

# Cherwell District Council

## Executive

7 April 2015

### NW Bicester Apprenticeships Scheme

#### Report of Commercial Director (Bicester)

This report is public

#### Purpose of report

To update the Executive on the successful outcome of a recent bid to OxLEP to support the NW Bicester Apprenticeship Scheme, in order that Cherwell District Council can receive the funding as the accountable body.

#### 1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the contents of the report and approve Cherwell District Council role as accountable body for this grant award.

#### 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Over the past year, the Eco Bicester Project Team has been working with partners to progress a scheme which would allow a sustained programme of apprenticeships to be delivered throughout the construction of the NW Bicester site. In doing this we have been mindful of the Eco Town principles and the leverage this gives the Council as a planning authority to encourage the development to be economically sustainable.
- 2.2 In addition, it is the scale of the development at NW Bicester which gives us a golden opportunity to devise a scheme which could make a significant impact on the numbers of construction apprenticeships available to young people, both of benefit to them as well as providing the skills needed to support the further growth planned for this area.

#### 3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 The NW Bicester site will deliver 6000 homes and other mixed use development. The site will come forward via at least 5 outline planning applications and if approved by Cherwell District Council (CDC), will be built out over 25 – 30 years.

The project aims to deliver a sustained programme of a minimum of 300 apprenticeships over the build out period (and potentially beyond), focusing on the construction and related trades initially, but broadening its scope to end users on site. This figure has been confirmed as realistic by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB).

### 3.2 Setting up a local Oxfordshire-based Apprenticeships Training Agency (ATA)

A key element in the successful delivery of the programme will involve the setting up of a local Oxfordshire-based Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA). In essence the Council's role has been to seek a way to secure apprenticeships through development and setting up the ATA is the best way to make this happen. It will be this organisation that will employ apprentices. The ATA will effectively carry all the risk. It will provide the necessary insurances and health and safety training as well as liaising with Oxfordshire Apprenticeships to access suitable local candidates, liaise with local training providers to secure the appropriate college training and support, and with developers to agree the nature of the apprenticeship and on-site placement timescale.

3.3 In essence, the ATA will provide a holistic package for apprentices with the necessary support and training, who will therefore enjoy enhanced opportunities in accessing employment following the conclusion of their apprenticeships.

### 3.4 Sustainability of approach

This approach involves developing and testing a model - initially for NW Bicester and then to be rolled out in other development sites in Bicester and the wider Cherwell District. Ultimately the intention is that this pilot could be used Oxfordshire wide and with the positive impact of making the ATA self-sustaining over the long term.

### 3.5 Benefits of the Approach

Specifically the benefits are the creation of a scheme which:

- is easy and relatively risk-free for the developer to sign up to;
- is cost effective;
- meets the objectives of the participating partners;
- is locally driven and locally delivered;
- increases employer awareness of the benefits of apprenticeship and trainee placements
- provides a top quality educational experience for apprentices with enhanced employment prospects upon conclusion.

## 4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 The Eco Bicester Team submitted a bid to OxLEP's City Deal Initiative in December 2014 for funding to support the set-up of the ATA and its early operation. The bid was successful and a £50,000 grant has been awarded by OxLEP, subject to the signing of a legal agreement which the Eco Bicester Team are in the processes of

negotiating. This is a positive step forward for the initiative as now we have the means to turn the concept into reality. The funding is anticipated to be awarded in April 2015 and needs to be spent over 2 years during 2015/2016 and 2016/2017.

- 4.2 The aim is to set up the ATA by summer 2015 so that it can be referred to in future S106 agreements attached to any consents for NW Bicester, as a preferred route to enable developers to deliver apprenticeships. Initial discussions with developers of NW Bicester have been encouraging and have demonstrated an interest and willingness to sign up to the scheme. Regular meetings are being held to progress the initiative with CDC's delivery partners who are: Oxfordshire Apprenticeships, Activate Learning, ACE Training and Oxfordshire County Council. Letters of support for the Bid were also received from Bicester Vision, ACE Training and the CITB.
- 4.3 The £50,000 funding was bid for specifically to set up the ATA in the first year and then to fund its operation in the second year. CDC will be using the funding to carry out the necessary research and background work into the options for the ATA and to support the ATA becoming accredited by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) so it can operate as a bone fide organisation. The actual setting up of the setting and registering it as a company will be carried out by a third party rather than CDC which is preferable in terms of minimising exposure of CDC to any associated risks. So although the funding will rest with CDC, it will be used to support a third party set up of the organisation.
- 4.4 The acceptance of funding from OxLEP is conditional upon the delivery of the following outputs which are contained in a draft legal agreement - the final version is still awaited from OxLEP:
- Setting up the ATA as a legal entity within the first 6 months of the project duration.
  - Building on relationships with local partners to increase employer awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships and traineeships
  - To secure 20 apprenticeships during the 2 year duration of the project.
  - To provide traineeship opportunities wherever possible
  - To provide proposals to expand the project beyond the NW Bicester site before 31 March 2017.
  - The ATA to move towards self-sustainability by the end of the two year project duration.
- 4.5 There will be regular monitoring of the outcomes against the grant award with regular updates being given to the One Vision Steering Group.

## **5.0 Consultation**

- 5.1 The contents of this report have been subject to consultation with; ACE, Oxfordshire Apprenticeships, Activate Learn, OCC, One Vision Steering Group, Bicester Vision

## 6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not to accept the funding

## 7.0 Implications

### Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The expenditure on this project will be met from the grant with part of the funding being used to employ a staff resource to carry out the ATA set up work, the management of whom will be resourced within the Bicester Delivery Team.

Comments checked by:

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### Legal Implications

- 7.2 The draft legal agreement has been scrutinised by CDC's legal team who advise that it is a standard funding agreement with all the typical provisions one would expect to see.

Comments checked by:

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## 8.0 Decision Information

**Key Decision** **NO**

**Financial Threshold Met:** **No**

**Community Impact Threshold Met:** **No**

### Wards Affected

All Bicester wards.

### Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Meets "Cherwell - a District of Opportunity" specifically by supporting economic development, employment, regeneration and the development of the district. It also is part of the delivery of the masterplan for Bicester by helping to provide new jobs.

Meets “Cherwell – thriving communities” - specifically by working with partners to support financial inclusion and help local people into paid employment.

### **Lead Councillor**

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council

### **Document Information**

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
None	None
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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