

Land South of Vendee Drive and North of Chesterton

Note December 17

Purpose of Paper

This paper provides a summary of the progress to date in developing an approach to ownership and management of land South of Vendee Drive Bicester for the benefit of the local population. The paper is designed to assist in decision making by the interested parties on their future role with regard to the land.

Background

Following the permission for the development of the first phase of the Kingsmere Development, Chesterton Parish Council proposed the creation of a community woodland between the new development and the village on land in the ownership of Countryside Properties (the lead developer).

The aspiration for a community woodland has been progressed through the planning permission for Kingsmere Phase 2 with the negotiation for the provision of the land by the Developer through the S106 agreement. Following some delay the S106 agreement has been signed and planning permission issued that include the transfer of the land. No commuted sum has been secured with the land as it is beyond that which is required to meet the policy in the Cherwell Local Plan.

As there has been some time before the land is available a number of meetings have been held involving representatives of Chesterton Parish Council, Bicester Town Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council and the original proposer of the scheme (referred to in this report as the Woodland Working Group), to explore the opportunity and the appetite to be involved in the long term future of the site. It is now anticipated that work on the development of Phase 2 will commence in 2018 and the land could become available.

To enable a better understanding of costs that could be involved in developing the area, Ryder Landscapes were appointed to carry out stakeholder engagement. Two workshop sessions were held to explore the aspirations for the site and these are being captured in a plan for the area. The Cherwell Landscape team have also looked at what a minimum cost scheme might require and produced some indicative costings.

As the timescale for the availability of the land becomes clear there is now a need to develop a firm plan to enable the project to move forward. The land is due to transfer prior to first occupation which is anticipated in 2018.

Case for additional green space

It is often said that parks and green spaces define our communities. They enhance quality of life and give local neighbourhoods the identity that helps engender a sense of belonging. In addition, high quality parks and green spaces can create socio-economic benefits for local residents and businesses. Bicester as a town that is subject to considerable growth, means many residents feel

that green spaces within and around the town are under pressure and are also highly valued. The designation as a Garden Town also increases the expectation around good quality green spaces to serve the town.

Research has shown that a 1% increase in green space in a typical ward can be associated with a 0.3 to 0.5% increase in average house price. Meanwhile another study from the University of East Anglia, indicates that being close to green space increased house prices from 1 to 30% depending on proximity, type of park and visibility, with the impact of a green space on property prices extended to properties located from 100 to 1000 metres distance.

In addition to this evidence, research demonstrated that in three Midland towns:

- Views on to green areas led to a cost uplift of 13% - 21% in residential buildings;
- Tree lined streets led to 18% - 41% cost uplifts in residential buildings.

Beyond the purely economic there are a range of other recognised benefits to quality green space. These include, but are not limited to:

Benefit Good quality green spaces can;

- Add value to the surrounding property, both commercial and residential, consequently increasing tax yield to maintain public services
- Contribute to attracting tourists
- Encourage employment and inward investment to an area
- Help to create a favourable image of a place
- Provide places for quiet contemplation and reflection, for relaxation, informal recreation, peace, space and beauty which are important for well being
- Provide opportunities to improve health and personal fitness and take part in a wide range of outdoor sport and activity
- Provide safe areas to meet, talk and play, for free association of friends and strangers, for families and between the generations
- Provide cultural links with an area's past, giving a sense of place and identity
- Provide opportunities for community events, voluntary activity and charitable fund raising
- Provide an educational resource – an outdoor classroom stimulating ideas on art, design, the environment and natural sciences
- Provide habitats for wildlife, aiding bio-diversity
- Help to stabilise urban temperatures and humidity
- Absorb pollutants in air and ground water

- Provide opportunities for the recycling of organic materials
- Slow storm water run off and reduce drainage infrastructure
- Provide a sense of the seasons and the links between the natural world and the urban environment

The nearest accessible woodland site to Bicester is Stoke Wood to the north of the town. This wood is only accessible by car and has a small car park to facilitate access. The wood comprises ancient woodland and there is anecdotal evidence that the level of use it receives causes some damage to the area. An area closer to Bicester and to the south of the town is likely to divert some trips and also would be accessible without a car from the local area. The land south of Vendee Drive could therefore become a well-used recreation area for the local population.

As the town grows there is also a loss of countryside and a risk of biodiversity losses. The land south of Vendee Drive, which has largely been in arable use, could provide an opportunity to increase habitat and link to ecologically sensitive landscapes to the south of the town. The site has a high potential for bio diversity gains and some funding is being sought through SEMLEP to support bio diversity enhancement for meadows, hedges and scrub.

Policy

The Cherwell Local Plan sets the policy for the area and it's open space policies are based on studies of the existing provision in the area that are currently being updated. The published position is that a 11.69 ha deficiency in parks and gardens, 2.87ha of natural/semi natural greenspace and 8.18 ha in allotment provision.

The Cherwell Local Plan policies seek to protect existing green space from development and also require new greenspace to serve new development. The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-31 vision for Bicester includes the aim of 'Deliver strategic open space and recreation opportunities to address existing deficiencies and meet the future needs of development'. Policy Bicester 7 further elaborates, recognising the need to meet 'current and future' deficiencies in open space. The policy seeks to establish an urban edge park around the outskirts of the town to create a circular route, establish the community land South of Vendee Drive would assist with meeting the first two objectives.

The land to the south of Vendee Drive was not required to meet the needs of new development (policy compliant provision is provided on site at Kingsmere, with the exception of allotments) but it would help to address the provisions of policy Bicester 7 and gaps in current provision. The land is of sufficient size that allotments could be accommodated as part of any proposal.

There is therefore strong policy support for the use of the land for a community woodland.

Challenge

The land at Vendee Drive is due to be transferred by the Developer to Cherwell DC but will not be laid out by them or come with a commuted sum for maintenance.

Appendix 1

There is a recognised challenge surrounding funding of public parks, both nationally and locally within Bicester. Nationally public sector funding for discretionary and non-statutory services like parks is projected to fall by 60% or more over the next decade, placing strain on maintaining existing parks and developing new parks for use.

To date Cherwell has made a formal decision (Executive 7/7/14) to accept the transfer of the land, but decisions now need to be made about the use and management of the land as well as long term ownership.

Use of the Land

The Woodland Working Group supported CDC in the appointment of Ryder Landscapes to undertake a design consultation with stakeholders to establish how the land might be laid out and enable costing work to be undertaken. The stakeholder workshops demonstrated a high degree of aspiration for the land and highlighted the potential for woodland, recreation and bio diversity enhancements. Each of the uses has different maintenance and management requirements and it is clear that the emerging proposals would require funding to be available which is not currently the case. They therefore provide a useful indication of the potential of the area, all be it that the land could be used as an area of informal access to the countryside with a more minimal approach to the laying out and management. This would significantly reduce costs.

The last discussion of the Woodland Working Group therefore agreed to look at informal use of the land for recreation with a minimal alteration initially and therefore more limited management liability. This approach would enable a phased development of the land as resources allow.

Minimal Scheme & Cost

Paul Almond, CDC Landscape and Street Scene Manager, has identified a minimal scheme to enable the land to be used for informal recreation. The land could be managed by mowing or could be grazed to maintain the land. The approach has been designed to reduce the need for capital investment and have minimal revenue costs. The costs are identified below.

| Item | Option 1 - Capital | Quantity | Unit | Rate | Frequency | Total |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|------|------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1 | Entrance Signage | 4 | No. | 650 | 1 | 2600.00 |
| 2 | Litter bins | 6 | No. | 500 | 1 | 3000.00 |
| 3 | Dog bins | 6 | No. | 500 | 1 | 3000.00 |
| 4 | Pedestrian Entrance Gates | 3 | No. | 1000 | 1 | 3000.00 |
| | | | | | | 11600.00 |
| Capital Cost Total | | | | | | 0 |

| Item | Option 1 - Revenue | Quantity | Unit | Rate | Frequency | Total |
|------|---------------------------------------|----------|------|---------|-----------|---------|
| 5 | Mown path (B cut) 2550 Lm by 3 m wide | 7650 | m2 | 0.02215 | 12 | 2033.37 |
| 6 | Meadow Cut | 128400 | m2 | 0.06 | 1 | 7704.00 |
| 7 | Litter Picking | 7650 | m2 | 0.0008 | 52 | 318.24 |

Appendix 1

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|----------------------------------|---------------------|---|-----|------|----|----------|
| 8 | Litter Bin Emptying | 6 | No. | 1.35 | 76 | 615.60 |
| 9 | Dog Bin Emptying | 6 | No. | 1.35 | 76 | 615.60 |
| 11286.8 | | | | | | 1 |
| Annual Revenue Cost Total | | | | | | 1 |

This approach would enable the early use of the land for informal recreation and would not preclude further development of the space as and when funds became available.

A further option has also been explored that would look to graze the land and therefore requires stock proof fencing and water to be provided. It has a higher initial cost but reduced revenue costs.

Example costs are set out below;

| Item | Option 2 - Capital | Quantity | Unit | Rate | Frequency | Total |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|---------|------|-----------|----------|
| 1 | Entrance Signage | 4 | No. | 650 | 1 | 2600.00 |
| 2 | Litter bins | 6 | No. | 500 | 1 | 3000.00 |
| 3 | Dog bins | 6 | No. | 500 | 1 | 3000.00 |
| 4 | Pedestrian Entrance Gates | 3 | No. | 1000 | 1 | 3000.00 |
| 5 | Stock-proof fencing | 1345 | Ln m | 8 | 1 | 10760.00 |
| 6 | 5 Bar gate | 1 | No. | 400 | 1 | 400.00 |
| 22760.00 | | | | | | 0 |
| Capital Cost Total | | | | | | 0 |

| Item | Option 2 - Revenue | Quantity | Unit | Rate | Frequency | Total |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| 6 | Mown path (B cut) 2550 Lm by 3 m wide | 7650 | m2 | 0.02215 | 12 | 2033.37 |
| 7 | Litter Picking | 7650 | m2 | 0.0008 | 52 | 318.24 |
| 8 | Litter Bin Emptying | 6 | No. | 1.35 | 76 | 615.60 |
| 9 | Dog Bin Emptying | 6 | No. | 1.35 | 76 | 615.60 |
| 10 | Stock-proof fencing Repairs | 4 | Hou r | 65 | 3 | 780.00 |
| 11 | Grazing Licence Income | 1 | No. | -750 | 1 | -750.00 |
| 3612.81 | | | | | | |
| Annual Revenue Cost Total | | | | | | 3612.81 |

There is potential to look for grant funding to support the delivery of the space. This could be used to deliver additional features and planting over time but is unlikely to meet revenue costs.

Approach to Management and Ownership of the area

The Woodland Working Group has considered a variety of possible approaches to management of the area to enable its use for informal recreation. Options have included management by one of the Councils, community management and management by other bodies such as the Woodland Trust. Whilst the representatives of the Councils have informally all felt their organisations individually were not best placed to take on the land on their own, a proposal has emerged that a shared approach could be a viable solution. This would not preclude active community involvement, which

is likely to be a valuable resource, but could provide a secure parent body for the management of land.

A Shared Management Responsibility

The Woodland Working Group gave some consideration to a shared cost approach to establishing and managing the land. One option the Group wished to explore was a shared committee. Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) through Section 101 allows for the establishment of joint committees, and this could therefore be a route to enable joint responsibility for the area.

In pursuing a joint committee approach there would need to be clarity of the role and function delegated to the committee and the responsibility that it is to take. There would also need to be agreement of who sat on the committee. This could be established through terms of reference agreed by all the organisations.

Key questions to consider would be how such a committee would deal with issues of;

- raising funding for management and maintenance,
- responsibility for liabilities
- commissioning of works of management and maintenance and
- how day to day management issues would be dealt with.
- How the committee would be resourced and the level of advice and expertise it would require

A joint committee could be serviced by one of the partner organisations or could be serviced on a revolving basis and this would need to be established. The Committee could set a budget but would have to negotiate this with the funding organisations which would provide the money. In establishing a joint committee each organisation would need to consider the implications for them but there are examples where this approach works elsewhere.

Alternative approaches that still resulted in a shared commitment could be to have a lead organisation to which others contribute in terms of funding and input into the management and development plans, possibly through a management board or similar arrangement. This would benefit from use of existing organisational structures but would require one organisation to take the lead role.

If the minimal public access scheme were to be implemented as set out at option 1 and the costs for initial establishment and first years maintenance, shared between 4 organisations equally, the costs would be as follows;

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Capital | $£11600/4 = £2900$ |
| Revenue | $£11287/4 = £2822$ |
| Total | $£22887/4 = £5722$ |

The revenue cost would be required on an annual basis.

Long Term Funding Options

One of the key concerns of the Woodland Working Group is the potential cost of long term management and maintenance of the area and how this is funded. For Bicester Town Council this issue is compounded by the location of the area which is currently outside of their boundary and the recent acceptance of the management liability of the Whitelands Farm Sports Ground which will serve both the town and wider area. For Chesterton Parish Council, as a relatively small parish, potential costs in relation to their overall spend are significant and there remains difficulty in securing convenient access to the land from the village. For the District and County funding challenges remain with capping of council tax increases and changes in government financing. This issue is influencing consideration of the management and ownership of the area.

There are opportunities to bring in funding from external sources. Most grant funding is focused on securing identified objectives over a limited period of time. This could well support the development of the area but is unlikely to provide long term revenue funding.

There may be opportunities to look for income raising activities to support the maintenance of the wider area. In some locations charging for parking, food outlets and activities provide income streams.

A further route to reduce costs would be to work with volunteers to carry out some of the maintenance and management tasks. There is interest locally but to date the extent of this has not been explored in detail or costed.

Further consideration on long term funding is set out in Annex B.

Next Steps

This note has been prepared to assist each organisation to consider what role it could have in the future ownership and management of the land and in particular whether there is support for a joint committee or alternative arrangement that can be identified in this financial year to enable plans to be developed so the land transfer can take place in 2018. It is suggested that each organisation provides an update on this at the Woodland Working Group meeting on the 15th February 2018 to take forward an agreed route for formal decision thereafter.

Once this is resolved it would be possible to move on with refining the 'minimal' design, seeking funding and submission of a planning application. It will also be possible to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to support the proposal.

Annex A Plan

Annex B Funding Options

Annex B

How best to overcome the funding shortfall for public green space is a challenge. The NESTA 'Rethinking Parks 2013' document identifies four key income generating models for Parks:

Appendix 1

- Generating income through concessions and events;
- Generating income through taxation;
- Generating income through ecosystem development; and
- Generating income through commercial developments.

This reports also highlights 4 key areas for park innovation:

- Support changes in park management and maintenance systems including potential changes to maintenance regimes, restructuring contracts and maximising the productivity of particular landscapes.
- Encourage new organisational structures partnerships that can adopt more locally– focused and collaborative approaches to the long–term care of parks.
- Identify more diverse sources of funding and resources to supplement those from local councils and to increase the variety of uses and activities that parks may be used for.
- Explore new uses and activities within parks from carbon capture to concerts and more.

To support open access and to support future funding CABI have identified 8 income streams for parks, including:

- Traditional local authority funding.
- Multi–agency public sector funding.
- Taxation initiatives.
- Planning and development opportunities.
- Bonds and commercial finance.
- Income–generating opportunities.
- Endowments.
- Voluntary sector involvement.

The following is a high–level review of the potential routes Cherwell could pursue to obtain funding for the site and to deliver a long term management plan / strategy.

| Option for Ownership | SWOT | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating income through concessions and events; | Strength – Community will and engagement in delivering new green space | Weakness – Would need a Trust or CDC to run events – Need to employ or appoint key people to maintain / manage the area |
| | Opportunity | Threat |

Appendix 1

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment/Tourism - Environment/Health/Education - Community/Development - Increase local knowledge of the site as a community asset. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of understanding of what is required - Need for capacity building (in terms of knowledge and skills) to address the above |
| Funding Option? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nesta: http://www.nesta.org.uk/get-funding - Crowd Funding - Local / National business volunteering | |

| Option for Ownership | SWOT | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating income through taxation; | Strength | Weakness |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Steady income stream - Can utilise local funding for local resource | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge on resources - Negative public perception - Defining source of tax |
| | Opportunity | Threat |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can establish clear business plan with defined contribution / funding requirement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unacceptable approach within local community - Funding used on other issues rather than for public park |
| Funding Option? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offset levy? - Allotment space... - CIL? - Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund - BID, or Park Improvement District? | |

| Option for Ownership | SWOT | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating income through ecosystem development; | Strength | Weakness |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responds directly to remit / wishes of community woodland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potentially limited budgets available - Any funding needs to be spent on generating benefits, that the site of current low ecological value may be a challenge |

Appendix 1

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|-----------------|---|---|
| | Opportunity | Threat |
| | – Receiving funding, and recognition, for generating new woodland | – Competition from other areas looking to receive funding |
| Funding Option? | – Climate KIC? – Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund – BID, or Park Improvement District? – Funded via ecosystem services: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/payments-for-ecosystem-services-pes-best-practice-guide | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Option for Ownership | SWOT | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generating income through commercial developments.</i> | Strength | Weakness |
| | – <i>Potential to demonstrate value of area and generate long term income for longer term benefit of site / local community</i> | – <i>Negative links with service providers</i> |
| | Opportunity | Threat |
| | – <i>Create a point of interest for people to use the park</i> | – <i>Negative public perception</i> |
| Funding Option? | – <i>Climate KIC?</i> – <i>BID, or Park Improvement District?</i> | |

Further Reading:

http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/learning_to_rethinking_parks_report.pdf