

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: Garden Town Report	
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. MHCLG are actively promoting housing growth through the Garden Communities programme. Bicester was one of the first Garden Towns within the programme, identified in 2014, which now comprises a further 49 Garden Towns and Garden Villages.

1.2. Garden Communities are defined by the Government as having the following characteristics:

- a purpose-built new settlement, or large extension to an existing town;
- a community with a clear identity and attractive environment;
- it provides a mix of homes, including affordable and self-build;
- planned by local authorities or private sector in consultation with the local community.

1.3. As well as building new homes, the communities will develop:

- job opportunities
- attractive green space and public realm areas
- transport infrastructure, including roads, buses and cycle routes
- community infrastructure, schools, community and health centres
- a plan for long-term stewardship of community assets

1.4. Garden Communities champion 'best practice', well planned and designed settlements. This work is supported, by MHCLG capacity and revenue funding.

1.5. This report aims to highlight key areas of work that have been progressed since the last SDB update.

2. Garden Town Capital Funding

2.1. As Board members will be aware, during 2014/15 Bicester was identified as a Garden Town by MHCLG. With this, MHCLG provided an allocation of both capital and revenue funding to support the sustained growth of the Town. In total £19m capital

was identified for Bicester, subject to the submission of a business case justifying the spend.

- 2.2. In 2017 agreement was reached with MHCLG to pay £4.25m to Cherwell to pay Network Rail part of a 'shared value' payment to enable the rail bridge to be built at NW Bicester. This funding is no longer required for the 'shared value' payment and subsequently negotiations between CDC, OCC and MHCLG are ongoing to agree if this money could now be reallocated to enable the delivery of Howes Lane.
- 2.3. As will be reported during this SDB, the NW Bicester Railway bridge and underpass scheme remain on programme to be delivered during 2021.
- 2.4. During April 2018 a business case was submitted to undertaking three further highway schemes:
 - Pioneer Roundabout;
 - Ploughley Road junction;
 - Banbury Road roundabout.
- 2.5. The delivery of these schemes will enable the acceleration of housing delivery within Bicester.
- 2.6. MHCLG is working in partnership with CDC to ensure the delivery of the second tranche of funding in a timely manner and discussions continue to facilitate this. Despite the impact of COVID-19 during 2020, progress has been made on all three schemes.
- 2.7. The Board may note that OCC will deliver both Ploughley Road junction and Banbury Road roundabout and the Graven Hill Development Company will deliver Pioneer Roundabout.
- 2.8. CDC and OCC are working closely in partnership with each other and submitted papers during July 2020, to both CDC Executive and OCC Cabinet to enable the progress of the schemes set out in 2.3 above.
- 2.9. Good progress is being made on all capital projects. Tighter programme regime have been introduced and HE are being kept up to date with progress to ensure the release of additional funds to deliver the schemes at pace.
- 2.10. A further bid for Capacity funding was submitted during September 2020, to MHCLG, to enable further work by the BDT which will help set the conditions for the delivery of new homes within the Bicester in the near future.
- 2.11. A decision on whether this bid has been successful is expected later in the year. It is worth noting, that should the bid be successful, and as an established Garden Town competing against a growing number of newer Garden Communities, that this capacity funding will be significantly less than previous allocations.

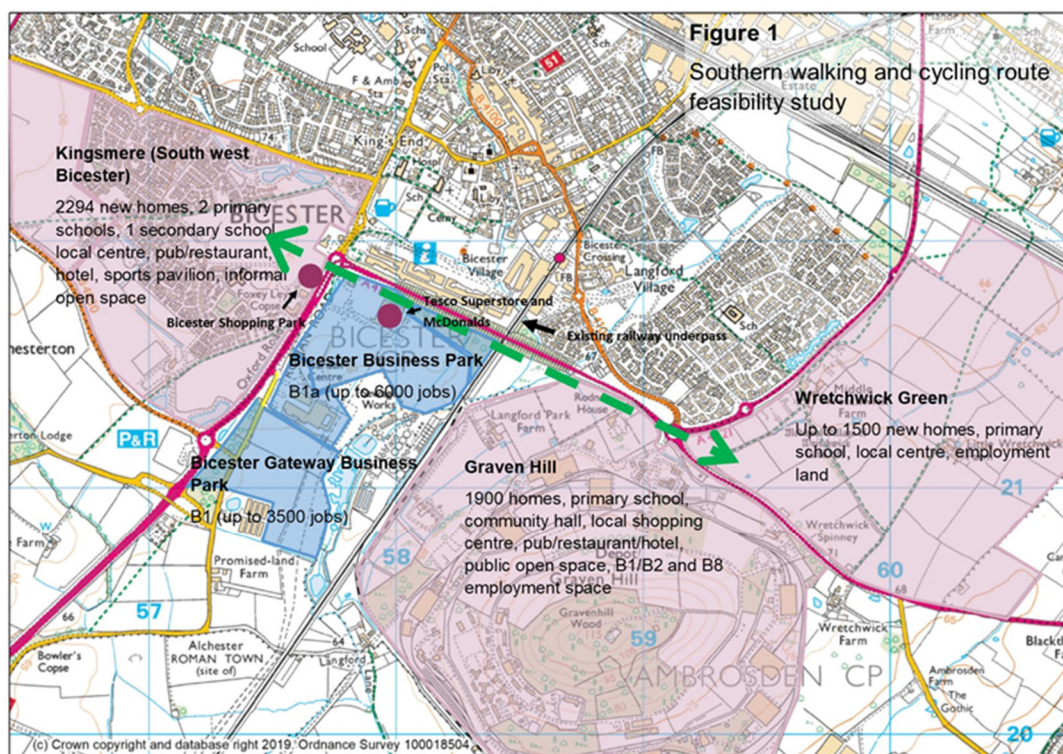
3. Bicester Air Quality Management Area

- 3.1. Funding was secured through the Healthy New Town programme to undertake an innovation project to design and implement a planting scheme to reduce the impacts of poor air quality in the town's Air Quality Management Area.
- 3.2. The first phase of this project has been to appoint Landscape Architects to develop options for the area. After a formal procurement process local firm Applied Landscape Design, a local company, were successful.
- 3.3. Applied Landscape Design have prepared a planting design scheme which has been circulated to key stakeholders for initial comments. The design includes a planting scheme the King's End/Middleton Stoney Road junction where deficiencies in pavement width and current provision for pedestrian desire lines have been identified.
- 3.4. A wider improvement scheme has been proposed and developed with OCC which would address these issues alongside the provision of continuous cycle route connectivity with the existing Queen's Avenue cycle route. Funding has been sought by the County Council as part of the Tranche 2 Active Travel Fund the outcome of which is imminent.
- 3.5. Should funding be secured the environmental planting scheme will integrate with these improvements. Whilst the project has been delayed by the footpath issues as well as Covid 19, issues should be resolved in the near future. Final draft schemes are currently being prepared.
- 3.6. BBOWT have indicated that they will be available to assist with this project to work in partnership within the local community (primarily the West Bicester area), either as part of Wild Bicester or as a separate piece of work, in terms of long term maintenance or custodianship of the newly planted areas.

4. Southern Connectivity in the Town for Walking and Cycling

- 4.1. Consultants EAS were appointed in April to undertake a detailed feasibility study to understand the available options for the creation of a new pedestrian and cycle route to address the gap in the network that exists on the A41 between the roundabout junction with London Road and the roundabout junction with Oxford Road.
- 4.2. There is an overgrown segregated route to the north of the carriageway from Oxford Road ending at the railway bridge and a further existing section of route running roughly east-west from the Talisman road roundabout.
- 4.3. The railway represents a key barrier to overcome to join these routes together and to connect to London Road where a S106 funded route is being progressed by OCC.
- 4.4. EAS have been investigating the feasibility of using an existing railway underbridge and Network Rail have enabled access for topographical survey work to be undertaken. This option is more deliverable than potential alternative schemes

requiring a new railway overbridge parallel or adjacent to the A41.



5. Access to the Countryside Project

5.1. The Adopted Cherwell Local Plan sets out the following policy commitment:

“Policy Bicester 7: Meeting the Need for Open Space, Sport and Recreation As part of measures to address current and future deficiencies in open space, sport and recreation provision in the town we will:

“Seek to establish an urban edge park around the outskirts of the town, by protecting the existing network of green spaces and securing new open space and linear route provision linked with public footpaths/cycleways, to create a circular route with connections to the town centre and the countryside beyond”

5.2. With respect to this policy objective and the wider need to achieve modal shift to active modes this project identifies the following aims:

“To provide safe and attractive walking and cycling routes between Bicester and the villages within the immediately surrounding area to provide for both leisure and utility trips by these modes.”

- 5.3. To enhance opportunities for recreation and exercise with the creation of circular walking and cycling routes which readily connects with the Bicester urban area negating the need for an initial journey by motorised means.
- 5.4. Consultants, EAS, have been appointed and are auditing four routes/route areas around the periphery of Bicester to identify opportunities and constraints. .
- 5.5. The Bicester Delivery Team's (BDT) Transport Planner left the post mid January and due to the lack of transport knowledge in the team, BDT officers are liaising with OCC's Principal Officer – Public Rights of Way Access Strategy & Development and North East Countryside Access Officer, to ensure the work is undertaken as an holistic approach.

6. Town Centre and Market Square

- 6.1. A "Town Centre Task Group" formed following an event with retail guru Bill Grimsey in June 2019. The group reported back on its work in November 2020, presenting an outline plan for reimagining Bicester's town centre for the 21st century. Feedback received from this meeting has highlighted the importance of Market Square in providing connectivity with Sheep Street, Crown Walk, Deans Court and also as a focal point when accessing the town centre from the south, Bicester Village and Bicester Gateway (being large visitor attractors). It also has the potential to provide space for events and activities.
- 6.2. CDC officers and OCC have been working closely together to produce an options appraisal. The Garden Town funding provides the potential to review the previous design to alter market square and explore the opportunities to create a destination space within the town centre.
- 6.3. Some funding is held by OCC to implement a scheme, but it is unlikely to be sufficient on its own to fulfil all aspirations.
- 6.4. The town centre work has good synergy with a number of other programmes of work, such as the '*Meanwhile Use*' project (utilising Renaissance Funding) to transition empty retail units back into use, '*Reopening High Streets Safely Fund*' which will deliver up to five projects for Bicester, and the '*Contain Outbreak Management Funding*', for which project ideas are currently being discussed.

7. Graven Hill Community House.

- 7.1. Work has taken place with Graven Hill Development Company, Bromford Housing Association and the Communities team to provide a temporary community facility in advance of the permanent community hall being built. This was an approach that was one of the innovations from the Eco Town at Elmsbrook and supported early community development and hosted a wide range of meetings and events for and by the community.

7.2. In collaboration with Bromford Housing a temporary community house was agreed and equipped and is now available to the community at Graven Hill. Developer funding is also enabling a part time community development worker, Lesley Montague, (in agreement with Community First Oxfordshire). The post is for one day a week. A new Residents' Association has been constituted and is working with Lesley to use the house for meetings etc. Ongoing support will be given to Lesley by the Bicester Team and Jon Wild from the Communities Team. Regular meetings are now held between Community First Oxfordshire, CDC and Graven Hill Development Company. A recent booking of the house was to a student who was unable to attend university or work at home, and needed a place to study.

7.3. Discussions have commenced on the design and delivery of the permanent hall which will be delivered in accordance with the S106 agreement for the site.

8. Wild Bicester Project

Wild Bicester is a new partnership project between Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust and CDC. Bicester Town Council is also a key partner - as they own much of the land which the projects will take part on.

Funded through Cherwell's Community Nature Project, Healthy Place Shaping and Bicester Garden Town. It is an 18 month programme, costing £31,500. After 18 months, it is hoped a sustainable model is established so the project can run on its own (as with Wild Banbury).

Wild Bicester is designed to improve the overall biodiversity in Bicester as well as promoting the health and wellbeing of those involved through participation in the events/activities.

BBOWT will work with the local community to enable residents to improve spaces for wildlife whilst highlighting to local people the impact that nature-based interventions can have on their lives and wellbeing. BBOWT empowers local communities to improve space for wildlife and help people connect with local wildlife on a hyper local scale which in turn has a positive impact on the wellbeing of the individuals and the community.

- **Outcomes**

- Increased skills, knowledge and confidence of local people about wildlife
- Increased nature connectedness for Bicester residents
- More spaces for nature in Bicester
- Improved wellbeing for Bicester community

Ed Munday, the Community Wildlife Officer will work in Bicester for two and a half days per week for 18 months and will be responsible for working with the wider community to promote the Wild Streets and Neighbourhoods, events and activities and work with BTC and CDC as part of the Wilder Spaces part of the project. Kate Sheard, Community Wildlife Manager (Volunteering) is responsible for the community group network and upskilling, and will work with groups to create bespoke training and support system as required by Bicester groups. Wild Bicester will have a portal on the BBOWT website

9. Conclusion

9.1. In conclusion, despite the very real impact of COVID-19 upon the team and the Garden Town programme, work continues at pace, to support the delivery of the

Garden Town objectives. The BDT is working on the multi-dimensional delivery of the Garden Town programme providing an exceptional environment to work, live and play.

- 9.2. The BDT has proven to be agile and innovative, remaining focused on the delivery of the Garden Town commitments and helping to set the conditions for the delivery of new homes within Bicester
- 9.3. The significant provision of capital funding for infrastructure is supporting the delivery of strategic objectives, whilst revenue funding is helping deliver place shaping initiatives including active travel initiatives.
- 9.4. Moving forward there will be Greater focus on the delivery of the Garden Town programme to ensure Bicester remains a national exemplar for Garden Communities.