

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 26 January 2017	AGENDA ITEM NO: 9
Report title: Garden Town Capacity Funded Studies - Update	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides a progress update on the Garden Town programme of studies and activities funded from Government capacity grant.

2. Garden Town Studies

2.1 Bicester Masterplan

At its November meeting, the Board was advised that public consultation on a draft masterplan for Bicester was programmed for the New Year, with completion envisaged for March 2017. Unfortunately the programme has been further delayed in response to deferred policy work but options on how best to proceed are being explored.

2.2 Feasibility of a new Motorway Junction

Work on appraising the implications and potential opportunity of a new junction on the M40 close to Bicester continues. As advised previously the objectives of the study is to understand whether a new junction could help improve connectivity to the strategic highway network; relieve congestion through the central areas of the town; and support the management of traffic on the peripheral routes around Bicester. A full assessment of the best performing options remains on course for completion in March.

2.3 Socio-Economic Profile of Bicester

A final draft profile of Bicester has been completed. This report looks to understand how Bicester compares to the Cherwell, Oxfordshire and national averages and will provide evidence to shape and support other programmes - such as marketing Bicester to attract new employment and investment and the Healthy New Town programme - and project funding bids.

A questionnaire, intended to collect similar information about new residents on the strategic housing sites was in the process of being finalised. However options as to if/ when this questionnaire will be issued are being considered in the light of a similar household survey planned by OCC.

- 2.4 Further capacity-funded studies focussed on utilities infrastructure; electric vehicle and charging infrastructure; and an economic investment prospectus remain on course for commissioning by the end of the financial year.

3. Activities

- 3.1 The SPARK grant scheme, financed by both garden town and healthy new town funds, provides small grants to help voluntary groups grow and enhance Bicester's community spirit. The first round of applications closed on 12 December 2016. Eight applications were received of which half were successful. The amount of grant being awarded from this initial tranche as part of this phase totals £3,500.
The deadline for the next wave of funding is 6 March 2017.
- 3.2 In response to public consultations last year that suggested high business rates may be a reason for vacant units in the town, the council is now reviewing the bills of 217 retail units in the town centre to determine if they qualify for a reduction or relief. This could include small business rate relief or hardship relief. This work is part of a 'quick wins' action plan for the town centre.
- 3.3 The Housing White Paper, which is due to be published shortly, includes Bicester garden town as a case study and highlights the work undertaken on the future vision for the town, community engagement and masterplanning. It features achievements in housing delivery on both Graven Hill and NW Bicester sites and also references the Healthy New Town programme.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

- 4.1 Capacity funding from government provides the financial resource to identify the infrastructure needs of Bicester through a programme of studies, the outputs from which will be used to inform future bids to Government for capital funding.
- 4.2 The Board is asked to note the progress with the capacity funded studies and the promotion of Bicester as a garden town and to continue to receive further regular updates.