

Executive

Bicester Masterplan Update

28 May 2012

Report of Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To brief members on the progress with the development of the Bicester Masterplan.

The completed Masterplan will set the strategy for shaping the development of Bicester and be used to inform the determination of planning applications.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To receive a presentation by WYG on progress being made with the development of the Bicester Masterplan.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy, in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning, to make any minor changes before publication of the Bicester Masterplan (WYG presentation) for public consultation.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 Since the endorsement of the Conceptual Plan by the Executive in February 2012, WYG have undertaken detailed site assessment and stakeholder engagement around the themes of employment, housing, movement and open space.

Proposals

- 1.2 Securing integration of development with the existing town
- 1.3 Helping unlock the potential of the town.

Conclusion

- 1.4 It is proposed that the Bicester Masterplan update be approved. The update illustrates the substantial progress being made and the next steps being developed to conclude the plan making process.

Background Information

2. The Cherwell District Council appointed consultants WYG to prepare a Masterplan for Bicester in November 2011
- 2.1 Following the appointment Oxfordshire County Council confirmed a major contribution to the funding of the work and are actively involved in the coordination of the project jointly with CDC.
- 2.2 WYG were asked to complete a conceptual plan by the end of January 2012, which was agreed by the CDC executive at its February 2012 meeting with a full Masterplan in the process of being completed being completed adoption by the Council as planning policy guidance for the town.

The role of the Masterplan process

- 2.3 The Masterplan has been commissioned to examine the town and its future needs over the next 20 years. It aims to provide a clear vision for the future of the town and set a framework for the integration of new developments with the rest of the town, to ensure that opportunities for securing a stronger economy are realised.
- 2.4 A number of opportunities exist in Bicester which are critical to consider in a comprehensive, coordinated and planned way. The Masterplan process has proved itself as a powerful means to capture the aspiration of the town and to consider how best to realise its full opportunity to bring benefit to the economy, environment and wellbeing of residents.
- 2.5 The Masterplan seeks to amplify and build upon the strengths of the town. Bicester has a range of current strengths, from the development of the Eco-Bicester concept, a strong commercial and retail partnership in Bicester Vision, the Bicester Outlet Village which draws millions of visitors per annum, an attractive historic core, a substantial amount of defence estate land for potential redevelopment, a dynamic local College, access to the M40, good rail links to Birmingham and London and proximity to the major economic driver of the City of Oxford. The Masterplan for Bicester seeks to harness these factors into a coherent view of how the town might grow by building on these assets.
- 2.6 These include taking advantage of the new East –West Rail link, the potential for creating a larger town centre with more shops, restaurants and overnight accommodation. The Masterplan is also considering areas such as transport pressures, retail needs, green infrastructure and future education needs and other aspirations for the coming decades. It will also consider the potential gains from proposed development in the wider Bicester area including the Graven Hill MoD site.
- 2.7 The Masterplan is intended to help ensure that all new development is fully integrated into the existing town. The Masterplan will also propose a new green edge to the town, a new boundary that sets a limit to the town's growth

which has been taken up in the Local Plan Submission draft.

2.8 The main aims of the Bicester Masterplan are to:

- Guide the growth of the town up until 2031 and beyond.
- Identify opportunity sites in the town and potential land uses.
- Identify the key physical and social infrastructure that is required to meet the requirements of the current and future population
- To inform the development of the Local Plan.
- Set out an urban design framework for the town.
- Identify how best to present the town as a destination and to examine how the town's considerable heritage might be used to develop new cultural activities and a new tourism offer.
- Highlight to potential landowners, developers and investors the opportunities that Bicester has to offer.
- Secure the future role of the town centre, ensure its vitality and viability, widen and secure the retail offer, reduce the number of vacancies and prevent against unsuitable out of town development that would undermine the role of the town centre.
- Provide a sustainable movement strategy for the town.
- Secure a stronger employment base for the town.
- Provide a robust document that the Local Planning Authority can use in pre-application discussions, to assess future planning applications and assist in the determination of proposals.
- Many of the opportunities will take time to secure, requiring the sustained commitment from many agencies but particularly the District Councils and Oxfordshire Country Council working together.

Guiding and shaping growth

2.9 Bicester is recognised in the current Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East as one of the main locations for development in Oxfordshire between now and 2026, by a minimum of 670 dwellings per annum. This growth is planned to take the form of key sites within the existing town, town centre regeneration and a series of urban extensions on strategic sites of which the NW Bicester site is to 'Eco-Town' standard (PPS 1 supplement – Eco Towns.

2.10 The Masterplan is developing a clear spatial vision for the town and setting a framework for the development of key opportunity sites. It will also enable Cherwell Council and its partners to take a proactive role in guiding future development within a clear town boundary that prevents urban sprawl or encroachment on the surrounding villages. The Masterplan is examining ways of best integrating all new developments such as Graven Hill with the rest of the town.

A stronger town economy

- 2.11 The Masterplan sought to address the availability of employment land to ensure local companies can grow and the economic base of the town be maintained and strengthened.
- 2.12 The Masterplan process has considered how best Bicester might build on its role as a market town.
- 2.13 Employment lead - growth to company expansion and inward investment. Substantial employment growth Addresses need for major employment growth, a key step towards securing the potential for turning around the out-commute. New technology investment. Exploring links to Silverstone, technology corridor. Employment quick wins – gateway. Economic positioning. Securing the economic gain we have identified will require us to change how we take forward economic development.
- 2.14 The Bicester Masterplan is also exploring how best the town should strengthen the retail sector of its economy and promote the town as a shopping, tourism and cultural destination and secure a closer relationship between the potential for future development of the successful Bicester Outlet Village and a larger town centre.
- 2.15 The Masterplan seeks to address a number of other challenges faced by the town, including:
- How to reposition the town in the face of competition from neighbouring towns with consequential retail leakage, leading to it becoming more of a dormitory town than a competitive, dynamic, attractive retail centre.
 - How to reduce the number of vacant shop premises within the town centre.
 - How to strengthen local resident's perceptions of a positive future for the town.
 - Identifying potential new employment sites within and around the town to assist in reducing the current high level of out commuting and responding to the restructuring of employment within the town, with a particular focus that matches the 'Eco-Bicester' concept.
 - How to build on the success of the Bicester Outlet village as a foundation for a more dynamic and diverse town economy.
 - How best to strengthen the economic benefits from Higher Education provision in the town.
 - How best to relate the potential use of Defence Estates land into the town for new residential and employment uses, that help strengthen the economy and demographics of the town.
 - How the town centre might be further developed as a high quality attractive place that meets wider business needs as well as providing an

attractive mix of national and independent retailers.

- How to use its locational advantages and maintain its excellent connectivity.
 - How best to promote the town as a tourism centre, by exploring the potential use of the former RAF Bicester site.
 - How best to announce 'arrival' into the town.
 - Providing coherence and avoiding sprawl
- 2.16 With this starting point, the Masterplan is an important means to consider the development of the town in a coordinated, planned and integrated way.
- 2.17 Bicester is a market town that serves a substantial rural catchment. As a result of the planned growth, the role and functions of the town centre will need to be expanded and enhanced both to maintain and strengthen the role of the town within this catchment. The challenge is how best to shape this town growth so that the town uses its key opportunity sites in a coordinated, integrated and planned way and to expand the retail, employment, leisure, education and social portfolio of the town to cater for the existing and a growing population.

Transport improvements

- 2.18 Central to the Masterplan project is the aim of improving public transport services; both bus connections within the town and to surrounding villages; the gain from the investment in the Chiltern Rail service from Birmingham, to Banbury, Bicester and London; the opportunities to be gained from the East-West Rail project linking Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes and Bedford through a new frequent rail service.
- 2.19 Alongside the expansion of the range of commercial and social facilities available, Bicester faces a challenge of how to secure an improved sustainable transport network for walking and cycling together with new bus connections that will collectively help to reduce the level of out-commuting and encourage 'modal shift' and promote the 'well-being' of residents of the town.
- 2.20 Funding to improve Junction 9 of the M40 is being actively sought through SEMLEP and OLEP through the Growing Places Fund and DfT Pinch Point Programme to ensure that this junction does not constrain development at Bicester.
- 2.21 The Masterplan process will include consideration of the need for enhanced Green Infrastructure, such as an expanded network of footpaths, link trails and new cycle paths, together with other investment in the public realm and ensuring that Bicester becomes a greener more attractive town.
- 2.22 Potential land use changes will raise the possibility of altering transport patterns in the town, the opportunity to remove pinch points and how the constraints on economic growth from M40 junctions 9 & 10 might best be resolved.
- 2.23 WYG have also now been commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to

consider the detail of a new 'movement strategy' for the town and guidance to support their role as the local highway body.

Creating sustainable communities

- 2.24 The Bicester Masterplan will include an assessment of the likely volume of new housing, securing high building standards such as the use of Eco-Town standards. Building regulations, stronger design
- 2.25 The plan is considering how best to integrate areas of potential urban expansion with the existing town to ensure that the town benefits from this growth, with new community facilities and the impact on existing services fully assessed. This will include consideration of the educational needs of the town, the relationship between potential education locations (of all types – primary, secondary and higher) and the appropriate level of health facilities, together with the potential for new and extended cultural, arts, sports and leisure facilities.
- 2.26 The aims are to consider how best to:
- Provide a wide range of high quality, sustainable housing choices and build safe neighbourhoods.
 - Strengthen the cultural life of the town, the public realm, arts and facilities for community use.
 - Secure a high quality leisure, sport and recreation offer.
 - Ensure that the proposed urban extensions to the North West, South West and at Graven Hill might best be integrated with the rest of the town.

Informing the Cherwell Local Plan

- 2.27 The Bicester Masterplan will assist with the completion of the Local Plan for the District having considered the issues facing the development of the town as a whole in depth.
- 2.28 The Local Plan will incorporate the conclusions of the Masterplan onto a statutory footing, placing the future of Bicester into the context of Cherwell District as a whole.
- 2.29 Completion of the Proposed Submission Local Plan is being considered on 28 May 2012, followed by a final 6 weeks consultation and submission planned for the autumn 2012. This will lead to an Examination in Public in the winter and Adoption anticipated in late Spring 2013.

The process of Masterplan preparation

- 2.30 WYG are in the final stages of preparing the Masterplan and have been gathering information and liaising with key stakeholders to inform its production.
- 2.31 Key stakeholders include elected members and officers from the 3 tiers of local government - District, Town and County Councils; Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, Defence Estates and local businesses through Bicester Vision

and the Chamber of Commerce.

- 2.32 Engagement has so far included a series of workshops and one to one interviews.
- 2.33 Following public consultation the Masterplan will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document to give the document weight in the planning system. The adopted Masterplan can be used to inform pre-application consideration with developers. The Bicester Masterplan will align with the Local Plan and be used for the determination of planning applications.

Consultation on the Masterplan

- 2.34 Cherwell District Council will be consulting more widely on the Masterplan in June and July. This will ensure that the final plan has taken account of all those with an interest in Bicester, in shaping the future of the town.
- 2.35 The final report for CDC will be brought to the Executive. It will include an executive summary of the key findings.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 To receive the presentation of the progress update from WYG.

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

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| Option One | To support the continued development of the Bicester Masterplan. |
| Option Two | To support the development of the Bicester Masterplan with amendments. |
| Option Three | To not support the completion of the Bicester Masterplan and to continue with a piecemeal approach to development that fails to ensure integration with the existing town or to ensure that opportunities are realised for the benefit of residents and businesses in Bicester. |

Consultations

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| Cllr Michael Gibbard | Informal Briefing |
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Implications

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| Financial: | There are no significant direct financial implications
A rising from this report.
Comments checked by Leanne Lock 01295 227098 |
| Legal: | The Council is not required to produce a Masterplan as a |

component of place shaping. It is intended to consult on the draft prior to its adopted as an SPD.

Comments checked by Nigel Bell Team Leader – Planning and Litigation 01295 221687

Risk Management:

Not having an up-to-date Masterplan for the town forms a sound basis for determination of applications Council’s proposed Development Plan Documents being found ‘unsound’ at Examination with consequent delay implications for resources. It would also produce uncertainty in deploying resources for completion of the LDF.

Comments checked by Claire Taylor, Performance Manager 01295 221563

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

- Accessible, Value for Money Council
- District of Opportunity
- Safe and Healthy
- Cleaner Greener

Lead Member

Councillor Michael Gibbard
Lead Member for Planning

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
Briefing papers on the development of the Bicester Masterplan	
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