

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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| Report title: Housing Task and Finish Group | |
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The housing task and finish group was established to monitor housing delivery and seek opportunities to increase housing delivery on behalf of the Board. The group last reported in July 2017 and this report is brought to update the Board following the publication of the Cherwell Annual Monitoring report (AMR).

2. Housing Delivery

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Strategic Delivery Board (SDB) in July 17 the preliminary housing delivery figures for 2016/17 had become available. In 2016/17 the preliminary figure for housing delivery was 369, this compared with a housing trajectory figure of 321 dwellings for the period. The publication of the AMR has confirmed the 2016/17 housing delivery figure of 371 completed units.
- 2.2 Maintaining a five year housing supply is important to the District as it enables decisions to be made in accordance with the adopted Local Plan. Without a five year housing land supply it is difficult to resist housing on unallocated sites. The five year housing supply is calculated for the whole district although the AMR identifies the projected delivery for Bicester within this. The overall delivery figure for Bicester, set out in the adopted Cherwell Local Plan, is 10,291 dwellings between 2011 and 2031, the local plan period. With the figures for 2016/17 a total of 1327 dwellings have been delivered, leaving 8,802 dwellings still to be built.
- 2.3 The AMR housing trajectory for Bicester sets out a projection of how the remaining housing numbers will be delivered to 2031. The projection is for 339 houses to be delivered in 2017/18 before delivery rises to 586 in 2018/19 and 833 in 2019/20. The delivery rate for 2016/17 is ahead of the trajectory for Bicester. However to maintain delivery in line with the housing trajectory there is a need for the delivery rate to increase next year and going forward.
- 2.4 Much of the delivery around Bicester is on large strategic sites which historically have been slow to commence delivery but once under construction tend to deliver consistently as long as there is a market for the properties. The trajectory recognises this and identifies that housing delivery is likely to be lower in the early years of major sites with a peak of about 200 dwellings per annum once established. This is a relatively cautious figure for delivery on a large strategic site but output can vary significantly on an annual basis. 2016/17 the Kingsmere site delivered 231 dwellings by way of an example. .
- 2.5 Of the major residential sites Kingsmere to the South West of the town has been delivering housing over a number of years but is now being joined by the first phase of NW Bicester and

the first completions at Graven Hill. Smaller sites like that at Talisman Road are also contributing to housing delivery. There is therefore a positive picture on housing delivery in Bicester but there remain challenges in making sure delivery continues to increase in line with the housing trajectory.

- 2.6 Kingsmere phase 2 has planning permission and work is taking place on the clearance of planning conditions and reserved matter applications to enable a commencement during 2018. Planning permission has now been granted for another 150 homes on the NW Bicester site and there are also resolutions to grant planning permission for 5200 further dwellings at NW Bicester subject to completion of legal agreements. The remaining large scale residential housing site, South East Bicester is the subject of a planning application and a revised masterplan is due to be submitted. There is therefore a strong pipeline of developments to support housing delivery.

3. Windfall Sites

- 3.1 As well as major sites there are also smaller sites that arise within the town that will increase housing numbers. Last report highlighted the permission on the former Lear Building on Launton Road/Bessemer Close and the housing the Build! Team have developed at Old Place Yard. The Homes and Communities Agency has now acquired the former Magistrates Court. Oxfordshire public sector organisations have also gained funding from the One Public Estate programme to explore a number of areas of public sector land including land at Queens Avenue and the Magistrates Court in Bicester. This funding was announced at the end of 2017 so work is just starting on the programme.
- 3.2 Other small development opportunities also arise from subdivisions and small infill plots within the town (windfall sites). Bicester does not have significant areas of unused or under used land within the town but small sites do arise and changes of use to residential development. Never the less the majority of housing delivery in Bicester is on the allocated sites on the edge of the town.

4. Infrastructure to Support Housing Delivery

- 4.1 One of the challenges of the scale of growth in Bicester is the ability to deliver the infrastructure required to support development. Much infrastructure is secured through planning permissions and accompanying legal agreements, this includes new schools, highway works, open space, sports facilities, affordable housing and community facilities. This infrastructure is that necessary to mitigate the impacts of new development and care is taken to ensure that it does not make development unviable.
- 4.2 Albion Land recently appealed their application for commercial and residential development at NW Bicester, application 14/01675/OUT. Much of the appeal focused on the contributions that were being sought to mitigate the impacts. Importantly the Inspector supported the need to secure the line of the realigned Howes Lane and the need to deliver affordable housing at a policy compliant level and the majority of the contributions sought. Areas that were not supported were those related to community development and the implications of this for the development of the community at North West Bicester are currently being reviewed. The appeal decision is available on the Cherwell web site where the planning application can be viewed.

- 4.3 As well as the impacts of individual proposals there are also cumulative impacts of development and challenges such as the need for rail crossings. Work continues by the District and County to seek to secure funding for this infrastructure that is necessary to support the growth of the town.
- 4.4 Garden Town designation provides one potential route to funding. A bid is being prepared to treasury for funding to support delivery of road improvements to increase housing delivery. This is being led by the Garden Town Manager and will be submitted shortly.
- 4.5 The Government also announced the Housing Investment Fund (£2.3 billion) (HIF), which ' will help fund vital physical infrastructure projects like the building of roads, bridges, energy networks and other utilities' 'Funding will also be available to help build new schools, healthcare centres and digital infrastructure to accommodate growing communities and alleviate pressure on public services.' There was a bid made to the Marginal Viability fund which was accessible to District Councils on a competitive basis to unlock new homes and is focused on marginal viability funding and forward funding. The bid was to fund the rail bridges at North West Bicester and the out come of this bid is anticipated in February 2018. Further funding has been identified for the Oxfordshire Growth Board to support countywide infrastructure delivery. The Growth Board will agree the priorities for this funding.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The housing delivery figure for 2016/17 shows a solid delivery of housing. There is a large pipeline of development to support future housing delivery. The challenges to housing delivery remain the timely completion of legal agreements, the securing of commencements on site and the funding and delivery of infrastructure in a timely manner. The authorities represented on the Board have a key role to play in ensuring that there is sufficient resources to deal with the proposals for growth within the town.
- 5.2 The work on housing delivery can also not happen in isolation. It is important that the town remains an attractive area that people choose to locate in, that business growth supports housing growth and investment in the town centre, leisure facilities and community activity continues. These are the conditions that will support the delivery of the planned growth.