

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 30 May 2013	AGENDA ITEM NO: 5
Report title: Eco Business Centre – Issues and Options Appraisal	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report the initial findings of the issues and options appraisal of the proposed Eco Business Centre at North West Bicester before the final report is produced.

2. Background

- 2.1 The proposal for an Eco Business Centre on the first exemplar phase of North West Bicester was first put forward by P3Eco in 2010 following contact with the developers of the York Eco Business Centre (<http://www.yorkecobusinesscentre.com/>). The York case study was intended to be a blueprint for future sustainable developments throughout the UK. P3Eco initially put forward proposals to develop the scheme in partnership with Oxford Innovation. Further investigation of the options for delivering and funding the centre concluded that a different approach would be required for the Eco Bicester project. This culminated in a planning agreement for the land to be transferred to Cherwell District Council at no cost in return for the Local Authority progressing the development and project management of the scheme.
- 2.2 A Consultants Brief was prepared and following a good response to the competitive procurement process, Basepoint Business Centres was appointed in November 2012 to prepare an issues and options report and supporting outline business plan. In preparing the report Basepoint has worked with property consultants to assess the Bicester market and architects on the design of the building. Local businesses and representatives of the business community have also been involved in the appraisal process supported by officers from economic development and regeneration teams. Final comments on the report are being collated before the final report is completed in June 2013. A review of the initial findings is set out below.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 The appraisal report and supporting appendices identify the following issues:
 - The Local Property Market and existing competing schemes appear to be catering for larger more established businesses which in Basepoint's opinion would be unsuitable for flexible workspace for start up businesses and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).
 - Current and proposed development is limited in the Bicester area.
 - Business Start up demand provides a good opportunity to provide high quality accommodation as part of an eco business centre.

- Sector focus – the report concludes the centre should offer an inclusive business environment and not be sector focussed. It also recognises that the entrepreneurial activities of homeworkers in the eco town will not be focussed on a specific sector.
- Design and layout – the proposed development will be an integral part of the local centre mixed use development and the report includes a reconfigured site layout as an alternative to the current proposals.
- Accommodation – a mix of small business units within Class B1 of the Use Classes Order (offices, research and development and light industry appropriate in a residential area) is proposed.
- Sustainability – Despite being part of an eco development Basepoint considers that delivering a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodolgy (BREEAM) “Excellent” Scheme will be a challenge.
- Parking – the report identifies an under provision of parking in the current scheme.
- Feasibility – the outline business plan identifies a notional net income generated by the development however it is noted that with the investment of public sector capital funds the development will provide an economically sustainable centre.
- Timescales – the report sets out an indicative timescale for completing the development by January 2015.

3.2 Finally, the report sets out a number of options for the procurement and delivery of the project which will require further consideration before the report is finalised.

4. Conclusion

4.1 In conclusion the report outlines the main issues and options affecting the delivery of the North West Bicester Eco Business Centre and demonstrates a demand for such a facility in the local area. The report also provides comfort that the business centre could be operated at a profit albeit with eco town funding. The final version of the report is currently being prepared and officers will continue to work with the consultants to complete this in June before reporting any updates to the Board.

5. Recommendations

1. To support the initial findings of the report.
2. To approve the Draft Report and instruct Basepoint to prepare the Final Report.
3. To agree to progress the implementation of the building as part of the local centre proposals.