

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 31 October 2013	AGENDA ITEM NO: 4
Report title: Review of progress on meeting the aims of the Shared Vision for Bicester	
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To report on the progress on meeting the aims of the Eco Bicester One Shared Vision.

2. Background

2.1 The Eco Bicester One Shared Vision document (hereafter referred to as “the Shared Vision”) was agreed by the Strategic Delivery Board (SDB) in December 2010 following an extensive consultation exercise. The first review of the Shared Vision was reported to the SDB in April 2012. Since then a Bicester Masterplan Consultation Draft has been prepared (August 2012) and the Cherwell Draft Submission Plan approved at the CDC Full Council meeting on 22 October 2013. The Bicester Masterplan will provide the framework for further improvements to the town, enhancing its role as a local service centre, and integrating new development with the existing. Further consultation on the masterplan is expected in 2014. The Cherwell Local Plan is also expected to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in 2014.

2.2 The Shared Vision sets out the long term (20-30 years) aims and aspirations for the town based on eco town principles. The Eco towns Planning Policy Statement (July 2009) is extant following recent changes to the planning system.

2.3 The Shared Vision focuses on:

- Effecting a town wide transition to a **low carbon** community triggered by the new **eco development at North West Bicester**
- Attracting **inward investment** to provide environmentally friendly jobs and commerce especially in green technologies, whilst recognising the very important role of existing employers in the town
- Improving **transport, health, education and leisure choices** while emphasising zero carbon and energy efficiency; and
- Ensuring green infrastructure and historic landscapes, biodiversity, water, flood and waste issues are managed in an environmentally friendly way.

2.4 It comprises four key themes:

- community first
- economy
- transport and
- environmental sustainability and infrastructure

In addition, it sets out development standards for Eco Bicester. Board members will recall that an Eco Towns Planning Policy Statement (PPS) extract was included as the final section of the Shared Vision document. It was always intended that the Eco town standards should be embedded in the local policy for Bicester. The Cherwell Local Plan (Paragraphs C.43 to C.46 inclusive) refers to the Shared Vision and Eco Towns PPS and supporting text to **Policy Bicester 1: North West Bicester Eco town.**

This report deals with each section and theme in turn and provides a summary of the progress in delivering the vision for the town. It follows a comprehensive review of each of the 80 objectives in the vision by the Eco Bicester Project team. Unlike the previous report, this review does not consider the main issues and priorities for taking forward the vision. However, the Board may feel that this is something that officers should look at.

- 2.5 This review has not looked at the delivery of the eco town standards in detail as it is too early in the project to fully assess the impact of the Shared Vision on the town as a whole. Following feedback from the Board in April 2012, the project team has looked to focus on the main objectives and report the findings succinctly in reviewing the Shared Vision. The previous 2012 review has been used as a baseline for the current review.
- 2.6 The Eco Bicester project demonstration phase has come to an end and it is now possible to look back on the four years since the eco towns announcement to measure successes and areas that are progressing less well. With the construction of the North West Bicester eco development imminent, the report focuses on work in the existing town while referencing some of the work that is going into the exemplar development and masterplanning.
- 2.7 Major changes to the town have taken place since the last review. Most noticeably, the town centre redevelopment has been completed with Pioneer Square opening in July 2013. This has been a significant step in delivering the vision for the town and contributes in a large way to the creation of a vibrant Bicester town centre encouraging people and business to locate and invest in the town. The associated access improvements along North Street, Field Street and St Johns Road have also had an impact on the accessibility of the town centre.
- 2.8 The Kingsmere housing development at South West Bicester is now well underway and a number of major applications have been submitted on sites around the town. These include the Graven Hill masterplan which has planning approval subject to completion of a planning legal agreement. The CDC "Build!" Project is actively pursuing its interest in the MOD Graven Hill site. Also, proposals for RAF Bicester are being developed following the acquisition of the site by Bicester Heritage in March 2013.
- 2.9 The town wide transition to a low carbon community is moving closer with projects such as the Bicester Green Deal having a positive effect on carbon reduction. This transition is difficult to quantify as there remains no accepted baseline information. However it is anticipated that the various Eco Bicester Projects will provide baseline information for monitoring performance as well as benefits to the town. These projects include:
 - The portfolio of demonstration projects including the deconstruction of the demonstration building
 - Continued promotion of Eco Bicester and demonstration projects
 - Community engagement through the demonstration building in Garth Park
 - Retrofitting firstly through the insulation scheme and more recently through the Bicester Green Deal Pilot
 - Progress in preparing masterplans for Bicester and North West Bicester

2.10 In terms of delivery, this report reviews work that is underway whilst the project is still in its early phases and delivery through the actions of external parties.

3. **Proposals**

Vision Statement: The Vision

- 3.1 As set out above, the new town centre improvements have been completed and made a huge contribution to the Shared Vision's delivery. This is demonstrated by the architects illustration on the first page of the document is now delivered on the ground turning the vision into a reality. It represents a significant investment in the town and will lead to a more vibrant town centre and stimulation of the night time economy through the leisure facilities provided by the cinema and restaurants. Planning for Phase 2 of the town centre redevelopment is underway and being led by the CDC Regeneration team. It includes a new civic building and possible hotel.
- 3.2 The preparation of the masterplan for NW Bicester has picked up again since April 2013 with a series of workshops and stakeholder engagement organised by A2 Dominion. The masterplan developers remain committed to the eco town principles and large scale zero carbon development. This is a nationally important project in showing the viability of sustainable development. Work is expected to commence of the first phase exemplar in late 2013. Work to progress the governance arrangements for the new community through the development of a local management organisation continues.
- 3.3 The retrofit programme for Bicester has delivered a successful insulation scheme (please refer to SDB paper dated January 2013) and Green Deal demonstration project with support from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) through the Bicester Green Deal. This will now be taken forward by the Green Deal Together programme the Community Interest Company (CIC) led by the National Energy Foundation (NEF). CDC's role will be to promote it locally.
- 3.4 Attracting inward investment – a significant amount of investment has been attracted to Bicester since the announcement of the North West Bicester eco town in 2009. Bicester Vision and the Cherwell Investment Partnership working with the CDC Economic Development officer, Invest in Oxfordshire, UKTI and the Local Enterprise Partnerships continue to develop opportunities for investment in the town. The Project Team continues to work with CDC Economic Development on the collation of information on inward investment into the town.
- 3.5 An Oxfordshire Green Construction Network is being established and is due to launch in late 2013. This will provide the platform for the green construction sector in Bicester to develop and attract further investment in green technologies.
- 3.6 Transport – the Eco Bicester Travel Behaviour Demonstration Project has included:
- The "Cycle for Bicester" scheme incorporating a cycling package comprising:
 - 20 bicycles available to loan
 - Free bike fixing sessions (approximately 30 bikes fixed at each session)
 - Additional cycle parking (town centre and Bicester North Station)
 - Minor changes to the cycling network including removal of barriers in Southwold and a cycle/pedestrian link (approximately 100m) adjacent to the Bure Park local centre west of the Banbury Road
- 3.7 The cycle loan scheme ran between March 2012 and November 2012 and it is understood approximately 50 bikes were loaned to local residents using the Demonstration Building as the

local facility for the scheme. Based on this take up, the scheme has continued to operate from March 2013 to November 2013 using the Bicester Green facilities as a collection point. It is understood that three bikes a month on average have been loaned to residents over the summer months (July to September) which is disappointing.

- 3.8 The town centre redevelopment has included works to improve the local highway network as part of the Oxfordshire County Council town centre access improvement scheme. Work is underway through the Bicester Masterplan, Cherwell Local Plan and Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan review looking at improvements to the Bicester transport issues and the highway network.
- 3.9 Health – a new community hospital is being built and due to open in July 2014.
- 3.10 Education – the primary school for the Phase 1 exemplar at NW Bicester is being procured and its delivery will be project managed by OCC. A review of education provision in the town is taking place this autumn and will help to inform future school provision. OCVC are also looking at the provision of a ‘studio’ school in the town, which would expand the educational offer at secondary level.
- 3.11 Leisure – a new cinema opened in the town centre as part of the town centre redevelopment and provides a leisure facility not previously available to local residents since the Regal on London Road closed. With it comes a number of new restaurants and shopping facilities.
- 3.12 Green infrastructure – the River Bure was de-culverted as part of the town centre redevelopment proposals and the North West Bicester Masterplan continues to develop proposals for the management of green infrastructure, biodiversity, water, flood and waste issues in an environmentally friendly way.
- 3.13 The following sections set out a summary of the review of each theme.

Community First

3.14 **Summary:**

- ***Various press releases and promotions***
- ***3 key messages from Strategic Delivery Board meetings communicated locally***
- ***Eco Bicester website and newsletter – increased numbers of searches and subscribers on mailing list***
- ***Demonstration Building in Garth Park – in process of being relocated to Warwickshire***
- ***Further development of community governance with partners as part of the emerging Local Management Organisation***
- ***Retrofitting – Eco Bicester insulation scheme had installed over 1,700 loft and cavity wall insulations when it closed in 2012 to be replaced by the Green Deal***
- ***Local Bicester Green Deal delivered 100 free green deal assessments and funded retrofits of 14 existing homes in Bicester with a further four commercial properties assessed and proposed for Green Deal type installations***
- ***Bicester Sustainability and Reuse centre – opened as Bicester Green in April 2013 with a new manager and volunteers now engaging with the local community and providing training***
- ***Grass Roots Bicester is operating as a Community Action Group and organised the Big Lunch in Sheep Street attended by around 3,000 local people and work such as the community orchard with approximately 50 local residents involved.***

- 3.15 This section focuses primarily on issues affecting the existing community and seeks to involve residents and businesses in developing the future of the town. It includes references to engagement and community governance including the potential ownership of community assets.

By Bicester for Bicester

- 3.16 There has been some progress on developing engagement and community liaison. However, since the closure of the demonstration building in Garth Park the Eco Bicester Community Liaison Officer has continued to maintain links through working from BTC and Bicester Green. The Eco Bicester Strategic Community Engagement Officer left the Project team in March 2012 and has not been replaced.
- 3.17 Demonstration Building - The Demonstration Building at the Garth closed in May 2012 and was a recognisable symbol of the Eco Bicester Project. Its contribution to the demonstration phase of the project was significant as reported to the Board in April 2013. Since the closure of the Demonstration Building, the Eco Bicester Community Liaison officer has moved back to the CDC offices in Banbury and the Eco Bicester Team no longer has an office in the town.
- 3.18 Progress in developing an approach to community governance continues and remains a key aspect of the delivery of the vision in terms of partnership working and development of Local Management Organisation.
- 3.19 In addition, the Eco Bicester website and newsletter continue to be updated and used to obtain the latest information on the project and other town wide initiatives. Over 300 contacts now regularly receive the quarterly newsletter and the mailing list continues to grow. In terms of social media, Eco Bicester has 525 followers on Twitter. Currently, Eco Bicester does not have a Facebook page.
- 3.20 The Community Action Group "Grassroots Bicester" continues its work in the town. It supports other groups such as the Bicester Green Gyms. A group has been set up to run the Langford Orchard as a community orchard to promote local food production in the heart of the town. GrassRoots Bicester has organised freecycling events and the Bicester Big Lunch in June 2013.
- 3.21 The Bicester Reuse and Sustainability Centre opened in April 2013 with a Centre Manager appointed to establish and develop the business.

Community First

- 3.22 The preparation of the Bicester Masterplan and Cherwell Local Plan has provided opportunities for people to have a say in the future of the town. Together with the Local Plan, the Bicester Masterplan establishes the long term vision for the town. The strategic objectives in the Bicester Masterplan build upon the One Shared Vision. Similarly the Cherwell Local Plan has been guided by the Shared Vision. The plans for the town demonstrate an holistic approach to development as advocated in the Shared Vision. Work on community facilities is progressing as part of the new development proposals.

Retrofitting for a Low Carbon Economy

- 3.23 The retrofit programme has delivered energy efficiency measures across the existing housing stock in the town. There remains an aspiration to install more solar panels on the roofs of Bicester but as yet a delivery mechanism has not been established. A number of ideas are

currently being considered including a community photovoltaic project similar to that in Oxford. The Green Deal remains in its early phases of implementation with mixed success. The Bicester Green Deal pilot has demonstrated the interest in improving the energy efficiency of properties in Bicester but also the lack of an attractive package through the current Green Deal scheme. This work will continue as part of the Green Deal Together CIC of which CDC is a founding member. The environmental charity, BioRegional continues to support CDC in its retrofitting programme and funding opportunities for retrofit projects such as the refurbishment of The Garth.

- 3.24 In terms of increased water efficiency, this is a longer term goal and CDC is engaging with the local utility company, Thames Water on this matter.
- 3.25 The OxOnline Broadband Project has become the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire Project delivering broadband across the County by 2015. It is not expected to significantly affect broadband speeds in Bicester and it remains unclear what support will be available to meet Bicester's aspirations.

Exacting eco standards for new development

- 3.26 The phase 1 development at NW Bicester is expected to begin construction in late 2013 (A2 Dominion to provide verbal update at the meeting). The first phase will meet the exacting standards identified and be a national exemplar of sustainable development. The scheme has been awarded CEEQUAL excellent with the highest score nationally.

Community infrastructure and facilities

- 3.27 Again, the town centre redevelopment has provided important facilities for the town and these will be enhanced by the proposals for Phase 2 of the redevelopment which include a civic building and library.
- 3.28 Once underway, the NW Bicester eco development will lead the way in delivering the aspirations for high quality community facilities set out in the Shared Vision. Detailed proposals for a local centre including provision of a community building will be progressed as the planning permission is implemented at NW Bicester.
- 3.29 A Sports Village will provide local sports and leisure facilities the South West Bicester (Kingsmere) development and the Community Hospital is under construction.
- 3.30 The Local Plan will also be supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Economy

- **Economic Strategy and baseline for NW Bicester Masterplan prepared**
- **Consultation Draft Bicester Masterplan identifies a comprehensive range of employment opportunities**
- **The Cherwell Local Plan sets out policies for expanding the Bicester economy**
- **Eco Business Centre Issues and Options Appraisal completed (see separate report and presentation to the Board)**
- **Bicester Job Club continues to provide opportunities for job seekers looking to find training and employment**
- Bicester Vision is prioritising resources to allow it to meet the needs and aspirations of the wider business community of Bicester at a time when major developments are beginning to commence in the town. Its three priorities are: 1.

To Work with Local Government, bringing the local government together with businesses; 2. To support businesses new and existing ones, by acting as a catalyst of information and aid and 3. To Market Bicester as the place to live and work, providing a new Bicester Narrative to stakeholders who are interested in Bicester in these very exciting times.

Employment opportunities

- 3.31 Again, employment opportunities are included in the masterplan for Bicester as a whole as well as for the eco development at NW Bicester. The economic strategy being prepared in support of the masterplan for NW Bicester identifies employment opportunities including proposals for an Eco Business Park at NW Bicester to promote innovation and the development of an environmental goods and services sector. Eco Innovation is also supported by the Bicester Chamber of Commerce and Bicester Vision.
- 3.32 As with other sections of the Vision there is a lot of aspirational statement in the economy section but there is already much work being carried out led by CDC Economic Development, the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) for Oxfordshire and the South East Midlands. Bicester is identified as a priority for the Oxfordshire LEP and the South East Midlands LEP is committed to supporting economic growth in Bicester as part of the wider delivery of a low carbon economy. The Project Team continues to provide regular updates to the Board on implementing the various employment strategies for Bicester.

Sustainable Travel to Work

- 3.33 The Travel Behaviour Demonstration Project is continues to promote walking and cycling. I think we need to say a bit more ref bike fix and
- 3.34 Over 50 people took part in the cycle loan and training scheme, with very positive feedback.
- 3.35 The capital improvements funded by the Eco Bicester Project included the installation of additional cycle parking in the town centre and at Bicester North Station, some minor improvements to the cycling network in Southwold and the construction of the Bure Park link – a small but important missing link in the network on the Banbury Road which has been well received. Schemes were drawn up for Buckingham Road, Banbury Road and Churchill Road but were put on hold while the town centre access improvements were being designed and implemented. Now that the town centre works are completed it is timely to review the schemes that were put on hold and confirm the next phase of expenditure.
- 3.36 Also rail proposals for the town are being implemented and progressed with work underway on the first phase of the East West Rail project.
- 3.37 A2 Dominion's Bike Day was a huge success in August with approximately 300 people attending.
- 3.38 The Bicester Green project continues to develop the sustainability culture in the town and is establishing itself as a successful centre. For example it is now selling cycles that have been fixed and generating an income.

Education, Skills and Training

- 3.39 A proposal for a Studio School is progressing. The Project Team continues to liaise with the Construction Futures with a view to securing training and employment on large scale developments in the town. A2 Dominion is committed to providing apprenticeships as part of the development at NW Bicester.

Employment Space

- 3.40 The Cherwell Local Plan and Bicester Masterplan identify significant areas of employment land over the Local Plan period. In addition, the Local Plan evidence base includes an Economic Analysis (August 2012) published since the last review of the Shared Vision. The Bicester Business Park on the A41 to the south west of Bicester remains undeveloped although the planning permission for the relocation of the Tesco superstore will deliver some of the enabling works to provide access to the site. The proposed Eco Business Centre at NW Bicester will provide the opportunity to provide office and workshop space for businesses.

Transport

Summary:

- **Travel Behaviour Demonstration Project continuing**
- **Local Plan and Bicester Masterplan progressing including a movement strategy and transport modelling**
- **Transport proposals for NW Bicester are continuing to be developed as part of the masterplanning process**
- **Bicester Bike Day 2013 – Second event organised by A2 Dominion**

- 3.41 The Travel Behaviour project continues with funding for minor infrastructure improvements to promote walking and cycling. Parts of the Shared Vision continue to be delivered through the NW Bicester eco development with work being done to promote walking, cycling and public transport. The Project Team continues to work with the applicants and developers to ensure opportunities for increased walking and cycling are maximised.
- 3.42 A2Dominion and its transport consultants are working with the County Council, Eco Bicester Project team and stakeholders to prepare a transport assessment for the NW Bicester Masterplan. The impact of East West Rail is being looked at by the County Council including the London Road rail crossing.
- 3.43 Following the 2013 Bicester Bike Day organised by A2 Dominion in August, the Eco Bicester website is being updated and the interactive mapping page allows users can identify the best cycle routes.

Travel Planning

- 3.44 The Government's Door to Door Strategy was published in March 2013 and sets out its vision for integrated sustainable transport. Cycling has risen up the political agenda and the opportunity to deliver cycling initiatives in the town remains. However, travel planning schemes and initiatives are not well progressed or developed in the town.
- 3.45 Infrastructure to support electric vehicles in Bicester has been installed in the station car parks and the new town centre car park.

Improvements to the existing transport network

- 3.46 The main improvements have been those delivered by the County Council in the town centre and some minor changes to cycling routes.

Environmental Sustainability and Infrastructure

Summary

- **Many of the objectives are still to be delivered although progress has been made**
- **The NW Bicester eco development is leading the way in terms of biodiversity, water use, flood risk, waste and energy**
- **The Bicester Masterplan incorporates some of the Shared Vision's aims and aspirations for open space and green infrastructure**
- **The Cherwell Local Plan incorporates elements of the Shared Vision in its policies**

- 3.47 This sections sets out the progress in delivering the Shared Vision's aims and aspirations for environmental sustainability including energy, waste, water, open space and biodiversity. This underpins the Shared Vision in terms of delivery sustainable development. Some of its objectives are being delivered through the NW Bicester development. The Bicester Masterplan looks to include some of these objectives across the whole town. Solutions can be tested at NW Bicester and some small contributions can be made towards green space and biodiversity, but town wide solutions need to be developed, learning from the work at NW Bicester and capitalising on some of the provision there.

- 3.48 A Bicester Environmental Baseline Report was produced in September 2013 as part of the Local Plan evidence base. It includes information on Bicester's environmental assets, ecological habitats, biodiversity and open spaces. It complements the Shared Vision.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure

- 3.49 Approximately 18 months after the first review of the Shared Vision the situation for open space and green infrastructure remains little changed although significant new green space is proposed at Graven Hill, NW Bicester and SW Bicester phase 2. SW Bicester is under construction with green infrastructure going in advance of the wider development and incorporating a network of green space.

- 3.50 A new burial ground site has not been identified and the search for a suitable site continues.

- 3.51 Policy ESD 18 of the Cherwell Local Plan refers to Green Infrastructure and states that all strategic development sites will be required to provide and link to green infrastructure and the key open space components of existing green infrastructure in Bicester is shown on the Bicester town map. Green buffers around the town are also shown on the Local Plan maps and replicated in the Bicester Masterplan. The masterplan identifies a shortage of approximately 42 hectares of open space, sports provision and amenity land in Bicester.

Biodiversity

- 3.52 The masterplanning process for NW Bicester is considering the need for a net gain in biodiversity on the eco development site. NW Bicester plans show the required 40% green space. Proposals for a community woodland at SW Bicester are now included in the Local Plan Policy for SW Bicester Phase 2.

Water Use and and Flood Risk

- 3.53 A policy (ESD8) on water resources is now included in the Local Plan as is a policy on Flood Risk Management (ESD6).

Waste and Energy

- 3.54 The project team continues to work with BioRegional to develop approaches to waste and energy. For example, the feasibility of a Bicester connection from the new energy from waste plant at Ardley continues to be progressed as part of a potential application for funding to the Government's £6million Renewable Heat Networks fund.
- 3.55 Cherwell District Council's recycling rate remains one of the highest performing in the country. The Bicester Reuse and Sustainability Centre opened in April 2013.

4. Summary and Conclusions

- 4.1 In terms of delivering the One Shared Vision there has been some progress over the last 18 months or so. Although not directly part of the Shared Vision, the development of a masterplan for Bicester and Cherwell Local Plan has been a significant step in the delivery of the Vision. The baseline was set out in the previous review of the Shared Vision. The role of the Eco Bicester One Shared Vision remains to provide the long term aims and aspirations for the town. Consultation on Bicester Masterplan is likely to take place in the new year with the aim for it to be adopted as SPD following the adoption of the Local Plan.
- 4.2 Particular progress has been made to progress plans and policies for Bicester in line with the Eco Bicester programme. The Bicester Masterplan and Cherwell Local Plan are key to the delivery of the Shared Vision, through the embedding of the requirements in planning policy, and therefore it is important that they reflect the objectives of the Shared Vision which underpin them. In the short term, the North West Bicester Masterplan will continue to be a significant area of work for the project team.
- 4.3 As with the first review findings, some areas of the Vision have progressed further than others reflecting the priorities of the project and ongoing projects. Other aims are more ambitious and have long timescales.
- 4.4 The work on community governance is making good progress and is highlighted as a success of the project. The emerging stage 1 of the LMO (Interim Management Body) has progressed and agreed terms of reference as the platform for further development.
- 4.5 Positive and significant stakeholder involvement led by A2 Dominion is being used to develop the masterplan.
- 4.6 Since the delivery of the demonstration projects phase of the project, there has been some progress against the aims of the Shared Vision. In some cases this has been as a result of the work of the Board such as providing encouragement to the Eco Bicester Project Team to explore and submit successful bids to the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) and other bodies, for initiatives which complement Eco Bicester (these include Design for Future Climate, High Density PV Smart Power, Innovative Refurbishment of the Garth and the Post Occupancy Evaluation of Bryan House).
- 4.7 In other cases this has been the result of work that was already underway such as Initiating and supporting the examination of innovative approaches which complement the Eco Town

development. The Shared Vision continues to have an important role in setting the direction of the town as it continues to grow.

5. Recommendations

The Board is recommended to:

- (i) Note the progress that has been made against the delivery of the Shared Vision
- (ii) Commit to work towards progressing the aims of the Shared Vision
- (iii) Note the preparation of the Bicester Masterplan and NW Bicester Masterplan
- (iv) Continue to review the Shared Vision every one to two years with the next report presented to the Board in 2015.