

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 30 March 2017	AGENDA ITEM NO: 6
Report title: Garden Town 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 Capacity- Funded Studies

- 2.1 While the completion of the Bicester Masterplan was impacted by local plan work, it has been agreed that the masterplan will proceed ahead of Local Plan Part 2. The masterplan is expected to be completed during the summer and will come back to this Board for approval. Masterplan proposals and identified development opportunities will acquire greater 'planning weight' as they progress through the statutory planning process; therefore the intention remains for elements of the masterplan to be considered for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to Local Plan Part 1 and/or to be considered as part of the work on and examination of Local Plan Part 2.
- 2.2 The demand for access to the Oxfordshire Strategic (transport) Model for local plan work across the county is also delaying completion of the feasibility study into a potential new motorway junction. A solution to progress this work is being finalised with CDC, OCC and the appointed consultants and the study is expected to be completed by the summer.
- 2.3 A questionnaire intended to collect information about new residents on Bicester's strategic housing sites was put on hold because of some overlap with an OCC survey. Although the latter is also now on hold without an agreed resumption date, the recently launched Health & Wellbeing survey means the New Residents survey needs to be further delayed. To launch it now or in the near future risks a low response rate as residents feel 'fatigued' by and cynical of consultation.

3. Utilities

- 3.1 At the November meeting, Board asked for a progress update on utilities infrastructure.
- 3.2 Electricity
Bicester is located at the end of a spur on the UK electricity grid network, with all electricity supplies for the town and its hinterland arriving via Oxford, through distribution substations at Headington and Cowley, with a supplementary line to Yarnton. Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution (SSEPD) is working on plans to add a new connection between Bicester and the 400kV grid (at East Claydon, 12 miles east of Bicester) in 2019/20. This 132kV line

will be laid underground under permitted development rights.
Planning permission was been granted for the new substation at Skimmingdish Lane in September 2016. As such the project is on course for completion in 2019/20.

3.3 Gas

SGN, which manages the gas distribution network in this area, has previously advised CDC that its gas infrastructure will be significantly affected by the levels of growth set out in the adopted local plan and will require reinforcement. However it would not develop firm extension or reinforcement proposals until it is in receipt of confirmed developer requests. Developers in Bicester have not indicated that gas supply is a constraint to delivery.

3.4 Water & Sewerage

Thames Water and the Bicester Delivery team have previously discussed the opportunity to work jointly on an integrated water management strategy for Bicester. Garden Town capacity funding has been allocated towards commissioning that strategy this calendar year.

4. **Activities**

- 4.1 The second round of SPARK grant scheme, financed by both garden town and healthy new town funds, closed on 6 March 2016. Five applications were received along with better developed bids from two Round 1 applicants. All of these bids were acceptable in principle. The amount of grant being awarded from this second tranche amounts to approx. £6,000 bringing the total grant awarded over both phases to almost £9,500. The deadline for the next wave of funding is 6 June 2017.
- 4.2 Since the last meeting, CDC has hosted visits to Bicester from DCLG minister and senior officers. Bicester was featured at the New Garden Cities Alliance Garden Cities conference in Letchworth in February. There have also been visits from Daventry District Council officers and those involved in delivering Didcot's garden town.

5. **Funding**

- 5.1 At the end of February the designated garden towns submitted information to DCLG to support the case for additional capacity funding for 2017/18. DCLG has subsequently advised that future allocations will be determined by competitive, formal bids to the HCA. Details of the application process and a call for submissions have yet to be issued.
- 5.2 The Spending Review 2015 allocated £19m capital to Bicester Garden Town which is required to be spent by March 2019. Receipt of this funding depends on government approval of a business case and work has commenced on setting out how this money will be spent. This work will also assist in identifying projects that potentially seek support from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (the £2.3bn fund was announced in last year's Autumn Statement) when it becomes available.

6. **Conclusion and Recommendation**

- 6.1 The Board is asked to note the progress with the capacity funded studies, the promotion of Bicester as a garden town and funding opportunities and to continue to receive further regular updates.