

This report is public	
Bicester Market Square Project	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	2 September 2025
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration, Councillor Lesley McLean
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	25 June 2025
Report of	Corporate Director of Communities, Ian Boll

Purpose of report

To provide an update to the Executive on the progress of the Market Square, Bicester regeneration and public realm improvement project and to seek approval to continue to the next stage of the project, and ultimately on to complete the project, subject to all of the required procurement processes being undertaken successfully. This report details the next steps of the design work required to the concept plan, seeking the required planning permissions, approval of the draft programme and budget approvals based on the estimated cost plans undertaken as part of stage 1 of the project.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To note the progress of the project to date, including the public engagement process and how the proposed concept design was developed.
- 1.2 To approve the concept design presented for development to the next stage.
- 1.3 To approve that the £881,000 from Oxfordshire County Council town centre s106 funds be added to the currently approved £4.25m capital programme budget for this project – to give a maximum total project budget of £5,131,000 to complete this project in full.
- 1.4 To delegate to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Communities and the Assistant Director of Finance the tranches of budget for each stage of the project as required, into the capital programme to enable completion of this project.
- 1.5 To delegate to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Communities and Assistant Director of Law and Governance to approve the appointment of the preferred Consultant & Contractor, to work with the Councils project team to deliver this project following the required Council procurement processes.

- 1.6 To delegate to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Communities and the Assistant Director of Law and Governance the decision on the specific contract options & construction route to deliver the project in full (which is currently proposed as a two-stage contract process) (NEC 4E x22) following the Councils required procurement processes.
- 1.7 To note the current draft programme of works and estimated timescales of each stage of work, as provided by WSP, as part of their Stage 1 feasibility work as set out in Appendix 4.
- 1.8 To delegate to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Communities to confirm approval to submit the planning application of the detailed design.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In 2023, Cherwell District Council approved the regeneration of Bicester Market Square as part of the Bicester Garden Town Programme. A consultant (WSP) was appointed through a competitive procurement process, and a comprehensive public engagement programme was undertaken, including surveys and design workshops with residents and businesses. To support this process, a communications-led strategy was implemented to ensure widespread awareness, community participation, and stakeholder involvement. The multi-channel campaign contributed to more than 1,500 survey responses and over 400 in-person engagements, as outlined in Appendix 5a. Insights from this engagement have directly informed the development of the preferred concept design, which now requires approval to progress to the next stage: detailed design and pre-construction.
- 2.2 This report sets out the strategic context, updated vision and project goals, and findings from extensive research and public engagement undertaken in collaboration with WSP. A targeted communications approach underpinned this work, helping to increase visibility, shift the community early negative sentiment, and secure positive, wide representation across stakeholder groups. The report also outlines the preferred delivery options, a proposed maximum budget, and an indicative programme and cost plan. Executive approval is now sought to proceed to the next phase of the project, and onwards to completion of the project.
- 2.3 Bicester Market Square requires regeneration to enhance its public realm. Following two years of community engagement, a preferred design has been developed. The project is now ready to move into the detailed design and pre-construction phase, requiring formal decisions to maintain momentum and transition from concept to detailed design, to secure planning permissions and finalise material and design palettes, to approve the updated maximum budget and delivery approach, and to enable a timely delivery aligned with strategic and community priorities.
- 2.4 Approval is also sought for the additional £881k from OCC to be included to the existing approved project budget, bringing it to a total of £5.131m in line with the estimated cost plan for the preferred design. Considerations also include the delivery options, where either CDC can retain ownership, ensuring control over design, cost and delivery, or OCC can assume responsibility, introducing risks around control and alignment. Lastly, the cost plan and programme are appended

where key dates and costs have been outlined, although these will be subject to further refinement as the project progresses through the procurement, design and planning processes.

Implications and Impact Assessments

Implications		Commentary		
Finance		<p>Funding for the Bicester Market Square has already secured £4.25m of which £180k has so far been approved for spend as Executive took the decision to allocate budget in stages. To progress to the next stage Executive must approve the preferred design and therefore approve the next tranche of budget to be released into the capital programme. Confirmation of further S106 funding from OCC of £881k takes the total funding to £5.131m which the cost plans are showing as adequate funding for the preferred design plan. However, it must be noted that this is dependent on material choices, levels of inflation and delivering the project within the given timeframe. This project, if progressed to construction will need close monitoring by the project team with support from Finance, to ensure the project is delivered within budget.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 18 June 2025</p>		
Legal		<p>The council's consultant and contractor in respect of these works will be subject to the relevant Procurement Legislation and the Council's own Contract Procedure Rules. Compliant routes to procure, such as via a framework, should be assessed to cover the detailed design, pre-construction & construction phase in a compliant manner. Relevant KPIs will need to be set and monitored to ensure successful delivery of this phase.</p> <p>Mubin Khan, Lawyer (Contracts and Procurement), 20 June 2025</p>		
Risk Management		<p>There are no risk implications arising directly from this report. Financial resilience and any risks link to it are managed through the Corporate Leadership Risk register.</p> <p>Julie Miles, Performance Analyst & Developer, 19 June 2025</p>		
Impact Assessments		Positive	Neutral	Negative
Equality Impact				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that				
				No

could impact on inequality?				
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				Positive effect
Climate & Environmental Impact				Yes – this will be considered by the project team and is a key outcome that a positive climate and environmental impact is achieved
ICT & Digital Impact				N/A
Data Impact				N/A
Procurement & subsidy				Any procurement actions or processes will need to follow the Contract Process Procedures and follow legal guidance on any contract that is put into place. Internal Process must be followed in line with the Contract Procedure Rules and Public Contract Regulations. Chris Wain 17/06/2025
Council Priorities	<p>An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres – this project aims to support local businesses within Bicester town centre, including those in Market Square, Sheep Street, and the market traders.</p> <p>The project will improve the area and will promote Market Square as a visitor destination, attracting investment in the town centre.</p> <p>The project will be delivered in partnership through public and business engagement, improving the outcome for the community this area will serve.</p>			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	Appendix 5			

Supporting Information

3. Background

3.1 On the 4 September 2023 the Executive were presented with a report: Bicester Garden Town Programme - Market Square Project Business Need & Next Stages.

The three recommendations from that report which were approved were –

- to confirm the business need for transformational public realm improvements at Bicester Market Square
- to approve the expenditure (up to a level of £180k) required for consultants to undertake detailed design through to planning permission and
- consultation with stakeholders; to include associated studies on;
 - the relocation of parking and wider impacts of parking within Bicester
 - traffic movement and flows through Market Square and around the Town Centre, including access for existing businesses/users
- a full design of the Market Square public realm improvement project with full business case for the capital expenditure and future revenue impact from changes to car parking income and any future costs
- to note the governance of the project to monitor and review development of the full business case which will return to Executive for approval prior to delivery of the project

3.2 As part of the September 2023 report it stated - *There is strong support and justification for the Bicester Market Square project through existing and emerging planning policy and the Corporate Business Plan. The current Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 acknowledges the need to 'support the viability and vitality of the existing town centre' and to 'improve the character and appearance of the centre of Bicester and the public realm'. The emerging Local Plan (Cherwell Local Plan 2040 reg 18 Consultation – yet to be approved by members) states that there are specific areas of change identified for Bicester, with the Market Square being one of them;*

- *Site three - Market Place (Square) - This area offers the opportunity to become a focal point of the Town Centre and a venue for periodic events that could drive interest and footfall in Bicester. Removal of car parking would facilitate improvements to the public realm, including widening of pavements, enable outside seating for the nearby food and beverage traders and create an attractive 'café culture' environment where visitors will want to spend more time. It is important this area provides a successful multi-functional space, enhanced landscaping and a high-quality pedestrian environment.*

3.3 The report went on to confirm –

Further consultation, engagement and research on various issues is now required to understand the full scope and implications of the project and to develop the concept ideas into a final design. Other factors such as the London Road Level Crossing requirements and whether vehicular traffic will be restricted here could

influence the design ethos. It is important that this is considered and investigated, but that it does not define the Market Square project which may need to come forward ahead of any decision on this.

- 3.4 The September 2023 report is provided in Appendix 1 for information, as it does provide further background to the growth of Bicester, as well as the initial basis for the Market Square project from 2019 – 2023 including the business case at that time for this project.
- 3.5 This report will now set out the detailed work which has been progressing since September 2023. It is also worth noting at this stage of the report that the administration of the Council changed in May 2024.

4. Details

- 4.1 In May 2024 the Council's administration changed with a clear directive that this project needed to be driven by the Bicester community with a "bottom up" approach.
- 4.2 In July 2024 a new, permanent Bicester Garden Town Programme Manager was appointed to lead this project, and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, Cllr McLean, the project was reviewed over the summer of 2024 to clarify the vision, strategic context, why improve the square and clear project objectives.
- 4.3 It became very clear during the review process with feedback from previous public consultation, the local community and businesses did not want to consider a fully pedestrianised design for the Market Square. Maintaining parking, ideally at the current levels, was a clear priority. Pedestrianisation was therefore discounted as an unviable option to move forward with.
- 4.4 The following documents were developed to confirm this approach. Full details are provided in Appendix 2.

Updated Strategic Context and Vision

1.1.1 BICESTER-WIDE IMPROVEMENT AREAS

The following plan highlights the current improvement areas across the town. It pulls together a strategic plan to highlight how the Bicester Market Square is connected to the wider development of Bicester.

This plan highlights the three main key connections which need to be considered in the development of Market Square:

1. Sheep Street, The Lanes of Crown Walk and Bure Place. This is the main pedestrian loop, with retail and commercial shops.
2. Direct corridor link to Bicester Village Railway Station and Bicester Village Shopping Village.
3. Leisure walking route past St Edburg's Church, the Dovecote and greenspace.

KEY

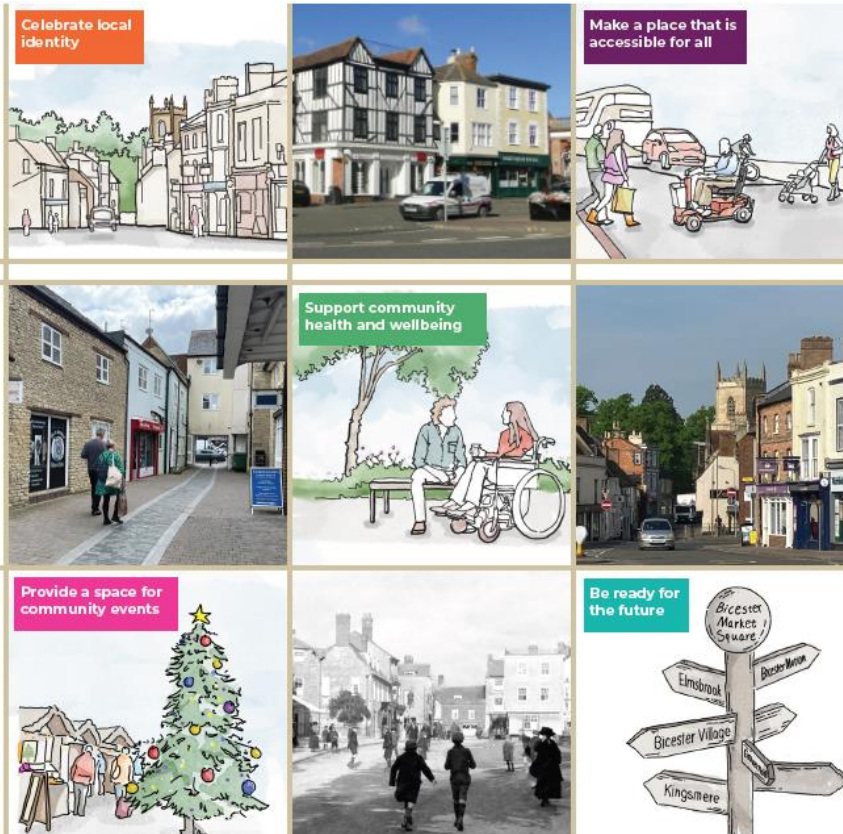
-  Key Improvement Areas
-  Surrounding Community Assets
-  Sheep St / Lanes / Market Square Loop
-  Key Pedestrian Links
-  Commercial Areas
-  Public Carparks
-  Industrial Areas
-  Parks
-  Built-up Areas
-  Countryside
-  Waterways
-  Key Connecting Roads
-  Railway & Stations
-  Proposed Corridor Improvements
-  Proposed Walking Route Improvements



Why improve the square?

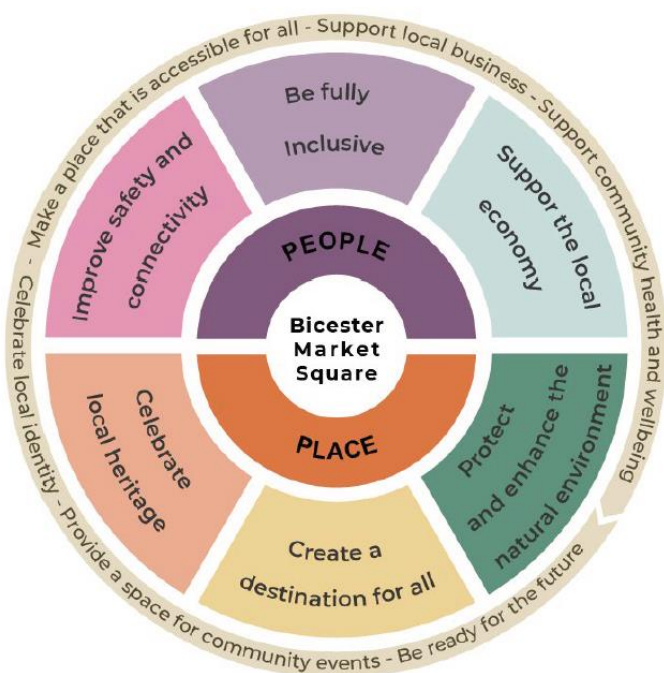
Bicester Market Square

Working together to...



Clear project objectives

1.3.1 THE MARKET SQUARE CORE PROJECT OBJECTIVES



Be fully inclusive

- Promote and integrate walking, cycling, buses, taxis, and private vehicles.
- Provide for all ages, abilities and demographics.

Improve safety and connectivity

- Improve connectivity to surrounding lanes and car parks.
- Enhance links to the town centre, for example; Bicester Village, Bicester Avenue, Bicester Gateway, Bicester Motion and both railway stations.

Celebrate local heritage

- A sensitive heritage focused design that enhances Market Square.
- Consider opportunities for arts projects, including the potential for a war memorial.
- Ensure a consistent heritage look and feel within Bicester.

Create a destination for all

- Develop flexible spaces for the community to enjoy events and activities.
- Consider technology and how it can enhance visitor/user experience.
- Improve lighting and highlight focal points, to help improve night time experience.

Support the local economy

- Continue to develop both day-time and night-time economy.
- Consider current and future parking within the town centre to accommodate growth.
- Provide access and loading for local businesses.

Protect and enhance the natural environment

- Incorporate planted areas to create visually appealing and accessible green spaces which enhance the town centre and its buildings.
- Create shaded, protected and comfortable resting places.

- 4.5 Once the internal review was completed and the project objectives were agreed, the project team moved to the next stage – Community engagement and concept development. The detailed process which was developed is provided in the attached Appendix 2 document:
Bicester Market Square - Public Realm improvements – Concept development.
- 4.6 To support and enable high-quality engagement, a dedicated communications and engagement specialist was brought into design and deliver a comprehensive strategy. This included proactive media outreach, targeted digital advertising, a public display in the local library, printed posters, roller banners and relationship-building with local stakeholders, including councillors, schools, and community groups. The communications campaign reversed early negative sentiment, generated awareness across a wide audience, and directly contributed to more than 1,500 survey responses and over 400 event participants. The communications approach was phased in line with key project milestones, using creative assets, physical displays, and digital targeting to maximise reach. Further detail, including campaign performance and engagement data, is provided in Appendix 5a.
- 4.7 As part of the extensive public engagement, the project objectives were clearly communicated alongside the “why” slide, which helped establish a shared understanding of the need for change and the vision for Market Square. The first Concept and Design workshop was then held with local businesses from the Market Square and surrounding area, alongside community interest groups (e.g. Bicester BUG) and councillors from Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, and Bicester Town Council. The event took place at the Chesterton Hotel,

Bicester, on 25th November 2024. Three early concept design ideas were presented, generating a range of feedback from participants.

- 4.8 This was followed by a public display at Bicester Library, which remained in place throughout the engagement period. The display launched with an in-person event at the library on 26th November 2024, marking the start of the wider public engagement. A second public event was held at Bicester Friday Market on 29th November 2024. Across both events, the project team engaged with over 400 members of the public, who provided valuable feedback on the three design options.
- 4.9 An online public survey titled “Have Your Say” ran throughout November and December, generating over 1,500 responses from members of the Bicester community. To ensure accessibility, the survey was also made available in paper format as part of the library exhibition, with a dedicated drop-off box for completed responses.
- 4.10 These engagement events were well attended and received positively by the majority of the community, with collaboration and active listening at the heart of each session. A full list of businesses and community groups consulted during this process is provided in Appendix 2.
- 4.11 A further series of engagement events took place in January and February 2025, including a second business and Councillor session, as well as repeating the public events. These sessions invited the community to indicate their preferred option from the three concept designs presented. Full details of these events are provided in Appendix 2.

To note: For any future engagement sessions we are committed to holding sessions during the working week, evenings and Saturdays to ensure the events are well attended and provide the fullest opportunity for residents and businesses to be involved.

4.12 The responses from all of the events were reviewed with the following outcome –

2.6.2 ENGAGEMENT PREFERENCES

Through engagement with local businesses in Market Square, community groups, key stakeholders, and the wider public, a clear preference has emerged for Design Idea 02. This approach brings together key elements from both Design Idea 01 and Design Idea 03, bridging the gap between differing views. As a result, it delivers a well-balanced design that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.

Through-out the engagement process there has been clear messages with :

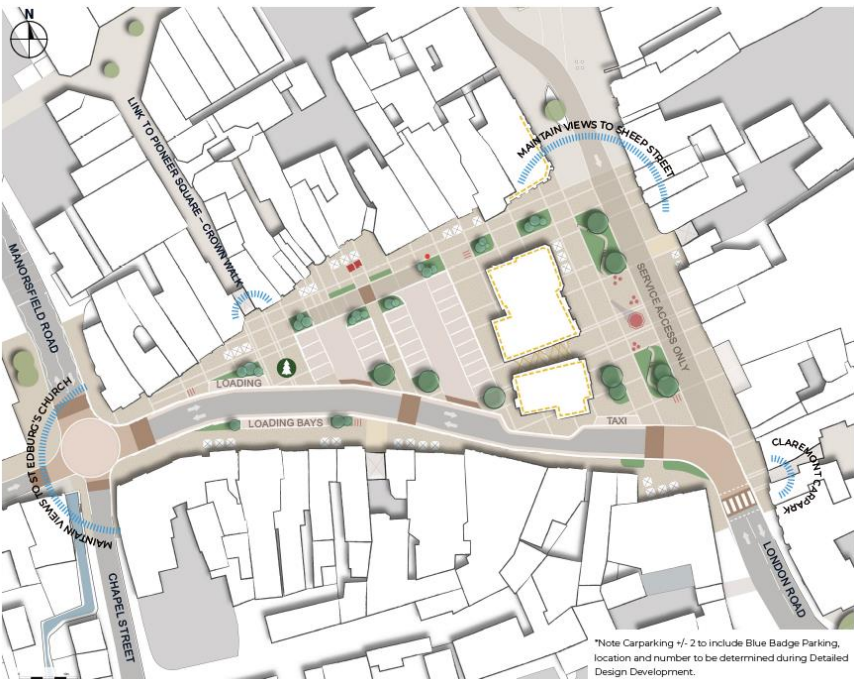
- The importance of supporting local businesses, residents and visitors
- The need to maintain accessible parking options to improve usability
- A strong and clear call for enhancing Market Square, while preserving its historic character.

	Colour
Most Preferred	
Mid Preferred	
Least Preferred	

		DESIGN IDEA 01 Existing road layout, Market Square enhanced	DESIGN IDEA 02 2-way road and Market Square enhanced	DESIGN IDEA 03 2-way road, Market Square enhanced and relocated parking
1st Co-Design Workshop Preference				
2nd Co-Design Workshop Preference				
Bicester Local Businesses Preference				
Market stall traders Preference				
Bicester Bug Preference				
Public Feedback Survey - (Library & Market Stall) Preference				
Professional Analysis	Safety for pedestrian (when considering Road Layout / Traffic)			
	Carparking Places *Subject to revision in Detail Design			
	Space available for Community			
	Space available for Planting *Note without underground surveys the location and number of planting might change			
Budget Considerations	*Note this would require confirmation from a Cost specialist	Could be achieved	Would need additional funding and require a phased approach	Would need additional funding and require a phased approach

Reviewing the responses from the public, local businesses, community groups and the co-design workshops, it is recognised that there emerges a preference for Design Idea 02.

The Preferred Concept Design



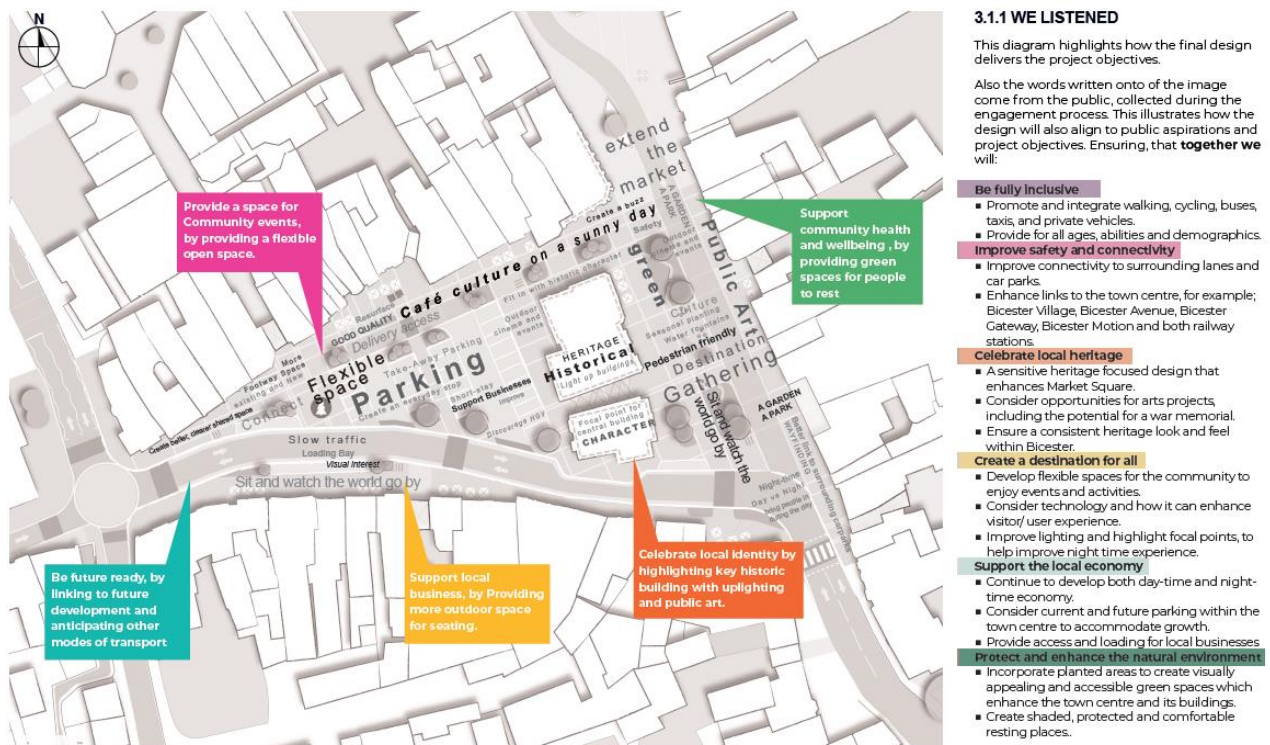
3.1.2 MARKET SQUARE DESIGN

This design combines the communities need to provide more greenspace, community space, more footway whilst still remaining the two-way traffic and essential parking for surrounding businesses. By focusing the parking to the western side of Market square, this allows the continuation of sheep street, providing more spaces for the community, for events and extends the market into the Market Square.

- KEY**
- Improved Paved Footways
 - Paved Car-parking and Loading Bays
 - Carriageway Accent Treatment
 - Carriageway with Visual Narrowing
 - Pedestrian Crossing Point
 - Vehicle Crossovers
 - Service Access
 - Planting
 - Trees
 - Landmark Feature
 - Outdoor Commercial Seating
 - Street Furniture (Seats, Play & Cycle Stands)
 - Uplighting to Existing Buildings
 - Catenary Lighting
 - Christmas Tree / Event Space
 - Existing Public Realm
 - Existing External Carparking Area
 - Existing Buildings
 - Existing Trees
 - Existing Phoneboxes
 - Existing Postbox

We Listened

This diagram highlights how the preferred concept design delivers the project objectives.



4.13 Further studies and surveys are required to ensure that this design can be fully developed into the final design.

The following outlines the main technical studies needed. This work will begin over the summer 2025.

- Highway and Traffic Engineers to review and input into junction area re-designs.
- Survey requirements for better understanding loading, public parking and servicing access.
- Car parking spatial requirements to be developed in greater detail, including locations for blue badge parking, taxi bays and car parking circulation study.
- Designing the localised pinch point in the highway and give way arrangements in greater detail.
- Potential impacts on movements to be reviewed by traffic Engineers.
- A detailed review of potential issues related to underground structures, including investigation of cellars and foundations of previously demolished building, including any archaeological requirements.
- Consultation with the local heritage group and local community for any possible new landmark or memorial design, including location.

- Viability of tree planting location with underground investigations and visibility studies.
- Review landownership – currently identified CDC and OCC as landowners.

4.14 The Appendix 2 document provides further details on potential design palettes, including surface material options and ideas for lighting, planting, seating/street furniture. All of these decisions will be taken as part of the next stage of design and will be in part led by the planning process. The project team will still have significant input into this process as part of the detailed design process.

Delivery of the project

4.15 There are several ways this project could be developed and delivered. Traditionally within Cherwell District a project of this size would have been handed over to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to develop the detailed design, appoint and manage a contractor to deliver the scheme out.

4.16 This project could be handed over to OCC, however there are risks to CDC with this approach which include -

- limited involvement with the detailed design - the design could be delivered with significant differences from the preferred concept design currently recommended
- limited involvement in selecting materials and potential concerns with quality, time and cost controls.
- A significant proportion of the total budget - £4.25m, is CDC capital funding, however if we are not delivering the project on site, there could be reputational risks if the project was delayed, or significant cost rises were out of CDC control.

4.17 In discussions to date with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration another delivery plan has been discussed where CDC retain the detailed design and delivery of this project. This approach would include –

- CDC project team progressing the pre-construction stage of the project as outlined in the attached programme in appendix 4. This retains control particularly of the details design process, and development of the planning application. The project team would still work very closely with OCC colleagues.
- As part of this a two-stage contract process is recommended (NEC 4E x22 contract suggested)
- The first stage would be advertised via a Framework within CDC procurement rules and following corporate policies. The successful contractor would then develop the design within a target cost. Stage one also allows for value engineering to ensure the design meets the set budget.
- If all ok with stage one, we then progress to appoint for stage two – delivery of the scheme, within the costs identified in stage one.
- This ensures CDC retain control of costs, design and timings for delivery.
- Alternatively, a Design and Build JCT contract could be entered into. This route is likely to attract larger contractors, not so good potentially at the detail, quality and cost mitigation, or prepared to work with the project team as closely.

Budget and Indicative Cost Plan

4.21 The earlier Executive report from September 2023 outlined the following –
Cherwell District Council

In February 2023 Council approved £4.25m to be allocated towards this capital project and further funds of c.£880k may become available through OCC s106 town centre funding which could reduce resources required for this project or further resources could be requested depending on the agreed final project plan.

OCC have confirmed £881k is available from s106 town centre funding and they are currently seeking the required approvals to transfer this to CDC.

This report is therefore requesting the OCC s106 funding is added to the £4.25m budget already identified to provide a maximum project budget of £5.131m. £180,000 has been spent to date get the project to this stage, as approved in the September 2023 report.

There are two indicative cost plans for the preferred concept design attached as Appendix 3. One plan is an indicative cost to include higher cost materials e.g granite, with an estimated total cost of £5,029,640 (appendix 3a) (excluding risk and inflation = £3,808,929). The other is for lower cost materials eg manmade materials; with an estimated total cost of £4,499,466 (appendix 3b) (excluding risk and inflation = £3,434,729)

(To note – a new estimated cost plan will be available ahead of the Exec meeting on the 2nd September, subject to the surveys to be completed over the summer so will be updated for accuracy during the CLT to Exec process)

Estimated Programme

- 4.22 The estimated programme to deliver the currently proposed design is attached in Appendix 4. This is dependent on the outcome of the surveys due to begin over the summer 2025, including the archaeological surveys and progress of the planning application process. These are identified as the two main risks to the programme currently.

(To note – a new estimated programme will be available ahead of the Exec meeting on the 2nd September, so will be updated for accuracy during the CLT to Exec process)

July/August 2025 – Data collection and surveys

Autumn 2025 – seek pre-app planning advice

From Sept/October 2025 – development of concept design onto detailed design

Early 2026 – Submit planning application

Early 2026 – Procurement for construction contractor

Summer 2026 – Construction starts

Summer 2027 - Completion

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option one: To approve a previously available design from the one presented which does pedestrianise the Market Square. This is not an option for the local businesses

and community of Bicester; during engagement this was a very clear message along with the request to retain some parking and if possible, at the current level.

Option two: To approve one of the other presented designs in Appendix 2. This would not be the preferred design from the public and business engagement, but it is possible to deliver one of the other concept designs at this stage.

Option three: To pause or stop this project now and not continue to the next stage. This would save the project budget to be spent on other projects or Council priorities; however this project has been discussed within the community for over 20 years and during the last year the team have been working very closely with our Portfolio Holder who has been supporting this project.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The Bicester Market Square improvement project has been in the public domain for many years. A report to the Executive was presented on the 4th of September 2023:
Bicester Garden Town Programme - Market Square Project Business Need & Next Stages.
- 6.2 This report follows the stages of the project over the last two years to date; specifically following an internal review in summer 2024 with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property and Regeneration in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Communities, the project has progressed with a full public engagement process completing, as well as confirming project “why” and project priorities.
- 6.3 The outcome of the public engagement process has been a preferred concept design, together with a draft programme which outlines next steps, together with estimated cost plans depending on choice of materials to deliver this project.
- 6.4 The cost plans are estimating the preferred plan can be delivered within a total maximum project budget of £5,131,000, (dependent on material choices) with £180,000 spent to date.
- 6.5 This report therefore sets out recommendations to take forward the next steps of this project onto successful delivery and completion.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All Bicester Wards

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Bicester Garden Town Programme - Market Square Project Business Need and Next Stages
Appendix 2	Bicester Market Square - Public Realm improvements – Concept development
Appendix 3	(3a) Bicester Market Square Cost Plan (Granite paving option) (3b) Bicester Market Square Cost Plan (Manmade paving option)
Appendix 4	Bicester Programme
Appendix 5	WSP Market Square Engagement
Appendix 5a	Communications and Engagement Performance Summary
Background Papers	Bicester Garden Town Programme - Market Square Project Business Need and Next Stages – Sept 2023
Reference Papers	none
Report Author	Julia Harrington Head of Regeneration and Growth
Report Author contact details	07540433310 Julia.harrington@cherwell-dc.gov.uk