

## Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

<b>Date of meeting: 23 January 2014</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM NO:</b>  <b>7</b>
<b>Report title: Review of first year of Bicester Green – Centre for Sustainability, Skills and Second Hand Goods</b>	
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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides a review of the first year of Bicester Green, Centre for Sustainability, Skills and Second Hand Stuff

### 2. 2013 Summary

- 2.1 Since the initial 12 months seed funding for project manager Cliff Jordan ended in April, Bicester Green has secured premises (on the McKay's Trading estate) and as of April 15<sup>th</sup> employed Centre Manager Emma Gordon, to manage operations. The Centre was officially launched on the 7<sup>th</sup> June. Ms Gordon is now the sole employee, as Cliff Jordan stepped down from his position in October.
- 2.2 Bicester Green has so far recruited a total of 29 volunteers, many of whom volunteer regularly from anywhere between 2 to 16 hours per week. It currently hosts between 16 and 18 volunteers each week. The sum total of volunteer hours recorded between July and December 2013 totalled 2051 hours. The demographic of volunteers is broad and includes men, women and youngsters from 16 all the way up to retirees. Some are on benefits due to injury or illness, some are in the process of finding work and one volunteer is both deaf and mute. This cross section is testament to the Centres' broad appeal across the community.
- 2.3 Bicester Greens' primary activities have been to engage volunteers in the repair of three main waste streams: bikes, furniture & portable electrical items. Through the resale of these repaired items the Centre generated revenue of £4909 up to December 2013. Breakdown; furniture £1400, bikes £2989 and electrical items £504. These figures are much lower than had been anticipated in the business plan.

### 3. More than just a repair centre.

Bicester Green was set up to be much more than just a repair centre. Its ambition is also to be a centre for skills and for sustainability.

#### Training the community

- 3.1 17 separate training sessions have been hosted at Bicester Green, of which all, except 3 were organised and delivered in-house, for either the public or the volunteers. These included a successful schedule called Green Tuesdays, which offered either cycle repair or up-cycling evening workshops. The Spring 2014 Green Tuesdays schedule is already in the pipeline, they

include Ladies DIY courses and Cycle Confidence bike tours. Bicester Green will hold weekly or fortnightly training sessions on various areas of repair, with local tradesmen invited to help run the training sessions. We aim to become an inter-generational knowledge bank for practical skills. These knowledge transfer sessions occur daily at the centre.

### 3.2 Communal Meeting Space

The meeting room area has been host to numerous meetings both for clients in a board room style or for planning community events such as The Big Lunch, Bicester Bike and Family Fun Day, The Green Deal drop-in sessions, as well as serving as the base for local community action group Grassroots Bicester's monthly meetings. There are plans for both IT and craft based training sessions to also be held in this space.

### 3.3 Community Resources.

The Centre has served as the base for a number of free community resources. The public can borrow Energy Monitors from the centre. It hosted the Cycle for Bicester free bike loan scheme over the summer and the Centre is currently in negotiations with Oxfordshire County Council to acquire some of the bicycle fleet to continue to offer cheap bike loans as well as a series of other bike related public activities. Bicester Green is also due to start building and subsequently hosting the Cherwell Arts bike trailer community kiosk; another free resource to be loaned out to local groups for community events.

### 3.4 Energy and waste reduction

Through the primary activities of the Centre 2.6 tonnes of waste have been diverted from landfill in 6 months. These savings are two fold when it is considered that the repaired item often replaces the need for a new one. Bicester Green has agreements with both Sanctuary Housing and the Ardley Household Waste Recycling Centre to collect repairable and reusable furniture for redistribution, thus providing affordable furniture to low income families. Bicester Green is also well know in the surrounding area for its activities and regularly gets invited to showcase its work and repair techniques at various events, such as electrical repair and PAT testing at both local Freecycle events and a Swap & Fix event in Oxford. We are also invited to an upcoming Re-fashion event in February showcasing upholstery using salvaged denim fabrics.

### 3.5 Challenges.

Six months of trading has provided a greater understanding of the Centre's current delivery model:

- A) Working with volunteers from all walks of life - An enterprise that relies on revenue from sales of repaired goods entirely may not be able to afford to host and steadily train those who are learning or in particular have special needs. This training takes time, as does the related repair work. To continue to do this work we need additional external funding.
- B) Items beyond economic repair – As a new enterprise it took us time to ascertain which items were indeed beyond economic repair. We have refined our focus to select streams that not only can be fixed, but that people are also prepared to buy.
- C) Starting from scratch and gleaning a workshop – Almost the entire workshop was either gleaned or donated from the surplus of Bicester's garages and offices. This method of setting up meant we largely underspent our predicted set up funds. However, it also meant that it took us longer to begin trading and generate income.
- D) Space – Doing three types of repair in a single workshop has been difficult. There are plans, but not funds, for a mezzanine to expand the workshop area and thus productivity.

### 3.6 Further support

In the space of two years, Bicester Green has progressed from an initial feasibility study to a live project that has secured premises, a centre manager and has been trading for six months. The centre has been embraced by the local community and already has more than 2,000 volunteer hours worked. Whilst we've demonstrated our ability to source, repair and re-sell goods, at present this income alone is insufficient to make us self sustaining. Continuing to serve the local community beyond the next two to three months will require additional funds. We have £11,100 remaining revenue funding, whilst our expenses currently average at £4200 per month, of which 81% accounts for fixed costs of rent & utilities [23%], salaries [51%] and insurances [7%].

3.7 Members of the Strategic Delivery Board are asked to recognise our need for further funding support and to assist Bicester Green in identifying and securing funds in order to continue to build this unique and popular community project. There are a number of avenues that we are pursuing at present, we have submitted for grant funding to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and are initiating talks for potential partnership projects with Viridor, Bicester Village and A2Dominion.

3.8 Bicester Green needs £20,500 in order to continue for another 6 months, and £41,000 for another year.  
An additional investment of £8,000 would fund the construction of a mezzanine to increase floor space and consequently our productivity. This would allow us to improve training and the through put of repairs.

## 4. **Recommendations**

1. That the Board note the valuable contribution of Bicester Green in providing a resource for Bicester, supporting volunteers and reducing waste;
2. That the Strategic Delivery Board recognises the need for further funding support for Bicester Green and helps the project develop and secure links with other potential funders and/or opportunities for premises free of charge.

Link to promotional video for Bicester Green: <http://vimeo.com/81188100>  
[www.bicestergreen.org.uk](http://www.bicestergreen.org.uk)