

# Cherwell District Council

## Executive

4 July 2016

### The Growth of Bicester: Progress Update 2015/16

## Report of Commercial Director

This report is public

### Purpose of report

To advise Members of the work that is being undertaken in Bicester including highlighting key achievements; of the expenditure from the Eco Town grant; received in 2010; and, of forward planned expenditure 2016/17

### 1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1. To note the progress on work in the town.
- 1.2. To note the expenditure that has taken place and the committed funding from the Eco Town grant.
- 1.3. To note 2016/17 forward plan.

### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Bicester is identified as a location for growth within the adopted Cherwell Local Plan, which proposes an additional 13,000 dwellings in total and 138.5ha of employment land. The local plan builds on earlier initiatives such as the Eco Town proposals that supported the growth of Bicester.
- 2.2 The identification of Bicester as an Eco Town location in 2009 enabled the Council to successfully bid for funding, receiving initially approx. £7.9m capital funding and £1.8 revenue funding to support the eco town. A second round of Eco Town funding grant in 2010 secured a further £3.5m comprising of £150,000 revenue and £3.4m capital, taking the total capital to just under £11.3m and revenue to almost £2m. In 2014 the Executive agreed delegation for the Eco Town grant to the Director for Bicester in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
- 2.3 In December 2014 the coalition Government announced Bicester's designation as the country's second locally-led garden town, which brought with it almost £1.5m

capacity funding (revenue) to help ensure that feasibility studies around infrastructure needs of growth, broadly in line with the bid approved by DCLG, could be undertaken. The award of garden town status brought with it the opportunity to also bid for capital funding to expedite the delivery of key infrastructure.

- 2.4 In 2010 a Strategic Delivery Board was established to guide development proposals initially in NW Bicester but more recently to monitor progress with delivering the garden town growth. The Board comprises of representatives of the Town, District and County Councils, DCLG, EA, Bicester Vision and Bicester Chamber and meets quarterly.

### **3.0 Key Achievements 2015/16**

#### **3.1 New Development**

- 3.2 In October 2015 the renamed Bicester Village station reopened serving the first phase of the East Rail scheme. This section of improved line links Oxford (currently from Gosford & Water Eaton) to Bicester and then Marylebone. A regular service is now running to the station.
- 3.3 In November 2015 the new park and ride site opened on the south side of Bicester adjacent to the A41. The site provides 580 spaces and is served by buses to Oxford and Bicester.
- 3.4 Franklins House a development undertaken by the Council, incorporating the Council's office and the new Bicester library (practical completion 21/03/16 on time and on budget) has been delivered completing the Pioneer square development.
- 3.5 The new Tesco superstore relocated from Pingle Drive to Lakeview Drive, off A41 (opened 14/04/16) freeing land for the expansion of Bicester Village.

#### **3.6 Housing Delivery**

- 3.7 Bicester continues to see considerable construction activity:
- 3.8 Work at Kingsmere continues with over 600 completions having taken place by March 2016, whilst occupations of dwellings from the conversion of the historic buildings at the Garden Quarter have also continued.
- 3.9 NW Bicester first phase, Elmsbrook, saw its first completions (91no. homes) - first occupations commenced in May 2016.
- 3.10 Work has progressed at Graven Hill with the first land being transferred and work progressing with 10 pioneers who will be the first to develop plots. There is a masterplan and design code in place and Local Development Order (LDO) to facilitate the development of the site by self builders.
- 3.11 SE Bicester – pre-application public consultation took place in October 2015 with some engagement with CDC taking place later in Q3 and again in Q4. The application has not yet been received but submission is expected soon.

3.12 In 2015/16, 367 dwellings were completed in Bicester bringing the total for 2011-2016 to 956 dwellings. Whilst 3,414 homes have been granted planning permission and have not yet been built. As these planning permission are implemented there will be an increase in housing delivery.

### 3.13 Other Facilities

3.14 There has been the construction of a natural playground at Garth Park supported with £70k funding from WREN; and

3.15 The opening of the café and new public toilets within Garth Park (25/03/16) by the Town Council, which was supported by Eco Town funding.

3.16 Work has commenced on procuring the detailed design and construction of the Eco Business Centre to be developed at NW Bicester. This business centre will be delivered by Cherwell on land secured from the developers to support the incubation of small business and home workers. The funding for construction will come from the Eco Town grant.

### 3.17 Town Wide Initiatives

3.18 A boiler replacement scheme has been operating in the town to support residents to replace old boilers with more efficient ones to reduce costs and save carbon. The scheme has provided a subsidy from the Eco Town grant to 54 homes enabling them to replace their boilers.

3.19 A new web site and newsletter has been launched, Growing Bicester, in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and Bicester Town Council. The web site aims to provide information to residents and business about the developments that are taking place in the town.

### 3.20 Strategies/Studies

3.21 NW Bicester Supplementary Planning Document, to guide the form and nature of future developments and planning proposals on the site, was formally adopted as a supplementary planning document (March 2016).

3.22 The Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy was completed and approved by SDB and Executive (October 2015), to inform and guide the creation of a network of transport infrastructure and services that make it easy and attractive to travel by sustainable means. The strategy forms part of the evidence base to the Cherwell Local Plan part 2.

3.23 With funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU) an initial feasibility study was undertaken to identify the opportunity for developing a decentralised energy heat network supplying homes at NW Bicester with low cost, low carbon heat from the Ardley Energy Recovery Facility (ERF). The first phase of the study is complete confirming that it is technically possible to use waste heat from the ERF.

3.24 Under the garden town initiative extensive engagement with stakeholders, residents and businesses in Bicester was undertaken refresh the future vision for the town.

The work sought to identify what people liked about Bicester; what improvements they would like to see to the town; and what for them made a true garden town. A 3-day consultation event was held in a town centre unit from 10-12 March and was attended by over 500 people with 900+ written representations made during the event and subsequently on social media. The refreshed vision and key themes/priorities for the town will inform the production of a new Bicester Masterplan, which will build on the adopted Local Plan and set out how and where aspirations and physical change will take place in order to stitch the whole of Bicester (existing and proposed growth) together in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

### 3.25 Funding

3.26 Considerable funding has been secured for Bicester and is enabling a number of additional studies to be undertaken. These have included:

3.27 An additional £50,000 grant from DECC HNDU (March 2016) to explore the next stage of plans to use heat from Viridor's ERF at Ardley to heat homes. This further work will provide detailed financial viability work, development of business models and engagement with stakeholders including Oxfordshire County Council, Viridor and North West Bicester developer A2 Dominion.

3.28 Natural playground at Garth Park - £70k from WREN (June 2015).

3.29 WRAP (Waste Prevention Fund) - £29k towards the 'Bicester Moves' project intended to prevent waste and encourage re-use for people moving into Bicester.

3.30 Local energy mapping for the identification of retrofit opportunities with Oxford Brookes University £81k (50% of total project cost) (April 2016).

3.31 A project looking at toolkits for green infrastructure planning with Oxford University (January 2016).

3.32 Funding from OxLEP (£57k) has been secured to support the establishment of a company to deliver apprenticeships, The Apprenticeship Training Agency. This seeks to support developers by providing apprenticeships and work placements, making it easier for them than employing apprentices directly (April 2015).

3.33 £19m garden town capital funding was announced from Government in the Autumn Statement (2015) but will not be available before 2017/18.

3.34 In March 2016 Bicester was identified as one of the Government's 10 Healthy New Towns. The expression of interest was made by a core team comprising the council health service partners and academics. The New Healthy Towns Initiative provides the opportunity to assess the innovations at NW Bicester and identify their impacts on public health and determine how they can be replicated across other developments. In addition the initiative will include the work on health prevention and better health care delivery, digital innovation, community empowerment and the design of the built environment supported by the NHS. £150k initial funding has been made available from Government and the council has committed £20k 'seed funding' to catalyse contributions from other local partners.

- 3.35 Support has also been provided to the Town Council to apply for funding, securing funding through WREN for the replacement of signage and bridges at Bure Park. This funding was £41k and work is due to commence in the autumn.

## **4.0 Grant Expenditure**

### **4.1. Eco Town Grant Revenue Funding**

- 4.2. The Bicester Strategic Delivery Board (SDB) has received quarterly reports on the funding position and overseen expenditure and delivery of projects. The grant revenue funding has supported a dedicated project team which has worked both on the delivery of new development but also on the delivery of projects in the town. The funding of a dedicated project team, now supplemented by capacity funding from DCLG for the Garden Town, has been instrumental in enabling work in Bicester, particularly in seeking grant funding, delivery of projects, development of additional policy such as a the NW Bicester SPD and support for the delivery new development.

- 4.3. It was originally envisaged that the revenue funding would support a project team for five years. However not all posts originally identified have been filled and therefore some revenue funding remains. In addition given the success of a dedicated project team in ensuring delivery, the relatively limited grant revenue funding has been supported with interest earned on capital to prolong the funding of the team (see budget at Appendix A). The project team expenditure, together with expenses and consultancy has resulted in a revenue expenditure to end of March 2016 of £175,827.

### **4.4. Eco Town Grant Capital Expenditure**

- 4.5. The majority of the Eco Town grant was capital. A proportion of the funding identified was used to deliver demonstration projects in Bicester including the temporary demonstration building at The Garth, zero carbon sixth form, travel behaviour project and an insulation scheme. Some of the budget for sustainable travel and energy efficiency was not spent initially and this has enabled funding to be identified for the provision of a cycleway along Buckingham Road and for a boiler replacement scheme that has been operated within the town over the last year.
- 4.6. In the last financial year a grant of £30k was committed to Bicester Town Council to support the delivery of the new Garth Park café and public toilets. The café is now in place and is proving very popular with the Town Council reporting an increase in users of the park.
- 4.7. Funding was also used to fund the boiler replacement scheme that was operated in the town.
- 4.8. Work has also commenced on the delivery of the Eco Business Centre at NW Bicester with some costs being incurred.
- 4.9. Given the finite amount of grant, opportunities have been sought to maximise the effectiveness of the funding by seeking opportunities to use it as match funding or secure other funding or recirculate the funding where possible.

#### 4.10. Committed Funding

- 4.11. There is a commitment to spend £6.25m of capital funding to support the early delivery of a primary school on the development at NW Bicester, which is currently under construction. A school has been seen as important to supporting the formation of the new community and establishing sustainable patterns of travel. Normally schools on new development are funded through developer contributions and therefore are only viable on large scale developments (about 1000 dwellings) and often are not delivered until developments have a considerable number of occupations. The purpose of identifying funding is to ensure the delivery of the school as early as possible. It is proposed funding will be recouped through developer contributions as the first phase builds out and from later phases of the development.
- 4.12. One of the aims of the eco town development was to increase the level of local employment. The provision of an eco-business centre to provide supported incubation work space has therefore been identified as a priority for funding. Land for the eco business centre will be secured as part of the first phase of development at NW Bicester and £4m of funding has been earmarked to support the delivery of the project. Feasibility work is currently underway prior to procurement of the building. Detailed report on the Eco Business centre is programmed for the September Executive which will report on progress in the design and procurement of the building. There is potential for future income generation or recycling of the capital funding from the project.

### **5.0 Future Funding Plans**

- 5.1. The remaining Eco Town funding that was earmarked to support sustainable travel it is proposed to use to support two projects that have been agreed with the Strategic Delivery Board. The first is a proposal to deliver off road cycling along the Buckingham Road as a first step towards improving cycling provision within the town. This is identified in the Sustainable Transport Strategy as part of the central corridor through the town. The delivery of this improvement has been subject to an initial feasibility by Oxfordshire County Council (Jan 2015) that has identified the cost between £300 - £400k subject to detailed design work.
- 5.2. The other project is the provision of signage within the town, the Bicester Wayfinding project. This project seeks to encourage walking and cycling by making it easier to navigate around the town for residents and visitors. The project has been undertaken with OCC officers and a group of local stakeholders including Bicester Town Council. The project has involved the auditing of all existing signage and identifying key routes and providing both mapped signage and finger posts. The signage will include details of the time it would take to walk to key locations to encourage people to walk as opposed to use cars for short journeys in the town. This project has a budget of £100,000. An additional £41,000 has been secured with the Town Council for the provision of signage within the Bure Park nature reserve.
- 5.3. The ability to use further funding will be reliant on the receipt of developer funding to allow the recycling of school funding, funding from the eco business centre and access to other sources of funding such as further grants. The first developer

payment towards the school has been received and it is anticipated that the Elmsbrook phase of the NW Bicester development will in due course provide £3.5m towards the school. It had been anticipated the remaining funding would be secured through the application for development for the remainder of the land north of the railway, application 14/01384/OUT. Viability testing has however shown that the development cannot support all the contributions sought and OCC have requested that some of the grant funding is used to support other infrastructure on the site. This together with the phasing of contributions is subject of on-going negotiations.

- 5.4. Should funding be recouped from the school two potential areas of spend have been identified. The first is that if the forward funding of the school is successful this approach could be repeated elsewhere on the development to ensure early delivery of facilities to serve the residents. In addition there remains the potential for investment in energy generation, for example through the work to explore the development of a heat network connected to Ardley, which could also provide future income for the Council. It is recommended that options are kept under review as recycled funding becomes available.
- 5.5. Garden Town Capacity funding will support the delivery of studies to support the growth of the garden town and resources within the delivery team.

## 6.0 Planned Programme for 2016/17 for the Bicester Delivery Team

- 6.1. On-going work includes work with developers to support delivery in accordance with the Local Plan, bidding for funding, responding to local issues. Set out below are the key milestones for projects being delivered 2016/17.

Project/Activity	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Vision	Consultation		Launch	
Masterplan		Commission	Consultation	Report
M40 Junction Study			Commission	Report
Prospectus				Commission
Eco Business Centre		Design feasibility	Exec Report & procurement	
Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan		Draft plan		
LEMUR	Commencement	Local Engagement		Report
Heat Network Feasibility		Commission		
Local Engagement		Summer events		
Apprenticeship Training Agency	Set up & accreditation		Operator appointed	Operational
Wayfinding		Strategy & Procurement	Implementation commences	
Cycle path improvements		Feasibility		Procurement
Retail Support Project		Retail mentoring		

## **7.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 7.1. Much is happening in Bicester and this is demonstrated by the delivery of new development such as Franklins House with the new library and CDC link point, the continued housing delivery. Work to provide an appropriate policy basis for the improvement and growth of the town has progressed with the adoption of the NW Bicester SPD and the consultation work to refresh the vision for the town. Never the less there remain challenges in delivering the strategic development sites in the adopted local plan and ensuring sufficient infrastructure is in place to serve the growth of the town and work continues with partners to deliver necessary infrastructure and seek to speed up housing delivery.
- 7.2. The work continues to have a whole town approach, seeking opportunities to improve the existing town as well as deliver new development. A number of projects have been delivered in the town, particularly focussing on energy efficiency and sustainable travel. In the last year this has been focussed on the replacement boiler scheme the energy mapping project LEMUR and securing grants to support other works such as the café and playground at Garth Park. Pursuing a whole town approach remains and important commitment with considerable work going into bids for funding to enable projects to be delivered.
- 7.3. Over £19.5m worth of grant funding is outlined above and this together with previous grants comes to over £50m that has been attracted to Bicester, including the DCLG Eco Town funding and Garden Town funding. This has been instrumental in the range of projects that it has been possible to deliver in the town. This approach of seeking external funding is continuing with further work being done to enable projects to continue to be delivered in the town.
- 7.4. Grant funding is a small proportion of the overall investment that has taken place in the town. A draft study by Montague Evans estimated that 2014/15 that over £150m of private sector funding has been invested in the town in the construction of housing and commercial premises. Furthermore the report concluded in terms of future development as part of the growth of Bicester, the estimated value of the housing sites identified in Bicester by 2031 is £1.2bn which is expected to be supported £750 million of infrastructure investment.
- 7.5. Bicester continues to attract national attention for its growth plans and the delivery of projects in the town. The work to date has attracted considerable investment through grants but also through the private sector investment in the town. Never the less there remains an ambitious programme of work to deliver improvements in the town during 2016/17.

## **8.0 Consultation**

None directly for this report.

## **9.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

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



Option 1: Identify alternative approaches to the use of Eco Town Grant or continue to hold the funding.

This option has been rejected as the projects identified have been identified based on the needs identified and arising within the town.

Option 2: To commit to future spend of recycled Eco Town Grant funding

The timing of the receipt of recycled funding is uncertain and over time priorities and pressures can change. It therefore is difficult to commit to funding specific projects at the current time. Some flexibility is therefore sought to review priorities as funding becomes available.

## **10.0 Implications**

### **Financial and Resource Implications**

10.1 There are no new financial implications from this report.

Comments checked by: Joanne Kaye Principal Accountant 01295 221545  
Jonne.kaye@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

### **Legal Implications**

10.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report

Comments checked by: Nigel Bell, Team Leader Planning, 01295 221687,  
nigel.bell@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

## **11.0 Decision Information**

### **Key Decision**

**Financial Threshold Met: No**

**Community Impact Threshold Met: No**

### **Wards Affected**

Bicester, Chesterton and Caversfield

### **Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework**

The 2016/17 Business Plan identifies the importance of delivering the strategic sites with the Cherwell Local Plan and the masterplan for Bicester (a1, a2). Work within the town contributes the Council's Safe, Green & Clean priority, particularly with regard to work on carbon reduction and green infrastructure as well as Thriving Community particularly work around health and well being. Performance pledges

include the delivery of NW Bicester and Graven Hill and delivery of affordable housing.

### **Lead Councillor**

Councillor Barry Wood – Leader

### **Document Information**

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
A	Eco Town Budget
B	Key Achievements 2015/16
C	Growing Bicester Newsletter
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
<b>Report Authors</b>	Jenny Barker, Bicester Delivery Manager Maria Curran, Garden Town Delivery Manager
<b>Contact Information</b>	01295 221828 Jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk