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| Report title: Demonstration Building progress report | |
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report reviews the use and removal of the Eco Bicester Demonstration Building (EBDB) at Garth Park. It sets out the issues and options for the future of the EBDB including its removal and dismantling before reinstatement of Garth Park. Finally the report assesses the contribution the building made to the demonstration phase of the Eco Bicester Project and the implications of its removal.

2. Background

2.1 The EBDB was an “early win” demonstration project, one of a portfolio of “start-up” projects in the eco town funding bid. It was initially proposed as an “exhibition house” to support the proposals for NW Bicester in the eco town funding bid (Nov 2009). It has made a significant contribution to preparing the existing community for eco development. The EBDB has successfully and fully achieved the following objectives:

- It has been delivered in the first two years of the project
- It was constructed by private sector developer partners involved in NW Bicester
- It showcases some of the technologies used in eco developments
- Its construction demonstrated sustainable techniques and principles
- Its central location has been used to focus community involvement in the project
- The building provides a “flagship” development for the project
- It has attracted a wide range of visitors from government agencies and key stakeholders to schools and the local community including residents and businesses
- Its construction, using passiv haus techniques, has provided valuable local experience of building sustainably
- The construction methods and materials could be employed elsewhere in the town and potentially in the NW Bicester eco development.

2.2 It was agreed that the building would be temporary and would be removed after two years when it was expected the development at NW Bicester would be underway. Garth Park was identified as the most suitable site for the building due to its proximity to the town centre and railway stations. A temporary planning permission was granted on 24 November 2010 following non-material amendments to the planning application (reference: 10/00109/F). The building opened in May 2011 and the temporary permission for the building originally expired in November 2012, but an extension was granted in January 2013 for a further year.

2.3 Recently, the main issue has been to establish the timescale and process of removing the building with P3Eco and Bicester Town Council. This has required the commitment and involvement of P3Eco and its partners. It is anticipated that an alternative use could be identified and its contents reused allowing its removal and the reinstatement of the site at

Garth Park to its former use. The main issues affecting the removal of the building are as follows:

- Functions – transfer to other site, meeting venue, exhibition space, local contact point
- Ownership – P3Eco, BTC, Cassadian Homes (sponsors), contributors
- Planning permission
- Cost
- Perception and publicity
- Community liaison

- 2.4 A licence and lease agreed with P3Eco, as the owner of the building, sets out the responsibilities for its removal. The licence and lease have been extended until the end of May 2013. It is clear that the building cannot remain in its current position and must be removed to allow for the reinstatement of the Garth Park. The building is owned by P3Eco and the owner is responsible for its removal. Cassadian Homes, P3Eco's developer partner constructed the building with consultancy advice provided by Ardent Construction. The structure contains various pieces of equipment, fixtures and fittings supplied by leading businesses in sustainable housing development. These items have been incorporated into the fabric of the building and are integral to the management and running of the property. They include:

Fully fitted kitchen and appliances
Greywater system
Rainwater harvesting system
A domestic hot water system (heat exchange)
A mechanical heating and ventilation (MHV) system including pipework
Solar panels on the roof
Light fittings
Sanitary and bathrooms fittings
Windows and doors
Building materials (timber, tiles and stone)

- 2.5 Given the building's low environmental impact, most of it can be recycled or reused and this has attracted the interest of a sustainable living project. Its high levels of insulation and air-tightness has reduced energy consumption although this has not been fully monitored. The assessment of options for the future use of the building considers these important features.
- 2.6 As described above, sustainable construction techniques and technologies are used and displayed in the building and alternative buildings are unlikely to provide this.

3. The Building in Use

- 3.1 In the short time since opening, the building has been used for a variety of purposes including those set out above but also a symbol of partnership working with the private sector. The EBDB currently performs an important role for Eco Bicester. In particular it provides a physical presence for the project in the town, symbolising the future eco development of the town. The EBDB has received approximately 3,000 visitors making it one of the leading visitor attractions in the town. It serves as an information centre for Eco Bicester providing advice on sustainable construction and the principles of eco living as part of a low carbon future. It has also been used as a venue for exhibitions, events and Project Team meetings by a variety of organisations, engaging with the local community.
- 3.2 Monthly visitor numbers peaked at approximately 350 visits in June 2011 and were lowest (approximately 100 visits) in December 2012 due to works on The Garth. On average

approximately 200 people a month have visited the building although this has fluctuated with higher numbers particularly when there has been local press coverage. The public reaction has been generally positive and is recorded in the visitors' book. Some comments include *'very informative, we will try and be more eco-friendly'* and *'a very well thought building demonstrating 21st century ideas'*. The main two interests for people when they visit are finding out more information on NW Bicester and how they can reduce the utility bills through energy efficiencies or retrofitting technologies. These two topics are covered by having a permanent exhibition on the NW Bicester eco development which includes maps of the exemplar, masterplan and a model showing the lay out of the exemplar.

- 3.3 Recently the building's use has adapted to reflect the need for community meeting/ exhibition space and a focal point for the public to get involved in the Eco Bicester project. The building has been used for Grassroots Bicester's monthly meeting, Green Gym AGM, and Low Carbon facilitator training sessions for members of the community ("The Carbon Conversations" project), which included the Bicester Chamber of Commerce.
- 3.4 As Eco Bicester demonstration projects progress, the building has allowed for members of the wider Project Team to work in Bicester and promote the different aspects of the project. For example, the Bicester Reuse and Sustainability Project Development Manager, worked at the Eco Bicester demonstration building once a week for a year and. Also Oxfordshire County Council officers working on the Cycle to Bicester scheme have been able to use the building on a regular basis to promote and administer the bike loans, adult cycle training and bike fixes.
- 3.5 Local groups that have already visited include OxCAN (Oxfordshire Climate Change), The Registered Social Landlord (RSL) Development Group and Residents Panel, Bicester's Women's institute, Grassroots Bicester, Bicester Green Gym, 1st Bicester Brownies and Oxford Construction Excellence. The Bicester in Bloom Regional Judges presentation was held at the building in July 2011 followed by a tour of the building. Recently Oxfordshire Youth Arts Partnership have been able to hold an art exhibition curated by the Youth of Bicester action team as part of the county-wide Arts Week project.
- 3.6 Several workshops and events have take place in the building including Solar Power Bicester for residents and businesses to find out all the information on solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, government tariffs and planning restrictions. Three workshops during the Christmas period were aimed at families and encouraged them to use recycled material to make Christmas decorations. On the run up to the Jubilee celebrations a coffee morning was held with the first floor used as an art gallery to display Jubilee inspired posters painted by local school children and judged by the public to promote the Jubilee celebrations. In 2013 the building has been the base for engagement activities surrounding the Green Deal pilot, by holding resident drop-in sessions and becoming the base for the wider team to meet. Community events during in the final six weeks of the building being open have been help to promote home composting and to raise awareness about Swift conservation.
- 3.7 Schools have been encouraged to visit the demonstration building to be able to instil the importance of sustainability in the town's children. School visits allow children to link existing school projects with a local project taking place in the town. During the visits children are taught how the low carbon technologies in the building can provide a greener way of living. There is a set of Bicester maps, showing the town in 1885 to 2012. School children have created their own eco towns including deciding which facilities are needed, designing towns which are displayed in the building. 13 local primary and secondary schools have visited, with two schools making repeat visits. As well as visits from university students from Oxford and Germany. Recently there has also been a visit from student attending the hospital school in Bicester.

- 3.8 Important visitors to the building include Professor Li Shirong Deputy Director Chongqing Overseas Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Committee, Robert Napier HCA Chairman and John Lawrence Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford.
- 3.9 In June 2012, Sky News visited when they were looking for examples of water efficiency good practice. Sky News filmed at the demonstration building and featured items on grey water recycling, rain water harvesting and aerated taps to reduce water use. In October 2012 Bicester and the demonstration building were the focus of a Spanish TV documentary commission by the Spanish Ministry of Education as part of their city of the future episode.
- 3.10 The programme of events focused on sustainable lifestyles, energy and water efficiency as well as sustainable transport. In July and August 2012, working alongside BioRegional, a Green Olympics exhibition was displayed providing links to London 2012 and Bicester Town Council's Activities Day. This rang alongside promotion of the Cycle for Bicester scheme, which continued over the autumn/ winter 2012/13, also running was the energy monitor loan scheme for local residents and schools.

4. Future community involvement

- 4.1 Now that the first phase "exemplar" planning application has been approved at NW Bicester it is expected that the focus moves away from the demonstration phase and into the phase of the eco town project will move to the site. This will allow the EBDB to be removed and the site reinstated. It is anticipated that the development on the NW Bicester site will start in this summer with construction of the first homes underway in early 2013.
- 4.2 The location of the Bicester Community Liaison Officer in Bicester has provided a valuable point of contact for local people as well as the demo EBDB providing a base to accommodate visitors. Consideration is therefore now being given to other possible options to accommodate this work. Bicester Green, centre for reuse and sustainability centre located in Station Approach has recently opened and there may be a possibility that the Project Team could have a office space with in their premises. This matter is being explored further.
- 4.3 The focus of work is now also moving to the master planning over the next 12 months and this will involve community engagement activities, which will need to take place in Bicester.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The EBDB has successfully delivered the objectives in the eco town funding bid and "flagship" development of the start up phase of the Eco Bicester project. The Strategic Delivery Board is recommended to:
1. Support the proposals for the removal of the demonstration building and the reinstatement of Garth Park marking the end of the demonstration phase of the Eco Bicester Project
 2. Agree that the Project Team explores potential locations for a Bicester base for the team and future community engagement activities around the master plan.
 3. Work with P3Eco and its partners to implement and remove the building and reinstatement for the site that meets the needs of the Town Council.
 4. Agree that the Project Team supports P3Eco to coordinate the removal of the building and a reinstatement of the area.