

Cherwell District Council

Executive

5 October 2015

Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy

Report of Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy

This report is public

Purpose of report

This report seeks the Executive's endorsement and support for the Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy as the Council's commitment to sustainable transport in the town recognising its role in accommodating growth and integrating new and existing neighbourhoods.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To consider and note the Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy.
- 1.2 To endorse the Strategy's vision and principles.
- 1.3 To support the Strategy as the basis of further work to inform Part 2 of the Cherwell Local Plan, the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan and other documents.
- 1.4 To note the next steps required to develop an action plan to deliver priorities in the short, medium and long term as schemes and funding opportunities are progressed.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Bicester is located in a highly accessible and sustainable location with excellent links to the motorway network and rail connections to major city destinations. Bus routes linking Bicester to Oxford and Cambridge are good with local bus services serving the residential areas surrounding the town. It is also relatively flat making it easily accessible on foot and bicycle. Given the topography of the town there is potential to increase the number of trips made by sustainable transport through relatively small scale investment in the walking and cycling network.
- 2.2 The Infrastructure Act 2015 sets out the Government's ambitions for a new transport system. For the first time the Secretary of State for Transport will be

required by law to set out a strategy for cycling and walking infrastructure and importantly the funding provided to meet it. The Act includes a walking and cycling investment strategy to ensure active travel is considered as a priority area for investment.

- 2.3 The Government announced its response to the consultation on its Cycling Delivery Plan in March 2015, following the inclusion of cycling and walking investment plans in the Infrastructure Act. Recent statistics, based on results from the Active People Survey (APS) by Sport England, show that there have been significant increases in the number of people walking and cycling every week in many areas, with 47% of people in England walking at least 5 times a week and 3% cycling at least 5 times a week (Reference: Local Area Walking and Cycling Statistics 2013/2014, Department for Transport).
- 2.3 The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 was formally adopted by Cherwell District Council on 20th July 2015. The Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy (STS) will inform Part 2 of the Local Plan and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 2.4 “*Connecting Oxfordshire*”, Local Transport Plan 2015 – 2031 (LTP4), was adopted by Oxfordshire County Council’s Cabinet on 8th September 2015. It provides a comprehensive policy and strategy framework to maximise the transport opportunities for Oxfordshire. It was developed in close partnership with internal and external Stakeholders, including the Local Enterprise Partnership, District Councils and Members.
- 2.5 The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership’s (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) is supported by the policies and objectives of the LTP4. It includes the transport priorities within Bicester providing the “connectivity infrastructure” to tackle the challenges in the Bicester Movement Study. In terms of sustainable transport, a Walking and Cycling Connectivity Project will have a role in accommodating growth and is anticipated to create 100 construction jobs and a Gross Added Value (GVA) of £3.9 million.
- 2.5 The Eco Bicester One Shared Vision (December 2010) sets out the aims and aspirations for transport and movement within the town. It encourages walking and cycling as the first choice of travel to: improve health; reduce carbon emissions and improve the quality of the environment. The Shared Vision underpins the Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy and Local Transport Plan Bicester Area Strategy.
- 2.6 The transport studies for Bicester are set out below and provide baseline information for the STS:
 - i. Bicester Bus Movement Study (2009)
 - ii. Draft Bicester Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy (2009)
 - iii. Baseline Travel Behaviour Survey (2010 published 2011)
 - iv. Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP3) (2012)
 - v. Bicester Movement Study (2013)
 - vi. Garden Town Transport feasibility study (summer 2015)
- 2.7 The Bicester Movement Study forms part of the Cherwell Local Plan evidence base. The Bicester Transport Model used in the Study showed that the network was generally operating well around the town. It shows a few specific and localised

areas of congestion or delay, specifically the A41 to the south east of the town and the central corridor (Kings End/Queens Avenue section to the junction of Banbury and Buckingham Road).

- 2.8 Eco-towns funding has been used to deliver sustainable transport measures in Bicester since the travel behaviour project in 2010. Some capital funding remains in the budget (approximately £500,000 – five hundred thousand pounds). Funding has also been committed to a wayfinding project. In addition, some funding for sustainable transport has been secured through the exemplar application at North West Bicester and will be sought from other developments as they come forward in and around the town.
- 2.8 More recently, funding has become available through the Oxfordshire LEP Local Growth Fund (LGF). In May 2015 a joint funding bid for a Bicester Cycling and Walking Connectivity Project was submitted by Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council seeking funding to bring forward walking and cycling improvements for key routes including Market Square, providing links between residential and employment areas and delivering the objectives of the Oxfordshire SEP. A decision on the funding is expected later this year.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 Cherwell District Council commissioned the Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy (STS) in April 2014 following previous transport studies for the town to support the eco-town proposals and the Cherwell Local Plan. The Brief for the commission was to ensure exemplary and innovative approaches to sustainable transport in Bicester applying a strong vision and principles to best practice. Officers and Members have been involved in the Strategy's preparation most recently at a workshop in September 2014.
- 3.2 The main issues in this report on the Bicester Sustainable Transport Project are summarised below and described in more detail in the following section:
- i. It helps Cherwell District Council (CDC) to achieve fine grain of integration between existing and proposed new neighbourhoods through policies for walking, cycling and bus travel;
 - ii. The study provides detailed guidance for Development Management.
 - iii. The study will sit alongside and help inform the further refinement of the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) led LTP4, adding detail to the Bicester Area Strategy and informing the next wave of transport proposals on peripheral routes, which will be set by Cherwell Local Plan Part 2.
 - iv. The study will be used in informing the Local Plan part 2, especially in contributing to the definition of the new town centre boundary as the town grows, by ensuring that key transport factors are taking into account.
 - v. The STS includes a delivery plan and in terms of next steps, an action plan, broken down into short term, medium and long term steps, will need to be developed and aligned with the Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).

Integration

- 3.3 In planning Bicester's future growth, it is recognised that transport has a significant contribution to the quality of the environment as development comes forward. The STS helps CDC to achieve high quality environments by defining the fine grain of the existing transport network and identifying opportunities for integration between existing and proposed new neighbourhoods. It does this through sustainable transport principles and policies for walking, cycling and bus travel.
- 3.4 The STS will contribute to the creation of more attractive places through improved connections for pedestrians and cyclists making Bicester a more attractive place to live, work and visit. For example, the proposals for the Market Square, Manorsfield Road and Causeway will open up the town centre making it more accessible to people and encouraging visitors to spend more time in the town, increasing footfall and spending in this location. The environment of the town will be enhanced, improving quality of life and attracting investment in the town.
- 3.5 A comprehensive network of safe and attractive footpaths and cycleways will allow the new development to integrate with the existing town. Furthermore, good links to the town's two stations will be provided to complement the investment in the rail infrastructure as part of the East-West Rail project and improvements to the rail links to major cities.

Development Management

- 3.6 The sustainable transport vision for Bicester is to create a network of transport infrastructure and services that make it easy and attractive to travel by sustainable means. Seven principles (Sustainable, Resilient, Incremental, Modal Priorities, Spatial Hierarchy of Routes, High Quality and Integrated) support the vision. These principles will be applied to detailed planning proposals in the determination of planning applications through the Council's Development Management function. The study provides detailed guidance for new residential streets in housing growth areas where there is the potential to build in a high quality cycle network from the start. As such it will assist Development Management in the determination of planning proposals.
- 3.7 The principles provide a high level framework for the strategy which will be used to guide detailed planning proposals through the development management process. The strategy provides a comprehensive review of the existing network and sets out an approach to deliver improvements to the future network. It focusses work on sustainable travel and provides an assessment of the opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport.

Local Transport Plan 4

- 3.8 The study sits alongside and help inform the further refinement of the OCC led LTP4, as it helps to flesh it out and inform the next wave of transport proposals on peripheral routes, which will be set by Cherwell Local Plan part 2.

Cherwell Local Plan Part 2

- 3.9 The study informs Local Plan Part 2 especially in contributing to the definition of the new town centre boundary as the town grows, by ensuring that key transport factors are taken into account. The strategy sets out potential routing improvements which will feed in to the Cherwell Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan. It builds on the Eco Bicester One Shared Vision sustainable vision for the town as a whole. The positive policies and objectives in the Cherwell Local Plan (Policy SLE4 – Improved transport and connections) are supported by the STS.

Delivery Plan

- 3.10 The Delivery Plan identifies areas to prioritise which could link with further work being carried out as part of the Garden Town feasibility studies. This work aims to identify areas, for example green space with the potential to create attractive places and integrate the proposed developments. In delivering the strategy, the priority will be to focus on the improvements to radial routes, some of which may be delivered through development, funding from the Local Enterprise Partnerships and remaining eco-town funds. For example, improvements to the Banbury Road and Middleton Stoney Road for walking and cycling are being progressed as part of the proposals for the eco-town.
- 3.11 The Delivery Plan has been prepared in consultation with officers and provides an indication of how the Strategy could be implemented. It sets out the priorities, responsibilities, delivery partners, potential funding sources including developer contributions and indicative capital costs of infrastructure improvements. The STS Delivery Plan has been progressed as far as it can by the transport consultants and officers of the Bicester Delivery Team and Oxfordshire County Council continue to work on an implementation plan based on the STS Delivery Plan and LTP4 to roll-out a programme of sustainable transport measures.
- 3.12 Further work is required to ensure consistency with the Local Transport Plan and development schemes as they come forward. However there is uncertainty about the delivery of some of the schemes due to a lack of funding opportunities. This is a particular issue for the Smarter Choices initiatives requiring a dedicated officer resource which is currently unavailable to implement this. The Delivery Plan priorities are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Sustainable Transport Strategy Delivery Plan summary and priorities

Quick wins (0-2 years)	Short term (0-5 years)	Medium Term (5-10 years)	Long Term (10-15 years)
Removing barriers along existing cycleways	North West Bicester exemplar proposals including improvements to Banbury Road	Upgrading the existing network to connect routes and integrate with new development	Multi modal transport interchanges at bus and rail stations
Increase cycling parking	Middleton Stoney Road	Walking and cycling	Walking and cycling

	walking and cycling improvements	improvements to link new developments	improvements to link new developments
Removing Traffic Regulation Order in Sheep Street and Bure Park Railway tunnel	Peripheral route improvements	Peripheral route improvements	Peripheral route improvements
Buckingham Road walking and cycling improvements	Town centre improvements	Market Square improvements	Town centre improvements

Principles and Vision

3.13 The seven principles that underpin the Strategy are that it is:

- i. Sustainable;
- ii. Resilient;
- iii. Incremental;
- iv. Prioritises modes;
- v. Sets out a spatial route hierarchy;
- vi. High quality and
- vii. Integrated.

3.14 These principles will be critical to the successful delivery of the project. In terms of next steps, the Council will develop an action plan to deliver the Strategy over the next 20 years. The action plan will set out and break down the elements of the STS into immediate priorities followed by short term (up to five years), medium (five to 10 years) and long term (over 10 years) infrastructure project and smart travel initiatives. It will build on earlier successes and deliver town-wide transport improvements over the next 20 years, supporting Oxfordshire County Council's Bicester Area Strategy in the Local Transport Plan.

Walking and Cycling Network

3.15 The overall approach to defining, designing and implementing the network is based on guidance in the "Handbook for Cycle Friendly Design" (April 2014) published by Sustrans. The Core Principles for the network in Bicester are as follows:

3.15.1 *Coherence*

Link all potential origins and destinations, with well located cycle lanes;
 Continuous, recognisable and properly signed;
 Offer consistent standard of protection throughout

3.15.2 *Directness*

Based on desire lines
 Result in minimal detours or delays
 Provide a positive advantage in terms of directness and priority over motor traffic

3.15.3 *Safety*

Safe and perceived as safe

Provide personal security

Limit conflict between cyclists and pedestrians and other vehicles

3.15.4 *Comfort*

Smooth, non-slip surfaces, well maintained, drained and free of debris

Sufficient width for the level of use

Enable cyclists to maintain momentum, with easy gradients

3.15.5 *Attractiveness*

Attractive and interesting

Integrate with and complement their surroundings

Contribute to good urban design

3.16 Improving walking and cycling infrastructure and the promotion of sustainable transport options will be critical to the success of the strategy which priorities and recommends network improvements.

3.17 Key points considered in the future movement strategy set out in the STS are as follows:

Walking and cycling network and core principles

3.17.1 The walking and cycling network is divided into primary and secondary routes, and is based on the core principles of **coherence, directness, safety, comfort and attractiveness**. The base network of existing facilities requires upgrading in order to fulfil these principles, set out in a comprehensive schedule of improvements. The focus for improvements will be to crossing facilities at radial distributor roads and minor residential roads.

Town centre improvements

3.17.2 In the town centre, the movement of through traffic needs to be addressed with the Strategy recommending restricted access and lowering traffic speeds.

Changes in the town centre would allow the retail centre of Bicester to expand, in tandem with the town's wider expansion.

Market Square

3.17.3 Market Square presents a particular opportunity. It is currently undervalued and dominated by parking and a one-way traffic gyratory. The strategy identifies the opportunities that arise from measures to pedestrianise the northern and eastern sides of the Square as well as the lower section of the Causeway.

In the longer term, the opportunity for through traffic to be restricted in Market Square is identified. If this was to be implemented only buses, taxis and cycles would be able to access Market Square between the hours of 7am and 7pm.

3.17.4 The STS suggests gradual implementation, supported by the servicing and deliveries and car parking strategy to ensure its successful operation.

Car parking

3.17.5 Currently, Bicester town centre has approximately 35,000 sq. metres of retail floorspace. 1,160 car parking spaces are provided, or one car parking space per 30 sq. metres of retail space. The strategy looks at the potential for the retail space and parking provision to increase with the town's expansion. The STS suggests additional provision could be provided by development on the site of the Claremont car park - forming a retail anchor to the south east of Market Square, which would mirror the retail anchor of Sainsbury's/Vue to the north west. This could increase retail space in the town to approximately 45,000 sq. metres, and car parking provision to approximately 1,250 spaces.

Electric and Ultra Low Emission Vehicles

3.17.6 Even with sustainable transport gains, the modal share for car driving for Bicester would still be 60%. The use of electric and Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) for these trips would make these car trips more sustainable. There is currently a high level of funding available for this, and ULEV are also more pleasant and healthy in terms of air pollution and noise levels. The STS recommends strategic placement of electric charge points and an electric car club in order to reduce emissions and increase capacity on the network.

Infrastructure improvements and behaviour change

3.17.7 Infrastructure improvements are critical to creating an environment where sustainable travel is the most popular choice, but this will be most effective when supported by the management and implementation of a smarter choices and active travel programme, funded and staffed appropriately. In a town the size of Bicester it is likely that no more than two full time project officers would be required to deliver a smarter choices and active travel programme at its peak with additional resource commissioned for specific schemes for example personal travel planning.

3.17.8 Proposed measures in the STS include travel awareness campaigns, a sustainable travel roadshow, work with rail stations, sustainable transport hubs, workplace engagement, a commuter challenge, school engagement, residential personalised travel planning and community street design.

Modal Shift – increasing walking and cycling

3.17.9 The STS states: *“The first phase of the Eco development, the Exemplar, has identified a target for the reduction in journeys made by car from 69% to 50% and eventually 40%. A 19% reduction is ambitious in comparison to the 7-9% reported in the Sustainable Travel Towns. However, with high levels of investment in infrastructure together with an integrated programme of Smarter Choices, a 19% reduction is considered achievable for all new development and can be considered aspirational in terms of the whole town.”* The statement above outlines the scale of the challenge ahead in delivering the cycling and walking objectives for Bicester.

Public transport connections and improvements

3.17.10 Public transport connections and improvements help maintain Bicester's role as a market town and as a service centre for the surrounding area. They support

Bicester's location at the head of the Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine. The proposed growth of the town provides further opportunities for enhanced public transport infrastructure and services in the town. This is described in some detail in the sections on bus and rail in the future movement strategy.

- 3.17.11 The strategy proposes interchange hubs at the two stations, encouraging multi-modal journeys. Bus provision is made legible by separating out longer distance and town services. A local retail relay route is established along the main spine (connecting also the new Park and Ride to the south), with all other town services passing through the town centre bus station which is enhanced to form the major interchange hub. These changes would be phased and all new bus stock would be accessible, low carbon and have ITSO (smart ticket) compliant readers.

London Road rail crossing

- 3.17.12 The potential closure of London Road level crossing is identified in the STS as a major concern because of its impact on bus services, potentially cutting off Langford Village, Graven Hill and East Bicester from the town centre. While final decisions have not been taken, were this to occur, it would be a major constraint on the network requiring attention. OCC is looking at the feasibility of an all modes crossing of the railway at this location with a preferred scheme to be identified.

Central corridor – recommended improvements

- 3.17.13 Previous studies including the Bicester Integrated Transport and Land Use Study (2009) and Bicester Movement Study (2013) have recognised that there is a need to reduce through traffic in the town centre particularly along the route between the Buckingham Road (A421) and Oxford Road (A41). Town centre highway improvements in 2012 have altered some of the junctions along the central corridor route and further improvements will be considered as part of Policy BIC2 in LTP4.
- 3.17.14 As part of the STS detailed design proposals for the central corridor along the Buckingham Road and Oxford Road north-south axis have been prepared by Sustrans in consultation with officers of the OCC. This was considered to have the greatest impact on reducing through traffic along this route and providing better facilities for walking and cycling linking to the town centre.
- 3.17.15 The proposals for the central corridor in the strategy follow the general approach for walking and cycling to be segregated as far as possible along the radial distributor routes in the town. Design proposals prepared by Sustrans as a detailed scheme to promote walking and cycling are included.

Funding

- 3.17.16 More detail is required to turn the delivery plan into a robust framework for bringing forward schemes and prioritising improvement to implement the strategy. The immediate priorities have been identified as quick wins with a phased approach to delivery over the next 20 years as the town continues to grow and new developments are progressed. Funding will be required to secure the delivery of the STS, with the sustainable transport projects being considered as part of the Cherwell Community Infrastructure Levy and opportunities as part of a Regional

Growth Fund package. Garden Town funding streams may also provide a source of funding.

Additional Benefits

- 3.18 The STS supports the objectives of reducing carbon emissions from transport, improving air quality with associated health benefits, increasing capacity on the road network and promoting sustainable lifestyles through active and healthy travel options. It supports Garden Town principles relating to integrated and accessible transport as set out by the Town and Country Planning Association in April 2014. These state that walking, cycling and public transport should be the most attractive form of transport in a Garden Town.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The Bicester STS is a key document in supporting improvements to the Bicester transport network. It reviews and summarises the policy context and best practice from the UK and Europe. The vision and principles support the shift to more sustainable travel in the future providing a framework for infrastructure improvements and behaviour change. Detailed designs have been prepared by Sustrans for the central corridor route.
- 4.2 The Strategy is necessary to ensure that the future growth of Bicester can be accommodated. Improvements and enhancements to the public transport network will ensure that opportunities for bus and train journeys are optimised. The Strategy will contribute to the creation of an attractive town by integrating new and existing neighbourhoods with easy access for pedestrians and cyclists linking to exemplary public transport facilities and services. It has an important role in integrating new development with the existing town through sustainable connections and enhancements to key routes in and around the town. By creating an attractive place to live, work and visit the STS will enhance Bicester's reputation as a place to invest and develop new neighbourhoods innovatively and sustainably. The proposed improvements to the peripheral routes form an essential part of the strategy by removing some of the vehicular through traffic from the town centre and providing the opportunity to integrate the existing and new development with sustainable transport connections.
- 4.3 The STS has informed policy documents and proposals such as the LTP4 Bicester Area Strategy and will continue to do so. By endorsing and supporting the STS it will give it weight and demonstrate the commitment of CDC to the delivery the sustainable transport ambitions for Bicester. Officers will continue to identify priorities and secure funding through developer contributions, CIL, LEP funding to deliver an action plan as a rolling programme of infrastructure improvements in Bicester.

5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 The Draft Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy was presented to a Members workshop in September 2014. At the workshop Members considered the vision, objectives principles and delivery plan. Work has continued on the development of

the STS Delivery Plan but was delayed by officers prioritising work on the Cherwell Local Plan and LTP4. In addition, proposals for traffic restrictions on the central corridor and town centre require further consideration as they are currently aspirational and will be delivered over a period of time as opportunities arise.

- 5.2 The Eco Bicester travel demonstration project included a travel survey of over 2000 residents in 2010. It identified three key objectives which have been incorporated into the Strategy as set out below:
- i. Total trips by Bicester residents reduced
 - ii. Total distance travelled by car (as driver) by Bicester residents to all destinations reduced
 - iii. Total CO2 emissions from car travel by Bicester residents to all destinations reduced.

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: To adopt the STS as a Supplementary Planning Document

This option was rejected as it will lead to delay to the preparation of the document and is considered unnecessary as the STS will be used to inform CLP Part 2 and the LTP4. It would also require additional resources to complete.

Option 2: To await publication of the STS until further detail is received to complete the Delivery Plan

This option was rejected given the uncertainty of funding streams. It would lead to undue delay, resulting in some sections becoming outdated and prevent the document being used to secure funding bids. The current delivery plan relates to the strategy document and demonstrates how the strategy could be delivered. As such, it is illustrative and will be worked up in greater detail by officers with elements incorporated into the Cherwell Local Plan Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial or resource implications arising directly from this report. The cost of the preparation of the Bicester Sustainable Transport Plan is met from existing resources.

Comments checked by:

Paul Sutton, Head of Finance and Procurement, 0300 0030107

paul.sutton@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

Legal Implications

7.2 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Comments checked by:

Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance, 0300 0030107
kevin.lane@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: Yes

Wards Affected

All Bicester Wards
Ambrosden and Chesterton
Middleton Stoney
Caversfield
Launton

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Cherwell District Council Business Plan strategic priorities: A District of opportunity;
Safe, clean and green.
Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011 – 2031 - Policy SLE4: Improved Transport and
Connections

Lead Councillor

Councillor Michael Gibbard,
Lead Member for Planning

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Bicester Sustainable Strategy Extract: Executive Summary
Background Papers	
Bicester Sustainable Strategy	
Report Author	Andrew Bowe, Implementation Officer
Contact Information	01295 221842 andrew.bowe@cherwell-dc.gov.uk