

# ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS ON BICESTER OF WESTON OTMOOR ECO TOWN

## GOVERNANCE MEETING SUMMARY PAPER

### 1 Overview

The Eco Towns initiative represents a policy response to a requirement for increased housing supply and mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The intention is that the first Eco Towns will begin construction by 2010, with five eco-towns by 2016 and up to ten by 2020. A short list of 15 potential sites for Eco Towns was announced by Communities and Local Government in April 2008 and a programme of evaluation and consultation is currently underway.

One of the shortlisted sites, is the Eco Town proposed at Weston Otmoor on a site located to the west of the M40 and approximately three miles south west from Bicester, and the purpose of this study is to assess its economic and social validity and impact on a sub region including the existing settlements of Kidlington and Bicester. These impacts will be an important consideration, alongside the results of other impact studies, e.g. for transport and deliverability, in determining whether the location is appropriate for an Eco Town and whether the proposed form of development (scale, mix etc) is the most appropriate for the area.

The Eco Town is potentially of considerable scale – creating approximately 10,000-15,000 dwellings and up to 15,000 jobs. As such it would be a very significant change in the area. The proposal also includes retail space; leisure facilities; primary and secondary schools; healthcare provision and other community facilities. A package of transport schemes is also proposed, including investment in the East West rail scheme, a tram network and other public transport schemes, a park and ride facility, improvements to the A34/M40 junction and controls on access to the site by car. A more detailed summary of the proposal is appended to this summary.

Significant forecast levels of demographic and economic growth are expected in the South East. The Secretary of State's proposed changes to the South East Plan reflect this and in particular planned delivery of new housing in the region. The Secretary of State's proposed changes also suggest an increase in the minimum annual average net additional dwelling requirement in Cherwell District from 590 to 670 (and total in period from 11,000 to 13,400).

## 2 Study Brief

The brief for the study was to assess objectively the potential economic and social impact of the Western Otmoor proposal. The study has been undertaken in two stages.

- The first stage of the study identified the existing socio economic conditions and key issues facing Bicester and surrounding settlements, which form the context for assessing the impact of the proposed Eco Town. It was also concerned with assessing the likely deliverability of the current economic development strategy and spatial plan for Bicester and other significant settlements, such as Kidlington, and the anticipated outcomes in the period 2008-2026. It included a workshop with stakeholders.
- The second stage of this study examined the impact of the proposed eco town on Bicester and other nearby settlements. The impact on the deliverability of the current planning and economic development strategy and on existing infrastructure capacity was considered. It also included a workshop with stakeholders.

At the outset a number of limitations of our assessment are worth noting. The first is that the assessment is of a scheme based on only very limited information in an uncertain context based on limited research. The second is that a scheme of the scale of the proposed Eco Town will have clearly have impacts and that it is the significance and potential mitigation of these impacts, which is most critical to any decision to proceed. A third issue is that this type of assessment is normally conducted as a comparison with other growth options in a context where the broad scale of growth has already been established, whereas in this case we are dealing with a single option and its impact on the existing planning strategy. A fourth issue is that even on the basis of best evidence the assessment relies on strong degree of judgement and the 'balance of probabilities' rather than certainty because of uncertainties of the future market and the detail of the scheme.

The results of the study are presented below in terms of addressing a number of key questions.

### 3 Potential areas of Impact

The main potential area of impact is on the settlements of Bicester and Kidlington. Bicester is a market town of about 30,000 population and Kidlington is a very large village of around 14,000 population



Evidence from the study suggests to us the most intense potential impacts will be on Bicester in terms of housing and jobs and on employment developments in Kidlington. This is because whereas Bicester has significant plans for both new housing and employment, plans for Kidlington mostly relate to employment and the development of science-based activities. We largely rule out any detrimental economic impacts in Oxford City because of the scale and strength of the economy, and in the more rural areas because of the limited potential for new development.

Bicester has experienced significant population growth in the last two decades and benefits from relatively high economic activity rates and a young population. However, the economy has consistently under-performed and there has been difficulty in achieving a desirable balance between housing and employment. In particular, Bicester has struggled to achieve significant employment growth and to attract higher value-added economic activities including those associated with the 'Knowledge' economy in which Oxford is comparatively strong. Part of this problem lies in the poor employment floorspace offer which is dated and unsuitable for the needs of modern

businesses. There is also an under-performance in Level 3 skills or higher – in contrast with the higher level of these skills observed in Oxfordshire as a whole.

Bicester has a relatively high proportion of out-commuting, as a significant proportion of residents travel further away to obtain higher paid positions of employment – evidenced by travel to work data and the difference observed between average full-time wages in Bicester and household incomes. Its road network is also heavily congested (especially the A34 and Junction 9 of the M40) – acting as a constraint against further development.

Most recently there have been tentative signs that Bicester is reaching a turning point in its economic fortunes – with significant new developments in the pipeline including new business space and leisure facilities. It is these improved fortunes that are potentially most vulnerable to the Eco Town or other developments north of Oxford. This view is confirmed by the emerging South East Plan.

Specifically, the RSS for the South East Policy CO1 sets out the Regional Assembly's broad approach to development in the Central Oxfordshire area, which, focuses growth in Bicester, Didcot, Wantage and Grove and the built up area of Oxford, with limited development elsewhere. The aim of strategy is to build on the sub-region's existing economic strengths in education, science and technology. This approach is supported in the Panel Report and the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes. Developing economic activity in Bicester is seen as essential to reduce its current dormitory function. The Panel Report accepts the objective to develop Bicester as a location for high tech growth, however cautions that Bicester's market is currently weak so there is a need to ensure that development to the north of Oxford, (which would include the Eco Town), does not adversely impact on this aspiration.

It must also be acknowledged that the general economic climate in the UK economy has deteriorated significantly recently and therefore it is expected that economic progress in Bicester could also be delayed as much rests on private sector investment.

## 4 The Future of Bicester and Kidlington without the proposal.

### Existing strategy

---

The Oxford/Central Oxfordshire area has been designated as a 'Diamond for Investment and Growth' in the Regional Economic Strategy, with the potential to 'act as a catalyst to stimulate prosperity across wider areas, and offer scope for further sustainable growth based on targeted investment in their infrastructure'.

A total of eight Diamonds were identified in the RES. All eight were highlighted as a focus for investment in infrastructure in the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) guidance submitted to central government in January 2006. The RES reports that 'it is the concentrations of people, employment, built assets, knowledge, transport, networking, creativity, leisure, culture and diversity which give [the Diamonds] the potential to be economic catalysts for the region as a whole. This needs to be reinforced by selective infrastructure investment as a stimulus to sustainable growth'.

Bicester is therefore identified as a key location to accommodate future growth in the South East regional economy.

The local economic development strategy for Cherwell sets out the direction for the Cherwell economy over the period 2007-2011<sup>1</sup>. It supports and develops themes outlined in the Community Plan. At a broad level, a key cross-cutting objective of the strategy is to appropriately balance Cherwell's population growth, economy and infrastructure. The vision is for a strengthening of the area's technical capacity, building on strengths in motorsports and high technology specialist engineering sectors. On a sectors basis, bio-technology is also expected to become increasingly important, especially in the southern part of the District.

The core economic objectives are to ensure the creation of additional employment to balance predicted population growth, increasing the rate of growth in the 'knowledge' sector and improving the quality and offer of commercial business space.

The key performance indicators set out in the Cherwell Economic Development Strategy include:

- 6,200 net new jobs by the end of 2011;
- Reduce the differential between place-of-work wage rates between Cherwell and the South East from 91.8% of SE average (2005) to 98% by 2011;
- Reduce the numbers of people with no qualifications from 24.5% (2005) to 20% by 2011; and
- Knowledge economy – increase the proportion of people in SOC2000 groups 1-3 from 35.8% (2003/04) to 40% by 2011.

The vision outlined for Bicester is to become a more attractive work location for its more qualified and higher earning residents and for it to become a significant location within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. This is based on growth in science

---

<sup>1</sup> Economic Development Strategy 2007-2011, Cherwell District Council.

and technology based businesses, exploiting innovations and spin-outs from academic research. It also aims to build upon its strengths in materials engineering and bio-technology. Overall, there is an emphasis that Bicester should grow its 'knowledge' economy.

The vision for Kidlington builds on its relationship with Oxford, being a quality centre for office and laboratory base businesses especially in the bio-technology sector and other spin-off activities. At the same time, the strategy is to retain its aspects of village life that make up much of its attractiveness as a place to live.

With three years left and in the context of an economy strongly affected by the credit crunch, it now seems unlikely that the Cherwell targets will be met. However, we consider them to be feasible over a longer timescale.

It is anticipated that there will be further growth in the knowledge and high tech sectors in Oxford leading to increased demand for science park and innovation centres. The ELR concludes that under the right conditions growth in Oxford could lead to overspill in surrounding towns, such as Bicester and Kidlington since they are part of the wider local property markets.

At the South East Plan EIP the demand for employment land in Oxford was examined. It was concluded in the Inspectors Report that supply was constrained, with for example, only 4-5 years of supply left at both the Oxford Science Park and Oxford Business Park. In the absence of further sites coming forward in Oxford, this would suggest a high potential for overspill of activity towards Bicester and Kidlington due to availability of sites. However, the EIP report concluded that further employment land is required at Oxford, which is likely to absorb much of the demand. There is a current safeguarded site (Peartree), north of Oxford. This site, referred to as the 'North of Oxford Gateway, land west of A34' in the Bicester and Central Oxfordshire Issues and Options Paper, is identified for the 'Northern Gateway' scheme.

The site was considered as part of the South East Plan EIP and the Inspectors report concluded that this development was likely to go ahead and was likely to be adversely competitive to Bicester's aspirations. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes states that although the possible use of the land at Peartree will be a matter for local determination, *'land should not be released for employment to the north of Oxford that could adversely affect the future economic buoyancy of Bicester and Witney'*. The City Executive Board of Oxford City Council has recently approved the principle of partnership working with developers for the production of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan Development Plan Document<sup>2</sup>.

The University of Oxford has a desire to develop land around its existing activities at Begbroke Science Park to the west of Kidlington - although this land is in the Greenbelt. The University of Oxford owns 125.5 hectares of land around its Science Park at Begbroke (4.1 hectares) and made a representation for development in the consultation on the Draft South East Plan. The site is in the so called 'Kidlington and Yarton gap' and referred to as 'Land to the west of Kidlington' in the Bicester and Central Oxfordshire Issues and Options Paper.

The University purchased the site at Begbroke in 1998. The core site extends to around 4 hectares but the total land holding is 129.6 hectares. The rationale for purchase was a desire to expand research activities that do not need to be

---

<sup>2</sup> City Executive Board Meeting Notes 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008, Oxford City Council.

located in central Oxford, in a less constrained environment. The main building is predominately occupied by university research from the Department of Materials and some Engineering. All of the remainder of the site was taken by spin-off companies and Oxford Innovation Ltd who set up a small innovation centre. The university has built new laboratories within the brownfield boundary.

The University's future vision for Begbroke is to have space for the development of new University research laboratories that operate outside the current 'departmental' structure and reflect 'sectors' of activity. The core of this would be more innovation space. However, it also seeks to provide adequate housing for scientists, technologists and supporting staff. The university does not have any firm plans to locate any of its activities in Bicester.

#### Evidence of the Bicester Prospects

---

Within Bicester, the best test of viability is whether or not any development is taking place or planned in the pipeline. In 2006, the allocated employment site, Gavray Drive, was approved on appeal for housing development (500 units) and other associated uses. The Secretary of State (2006) supported the Inspectors conclusions that the employment designation for the site was no longer appropriate given that it has remained undeveloped despite being allocated for nearly 20 years and the unlikely prospects of securing employment development in the near future. It was further concluded that there was a more than adequate supply of employment land and premises in the area to meet Bicester's contribution to the Cherwell's economic development strategy.

In 2007, an appeal was allowed for the land north of Skimmingdish Lane (1.67ha), which approved the use of a former allotment site for B1 development (Figure 2). The Inspector concluded that there had been a change in circumstances since the Gavray Drive decision and that there was shortage of land available for B1 development in the immediate future, which would hamper the 'pressing need to bring forward additional, high quality business developments in Bicester in the short term' and would frustrate the aspiration to redress the population/ employment imbalance in the town.

## Skimmingdish Lane Development Site



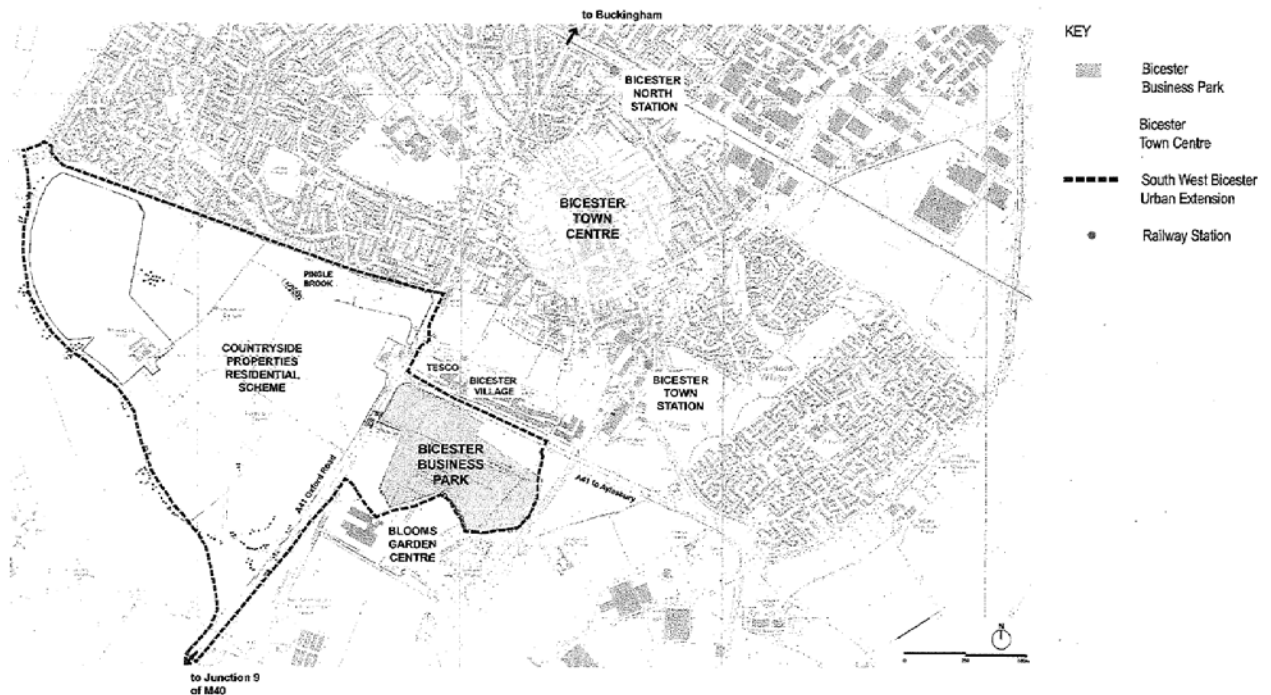
Source: Carter Jonas (2008) Skimmingdish Lane Sale Brochure

Planning permission has also been granted, subject to successful S106 negotiations, for South West Bicester. This is primarily a housing development but it also includes two hectares of employment land. The intention is that the employment area, which is located immediately to the west of the A41, will act as a 'commercial gateway' to Bicester when arriving from the south. At the consultation event, it was suggested that the delivery of this site will be delayed until market conditions have improved.

A business park is also planned, just off the A41 between the existing Wyevale and Bicester Village retail outlets. Resolution to grant subject to S106 negotiations has been given for an outline planning application for the construction of a 60,000sq.m. business park incorporating offices and a 150-bed hotel. The Highways Agency has directed that the planning permission should include a restriction, whereby only 25,000 sq.m. can be built until significant improvements to Junction 9 of the M40 have been undertaken. In discussions, the developer, London and Metropolitan, reported that the site will be delivered over a ten year period and that although some employers have already expressed interest in the site, development would not begin until the market conditions have improved. London and Metropolitan estimate that 3,000 jobs would be created on the business park when fully implemented. When this business park is delivered, it will help to improve Bicester's offer in terms of B1 space.



## Bicester Business Park



Source: London Metropolitan (2008) Bicester Business Park Brochure

The current economic climate seems to be subduing the local market generally. The RICS Commercial Market Survey for Quarter 1 2008 reported the following comments from a local surveyor (Christopher White, White Commercial Ltd): 'Bicester – reasonable demand couple with a shortage of supply. Values falling due to illiquidity problems and rate factors.' It is assumed however, that this position will be reversed following improvements to macro economic conditions. In discussions, a local surveyor suggested that there is potential for expansion in Kidlington and Bicester.

### Additional Employment Capacity in Bicester and Kidlington

The Cherwell employment land report (ELR) identifies five additional sites in Bicester (38.4 ha) and six sites in Kidlington (3.2 ha) as potentially available for development. The sites were a combination of designated but undeveloped employment sites allocated in the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011 and new sites identified by consultants as part of their survey work.

One of the larger sites in Bicester has subsequently been granted planning permission for a residential scheme and one site in Kidlington has been developed. This has reduced the overall quantum of potential development sites in Bicester to 23.7ha and Kidlington to 2.8ha.

The Bicester and Central Oxfordshire Issues and Options Paper (2007) suggests there is need for further employment land to be identified in order to widen the range of employment opportunities and to support economic growth. A number of sites for employment or mixed use are identified for discussion purposes only at this stage. If all of these sites were to be included in the Development Plan Document, there would be a total allocation of at least 118 hectares of dedicated employment land in Bicester and 12 hectares in Kidlington. However, it is unlikely that all of the proposed sites will come forward in the final Preferred Option for the LDF as more detailed analysis and consultation will mean that some sites are rejected.

## Future Economic Challenges

---

Our view is that the Cherwell Economic Strategy sets ambitious but achievable targets. The delivery of 6,200 net new jobs will require a significant turn around of recent past trends – with ABI data showing a decline in employment in Cherwell over 2000-2006 of 2,893, and rise of only 1,490 more recently in 2003-2006. A major emphasis of the strategy is increasing the value of the economy, and in particular the ‘knowledge’ economy. The reasoning of this emphasis appears sound – given the local the spatial context of Bicester and expected future out-spill of high-value economic activity from Oxford due to physical constraints to growth. However, an increase in the proportion of those in employment that are employed in ‘knowledge’ economy jobs to 40% is ambitious – given that Bicester has not yet fully established itself in the ‘knowledge’ economy market.

Delivering the strategy is feasible but challenging. It is likely that some form of ‘step change’ will be required for Bicester to make real progress in the ‘knowledge’ sector. However, discussions undertaken during the consultations suggest that Bicester is at a crucial ‘tipping point’ in its development which could change its fortunes. Particular issues that need to be tackled to deliver the strategy include:

- Attracting new businesses to Bicester;
- The area’s branding; and
- The quality and suitability of the employment floorspace offer.

Realisation of some of new employment proposals is critical to demonstrating the market potential of the available sites within Bicester and Kidlington. We would place particular emphasis on the Bicester business park proposal as having sufficient critical mass to realise this demonstration effect. Over and above this, there is perhaps scope to develop a more proactive approach to marketing Bicester’s profile and in strengthening links with Oxford City. This is because it is the Oxford sub-region has world class prestige and visibility, and science and a community of expertise to build on.

## Infrastructure Capacity

---

One of the major challenges facing Bicester is congestion – as identified by the Local Transport Plan (LTP). This identifies particular issues with the A34-M40 to Oxford and A41-King’s End, Bicester to M40 as well as the M40 junctions. A greater proportion of Bicester’s population travel more than 10km to get to work than other comparator areas. The majority of these individuals get to work by private car, contributing to the problem of congestion. The Bicester Integrated Transport and Land Use Study makes a number of recommendations for rectifying this problem – including highway and rail capacity enhancements. However, there is a need to ensure that sufficient employment opportunities are created within Bicester to reduce the need for travelling long distances to get to work. Clearly, the availability of suitable premises and employment land sites within Bicester to attract the types of businesses and investors that will create the employment that matches the skills and experiences of the resident population is important.

There are advanced plans to increase rail provision – both in the form of East West rail proposals (providing connections Oxford to Cambridge) and Chiltern Railways proposal (for an Oxford to London Marylebone service).

Realisation of motorway junction improvements is also a critical constraint and one that has a direct relationship with Business Park proposals. However, given increasing concerns for sustainability and the scale of planned housing provision it seems unlikely to us that Bicester will continue to be able to meet car-based demand in full and stronger traffic management initiatives will be required.

## Retail and Services

---

The recent retail study commissioned by Cherwell assesses future demand and concludes there is limited capacity for additional convenience floorspace in the Bicester town centre and that this capacity is likely to be taken up by extensions to existing stores or a new town centre format food store. It is also clear that forecast expenditure growth is sufficient to support a moderate increase in comparison goods floorspace in Bicester. This assessment does not take account of the additional growth arising from the South East Plan, nor the scope for linked trips with Bicester Village – particularly for convenience provision. Both of these factors seem to us to strengthen the potential for the successful development of Bure Place and of possible additional developments.

The retail study also concludes that there is scope for significant increases in capacity for additional convenience floorspace in the Kidlington area though the population is likely to remain static. This capacity is likely to be taken up by extensions to existing stores or a new format food store. However, there is probably a lack of suitable sites to accommodate this growth. Forecast expenditure growth is sufficient to support a considerable increase in comparison goods floorspace in Kidlington, although again sites may be limited. There is also capacity for further provision of comparison floorspace including retail warehousing in out of centre locations.

## 5 Potential Impact of the Eco Town

### Housing and Population

---

The developer has suggested that the proposed Eco Town, when fully completed, would provide housing for 15,000 households – and an approximate population of 35,000 people. Discussions with Parkridge indicate that their intention is for housing (and therefore population) to be delivered over a 20-year period with around 500 to 1,000 dwellings delivered per annum. This implies an additional population of approximately 1,750 people per annum. This is a significant rate of population growth – comparing with population growth in Bicester in 1991-2001 of the equivalent of around 900 people per annum.

Delivery of this level of housing is also highly significant in a wider Oxfordshire context as housing completions have until recently averaged just over 2,000 per annum and on the basis of affordability and existing trends suggest demand for new housing has not been as intense as elsewhere in Oxfordshire. It is therefore possible that build out times may be longer than 20 years.

If the scheme is delivered then adjusting the ONS district population forecasts for Cherwell in 2026 suggests that the population of the Eco Town will mean an increase in population to 192,400 in 2026 compared with an estimated 157,400 without the Eco Town. This implies growth in Cherwell of around 44% over a 2004 base compared with 17.9%. Comparable population growth rates to 2026 for Oxford and Oxfordshire are 21.4% and 13.3% respectively.

In our judgement there would be displacement of future planned growth away from other settlements in Cherwell, if the Eco Town goes ahead. While much depends on the attractiveness of the Eco Town offer, it seems unlikely that the Eco Town will be sufficiently attractive and differentiated from other provision in the district, to mean that it will generate the necessary additional growth in its own right. Our conclusion is thus that while the overall population of Cherwell will increase as a consequence of the Eco Town, it will not increase by the full extent of the Eco Town's population. Our best estimate, based on a comparison of household projections, planned provision, and the ability of the Eco Town to draw from wider area is that about half the Eco Town population will be additional.

### Employment Impact

---

The scale of employment space provision to accommodate 15,000 jobs proposed as part of the Eco Town is substantial. In our judgement the assumptions made by the developer are, of course, largely an 'act of faith' and that this is an area that is fraught with uncertainty.

Our general conclusion on employment impact is that the scale of employment proposed for the Eco Town is of a significant order – catering for approximately 15,000 jobs. In general, it is expected that the employment space at the Eco Town is likely to compete rather than complement provision at Bicester and Kidlington. The scale of growth envisaged at the Eco Town will mean that it will both absorb and displace growth. Take-up is therefore expected to depend on displacement from other locations including Bicester. Some growth displacement may be acceptable as it is from locations where there are capacity constraints (for example, Oxford).

The Eco Town employment offer is likely to be 'better' than Bicester's offer, for example, comprising of more modern stock with closer proximity to the motorway. There are a number of possible scenarios in terms of impacts. However, it seems likely that the sub-region will have more employment growth as a result of the Eco Town but that this will be shared amongst more settlements. This would therefore still mean a reduced share for Bicester.

In terms of the Economic Development Strategy for Cherwell, the Eco Town could both help and hinder the achievement of targets for employment – on the one hand generating a potential negative impact in terms of displacement and on the other a potential positive impact on providing quality employment space and attracting larger scale employers.

It is however possible that the Eco Town could bring some economic benefits and a number of these are set out below.

- There is the potential for the Eco Town to become part of Oxfordshire's branding, and in particular Oxford's brand in terms of an attractive location for businesses. By creating a place in which businesses (and potentially large scale headquarter type offices) want to locate the employment floorspace provided at the Eco Town could help to support and strengthen Oxfordshire's brand and increased economic growth in the County. It could also help to reduce constraints on growth arising from pressures on Oxford.
- The improved employment space offer and branding of the Eco Town may also result in the bringing of one or more major anchor employers to the area that otherwise would not be attracted. As well as reducing the potential for displacement of employment from locations such as Bicester, this may create new closer job and up-skilling opportunities for Bicester residents. It may also provide the opportunity for related companies to locate in Bicester.
- The provision of employment uses at the Eco Town could potentially provide an opportunity to widen the skills base in Bicester therefore having a positive impact for Bicester. In particular, if one or two large scale employers were secured (i.e. headquarter status offices), this may provide residents of the area with more opportunities for up-skilling locally than would otherwise be the case. Large company headquarters could provide more graduate level opportunities and access to the training and career development opportunities afforded by large organisations. Currently, residents in the area typically need to travel longer distances to access employers of this scale.
- In the early phases of the Eco Town, it is likely that new residents will travel to nearby settlements for retail and leisure facilities (as such facilities typically lag the delivery of new housing). This may provide a boost to centres such as Bicester and aid the incentive for some key schemes to be delivered in early years. Consequently, this could promote a period of strengthening in Bicester in the early years which would enable it to deal more effectively with the competition from the Eco Town.

Issues concerning the scale and composition of growth and displacement are also considered in more detail below.

#### Scale and Composition of Growth

We question the scale and composition of the proposed growth, based on the following concerns.

- The indicative figures from Parkridge suggest that the balance of employment will be dominated by B1 uses with all the employment (excluding retail & leisure) being created by 2020. The suggested quantity of B1 space is approximately 2,400,000 sq ft. Taken over a 20 year time period, this is equivalent to around 120,000 sq ft per annum. This can be compared with Experian forecasts for B1 type sectors which forecast an annual net additional requirement for B1 space in Oxfordshire in the order of 150,000 sq ft. In this context, the proposed quantum of B1 appears implausibly high and equivalent to 65% (on a jobs basis) of the total net increase in the B1 requirement for the whole of Oxfordshire in 2008 to 2026.
- The proposed Eco Town site has good motorway access and is well positioned between London and Birmingham. The nature of the market in the area is also currently B8 orientated. Accordingly, it is expected that a more realistic composition of floorspace is likely to be dominated by B8 distribution uses with a smaller amount of B1.
- There is likely to be a larger amount of retail and services employment – in order of 7,000 to 8,000 jobs rather than 3,000 jobs, although these will not necessarily be located in the Eco Town. We would expect a population of 35,000 to generate eventually (less in the early stages) about 7,000 to 8,000 local service jobs (mostly in health, education, retail, personal services, police fire, waste, construction, transport and some in town centre offices such as banks, estate agents etc.).
- If a larger proportion of employment is accounted for by retail and services, the tendency of this employment type to lag housing development means that on-site employment at the Eco Town may take longer than anticipated to be created. A time horizon of at least 20 years – occurring nearer to the year 2030. The implication of this may be a less favourable balance of jobs to housing in the earlier years of the Eco Town's development.

Following the above discussion, a revised employment floorspace composition, considered to be a more plausible alternative assumption to Parkridge's indicative figures is shown in the following table.

#### Alternative Floorspace Estimates

	GFA (sq ft)	Density	Jobs
B1 (office and R&D)	800,000	250	3,200
B2	520,000	500	1,040
B8	2,680,000	1,000	2,680
B-class uses: total	4,000,000		6,920
Retail & Leisure			7,000-8,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>13,920 – 14,920</b>

Source: Arup

#### Displacement and Growth Scenarios

Putting both the developers and our alternative assumptions into context, SEEDA commissioned Experian forecasts suggest growth of 6,781 jobs in Cherwell and 39,557 jobs in Oxfordshire as a whole in the period 2008 to 2026.

The projected growth sectors in Cherwell are Health, Business Services, Hotels & Catering, Other Services, and retailing.

The Experian estimate for Cherwell is thus clearly less than half the expected 15,000 jobs in the Eco Town. A key question is the source of potential occupiers (both in terms of use class type and geographical market). The scale of forecast growth also suggests that, if successful new employment space provided at the Eco Town could adversely impact on employment proposals Bicester and Kidlington as employment sites in both are marginal.

**Projected Employment Growth in Cherwell and Oxfordshire by Sector, 2008-2026**

	Change in Jobs 2008-2026 in Growing Sectors	
	Oxfordshire	Cherwell
Fuel Refining	69	0
Metals	365	386
Electrical & Optical Equipment	285	91
Wood & Wood Products	17	49
Paper, Printing & Publishing	756	191
Other Manufacturing	383	0
Retailing	3,706	1,277
Hotels & Catering	7,874	1,489
Transport	514	197
Communications	329	25
Banking & Insurance	1,032	0
Business Services	10,902	1,513
Other Financial and Business services	6,225	347
Public Admin. & Defence	429	172
Education	4,093	807
Health	8,115	1,642
Other	6,963	1,350
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,057</b>	<b>9,536</b>

Source: Experian forecasts

The analysis implies that the Eco Town would have to not simply absorb the job growth in Cherwell District, but also displace jobs from elsewhere. This would necessarily put at strong risk employment proposals in Bicester. However, in addition, since there is realistically not sufficient growth forecast in Oxfordshire, the Eco Town would need to create its own market capable of attracting new demand and displacing existing occupiers from elsewhere.

This raises the question of where jobs might be displaced from. It is likely that this would occur in the areas of strongest demand – presumably Oxford itself for B1 and high tech uses. For distribution, displacement is likely to occur from

less well located industrial locations (including Bicester) and areas where land is more expensive for these use types (such as south of Oxford).

The scale of B1 floorspace proposed by Parkridge also implies that it could represent a business park of regional scale. In considering the potential role of the employment floorspace at the Eco Town as regional scale business park, a number of comparators can be considered.

### **Milton Business Park**

Milton Business Park, located 12 miles from Oxford, near Abingdon can be considered a good comparator for the potential composition of business space at Weston Otmoor.

The 250 acre site hosts over 165 companies which employ around 6,500 people and has been developed from 1988 onwards. The size of the park is reflected in a wide variety of clients from a range of sectors including construction, distribution, design and print, financial services, telecoms, automotive, IT & technology and R&D and laboratory. The park is currently home to more than 30 science companies with over 500,000 sq ft of science and technology space. Its success is based on the strength of offer – of flexible and innovative space, on short leases – despite the park's location some distance from Oxford. However, spatially the park does benefit from closeness to Didcot and fast rail access to London.

MEPC who runs Milton Park, has recently announced that it is increasing its support for entrepreneurial technology start-ups by launching a new, purpose-built Innovation Centre.

### **The Harwell Science and Innovation Campus**

The Harwell Science and Innovation Campus is home to science and technology based innovation and enterprise including major national and international science projects and facilities. Over 4,500 people work on the campus in around 100 organisations. Covering some 260 hectares (640 acres), the Campus lies in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Oxfordshire near the ancient Ridgeway. With good access by road (A34/M4) and rail (Didcot Parkway), and within easy reach of the key regional centres of Oxford, Newbury and Reading, the site is well located for knowledge-based industry.

The campus was chosen as the location for the £350m Diamond Synchrotron, the largest UK-funded science facility to be built for over 30 years, this opened in 2007.

Its attractive location with good access to major transport infrastructure is a key part of its success. In 2000, approximately 65% of staff lived within 10 miles of the campus and another 20% within 11-20 miles,

### **Cambridge Science Park**

Established by Trinity College in 1970, Cambridge Science Park is the UK's oldest and most prestigious science park. It is now home to over 100 companies and 1,650,000 sq ft of buildings. It continues to attract new businesses, from small start-ups and spin-outs to subsidiaries of multinational corporations.

The main industrial sectors represented at the park are Bio-medical, Computing & Comms, Consulting, Energy, Environmental, Finance and Business Services,



## Industrial Technologies and Materials.

Since 2002, the creation of new clusters has begun on the Cambridge Science Park, specifically in the areas of photonics, nanotechnology and materials science. In particular the strength of the photonics cluster is demonstrated by the arrival on the Park of Cambridge University's Centre of Molecular Materials for Photonics and Electronics (CMMPE) which opened in February 2003. The key to the park's success is its strong links to the University of Cambridge.

### **Cambourne Business Park Phase 1**

The park has 50 acres offering up to 750,000 sq ft of advanced business space. As an international business centre, Cambridge has attracted an exceptional range and quality of R&D companies as well as many of the biggest names in IT, telecommunications and other corporate sectors. Just nine miles from the city centre, Cambourne Business Park offers companies the scale and flexibility they need to grow in a Cambridge location.

Since development in 1999, it is now estimated that around 1,000 people work at the business park. Current occupants include Convergys Technology, Citrix Systems, Campbell and Regus Business Centres. Cambourne will eventually become home to around 10,000 people.

Unique to Cambridge, Cambourne's 'open' B1 planning consent means a development on this scale is possible, providing both office and R & D companies with the space they need. The Research Quarter will ultimately feature 3,000 sq m (320,000 sq ft) of the highest quality office and laboratory accommodation to be developed in three major phases.

Cambourne is planned to be an almost self-contained community incorporating all the amenities you would expect to find in a small market town.

These comparators provide examples of the level of spatial significance that the Eco Town employment space would potentially need to achieve. The scale of the proposed employment space is substantial and therefore it is likely that a broad mix of employment uses could be established. In particular, Milton Business Park, one of the largest business parks in Europe, provides a good comparator.

Reference to comparators also highlights the issue of competition – there are other sites which are arguably better located than the proposed Eco Town. These include land at Peartree which is safeguarded in the Local Plan for employment uses. Oxford's Core Strategy preferred Options Paper states that 'the land occupies a strategically important position at the northern edge of Oxford, and offers the opportunity for a high-quality development to create a landmark 'northern gateway' to the City'. This would represent competition within relatively close proximity (and crucially closer to Oxford) to the proposed Eco Town.

Business sites located to the south of Oxford could also represent strong competition, especially for more high-tech and knowledge based employment. An area to south of Oxford has been branded as the 'Quadrant' with the intention of building up further the base of high tech activity in the area. SEEDA chairs the Quadrant Partnership. There is also the question of whether Bicester or Kidlington could offer anything of this nature. There are plans for Bicester Business Park. Construction of this is expected to commence in around 3 years time, although the developer has suggested this may not go

ahead if the Eco Town goes forward. If the Bicester Business Park did go ahead it may have an advantage of being delivered ahead of the majority of business park space at the Eco Town. However, later the two could be in direct competition. The extent of this competition would clearly depend on how similar the floorspace composition of the two is which is uncertain at this point in time.

## Social and Community Impacts

---

Oxfordshire County Council's guide on 'Infrastructure and Service Needs for New Development' states that in general there are no major areas of 'spare capacity' within the existing council services; and the earlier analysis of existing capacity for the identified social and community infrastructure did not identify any significant spare capacity. On the basis of these findings, the assumption is that the Eco Town would need to provide its own social and community infrastructure services and facilities to support its own residential population. Further, it is assumed that the integration of such facilities would be integral to the Eco Town proposals in order to meet sustainability principles and reduce the need to travel. Overall we have drawn the following conclusions.

- The provision of social and community infrastructure within Weston Otmoor would need to be commensurate with the demand created by the new residential population.
- Provision would need to be made for general practitioners and other primary care services, such as children's services, mental health care and community nursing.
- The scale of proposal is not sufficient to justify the provision of a new hospital, however, the additional demand generated by the increase population is likely to mean that the Bicester Community Hospital proposals will need to be reviewed.
- The scale and proximity of Weston Otmoor to Bicester may have a destabilising effect on Bicester's local primary care services, as it would directly compete for investment and may have implications for new infrastructure already planned for Bicester. Mitigation measures would need to be explored.
- Initial modelling undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council suggests that the child yield may be greater than currently assumed in Parkridge's early assumptions, therefore the education offer would need to be increased. There would be a need to plan for the likely short to medium term peak in demand for primary and secondary school places. In the long term, the provision of additional schools at Weston Otmoor could create direct competition for investment. Mitigation measures would need to be explored.
- Weston Otmoor would need to make provision for wider children's services, including social care, integrated services for under 5's, children's centres, early education and childcare. Sufficient provision and flexibility would need to be maintained within the masterplanning process in order to ensure that such facilities can be accommodated as required, for example, in conjunction with community centres or school buildings.
- Investment would be required to ensure adequate local provision for emergency services. Investment may also be needed to deliver services and facilities in the wider area associated with the demand generated by the additional population. Specifically an additional police station would be

required; and either expansion of fire and rescue services at Bicester or an on site fire station at Weston Otmoor. The scale of investment required in fire services could be reduced through the installation of sprinklers across the development, although an uplift in services would still be generated through additional movements on the M40.

- As suggested in the Eco Town proposal, locating community facilities within the heart of the community would be important. The scale and nature of such facilities would need to be directed by the Council, other key stakeholders, service providers and the community. Long term maintenance costs would be an important consideration.
- The scale of development would not be sufficient to justify the provision of high order services; therefore it would be necessary for Weston Otmoor residents to travel to a higher order settlement to meet these requirements.
- Overall, at this stage in the process, it is difficult to assess how the Eco Town proposals might be enhanced or their impact mitigated given the lack of detailed information with regards to social and community infrastructure provision. If Weston Otmoor progresses to the next stage, it will be imperative that detailed demographic forecasting is undertaken by the developer, since this will allow more meaningful discussions to take place as to the likely scale and nature of required services and facilities. Once a more precise proposal has been established, it would then be possible to explore how potential impacts on surrounding communities could be mitigated.
- Detailed discussions with service providers and the wider community would be essential to ensure that provision: meets needs; addresses the quality and capacity of existing services and facilities in surrounding settlements; meets or exceeds policy requirements; fits with strategy aspirations; and to take account of service delivery practices. Such discussions with both providers and users are important to ensure that planned facilities are 'fit for purpose', build on lessons learnt and could help to foster links and with the existing community.
- Key issues that should be explored in any further stage of work, include:
  - Ensuring that sufficient social and community infrastructure would be provided to meet the needs of the new population, potentially in advance of actual demand.
  - The timing of delivery of social and community infrastructure. Early and co-ordinated provision of sufficient infrastructure in advance of new development through effective partnerships and coordinating investment timescales, rather than reactive 'retro fitting', in order to ensure that sufficient services are delivered in the most sustainable locations.
  - Short and medium provision of infrastructure. For example, it may be necessary to secure additional investment in an existing secondary school, until the critical mass of population in Weston Otmoor is sufficient to ensure the viability of such a facility.
  - The need to provide facilities, which do not require standalone facilities, such as childcare, but would require a multi-purpose room in another planned facility, such as school or community centre. Sufficient flexibility would need to be maintained within the masterplanning process to ensure that such facilities can be accommodated as required.

- Co-location of facilities. For example, youth clubs could be provided as part of community centres or secondary schools; or community sports facilities could be provided at secondary schools. Where facilities or services are co-located, the specific requirements of each use would need to be considered. For example, in the event of co-location of youth clubs, separate access must be provided for youth facilities in order to ensure evening access, while if community sports facilities and secondary schools are co-located, additional land or floorspace requirements or need for separate access arrangements would need to be considered when estimating land requirements for the school facility.
- Opportunities to develop links and integrate the new community that would be created at Weston Otmoor and existing communities in the surrounding area.
- Initiatives that would help to build social capital and networks. This could, for example, include the provision of community space for leisure activities or sports. The formation of sport teams, which often happens relatively quickly in the creation of new communities, can be key to establishing internal (i.e. within the new community) and external (i.e. with the wider area) networks.
- The future governance of Weston Otmoor, which could be key in determining the nature and scale of potential impacts. Who would govern Weston Otmoor? Would a new parish council be set up and how would this fit with the existing structure? Could a development trust be set up, which might be responsible for the ongoing delivery of services and maintenance? If so, would assets be transferred to the development trust to enable the future funding of these activities?

## 6 Overall Findings

Our overall findings can be summarised as follows:

- The Eco Town is a substantial proposal that is likely to have significant impacts on the future development of Bicester and Kidlington. The proposal would create a town as big as Bicester over a twenty year period.
- Bicester has received substantial growth in population over the past twenty years. However, this has not been matched by employment opportunities in the town and investment in infrastructure. Until the recent 'credit crunch' it seemed likely that additional much need investment in Bicester would finally happen, such as the creation of a business park and redevelopment of the town centre. However, without other developments, such as the Eco Town, these developments are still likely to occur in the future when the economy recovers.
- The Eco Town is likely to attract both new population growth and displace some of the planned growth in Bicester. It is estimated that approximately, half the growth will be additional.
- The employment assumptions put forward by Parkridge suggest an end-state of 15,000 jobs, with a high proportion of B1 employment. We considered this to be an 'act of faith'. In our judgement:
  - The proportion of B1 is too high and a more realistic scenario would include more B2, B8 and retail and leisure employment.
  - The space provided in the Eco Town is likely to be 'better' than the current offer in Bicester and possibly in Kidlington – although the latter benefits from its proximity to Oxford. This means displacement of growth from Bicester is likely.
  - The scale of the provision means that it would need to attract growth or relocations from the wider region. This means it would have to compete with established sites in Oxford, South Oxfordshire and the wider area.
  - Under the most optimistic assumptions, the Eco Town could attract new employment to the region. This could reduce the displacement effect.
  - If realised, the Eco Town would help to meet the objectives of the Cherwell Economic Strategy.
- There is little capacity in existing social and community infrastructure. These would need to be met by the scheme.