

Cherwell District Council

Executive

3 June 2019

Bicester Garden Town – Capacity Funding Award 2018/19

Report of Assistant Director – Planning and Economy

This report is public

Purpose of report

To seek Executive's agreement for the proposed spend of the capacity funding award to Bicester Garden Town.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To agree the proposals for spending the capacity funding awarded to Bicester as set out in Table One.

2.0 Report Details

- 2.1 In 2014 Bicester was the first town nationally to be identified as a Garden Town by the Government under its current Garden Town Programme in recognition of the ambitious plans for the growth of the town. The Garden Town Programme nationally has now grown to include 28 garden towns and villages; local garden towns include Didcot, Aylesbury and Cotswold Garden Village.
- 2.2 Since the inception of the Garden Town Programme MCLG has supported sites in the programme with *capacity funding* to support high quality housing delivery. This support for Bicester has enabled a team to be established and funded and the delivery of a range of projects including work on the Healthy New Town, funding bids to be pursued, feasibility studies to be commissioned and the local community effectively engaged.
- 2.3 For 2017/18 an invitation was received from MHCLG to bid for part of a £7m fund to support the development of the Garden Town with a deadline of July 2018 for the submission of bids. The prospectus advised;

'The focus of the bidding process will be on identifying and supporting those places that have made or are making significant progress towards delivery of their garden community and demonstrating a sustained commitment to high quality place making and innovation in delivery. The aim of the Garden Towns and Villages programme is to

foster the delivery at pace of a new generation of attractive and sustainable communities that are exemplars of good design and best practice.'

2.4 The prospectus went on to identify the following criteria for bids:

1. Scale of housing numbers likely to be delivered
2. Evidenced expenditure of the of the previous capacity funding awarded in 2017/18 to put in place to put in place measures to progress or town project towards delivery
3. Evidence of appropriate resources in place within the local authority to drive forward the garden village or town project
4. Evidence of continued progress towards meeting milestones identified for delivery of the garden village or town and delivery of housing numbers
5. Implementation of measures to secure quality outcomes in the project

2.5 A bid was made for Bicester which was able to demonstrate the work that had been done and was being undertaken. New funding was sought against the project criteria for £1.06 million (see attached table). The focus of the Cherwell bid was upon increasing delivery particularly targeted upon actions emanating from existing master planning work, strategic infrastructure, supporting high quality development, innovation and staff resource.

3.0 Proposals for the Garden Town Capacity Funding

3.1 The outcome of the funding round has been announced and Cherwell has been awarded £770,000; this funding has been received very recently. The award was lower than the sum that was bid for and, in the light of funding received, a review was undertaken and a number of factors were considered including the bid criteria, previous Garden Town consultation and current priorities. The key areas that will be progressed are set out below.

3.2 It is proposed to use work from the emerging master plan to develop development and design briefs for town centre sites and progress the design of environmental improvement of Market Square. In addition, housing delivery will be facilitated which will help to support the town centre and the work to revitalise it. Furthermore, a more visionary plan for the town will be required and funding would support the development of this. Funding would be used to commission consultants to undertake the work.

3.3 It is also proposed to continue to use funding to provide capacity to embed healthy place making, particularly focused on the built environment and new development areas. The NHS funded Healthy New Town Project has made good progress particularly in engaging and activating the community. However the short term nature of the project has limited the progress on influencing the new developments being delivered. Additional capacity will support the creation of a stronger policy basis for the built environment and healthy and sustainable new development. In addition the capacity would support the negotiation on development proposals to ensure future development achieves a healthy environment. This will complement and support the work already underway to achieve healthy and sustainable communities.

- 3.4 The creation of high quality green spaces is central to a Garden Town. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) identify '*Development that enhances the natural environment, providing a comprehensive green infrastructure network and net biodiversity gains, and that uses zero-carbon and energy-positive technology to ensure climate resilience*' as one of the key principles for garden towns. To rebalance the focus on new building and address local feeling that the town and green spaces are under threat from development, it is proposed to develop the green infrastructure in the town. It is proposed to develop a Natural Capital strategy for the town, support enhancement of existing spaces and ensure new spaces, delivered through new development, will meet the Garden Town principles and support health and wellbeing. In addition the original Garden Town Bid included the creation of a large area of accessible countryside. Whilst it is difficult to see a route to deliver this currently; funding is proposed to explore the potential for the creation of access to the countryside along public rights of way. Funding would be used to commission the work and provide expert advice.
- 3.5 Funding to support infrastructure is identified and will be focused upon feasibility and design and includes pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the south of the town, the design of the central corridor, rail opportunities from the military railway and work to support and engage of an updated transport strategy for the town. Funding would be used in collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to commission work.
- 3.6 The MHCLG Garden Town Team are concerned about the quality of development in the places they are supporting and are looking for high quality development - more than "business-as-usual. As a result funding is identified to support design quality and proposals would be developed with Planning colleagues in Policy and Development Management to provide practical approaches to support good quality development.
- 3.7 Under the innovation work stream it is proposed to use funding to commission work looking at how a lasting legacy could be secured for the town, to create an opportunity for long term investment similar to the first garden towns which are still benefitting from funding from their development. This would be commissioned with the involvement of local organisations and the Town Council. A small amount of funding to support cultural activity is also proposed.
- 3.8 Finally staff funding was included in the bid and it is proposed to use it to support the Bicester team and dedicated communication resource. This will also enable continued participation in the MHCLG Garden Town forum where learning is shared.

4.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

- 4.1 The Garden Town capacity funding provides an opportunity to carry out work in Bicester to contribute to its development as a Garden Town. A holistic approach is proposed that seeks to support the growth of the town but also deliver on areas that are of particular concern to local people such as improving the town centre and green spaces and supporting cultural activity in the town.

- 4.2 The proposed budget allocations are supported by the Bicester Strategic Delivery Board and have been shared with the Garden Communities team at MHCLG. The Executive is recommended to agree the approach set out within this report.

5.0 Consultation

The Bicester Strategic Delivery Board (SBD) has endorsed the proposed approach within this report.

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: Decline the funding – that would not be an appropriate response given the benefits the funding will provide to the Bicester community.

Option 2: Amend the proposed spend – this has already been done in line with the reduced amount of funding.

Option 3: Agree the proposed spend as set out in this report – subject to the Executive agreeing the recommendations this is the preferred path.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The funding is a grant to the Council to support the work on Bicester Garden Town. There are no adverse financial or resource implications.

Comments checked by: Kelly Wheeler, Principal Accountant (Wellbeing and Environment), Kelly.Wheeler@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no legal implications arising from the funding. This sort of expenditure is authorised pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.

Comments checked by:

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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

Bicester East, Bicester North and Caversfield, Bicester South and Ambrosden

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

District of Opportunity and Growth, Thriving Communities and Wellbeing, Clean Green and Safe

Lead Councillor

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Proposed Garden Town Capacity Funding Spend
Background Papers	
None	
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