Policy Framework) no longer refers explicitly to Eco Towns (although the Eco Towns supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 is still in existence) but does encourage development that meets garden city principles.

This report considers the implications of this change in the governments approach in relation to Eco Bicester

Introduction

- 1.1 The government, particularly through speeches and publications by the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Housing, have supported new development to garden city principles. Garden Cities were planned new settlements that sought to 'provide a balance between town and country'. Recently the Town & Country Planning Association has published 're-imagining Garden Cities for the 21st Century' which identifies benefits and

lessons in bringing forward comprehensively planned communities.

- 1.2 Eco Towns were similarly envisaged as planned and sustainable settlements, raising standards and being exemplars. The Eco Towns guidance in the supplement to PPS1 also sets clear standards for such places, above those generally achieved in new developments. There are many synergies between the proposals for new settlements envisaged through the garden city movement and the more recent aspirations for eco towns.

Proposals

- 1.3 The government has indicated that there will be consultation later this year about how to apply garden city principles to new developments. The proposal is therefore that the opportunity to identify Eco Bicester with garden cities is explored with government now.

Conclusion

- 1.4 Whilst Eco Bicester is now recognised widely but there may be opportunities arising from also recognising the garden city principles that do not conflict with the ambitions for the town.

Background Information

Government Position on Growth

- 2.1 In a speech on 19 March 2012, the Prime Minister David Cameron announced;

So, yes, we need more housing, but sprawling over the countryside isn't the answer. We must absolutely protect our green belts and national parks, but we also urgently need to find places where we're prepared to allow significant new growth to happen. That is why we'll begin consultation later this year on how to apply the principles of garden cities to areas with high potential growth in places people want to live. And we must get our planning system fit for purpose; it needs to be quick, it needs to be easier to use and it needs to better support growth, jobs and homes.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.2 The NPPF published in March 2012 sets out the Government's planning policy and replaces the majority of previous planning guidance, although the supplement to PPS1 on Eco Towns remains in place at the present time. The NPPF promotes sustainable development identifying three dimensions; an economic role, a social role and an environmental role. The NPPF advises these should not be sought in isolation and that they are mutually dependent.
- 2.3 With regard to delivering large scale housing development the NPPF advises at para 52 that;

The supply of new homes can sometimes be best achieved through planning

for larger scale development, such as new settlements or extensions to existing villages and towns that follow the principles of Garden Cities. Working with the support of their communities, Local planning authorities should consider whether such opportunities provide the best way of achieving sustainable development. In doing so, they should consider whether it is appropriate to establish Green Belt around or adjoining any such development.

- 2.4 Much new development is planned to be accommodated in Cherwell by the way of large scale extensions to the existing towns of Banbury and Bicester.

Garden Cities

- 2.5 Garden Cities were a concept developed by Ebenezer Howard through his publication *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, published in 1898.
- 2.6 The Garden City vision was developed by Ebenezer Howard to combine the very best of town and country living to create healthy homes for working people in vibrant communities. The heart of the garden city ideals are holistically planned new settlements which enhance the natural environment, provide high quality affordable housing and locally accessible jobs.
- 2.7 The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) grew from the work of Ebenezer Howard and the garden cities movement and continues to promote the principles of sustainable new development.
- 2.8 The TCPA define the garden city principles as
- *Community ownership of land and long term stewardship of assets*
 - *High quality imaginative design including homes with gardens*
 - *Mixed tenure homes which are affordable for ordinary people*
 - *A strong local jobs offer with a variety of employment opportunities within the garden city and easy commuting distance of homes*
 - *Generous green space linked to the wider countryside. Over 60% of Hampstead Garden Suburb is green space, including a mix of public and private networks of well managed, high quality gardens and open spaces.*
 - *Access to strong local cultural, recreational and shopping facilities*
 - *Integrated and accessible transport systems*
 - *Local food sourcing, including allotments.*
- 2.9 Two garden cities were originally developed, Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City, which remain successful places today. The garden cities also inspired other new settlements in the UK and abroad including the post war New Towns developed in the UK.

Eco Towns

- 3.1 The Eco Towns programme launched in 2007 sought to address many of the same issues as the garden cities and new towns. Eco towns are to be exemplar developments *'that encourage and enable residents to live within managed environmental limits and in communities that are resilient to climate change'* (Eco Towns Supplement to PPS1 para 5).
- 3.2 The Eco Towns PPS sets minimum standards for eco towns, these are;
- Zero carbon development
 - Climate change adaptation
 - At least 30% affordable housing, building for life silver, lifetime homes, minimum of code 4 and 5 for water, real time energy monitoring, energy efficiency and carbon reductions
 - At least 1 job per dwelling
 - Priority for walking, cycling and use of public transport to achieve at least 50% of trips originating in an eco town by non car means
 - Promotion of healthy lifestyles through the design of the place
 - Local services
 - 40% green space
 - Protection of the historic environment
 - Biodiversity net gain
 - Reduced water use and water quality
 - Flood risk management
 - Reduction in waste
 - Master plan
 - Detailed delivery and monitoring
 - Community governance
- 3.3 The vision for eco towns was therefore that they would be highly sustainable, planned developments delivering both jobs and housing, sustainable long term governance and community facilities, significant green space and ambitious targets for modal shift, as well as the economies of scale that can come from large scale new development. In addition the Eco Towns are to provide demonstrators of best practice, achieving standards beyond those provided through other developments.
- 3.4 The Town & Country Planning Association also has supported the development of eco towns providing detailed worksheets on delivering the standards. Eco Towns could in many ways be seen as the 21 century interpretation of new settlements, much in the way garden cities informed earlier thinking on sustainable developments.

Bicester

- 3.5 NW Bicester was identified as an Eco Town location with the publication of the Eco Town supplement to PPS 1 in 2009. In addition to seeking higher standards for new development at NW Bicester the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board identified a need to ensure the existing town was not left behind and to use the new development as a catalyst to bring about change in the existing town. To that end a vision setting out the ambitions for the town was produced and adopted. The vision is entitled 'Eco Bicester One Shared Vision'.

- 3.6 The Eco Towns PPS aims were used to inform the One Shared Vision for Bicester which is based around three themes of Community First, Employment, Transport and Environmental Sustainability and sets out the long term aims for the town as a whole, including existing and proposed development. The Shared Vision has been adopted by Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Bicester Town Council, Homes and Communities Agency, Environment Agency and Bicester Vision. Eco Bicester has been used as the banner under which a diverse range of projects promoting sustainable low carbon living in the town have taken place.
- 3.7 Since 2009 work has been underway to deliver highly sustainable new development at NW Bicester and improvements within the town such as energy efficiency schemes, work on travel behaviour and exemplar buildings. Some of the work has been funded through Eco Town grant received from the Dept. of Communities and Local Government. However, it is evident that the government is no longer directly promoting 'eco towns' and hence the reference in the NPPF to garden cities.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

1. Through the Bicester Master Plan and Local Plan, Bicester will be identified to grow, accommodate new homes as well as substantial land for employment by 2031. With the very significant levels of growth proposed at Bicester it is important to think not just in terms of new buildings but how the town and its existing population can grow in a holistic way to accommodate the change, retaining the strengths of the existing town and addressing its current weaknesses. The Shared Vision has sought to provide this over arching vision for the town.
2. The Eco Town standards are helpful in identifying clear requirements for delivering sustainable new developments. However the Eco Town PPS supplement is clear that it also relied on advice that at the time of publication was provided in other planning policy statements which have now been replaced by the NPPF. In seeking opportunities for further funding for the growing town it is helpful to ensure that the local approach is consistent with government's current thinking on new development. This supports consideration of a garden cities approach in which sustainability is central, as remains the case with the NPPF.
3. In many ways Bicester meets many of the garden city aims. As a market town it has housing, employment and local facilities. Much development of the town has taken place in the second half of the 20th century at relatively low densities with individual gardens and significant areas of open space. Proposals to expand the town similarly seek a sustainable balance between employment, housing and open space. The NPPF provides the opportunity to consider green belts to provide long term limits for growth in connection with large scale development designed to garden city principles.
4. Given the governments approach to promoting garden cities and the clear synergies with the Eco Bicester approach, that seeks to transform the town into a sustainable community of the future, it is recommended that additional branding of Eco Bicester as a next generation garden city is explored with DCLG.

5. The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

Option One Explore the requirements for garden cities and explore the opportunities of identifying Eco Bicester as a next generation Garden City

Option Two Do not explore Garden City identification

Consultations

None, but extensive engagement with stakeholders will be required if future designation is to be pursued.

Implications

Financial: None arising directly from the report. If there were to be a significant re branding then costs would be incurred and funding for this would need to be further considered.

Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Head of Finance and Procurement Telephone 0300 0030106

Legal: None arising directly from the report

Comments checked by Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance 0300 003 0107

Risk Management: Eco Bicester is recognised as the umbrella under which projects in Bicester, contributing to making the town a more sustainable place, are being carried out. There is a risk that a change to the name would confuse the identity.

Comments checked by Claire Taylor, Corporate Performance Manager 01295 221563

Wards Affected

Bicester Town, East, South, West & North Wards

Corporate Plan Themes

District of Opportunity

Lead Member

**Councillor Barry Wood
Leader of the Council**

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
Eco Bicester One Shared Vision	
Eco Town Supplement to PPS 1	
National Planning Policy Framework	
Re-imagining Garden Cities for the 21 st Century – TCPA	
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