

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 4 February 2021	AGENDA ITEM NO: 3
Report title: Review of the Bicester Strategic Delivery Board	
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1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of the outcome of the comprehensive review of the Bicester Strategic Delivery Board (SDB) which was previously set out in the report at the meeting on 29 July 2020.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the SDB gives its endorsement to the new governance arrangements as set out in this document, which will come into effect from 1 April 2021.

3. Background

- 3.1. The SDB (formerly the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board) was established in March 2010. It was set up to facilitate and enable joint working and oversight on matters for the NW Bicester eco town development and its remit widened to include sustainable growth, development and planning within Bicester.
- 3.2. The SDB has now been operating for just over 10 years and its role and function remains largely unaltered.
- 3.3. The SDB has been a fulcrum to promote collaborative working and brings together Cherwell District Council (CDC), Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and Bicester Town Council, key community and business organisations and government agencies which collectively oversee and direct Bicester Garden Town initiatives.
- 3.4. The current core membership of the SDB includes:
 - CDC (3 members): Leader, Lead Member for Planning, Lead Member for Estates and Economy (a member for Bicester)
 - OCC (3 members): Leader, Cabinet Member for Environment, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families
 - Bicester Town Council (3 members): Chairman of Policy Committee, Chairman of Planning Committee, one other to be agreed
 - Ministry Homes, Communities and Local Government (1 member)
 - Bicester Vision (1 member) : Chairman
 - Homes England (1 member): Head of Area
 - NHS Clinical Commissioning Group / Healthy Place Shaping Lead (1 member)

- Bicester Chamber of Commerce (1 member) Chair
- Guests may also be invited by the SDB to attend meetings to present papers and give updates as necessary.

3.5. The SDB was established as an informal partnership with no executive powers or budget of its own. It operates on-the basis of consensus and influence and meets on a quarterly basis.

3.6. Following discussion with Veronica James, the SDB rep for the Environment Agency (EA) in November 2020, the EA have withdrawn from the SDB but continue their support in an ad hoc capacity as and when environmental issues are raised or when the EA would like to bring relevant issues to the group.

4. Scope of the Review

- 4.1. Officers supporting the SDB devised a scope for the review based on engagement with the Growth Board's membership and having regard to feedback received from various stakeholders, to date. The scope of the review included:
- Focus on project management and delivery of Garden Town – concentrating on critical workstreams.
 - Focus on inward investment into Bicester (to include both public and private investment) and ongoing bids / grants. This is to ensure CDC is 'tapping-in' to all available funding streams.
 - Focus on the membership of the Board – for example, does the CDC/OCC Chief Executive need to have a role / oversight in the Boards work?
- 4.2. It is important that the role of local partnerships is considered in the long term and the role the SDB could play in that context. Accordingly, membership, format and function of the SDB will be revisited to consider how the SDB's work might better engage with non-local authority partners who also have a key role in shaping Bicester as a place, particularly in the context of Garden Town.
- 4.3. The review tested whether the current arrangement is fit-for-purpose and valid and, if any suitable adjustment needed to be made. All options were considered.
- 4.4. With the primacy of Garden Town, it is important that the Governance arrangements are up to date and appropriate and the roles and responsibilities are clarified.
- 4.5. The review sought to ensure the SDB is able to provide appropriate governance, oversight and leadership and to ensure that the good aspects of the current arrangements are retained.
- 4.6. The SDB will requires membership of 'decision makers' with a breadth of knowledge and experience which will reflect the multitude of workstreams undertaken within Bicester.
- 4.7. The review sought to incorporate the views of SDB Bicester Councillors at all levels, strategic partners and stakeholders.
- 4.8. It also examined how the SDB feeds into and interacts with, respectively CDC's

Executive and OCC's Cabinet.

4.9. An options appraisal was also undertaken.

5. Approach to the Review

5.1. The Review was overseen by the Assistant Director – Growth and Economy supported by the Bicester Delivery Manager in line with the agreed scope. Supported by the SDB, the review was divided into three distinct themes; role and function, capability and resources, and process and structures.

5.2. Within these themes a set of questions was developed to help guide the review. The questions were designed to provide a thematic framework for; assessing how effective the Board is in its role, a structure for inviting contributions to the review and presenting conclusions. This framework was based in part on existing public sector guidance on well-led governance reviews. A summary of the three themes for the review is set out below:

5.3. Role and Function

5.3.1. A fundamental review of the SDB's role and how it might change took place. Consideration was also given to what the Board's role could be going forward, how it communicates those objectives, and how aligned or otherwise they are with existing workstreams and commitments.

5.3.2. The Garden Town status has brought new responsibilities and funding and it needs suitable oversight arrangements to be put in place and clarification about what the SDB's role in that is essential. There may also be a role to play in understanding the Growth Deal as it affects Bicester and its environs.

5.3.3. The SDB has limited decision-making powers, but it can facilitate local debate and collaboration on issues for which each member may exercise their local influence over. Any revised role will require the Board's Terms of Reference to be updated and agreed.

5.4. Capability and Resources

5.4.1. The review considered what capacity the SDB has available to deliver its objectives and fulfil its current role, and what capacity it might need in the future to address any functions it undertakes. The SDB is supported mainly by CDC officers but it may be that OCC colleagues should also play a greater role, as well, reflecting the closer partnership working between OCC and CDC.

5.4.2. The SDB's membership has evolved over time and so has its areas of focus. A fresh look was taken as to the role of Board members, and whether the membership could be different or more fluid to meet the demands of its current role, or any new direction.

5.5. Process and Structures

5.5.1. The Board's governance structure was reviewed to ensure it is still fit for purpose.

- 5.5.2. The production of reports and the schedule of meetings was reviewed to ensure that information is produced in a timely manner, with enough time made available for the public, councillors and officers to prepare for those meetings.

6. Outcome of the Review and Recommendations

6.1. Engagement

- 6.1.1. An SDB Review Task & Finish Group was established to lead the review. Its membership included Cllr Wood, Cllr Pratt, Assistant Director – Growth & Economy, Bicester Delivery Team Manager and Project Support, and met at each theme stage of the review. All members of the group had significant knowledge and experience of the GT programme and SDB. Additional meetings of the Task and Finish Group were also arranged at key Decision Points to ensure coherence, rigor and timely delivery of the review.
- 6.1.2. An online survey was circulated to Board Members on 3 & 17 November 2020 and 5 one-to-one discussions took place via MS Teams. Whilst the survey helped to direct the review, it was acknowledged that it had bias in terms of the questions and scope of respondents and was limited in the sample of replies received. The survey results were considered to inform the review but not relied on solely. A summary of the results can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 6.1.3. Alongside the survey and interviews, The Task and Finish Group reviewed and engaged with other Garden Communities. A summary is provided within Appendix 2.
- 6.1.4. Also, the Task and Finish Group engaged with the Oxfordshire Garden Towns Forum, which Bicester Delivery Teams is a part of, which meets monthly to share experience and knowledge between the five other Oxfordshire Garden Communities. This process provided useful 'lesson learnt', knowledge and shared experience between us and the other Garden Communities and directly fed into the outcome of this review.
- 6.1.5. As suggested by Homes England, best practice advice on the appropriate level of Garden Town governance and scrutiny was sought from Aylesbury Garden Town and Harlow & Gilston Garden Town in particular. It was noted that Aylesbury Garden Town had recently undertaken a similar review of its governance structures which were adopted during July 2020. Again, this process of engagement fed directly into the thinking of the Task and Finish Group.
- 6.1.6. Also, to ensure that an appropriate level of corporate awareness and reporting was in place, a report was taken to the Place Programme & Partnerships Board on 26 January to seek endorsement of the proposed new SDB governance arrangements, subject to SDB Members' support for the proposed change. The feedback of the PPPB has been considered and incorporated into the proposed new arrangements.
- 6.1.7. Critical to the successful implementations of any new arrangements is the 'buy-in' and awareness of key stakeholders such as Oxfordshire County Council. Subsequently, the Task and Finish Group have engaged with OCC's Leader for example and other stakeholders.

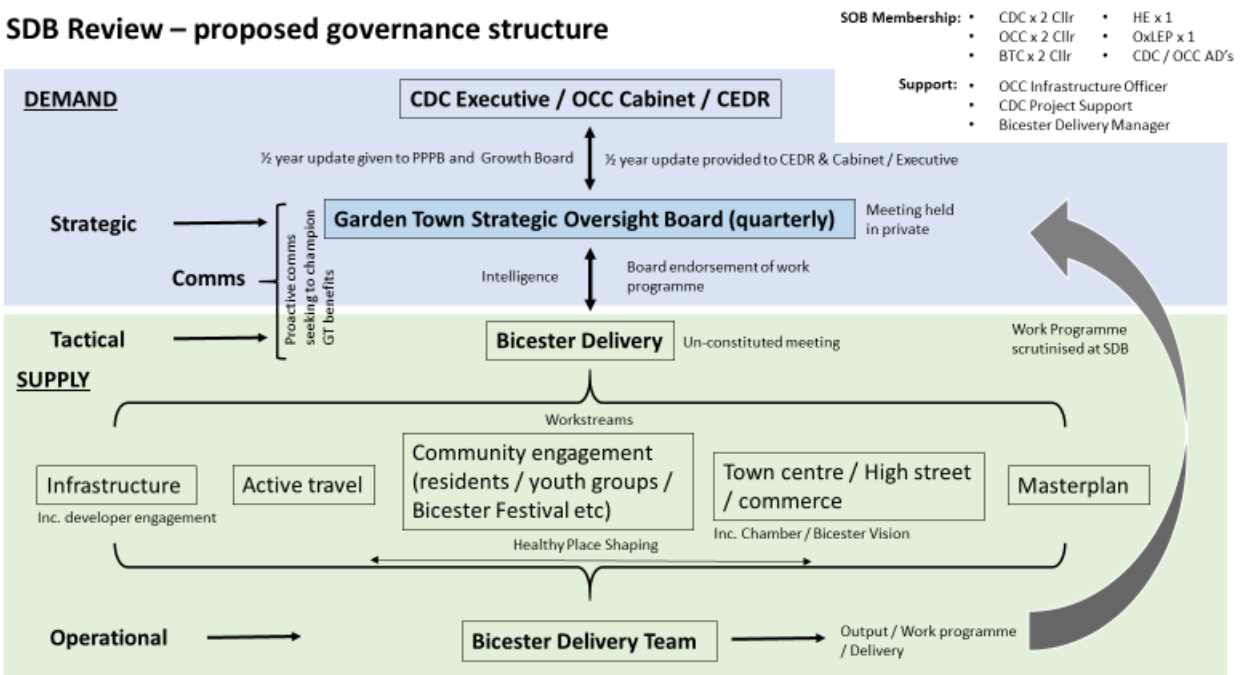
6.2. Garden Town Strategic Oversight Board

- 6.2.1. It is proposed that the Bicester Strategic Delivery Board be renamed to The Garden Town Strategic Oversight Board. This is to reflect the renewed prominence of the GT programme within the Boards enterprise moving forward and the name protocol is aligned with other GT's.
- 6.2.2. The existing SDB is a meeting that is not a formally constituted board as part of the council's constitution. It is not a decision-making board – if there are decisions that have financial, capital or other types of significant implications, then the SDB makes a recommendation to CDC's Executive. The SDB's reach is therefore limited to 'endorsing' and 'recommending' a cause of action. It is proposed that the current arrangement is adopted by the new Oversight Board.
- 6.2.3. The Boards meetings will scrutinize the GT programme, budget spend and monitor housing delivery within a forum that is collaborative and supportive to ensure the delivery of GT at pace. This sentiment is aligned with the direction given by Homes England and again is recognized as 'good' practice.
- 6.2.4. The Board, on an ad-hoc basis, may request additional people to join or contribute to the meetings when required. This might include representatives from the Environment Agency, Network rail or the utilities.
- 6.2.5. To improve the overall 'visibility' of the extraordinary GT work, the Oversight Board, with the support of Officers, will provide routine six-monthly updates to Place, Partnership and Programme Board, Chief Executive Direct Reports, OCC's Cabinet and CDC's Executive. The reports will highlight the GT programme, grant funding, homes delivery and any 'blockages' to delivery.
- 6.2.6. The Oversight Board will meet on a quarterly basis however it will also have the mechanism, reflected within the Terms of Reference (ToR) (Appendix 3), to call ad-hoc meetings when required.
- 6.2.7. In addition to the quarterly meetings of the Oversight Board, the ToR's will allow additional 'briefing' meetings to be arranged where additional depth and breadth is required on a specific matter or subject. These meetings are to be requested by the Oversight Board.

6.3. Governance Structure

6.3.1. Below is the diagrammatic representation of the proposed new arrangements:

SDB Review – proposed governance structure



6.3.2. The Governance structure is layered into three distinct but vertically interlinked groups:

- **Strategic** – the SDB (renamed Garden Town Strategic Oversight Board) – focused on the projects that are GT funded.
- **Tactical** – a Bicester Delivery, with current and future workstreams wrapped into clear groups to deliver GT and other Bicester key related projects.
- **Operational** – the Bicester Delivery Team, physically delivering, co-ordinating and leading the delivery of GT programme.

6.3.3. The layers clearly define the Strategic level as a 'demand' driver (highlighted in blue above) and Tactical / Operational as 'supply' (highlighted in green above). This is to clearly delineate the Oversight Board as 'Strategic' focused on GT programme scrutiny and remove any ambiguity that may currently exist.

6.3.4. The Tactical and Operational layers are critical for the successful delivery of GT and other Bicester non-GT related projects.

6.3.5. The 'Bicester Delivery' groups are made up of officers and key local stakeholders such as Bicester Vision and Bicester Chamber of Commerce. The Bicester Delivery groups 'wrap' the current workstreams delivered by Officers and community groups, providing greater corporate visibility. This new arrangement is not designed to create additional work for Officers, more it is to provide clarity and focus.

6.3.6. This arrangement also offers the opportunity for the Oversight Board to allocate additional tasks and new workstreams when appropriate.

6.3.7. The groups are not islands operating individually, indeed they will be by nature, interlinked. An example of this is the work of Health Place Shaping team whose work generally straddles all of the groups. This interdependency is critical to delivering a successful GT programme.

6.3.8. These groups also provide critical 'intelligence' at ground level in Bicester of what residents, businesses and organisations are doing, think and what is required to continue to build a vibrant and successful community. They also provide critical local skillsets and knowledge to deliver projects such as the 'Grimsey' Renewing Town Centre project.

6.3.9. The Oversight Board may request updates from the Bicester Delivery groups on progress of programme when appropriate.

6.4. Board Membership

6.4.1. The review of 'good' practice amongst other Garden Communities did not uncover a 'silver bullet' solution for the Membership of the Board. Indeed, there are many different examples of Membership types which reflect local needs and circumstances.

6.4.2. However, what is common practice is to have representatives from the Councils involved with a Garden Community programme, a business representative typically a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and a representative from Homes England. The Board Membership should be dynamic, active and promote collegiate working to find solutions to problems.

6.4.3. Mindful of this, it is recommended that the Oversight Board Membership should be the following:

- 1 x Homes England
- 2 x Cherwell District Council Councilors (including Board Chair)
- 2 x Oxfordshire County Council Councilors
- 2 x Bicester Town Council Councilors
- 1 x OxLEP
- Officers from CDC and OCC (2 x Assistant Director, OCC Highways / Infrastructure Officer, Bicester Delivery Manager and Project Support)

6.4.4. The Board Members will be encouraged to become GT 'champions', to support this endeavor, the Board will be supported by proactive Communications officer (part of the BDT).

6.4.5. The Task and Finish Group has engaged with current and future Members, to explain the new arrangements.

6.5. Timescale

6.5.1. Below is set out the timetable for the adoption of the arrangements. There is a period of consultation and several steps for the arrangements to be taken through the Councils democratic processes:

SDB – present report for comment	4 February 2021
SDB end of consultation and comments	26 February 2021
SDB approval for new arrangements	18 March 2021
New arrangements in place	1 April 2021
SDB meeting under new arrangements	29 July 2021

6.6. Review

6.6.1. To ensure the new arrangements remain ‘fit-for-purpose’, it is recommended that the Oversight Board ToR are reviewed on a rolling twelve-month basis.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The new arrangements are designed to promote greater focus on the delivery of Garden Town programme. The Board will scrutinize the GT programme, budgets and housing delivery to ensure effective delivery of the key objectives. The enterprise of the Oversight Board will be de-cluttered and focused.
- 7.2. The new structure promotes clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, identifying the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ elements of the programme. The Oversight Board will be ‘strategic’ and the Boards agenda ‘decluttered’ of non-GT related workstreams.
- 7.3. The new arrangements promote greater visibility within the wider organization of the work of Garden Town through providing regular updates to PPPB, CEDR, Cabinet and Executive, of progress and issues. This in turn, will promote wider corporate engagement in the GT programme to help identify ways to ‘unblock’ issues or concerns and seek new initiatives.
- 7.4. The arrangements set out in this document help crystalize the importance of the work of local partners in delivering the benefits of GT and importantly, other initiatives such as Healthy Place Shaping, giving these workstreams prominence within the wider organization and community.
- 7.5. The new arrangements provide Homes England with the assurance that the GT programme is being appropriately managed and delivered and that the allocated funds are being used to set the conditions to deliver 13,000 new homes by 2030 within Bicester.
- 7.6. With the approval of the SDB on the 4 February 2021, a revised set of ToR’s will be issued to reflect the arrangements set out in this document. With agreement from the current SDB, the new arrangements set out in this document will be in place for the new scheduled meeting on the 29 July 2021.