

## Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

<b>Date of meeting: 19 July 2018</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM NO:</b>  <b>8</b>
<b>Report title: A Masterplan for Bicester</b>	
<b>Author: Jenny Barker, Bicester Delivery Manager</b>	
<b>Tel: 01295 221828</b>	
<b>Email: <a href="mailto:jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a></b>	

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is to advise the Board on the progress to date on the Bicester Masterplan, enable consideration of opportunities to use outputs from the work to date and consider proposals to take forward a plan for the Garden Town.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 Work on a masterplan for Bicester was commenced to support work on the now adopted Cherwell Local Plan. This work was undertaken by WYG and was progressed through a series of workshops and a draft masterplan was published in 2012. The work was used to inform the then emerging Local Plan.
- 2.2 Given the identification of Bicester as a Garden Town in December 2014 a revised brief was prepared for an update to the masterplan in 2016. Systra were commissioned to undertake the work and have carried out a series of workshops and produced a draft masterplan. This report considers the progress to date and how best to move forward.

### 3. Emerging Masterplan

- 3.1 The work has progressed to a stage where there are some clear themes emerging, particularly around supporting cycling, green networks and the town centre.
- 3.2 Since work commenced there have been some changes in the context for the masterplan which present opportunities and challenges. In particular:
- the work on the Oxford Cambridge expressway has identified routes that will impact on Bicester (announcement in July 18)
  - the certainty over the timing of delivery of East West Rail
  - The Oxfordshire Growth Deal and requirement for a Joint Spatial Strategy
  - The impact of the above on the timing of Local Plan part 2 which would have provided some of the policy basis for work in Bicester,
  - Information on open space needs is now available
  - The designation of Bicester as a Healthy New Town
- 3.3 Initial discussion with Members, Director of Place and Growth and Planning Policy has also highlighted concerns that the current masterplan work does not capture the extent of the vision

for the town and other plans that might have done so, such as Local Plan Part 2 have not progressed at the rate originally envisaged. Discussions with Homes England have indicated support for a more ambitious approach to the Garden Town and identified a further capacity funding round that could help support further work.

#### 4. Options to move forward

##### 4.1 Progress with emerging masterplan to adoption as originally envisaged.

This would involve 2 stages of consultation, amendment of the document following each consultation and then formal adoption. Whilst this route could be pursued, there are some risks that consultation could raise significant issues that were not covered in the current masterplan, requiring further work. This would increase the time that it would take to progress the document. This would mean that the resultant masterplan would be likely to be limited in terms of its influence on the future growth of the town. . For this reason this approach is not recommended.

##### 4.2 Pursue emerging proposals from the masterplan through other routes e.g. through Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4 , Local Plan review or through direct delivery.

The work to date on the masterplan has some interesting emerging propositions relating to the existing town and it is important these are not lost. There is within the work that has already been done, material that is helping to shape the work programme and identify deliverables. Elements that are or could be progressed are set out below:

Masterplan proposal	Route to delivery	Timescale
Healthy Streets	A draft policy on health and wellbeing is being developed based on work emerging from the Healthy New Town Programme and taking into account recent National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) 2018 guidance. This will be informal guidance but embedded into Local Plan policy when the opportunity arises.	Dec 18 targeted for Informal Guidance
Reduction on speed limits to facilitate cycling	Work is progressing with OCC to reduce the speed limit around the perimeter route. Work on the Eastern Corridor design principles supports this. There is also ongoing dialogue around other routes where speed limit reduction would be beneficial. At Graven Hill there are proposals out for consultation around a 20mph speed limit for the development. There is a refresh of the LTP area strategy planned that could include the proposals re. the reduced speed limit and bring this together with other work on sustainable travel.	LTP refresh summer 18 – autumn 2019
Town Centre development areas	The work undertaken identifies potential development sites for	Consultation and publish informal

	expansion/development that could support the town centre. The formal allocation of the sites would need to be progressed through the Local Plan but the work could usefully be progressed as informal guidance to inform those looking for development opportunities in the town centre.	guidance summer 2019
Town centre public realm enhancement	<p>The work identifies the opportunity for public realm enhancement in Sheep Street and Market Square to support town centre regeneration, community and cultural offer. The most significant change would be to pedestrianise Market Square, to create space for activities and events, enable the historic townscape to be appreciated and create an attractive destination within the town centre. Previous work on a scheme was deferred whilst Pioneer Square was built and occupied. Subsequently concerns have been raised as to the impact of future options on London Road level crossing. The London Road crossing issues are being explored through the recent Task and Finish group. Any alterations would need to be flexible to accommodate future changes in transport patterns and two way traffic through the Market Square. Design work could take this into account.</p> <p>Work has been identified to undertake consultation, design review and updating work and feasibility during the current financial year. Delivery would require funding and OCC has been holding some funds since the project was deferred. CDC is holding some public art funding that was targeted at the Market Square. Until a detailed scheme is available it is not possible to get an accurate cost for the works. It is likely some additional funding will be required but there are funding streams that could be explored. There is local interest in moving this proposal forward and this could be achieved without waiting for the adoption of the masterplan.</p>	Undertake consultation and review scheme, brief for design feasibility by Spring 19 to include programme for delivery
Green Spines	<p>The masterplan includes a proposal for green spines to be developed through the town and green spaces to be enhanced. Open space studies have now also been completed. These highlight strengths and weaknesses in the existing open space provision in Bicester. A bid has been made for funding to enable bio- diversity enhancement in some of the</p>	TBC

	<p>existing open space areas in the town. These would be focused along stream corridors to enhance connectivity and have been identified with local stakeholders.</p> <p>Work undertaken by Oxford University on tools for green infrastructure planning have also provide useful information on value of green spaces and natural capital. This is providing a useful catalyst for discussions with the Town Council regarding the best approach to take forward proposals. The development of a Natural Capital strategy with a portfolio of investable propositions would help in securing funding and delivery. This could again be progressed without the formal adoption of the masterplan.</p>	
--	---	--

4.3 To move forward with the deliverables from the emerging masterplan is recommended as it will support delivery in the town.

4.4 Review and expand scope of a plan for Bicester to meet the changing circumstances and member aspirations.

There has been a long held local desire to see a plan for Bicester. Furthermore public consultation in 2016 highlighted that people did not believe there was joined up planning for Bicester, suggesting the Local Plan was poorly understood or recognised by some people. The existing masterplan has been helpful in identifying some clear deliverables but has some limitations in terms of its scope. There is a need for the ambitions for Bicester to be captured in a document for the town and for this to be a useful tool to influence and support the delivery of the planned growth and regeneration. In addition as new issues have arisen such as Oxford Cambridge Expressway, that have the potential to have a significant impact on the town, it is important that they are considered in creating a plan for the town. A collaborative approach to developing a Garden Town plan would ensure that it was holistic, had stakeholder buy in and was deliverable. For these reasons it is considered expedient to pursue a new plan, the implications and opportunity of a revised plan are considered further below.

## 5. A revised plan for Bicester

5.1 The original Garden Town expression of interest included the following principles;

*Bicester Garden Town will be delivered through nine key principles:*

- *One Vision achieved through strong leadership and community engagement that integrates strategic growth with existing communities.*
- *Delivering choice and affordability in the housing market by supplying a comprehensive range of tenure and housing type.*
- *A diversify employment base delivered through new strategic employment sites that target the special skills of the area and support the growth of the economic sub-region.*

- *Green places creating an outstanding landscape and garden setting to enrich daily life.*
- *Innovative design to create places of distinction, with high quality architecture, attractive streets, squares, parks and public art.*
- *Creating a vibrant town centre by providing retail, health, leisure, social and community facilities to serve the surrounding neighbourhoods and villages.*
- *A connected community achieved through sustainable movement networks, and social and business forums.*
- *Sustainability as a part of everyday life delivered through carbon reduction, water management, waste recycling improved eco standards in energy efficiency and education.*
- *Healthy living supported by a healthy and safe environment*

- 5.2 Consultation in 2016 also identified what people liked about Bicester and what they would like to be improved. The report is attached at Appendix A. These were used to influence the existing emerging masterplan.
- 5.3 The original garden town principles as set out have not been subject to formal consultation and have not been reviewed since originally put forward. The emerging masterplan responds to a brief that did not seek to address all the areas identified in the principles, a number of which go beyond land use planning issues. Since the identification of the land at NW Bicester for an eco town in 2009, a lot has been happening in the town and it would be possible to capture this, agreed principles for the growth of the town and future ambition.,
- 5.4 The original intention was to produce a masterplan for Bicester as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This would be consistent with the approach in Banbury and Kidlington. The advantage of SPD once adopted, is that it carries weight in planning decisions but it cannot make policy, only interpret existing policy. The adopted Local Plan has many useful policies but since its adoption some new challenges have arisen including the proposals in the partial review, the Oxford Cambridge expressway, east west rail timescales, sport and play studies and the Oxfordshire Growth Deal. New policy arising from these issues would need to be accommodated in a new plan, either Local Plan part 2, a reviewed plan or joint spatial strategy as appropriate, which the Bicester Masterplan SPD would need to reflect. This has implications in terms of the content and timescales in taking SPD forward.
- 5.5 Alternatives to SPD could be an informal policy document. This would not need to be developed with the same prescribed process as SPD and therefore has the potential to be produced quicker. However an informal plan would carry less weight as a consequence in planning decisions. Such a document could however encapsulate a vision for Bicester and other non-land use planning elements that are important for the town. There are many examples of such documents such as Birmingham's Big Plan and Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan. Such an approach might be more accessible for people and be able to capture their aspirations to a greater extent. It could also help to bring together different areas of work, both planning and non-planning into a holistic document. However the lack of influence such a document could have over development decisions, could lead to frustration locally. One way to address this would be to ensure that the process for producing the document met the requirements of issues and options stage of local plan making, so that land use planning elements could subsequently be incorporated in emerging planning policy documents when they are produced.

- 5.6 What approach is taken will depend on the outcomes that are desired, the resources available and the timescales for the work. A short appraisal of options is set out below:

	Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
SPD	-Carries weight in planning decisions -Prescribed process to develop -Role of document is generally understood	-Cannot make policy only interpret existing policy -time taken to produce -must be evidenced based and matters relevant to land use	-provide a stronger policy basis	Time to produce, may quickly date -two versions of masterplan already produced
Informal Guidance	Flexibility over content and process	-Lack of weight in planning decisions -could be expected to cover a wide range issues resulting in a large document	-Can cover a wide range of issues beyond land use -could be developed such that it covered issues and options stage negotiation	If not able to influence new development may be seen as a waste of time

- 5.7 Having considered the options it is recommended that a document is produced that is not constrained by being a supplementary planning document so that a more ambitious and holistic approach can be taken. However it should be produced so that land use planning elements can be taken forward in future planning documents to avoid the need to redo these as further local plans are developed.

## 6. Extent of the document

- 6.1 A range of requirements have been identified for the document including the need to be holistic, comprehensive, fine grain for the town, ability to influence S106, decisions and policy documents, integrate strategic growth with existing communities, bright, bold and ambitious. These would need to be applied across the plan and the following key areas for a revised document have been identified;

- Defining the Garden Town
- Community and Culture
- Movement
- Employment, skills and education
- Green Infrastructure
- Health and wellbeing
- Housing
- Town centre

- 6.2 For these topic areas it would be possible to look at current issues, planning matters as well as wider issues and future challenges. There would be the opportunity to consider how crosscutting issues of health and wellbeing, sustainability and future aspirations should be considered.
- 6.3 Developing a comprehensive masterplan can be time consuming and there is a risk that if circumstances change or something is missed it can derail the whole plan. As an alternative, the plan could be developed initially as a series of topic papers. This would enable targeted development of each topic with relevant partners and stakeholders and prioritisation of topics. It is recognised that there is existing work that can be built on and taken forward on all the listed areas. For example the regeneration of the town centre is already subject to the Bicester Mayor's campaign to promote the town and there is a commitment to work collaboratively to support the town centre including work by the Economic Growth team at Cherwell and Bicester Vision.
- 6.4 In addition approaching the plan on a topic basis would enable the outputs on each topic to be used without waiting for all to reach the same stage. This approach will enable greater scrutiny of the emerging work which cumulatively would be brought together in a single document to form the plan.
- 6.5 An example of how this approach could work for a topic area is set out below;

### **Health and Wellbeing**

- 6.6 Through the Healthy New Town work there has been wide engagement with both health partners and local stakeholders in developing the programme. In particular two partnership events have been held each year of the programme which have been important to report on progress but also to ensure planned actions meet local requirements
- 6.7 Consultation on health and wellbeing issues affecting the town could commence at the 2018 Healthy New Town conference to capture the learning from the programme and the expertise of the partners. This could be supplemented by on line consultation and taking advantage of other opportunities to get input from the wider population. The output would be a draft Health and Wellbeing paper which could then be subject to consultation and agreement.
- 6.8 It is envisaged that the initial consultation would;
- Explain the national picture –as regards health, i.e. the move to encourage increased self-care and personal responsibility for one's health and to draw on a range of community assets to support individual health and wellbeing and collectively to create a healthy community
  - Explain Bicester's particular issues in general terms and the Bicester Healthy New Town Programme - objectives and achievements to date. Initiatives such as the Dementia friendly town led by the Town Council would also be covered.
  - Identify which elements of the Healthy New Town programme are to be sustained and potentially extended beyond the initial phase as a demonstrator site funded by NHS England.

- Explain that one of the legacies of the Bicester Healthy New Towns Programme is to ensure the future growth of Bicester is designed and built in such a way as to encourage healthy lifestyles.
- Explain that although this paper provides a focus on Health and Wellbeing, the subject is also relevant to the rest of the Issues and Options Papers (e.g, Landscape and Greenspace, Transport and Movement, Social and Community, etc etc) as Health and Wellbeing cuts across all parts of how we design the environment.
- Seek views on how existing and proposed developments can support healthy lifestyles
- Seek views on changes to the health estate in the town
- Seek views on the priorities for health prevention
- Consider what a healthy town in the future will look like

6.9 Outputs would form part of the plan and those elements that relate to land use planning issues such as the need for land to meet health estate needs and requirements for building healthy developments could then be taken forward through Local Plan stages at the appropriate time. This approach takes advantage of the partnership working that is already in place and builds on it to produce the relevant part of the plan.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The existing masterplan has served a useful purpose in identifying deliverables that can be taken forward to the benefit of the town. However its scope is, as was intended, limited and therefore it is not recommended to pursue it further.
- 7.2 To produce an ambitious and holistic plan it is proposed that it is not produced as an SPD, to enable flexibility on content and approach. However the work should be undertaken in such a way that elements of the plan that relate to land use planning can be used to inform further future policy making.
- 7.3 It is recommended to pursue the plan on a topic basis to enable maximum use of existing forums and partnerships, such as the Healthy New Town Partnership, to effectively engage people in the process and ensure that the content is relevant and meets local ambitions.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Board support the following actions;
1. That the outputs from the emerging masterplan are taken forward as set out in the table at 4 above.
  2. That a new plan is produced for the town that is holistic but that it will not be a supplementary planning document but provide informal guidance.