

Application No: 10/01780/HYBRID	Ward: Caversfield	Date Valid: 23/12/2010
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Applicant:	A2 Dominion Group/ P3Eco (Bicester) Ltd
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Site Address:	Bicester Eco Town Exemplar Site Caversfield Oxfordshire
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Proposal: Development of Exemplar phase of NW Bicester Eco Town to secure full planning permission for 394 residential units and an energy centre (up to 400 square metres), means of access, car parking, landscape, amenity space and service infrastructure and outline permission for a nursery of up to 350 square metres (use class D2), a community centre of up to 350 square metres (sui generis), 3 retail units of up to 770 square metres (including but not exclusively a convenience store, a post office and a pharmacy (use class A1)), an Eco-Business Centre of up to 1,800 square metres (use class B1), office accommodation of up to 1,100 square metres (use class B1), an Eco-Pub of up to 190 square metres (use class A4), and a primary school site measuring up to 1.34 hectares with access and layout to be determined.

Introduction

This report is brought to the Committee to update Members on the progress that is being made in assessing the planning application for the first, exemplar, phase of the proposed eco-development at NW Bicester. The report will also enable partners working through the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board – SDB_ (an informal local partnership established with Government to help implement the Eco Bicester and Eco town) Project to judge progress on the application. This is particularly important for the Government's Homes & Communities Agency, who have undertaken to provide funding for affordable housing at the site. This report therefore does not lead to a recommendation to determine the application but the application will be returned to the committee in due course for determination.

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The application site is located to the north of Bicester, it adjoins the B4100 on its eastern side and wraps around Home Farm Caversfield. The most southerly part of the site is approximately 120 metres north of the existing extent of development at Bicester (Bure Park).
- 1.2 The site is just over 21 ha and currently in agricultural use. The land is currently in use for grazing with native hedgerows dividing up the fields. A small stream transects the site running west to east and then south through the southern part of the site.
- 1.3 The application proposes 393 dwellings, 30% provided as affordable, together with an energy centre, open space and infrastructure for which full planning permission

is sought. The application also seeks outline permission for a children's nursery, community centre, retail units, business centre, offices, public house for which outline planning permission is sought. A site for a primary school is also identified within the application site.

2. Application Publicity

- 2.1 The application was publicised by way of press advert in the Oxford Times, site notices and neighbour notification letters.

3. Consultations

- 3.1 **Bucknell Parish Council** object to the application and highlight the first phase of the development does not fall within their parish boundary. A summary of their concerns are listed below:

1. General Observations

- Density is high as insufficient consideration has been given to land available for each property.
- There is no variety in design of the properties and this has been disguised by using different types of cladding.
- Shape of the land available has had a detrimental effect on the layout and 'community' principle.

2. Traffic

Pleased to see no direct vehicular access to the Bucknell Road, however the issues of number of parking spaces was raised, that if the same 8% of parking spaces is applied to the masterplan a total of 8 800 parking spaces would be built and therefore it would undermine the eco concept and have a negative impact in traffic travelling through Bucknell. They would like to know what provisions will be made to restrict the 'through Bucknell' vehicular traffic accessing junction 10 of the M40.

3. Light Pollution

Very concerned over additional light pollution, how will this be addressed especially in view of the proposed high density housing.

4. Noise

Parish Council wants to know what mitigating measures will be put in place to mitigate the unacceptable noise intrusion on the rural community.

5. Buffer Zones

To help obviate some of the issues raised above the timing of the buffer zones needs careful consideration to protect rural Bucknell and the growth of biomass.

3.2 **Chesterton Parish Council** makes no objections to the application but do make the following comments:

1. They fully support the comments made by Phillip Clarke (Vice chairman) in his 'Why Shops & Offices' letter. (Details of the letter are awaited).

3.3 **Middleton Stoney Parish Council** object to the planning application and they state that they were not consulted directly by CDC, but felt duty bound to communicate their views as the masterplan of 5,000 houses will eventually extend closer to the parish boundary.

The parish council also highlighted that the web-based planning application was very vast and highly technical and it was not conveniently accessible and therefore undermined the consultation process. A summary of their comments are below.

1. Masterplanning

CDC must very carefully consider the longer term effect of any decision made in regards to the exemplar phase of NWBicester, as this application cannot be considered in isolation, but as part of a masterplan. It is felt that if the exemplar application is granted permission it will most certainly mean that applications for further developments within the Eco town site may simply be 'rubber stamped' and that is not compatible with good planning practice.

2. Examination in Public

There has been no examination in public of the proposed Eco town development, and due to the size and scope of the proposed project we believe there should have been. We question whether CDC should even accept the application for determination as it was only a small group of councillors who made a decision in regards to the use of this land not owned by CDC justified by the PPS. Alternative sites for this development should be examined.

3. Size of development

Question the need for a development of the size of the Eco town, and whether CDC were just reacting to the now defunct SE Plan. As Bicester is already growing quickly with agreed housing development, how will the local infrastructure cope with a further 5000 houses on its outskirts. There is lack of planned infrastructure to serve the development, and a further transport study must be undertaken as the Halcrow study is out of date. Once the development is finished it will mean an extra 10,000 cars travelling on daily journeys to and from the development to work far outside both the Eco town and Bicester itself. The Eco town will become a dormitory town where even if 1 job per household is achieved there will be up to 10,000 extra people).

4. Location of development

The site is detached from Bicester, approximately 2.0 miles from the

centre of Bicester (Market Square) and it is set alone within open countryside, with green fields between it and the edge of Bicester. It claims that the town is easily accessed by cycling and public transport, we believe that private vehicles will be used for the majority of journeys. Real concerns that the exemplar and indeed the whole Eco town it's driven by expectations divorced from reality that people choosing to locate in the eco development will adopt the sustainable living ethos. No real solutions are considered here other than 'discussions with OCC and Highways Agency will continue'.

5. Loss of agricultural land

The whole of the Eco town development will cover 850 acres of productive agricultural land that will be used for housing when DEFRA is already highlighting the need for a significant increase in food production. The existing landowners which CDC or the developer are not, should be encouraged to continue making a significant contribution to the agricultural economy and not be insulted by dismissive statements in regards to the quality of the land.

6. Alternative sites for development

Alternative sites existing brownfield sites within Bicester should be used without destroying productive land. These sites include MOD land at Graven Hill proposing 1800 houses and SW Bicester Phase 2 land which is already under option by a potential developer. However the MOD option was dismissed by CDC on the basis that the Eco town would provide all of Bicester's housing needs until 2026.

7. Financial viability

Concerns have been raised over the financial viability of the development.

The shortfall in central government funding has been raised as well as the funding need to provide three primary schools and one secondary school which would be in the region of £60m. Other issues raised were the land values and the uncertainty of where the funding will come from.

8. Prematurity

The submission of the planning application for the exemplar site is premature and we call for the Local planning authority to refuse this application, which will give an opportunity to assess the level of development Bicester need going forward and looking into the possibilities of development at Graven Hill and SW Bicester Phase 2.

3.4 **Bicester Town Council** support the principle of the application, however they raise some concerns summarised below:

1. General concerns

- The improved social, economic and environmental infrastructures promised for Eco Bicester as a whole does not appear to be being considered as part of this application, although the Eco Town concept has been 'sold' to the residents with these benefits as part of the whole package.
- Again we stress that with the necessary incremental nature of the NW development over many years it is essential that wider educational, health, social, community and transport needs are built into a master plan for NW Bicester so they are part of planned development and not addressed as an emergency after thought.
- In addition this master plan should also dovetail with a wider blue print for New Bicester as a whole so that the whole community benefits from Eco town status.
- We appreciate that this is not the traditional planning approach but having Eco Town status is not about being traditional it's about being cutting edge and looking forward to showing how things can be done differently both by the applicant and the planning authority

2. Sustainable houses

- We would like to see opportunities for sustainable 'self build' housing in all applications for NW Bicester including this one. We believe that unless this is built in at the start it is unlikely to become part of the overall master planning for NW Bicester.
- Need to be satisfied that provision for home working has been fully considered in respect of impact on family life as well as providing the right tools such as effective high speed broadband.

3. Economy and job creation

- The Economic strategy accompanying the application does not sufficiently enlarge on its aspirations of providing one additional job per dwelling that is accessible by public transport, walking or cycling.
- This first phase would generate some 465 new local on-site jobs. The vast majority of these jobs are of the type that would be generated by any development of this size. They are not the high skilled or green technology or construction jobs that are intended to be derived from being an eco exemplar.
- Lack of any focus on when or how high skilled and green technology and industry jobs can be attracted to New Bicester. Nor is it necessary for the new jobs to be solely located in the new development. Bicester Town Council wishes to see the employment and economic benefits of development being shared right across the town.

4. Education, health, social and community infrastructure

- The application outlines a site but gives no details about providing a primary school. Our expectation is that an on-site primary school will be available from the beginning of occupation of the first homes. We recognize that this is a major shift from the traditional approach but that is what being an

exemplar is all about.

- The school and significant indoor community space should be located together to increase community identity and reduce the carbon footprint. The application proposes a community building above a commercially operated nursery in a local retail centre. There is no certainty when this would be provided and its isolation from the school is not in the best interests of community development. Bicester Town Council suggests that closer location of the school to the retail centre or vice versa would be advantageous.
- We are very concerned that no medical facilities and services are identified in the application. The assumption is that already available local surgeries will absorb the additional numbers and meet their medical needs. However, it appears that local doctors have not been engaged with to ascertain their views on existing availability.

5. Heat, light and power

- The application makes reference to using CHP and bio-mass systems.
- There is no mention of the Ardley Incinerator, which could offer heat and power benefit to NW Bicester and to Bicester as a whole. It has been promised that the incinerator would benefit the local community, and the development on the NW is geographically ideally positioned to best benefit and act as a conduit to the rest of Bicester. The incinerator at Ardley will be generating power to feed back to the National Grid and exhaust heat to the atmosphere so denying local people, the environmental and financial benefits of local heat and power. Bicester Town Council is perplexed that this is an opportunity lost and we strongly urge that this is further and fully examined.

6. Transport

- Transport continues to be an issue. The application does not address integration of the Phase 1, NW development with the rest of Bicester.
- Lords Lane is an obvious barrier but no real options are offered to reduce or overcome this physical barrier to greater integration with the rest of Bicester. To be integrated into the existing town, efforts need to be made to break through this barrier; otherwise, the development will remain segregated.
- The timing of the Primary School provision is also key, in order to encourage the first residents to be able to access education as soon as they move in, otherwise travel patterns will be established with children being driven offsite to access school facilities elsewhere. In addition it will form a social hub helping to stimulate community identity and cohesion.

3.5 **Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)** object to the planning application, however that through further engagement with the applicant, more detailed information being provided and a commitment to fund measures that will ensure that the standards set for eco-towns are met, many of the concerns could be resolved. Detailed officer

recommendations were also submitted by OCC as part of their response.

Having reviewed the application, county officers are concerned that there is little evidence to demonstrate how this development is different from any other development of this scale, with the exception of the houses on the site meeting the standard for Code for Sustainable Homes level five.

1. Relevant strategic policy

- The Oxfordshire City-Region Enterprise Partnership identifies Bicester as a key spatial priority where the eco-town will be used to act as the focus for delivering an international exemplar of sustainable development. In addition to this, the County's emerging Local Transport Plan outlines a transport strategy for Eco-Bicester taking account of all of the known development that is due to take place in the town over the next 20 years. The application will also need to be considered in accordance with national policies, such as PPG13 (Transport).
- Following the site's identification in PPS1, CDC has, with support from the County Council, Bicester Town Council and other key stakeholders, promoted North West Bicester because it believes the building of an exemplar eco-town offers an opportunity to re-position Bicester as a place where new communities are built to high environmental standards and where people across the town enjoy more sustainable lifestyles built on features such as first rate public transport and zero carbon technology. This aspiration, together with the standards an eco-development should meet, are set out in the "Eco Bicester – One Shared Vision" document, approved by the County Council's Cabinet in December 2010.

2. Economic Strategy and job creation

- The economic strategy is highly aspirational in terms of how the overall eco-town development could help reposition Bicester and how the first phase would generate 465 jobs opportunities. The applicant's' aspirations appear dependent on partnership working; many of the on-site jobs would not be highly skilled nor related to green technology and it is not clear how or when the jobs would be delivered. In particular the heavy reliance on home working (one job per every three households) appears to be based on a large number of people who currently commute choosing to rebase existing jobs to their home location rather than the creation of new jobs in the Bicester economy. In conclusion, the strategy is ambitious but is light on substance.
- Further information is required explaining how it is intended to implement the proposed strategy to ensure the timely provision of high quality jobs (on and off-site). In addition further background information is required to demonstrate the assumed levels of home working.

3. Social and Community Infrastructure

- There is a political aspiration for a primary school to be available on-site from day one of occupation to ensure sustainable travel patterns to school and to provide a focus for the new community. The application offers a site

for a school and indicates its general location; however, the applicant considers that sufficient spare places exist in Bicester to accommodate the number of children they consider their development would generate. Officers have the following concerns with regards to the primary school:

- a) **Timing of on-site provision:** Officers are currently looking at how the design and construction programme for a new primary school could be accelerated to enable places to be provided as early in the development as possible; in addition we are looking at options for the provision of temporary places to accommodate the number of children generated between occupation of the first dwellings and the opening of a school.
 - b) **Funding of the new school:** Work is being undertaken on updating school place provision and catchments in Bicester, taking account of the impacts of already planned housing developments on future capacity. The nearest school to the eco-town site (Bure Park) is at capacity.
 - c) **School site:** The application only provides the general indication of land for the school; detailed information is required to enable the site to be agreed and fixed for inclusion in a s106 agreement.
- It is the County Council's presumption that community space will be collocated with the primary school at the heart of the new community. However, the applicant continues to propose a community building above a ground floor nursery located within the local centre. There is no certainty as to when this facility would be delivered as it would depend upon demand for the private nursery and it remains separated from the school site.

4. Transport

- PPS1 requires that 50% of movements generated by the development be by non-car means, with a more stretching target of 60% being the ultimate aim for eco developments attached to existing urban areas. The Travel Plan demonstrates how the applicant proposes to reach 45% by non-car means by 2016 and 50% by 2026, with an aspiration to reach 60% once the whole site is developed.
- The location of this first phase of this development is driven by land ownership and this will present a further challenge in meeting the mode share targets, due to the fact that the site is "disconnected" from the existing town. There are five areas of concern:
- a) **Connection between the northern and southern fields** – should be bus-only from the start, not a commitment to become so in later phases.
 - b) **Bus frequency** – the applicant commits to providing a 30-minute frequency 7am-7pm with an intention to seek to find ways to increase this to 15 minutes and cover a longer period of the day at the earliest opportunity. However, we require the applicant to provide a 15 minute frequency: without this commitment the bus element of this application is very poor and in order to achieve this level of frequency, the applicant should explore innovative ways to provide this service.
 - c) **Parking** – the parking strategy within the Transport Assessment for this application states that residents are expected to own at least one car and the development requires a careful balance between meeting the needs of the residents and the businesses without unduly encouraging car use. However, the parking levels being proposed for the residential element of

Phase 1 are in accordance with the maximum parking standards of CDC and OCC. This would do little to support all the positive elements of the Travel Plan and in fact could undermine them and therefore damage the chances of meeting the “non-car” targets.

- d) **Rights of Way** – officers have some concerns that insufficient consideration has been given to the impact on the Rights of Way network and opportunities for its enhancement. This will need to be subject to further discussion with the applicant.
- e) **Drainage** - there are a number of design, technical and legal issues with the proposed Drainage Strategy for the site which are currently unacceptable. These include that the proposals do not accord with the County Council’s specifications for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and a lack of information on the materials that would be used means that these would need to be resolved before support can be given.

5. Bridges

- The two bridges proposed within the site appear to be structurally sound, but the functional appearance is a missed opportunity to create an architectural statement that is exemplary in its design. Further details are required before “Approved In Principle” (AIPs) plans can be issued for their implementation.

6. S106 package

- Section 106 requirements for on and off-site transport and social & community infrastructure have been sent to the applicant. However, agreement has yet to be reached on the population profile for the development on which these requirements were based and the applicant has yet to respond on the acceptability of these requirements.

7. Waste & Energy

- Officers welcome some of the ideas put forward and the ambitious targets for recycling and composting and reducing residual waste detailed in the application. However, there is not enough information on what actually will be provided, by whom, by when and with what resources.
- The applicant should be working actively with the EfW operator to consider the potential for links between the site and the Plant.
- The principle of ensuring a varied energy mix is supported; however there could be greater recognition within the Energy Strategy of the degree to which architectural design and layout will be key to the degree of flexibility the proposed mix will have.
- There are several references within the application to the Feed-in Tariffs for solar PV. These will be less financially attractive by March 2012 (pending Government review)

8. Biodiversity

- This development does not stand out as one that is demonstrating best practice by taking full account of the biodiversity present on the site or one that has taken opportunities to maximise biodiversity within the proposed development. The main issues are:
 - a) Advice from natural environmental consultees was not taken on board in the pre-application consultation process;
 - b) The application masterplan design was finalised prior to ecological

surveys being complete so was not based on *'up to date information about the environmental characteristics of the area'* as required by PPS9;

- c) There is a lack of detail on biodiversity enhancements;
- d) The development design does not maximise opportunities for biodiversity enhancement;
- e) There is a lack of evidence that the development will deliver a *'net gain in local biodiversity'* as required by PPS1;
- f) The delivery mechanism for the management of green space within the development is not secured;
- g) It appears that the applicant's timetable for the wider eco-town site includes a "design-fix" of the masterplan prior to the completion of all the ecological surveys, which will result in the same issues for the wider site which have occurred for this application.

9. Community Engagement

- Officers consider the applicant approach to Community Engagement as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement should be commended. However, it needs to go much further in providing evidence of community engagement in design and planning of the proposal. To avoid a feeling of over-consultation future engagement should focus on key issues to ensure that the development creates something different.

10. Archaeology

- An archaeological field evaluation has been carried out on the exemplar site which did not record any archaeological features. There will therefore not be a need for any further archaeological investigation as part of this proposal.

3.6 **Thames Water** has provided the following comments on the application.

1. Waste

- Thames Water has identified an inability of the existing waste water infrastructure to accommodate the needs of this application. Should the Local Planning Authority look to approve the application, Thames Water would like the following 'Grampian Style' condition imposed requiring a requirement for a drainage strategy .

2. Water

- The existing water supply infrastructure has insufficient capacity to meet the additional demands for the proposed development. Thames Water therefore recommends a condition requiring impact studies to be undertaken and agreed.

3.7 **SEEDA (South East England Development Agency)** identified that the application did not meet their Regionally Significant Planning Application criteria, therefore no planning comments were made, however they welcomed the scheme and its eco credentials.

3.8 **Highways Agency** has directed that the following condition be attached to any planning permission which may be granted.

- *“Development shall not commence until highway improvement details have been submitted and approved in writing to the Highways Agency in conjunction with the local planning authority and the houses and buildings shall not be occupied until the highway improvements have been constructed in accordance with the approved plans.”*

- 3.9 **Network Rail** has no objections to the application and would support the developer contributions towards railway/station improvements in the area as clearly stated in the transport assessment at £186 per dwelling.
- 3.10 **Chiltern Rail** raise no objections but believe any rail contribution should be provided to them.
- 3.11 **Natural England** stated that this application does not have the feel of an exemplary Eco town site, not least in terms of biodiversity. Natural England’s concerns relate to the delay in biodiversity survey information within the master planning process, a lack of survey data relating to wintering birds, a lack of evidence on the net gain of biodiversity, and a lack of evidence on the impact of air quality on Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI.

1. Conservation Target Areas

11. The development should endeavour to help meet the aims of the Conservation Target Areas, either on or off site, rather than show a lack of impact.

2. Wintering Birds

12. Concerned that a wintering birds survey has not been included in the Environmental Statement following from Arup’s recommendation to produce one. This is so the applicant must be clear of the levels of loss that will occur.

3. Net Gain in Biodiversity

13. The current value of the hedgerows and the watercourses is related to their setting within the surrounding farmland and the species utilising them reflect this. Enhancements proposed, such as reduced cutting of the hedgerows and the provision of buffers will serve to mitigate the change in context, but not result in a gain in biodiversity.
14. The construction of SuDS features are planned to create a network of wet and dry habitats throughout the site, which will be designed to be of value for wildlife. However there is no detail as to how these features will be created and so Natural England remain unconvinced that this will be delivered. We are also disappointed that more wetland features have not been incorporated around the river corridors.

15. There is inconsistency in the detail of the habitats enhancement proposed for the site. For example on the landscape framework plan (drawing 3-2) there orchards to be planted on the wet grassland along the tributary of the River Bure. Orchards will not survive in wet grassland. However elsewhere in the document it is stated that these area may not in fact be wet, but actually quite dry. It need to be decided what habitats are planned for the proposal, and how this will be created and delivered before it can be decided what the biodiversity value will be.

16. 25% of the green space within the development is to be dedicated to nature conservation (page 61). These areas should be made clear in the plans, and access should be minimised in these areas in order to reduce disturbance. From the plans it appears that the areas considered to be important for nature conservation contain footpaths and cycle ways, and will probably make attractive dog walking areas. This will result in highly disturbed habitats which will not be of a high vale for nature conservation. One solution would be to incorporate carefully designed wetland features which will reduce permeability and hence disturbance. Where access is an essential part of the design then the value of these areas for biodiversity will be reduced and this should be taken into account when calculating biodiversity gains.

4. River Corridor/Bats

17. Natural England is concerned that we have been unable to find any evidence or designs to show that the lighting of the site will allow a dark corridor along the River Bure. The lighting strategy in the Design and Access statement says that 'This has been accommodated, as far as practicable,' but there is no detail to show what the result of this is, and how much of the river corridor will remain dark at night time.

5. Bridge Design

18. Natural England is concerned with the provision of box culverts as the bridge design for crossing the River Bure and its tributary. We believe that clear span bridges would allow for a more effective corridor for both continuity of habitat and movement of wildlife and people. This design would also retain a more open view along the river corridor, increasing the feeling of open space, and creating a more attractive landscape.

6. Long Term Management

19. The applicant needs to demonstrate that the green infrastructure can be managed, maintained and monitored in the long term in order to guarantee that a net gain in biodiversity can be delivered. This includes the need to commit to a management option which can be proven to be viable in the development.

7. Green Infrastructure

20. Natural England is pleased that 46% of the proposed development has been allocated as Green Space. (page 58 of ES). However we are concerned that the term multifunctional has been taken to mean that all areas of GI must serve more than one purpose. This does not have to be the case, and in some cases combinations of functions are not compatible.

8. Agriculture and Land Use

21. Natural England are happy that most if not all of the small area of best and most versatile land (Grade 3a) is being retained as part of the Green Infrastructure for the site, and that soils will be relocated to suitable locations, depending on the land use e.g. allotments and habitat creation.

9. Masterplanning

22. Natural England are disappointed that the design of this proposal was carried out without all of the relevant background information being available. Indeed the extended phase 1 habitat survey data was only received in November 2010, weeks before the application was submitted. Ecological surveys must be carried out first in order to inform the design as stated in PPS9. This must be the case for the wider eco-town master plan in order to prevent many of the problems that have been encountered here.

3.12 **Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)** has commented on the application and the comments are set out below.

1. Legislation and guidance

- In addition to the normal legislative and policy guidelines in relation to biodiversity, we are looking for this eco-town development to meet the guidelines of the supplement to PPS1 on eco-towns with regard to biodiversity and green infrastructure, as well as following the eco-town worksheets on biodiversity and green infrastructure published by the TCPA, CLG and Natural England. In light of the guidance available, I wish to submit the following comments.

2. Net Biodiversity Gain

- Overall, whilst the proposal is unlikely to be significantly detrimental to local biodiversity, it does not stand out as an exemplar in terms of biodiversity enhancements.

- Late provision of ecological survey information did not allow for ecology to be considered at initial stages of the design of this development. Further information is required in the Environmental Impact Assessment as it is considered that the level of information submitted is insufficient to determine whether the Eco-town will achieve the aim of a net gain in biodiversity, and as such whether it fulfils the requirements of the supplement to PPS1.

- Arrangements for the long term management of green spaces, including identification of a management body and funding, have yet to be secured. As a result it is unclear that the measures incorporated for biodiversity will

be fully realised.

3. Environmental Impact Assessment

- The results of wintering bird surveys are not available to inform the ecological assessment, so any gains or losses with regards to this group cannot be taken into account.
- In relation to assessment of impacts on Ardley Quarry and Cutting SSSI, I note that it is reported that calcareous grasslands would not be enriched by nitrogen. Reference to the Air Pollution Information Service (APIS) website indicates that whilst this is often the case as phosphate is limiting, and critical loads for nitrogen deposition, for this habitat it is indicated that *B.pinnatum* (which currently occurs on the site) is tolerant of low phosphate and therefore an increase in this species may result from increased nitrogen, thus resulting in a change in species composition.
- It is suggested that further consideration needs to be given to this issue, including assessment of contributions of nitrogen from increased traffic as well as the energy centre and with reference to the critical levels for nitrogen oxides.
- It should be noted that a systematic review of potential impacts on Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) has not been included. Whilst many of the LWSs in the locality have been mentioned, I would expect to see an assessment of potential impacts on the specific features for which these sites have been selected as being of local value; this should include assessment of any likely recreational, air pollution or hydrological impacts.
- Whilst impacts on Conservation Target Areas (CTAs) have been considered, the purpose of CTAs is in fact to identify areas of opportunity for biodiversity enhancements to help deliver the aims of the UK and local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) through landscape scale conservation. Policy ET16.3 of the supplement to PS1 indicates that the Biodiversity Strategy should set out priority actions in line with Local Biodiversity Action Plans. In line with this policy, I would wish to see an assessment of opportunities for the development to contribute towards the aims of the Tusmore and Shewell CTA and the Ray CTA. Whilst a negative impact on the Ray CTA has been excluded due to its location upstream of tributaries feeding from the proposed development site, I would wish to see consideration of the impact on the Otmoor CTA, and designated sites, which lie downstream of the proposed development.
- There is no mention of records for BAP priority butterflies in proximity to the proposed development, records were provided to Arup by Butterfly Conservation. These included brown letter hairstreak at Bure Park, and white letter hairstreak south of the application site. I would expect to see identification of opportunities to enhance the habitats for these species to encourage population expansion in line with Policy ET16.3 of the supplement to PPS1. Whilst I understand that hedgerow management is to be improved and may benefit brown hairstreak, the provision of elm for whiteletter hairstreak does not seem to have been considered (varieties resistant to Dutch elm disease are available). The EIA also reports water voles in the nearby area, consideration should be given to design of water features to provide appropriate habitat for this species.

4. Delivery of a 'net gain in local biodiversity'

- I welcome that a Biodiversity Strategy has been submitted with the

application, as is required under Policy ET 16.3 of the supplement to PPS1. However, it is not clear that a net gain in biodiversity will be delivered. Policy ET 16.1 of the supplement to PPS1 makes it clear that 'Eco-towns should demonstrate a net gain in local biodiversity'.

- Overall, it appears that it is intended that delivery of a net gain in biodiversity would be achieved through retention of existing features including hedgerows and watercourses, including management of these features, and habitat creation within corridors of open space.
- The eco-towns biodiversity worksheet emphasises the need to integrate biodiversity within the built environment to create a high degree of permeability for wildlife. Whilst bird and bat boxes are to be provided, I am disappointed not to see more innovative design of the built environment to provide for biodiversity.
- Whilst more sympathetic management of the hedgerows may well benefit certain species, particularly invertebrates, the setting of the hedgerows will change, which in turn is likely to make them less attractive to some of the farmland bird species (for example yellowhammer) which currently use them. Therefore achievement of an overall net gain for this habitat and associated species is unclear.
- The main corridor of open space following the watercourses in the southern section of the site is divided by roads. I understand that the bridges which are planned to carry these roads will consist of a box culvert. This is likely to reduce the ability of wildlife to move along these corridors of open space. It also creates a series of small management units which severely limits the ability to manage these areas in a suitable way to achieve successful wet grassland and species rich meadow creation. A clear span bridge design would be preferable to allow better connectivity and management of these areas.
- Whilst the need to maintain dark corridors along the watercourses has been recognised in the submission, particularly with regard to provision of foraging corridors for bats, I have some concern that this will not be achieved particularly since there is likely to be demand to light pedestrian routes along these corridors. Consideration should be given to routing these paths along the edges of the corridors to maintain a larger proportion of unlit space and to aid management of these spaces.

5. Green Infrastructure

- I welcome that the development meets the PPS target for 40% Green Infrastructure, but the multi-functionality of this green space means that there are unlikely to be many areas undisturbed by the public, thus limiting the ability to achieve a net gain in biodiversity. Through planting design and use of wetland features (such as ponds, scrapes and fen habitats), it is possible to design areas of open space which allow for quiet areas for wildlife alongside those areas which are more accessible to the public, but currently the design appears to encourage access throughout most of the open space.
- It has been identified that wet grassland and species rich grassland will be created within the watercourse corridors, but it is unclear whether the hydrology and soils in these areas suit these habitats. If the soils are too enriched or too dry or wet then creation of the habitats suggested will not be achievable. Additionally, in order to successfully create these grassland habitats, appropriate ongoing management will be needed. Such habitats

need to be cut and/or grazed; since the species rich grassland is also to be planted with trees it is unclear how this will allow for machinery to be used to cut the grassland.

- It does not appear that any fencing of these grassland areas has been identified, which would preclude the ability to graze. Grazing on such sites would provide the most effective management to achieve the desired habitats in terms of wildlife conservation and enhancement.
- Since a management body, and mechanisms for funding management work, have not yet been secured it is not clear that the biodiversity benefits of management of existing features will be realised, or the successful creation of wildlife habitats will be achieved.
- We would encourage the applicants to consider creative approaches to long term management involving the local community.

3.13 **Sport England (SE)** objects to the application, the reasons for their objection are stated below; however SE would be willing to withdraw this objection should further details be provided which address their concerns:

- The developments site does not include any playing field land, as identified by Article 16(1) Schedule 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 or any other sporting provision. Consequently, Sport England does not have any comments to make on the principle of the proposed development.
- Due to the nature of the development Sport England would expect the application to ensure that
 - a) the demand for sporting provision generated by the development will be adequately met,
 - b) The design of the development actively promotes participation in sport and physical activity, thereby enabling residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles.
- It is therefore essential that new developments, especially residential, provide for the additional demand they will generate for sporting provision as supported by PPG17.
- No information is provided on how the demand for sporting provision that will be generated from the development will be adequately met. The planning Statement under the 'leisure' heading refers only to green infrastructure provision rather than wider leisure facilities such as those for formal sports.
- The Social Infrastructure Provision (SIP) paper does include information on leisure and recreation facilities in Bicester, but concludes that the development will not generate the level of demand necessary to support a wider range of facilities beyond those local and neighbourhood facilities already proposed for the site.
- Due to the size of the development Sport England accepts that it may not be appropriate to provide formal sporting provision on site. However the information supporting the application does not provide any assessment of the likely demand that will be generated by the development and how this demand may be met by existing provisions.
- Details regarding a contribution towards meeting this demand off site through new and/or enhanced provision are also not included. Work is currently being undertaken to look at the likely demand that will be generated from the wider Eco town proposal for sporting provision. Using

Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator it was found that for the 1,000 population included within the SIP the demand that will be generated from the exemplar site for certain facilities types: Sports Halls – 0.31 courts at a cost of £219, 799, Swimming Pools – 11.01 Sqm at a cost of £123,396 and Artificial Grass Pitches – 0.03 pitches at £25,427 (3G Surface) & £20,517 (Sand Based surface).

- The design of the proposed primary school site should ensure that it lends itself to community use. Providing this new facility offers the opportunity to design in ease of access to ancillary provision (changing rooms and toilets) and an appropriate pitch specification to ensure local sports clubs could benefit from the provision at the site (e.g. playing field land) outside school hours. In addition a community use agreement should be secured to ensure the maximum benefit to sport of the school facilities. These points could be secured by way of condition to any forthcoming planning permission.

3.14

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) raised some concerns regarding the application, however they support the aspiration that if Bicester is to grow significantly, it should be achieved in a more innovative and eco-friendly way so that any new development truly minimises its impact on the natural environment, and indeed can be demonstrated to enhance that environment. Their main concern is the potential loss of 850 acres of “greenfield” land, which is currently productively farmed, should the whole eco-town plan go ahead. Therefore demonstration of special circumstances prevailing and appropriate mitigating features applicable to such a development are of prime importance.

1. Planning process

- The application is premature and driven by the PPA. An overall strategy needs to be approved instead of starting in a piecemeal manner. There need to be far more certainty over the financial viability and deliverability of the whole Eco town before embarking on the exemplar. At the same time the overall need and timing for building 5,000 additional dwellings at Bicester should be scrutinised and justified in the context of the changing national scene with the expected abolition of RSS 9, the removal of the Government's housing targets and a much less buoyant housing sector.

2. Alternatives

- The specific question of alternative sites needs to be reviewed in light of the possibility of development in the MOD Graven Hill area. Having attended your workshop on “how Bicester might grow in future”, on balance we are of the opinion that the development envisaged to the North West is the most appropriate given the assumed housing pressures and the other alternatives. Whether this has been altered by the possibility of at the MOD's Graven Hill “previously developed” site becoming available is hard to judge at this stage. Certainly initial proposals from the MOD do not appear to carry any eco credentials.

3. Eco aims

- We should like to applaud in general Dominion group/P3ECO's commitment to making this extension as eco friendly as possible. If Bicester has to grow, let it be in as eco friendly way as possible, and, if at all feasible, let such development influence the rest of the town so that Bicester can be held up as an example of what in future towns can achieve in their sensitivity to the local environment.

4. The Exemplar

- The development is very piecemeal, strung out and detached – which may be a function of opportunistic land acquisition.
- It is not at all clear how the local job formation will occur, and therefore how the new development's residents will be prevented from joining the vast majority of existing Bicester inhabitants in commuting by car to their work.
- We concur with OCC's view that the transport plan needs tightening up if sustainable travel from, to and within the site is to be the norm. In addition the overall effect of the new development on Bicester's existing traffic patterns remains unclear. We are reminded of Councillor Barry Wood's insistence that the long term problems at Junction 9 of the M40 need to be solved to make the NW Bicester eco-town viable. It is unclear what progress is being made with the Highway Agency on this major project.
- We are particularly concerned that given its overall eco-credentials that the proposed development does not appear to have made a full survey of the existing biodiversity on the site, and more importantly does not spell out how, under the terms of PPS 1 and 9, the developers intend to meet their statutory duty to enhance that biodiversity.
- Is there any sound reason why the Exemplar site should not achieve the Council's proposed policy (NWB1) of Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes? Surely by definition an "Exemplar" should set the highest standard aspired to?
- The new eco village at Milton Keynes though the dwellings and gardens were sympathetic, however the community had no pivotal point or fulcrum. This may be a function of scale or timing, but we would echo OCC's concerns that there is no certainty as to when the proposed community building will be delivered. Somehow the outcome of a soulless, piecemeal estate must be avoided even at this embryo stage.

3.15

The Environment Agency object to this planning application, however they do support elements of the scheme and it should be noted that their concerns may be overcome through revisions to the development and further information being provided. Their concerns are listed below:

1. Water Cycle Study (WCS)

- The submitted WCS is a good outline investigation. To fully demonstrate the likely impact the exemplar development may have on the water environment, certain elements of the study need to be expanded.

2. Water supply

- We support the proposal to limit potable water use to 80 litres, per person, per day through the use of water efficient devices and rainwater harvesting. This would ensure the development meets level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. We support this commitment.

3. Foul drainage

- The foul drainage for the exemplar site will connect to the existing Bicester sewage treatment works. The study concludes that capacity at the works is sufficient for the exemplar but the network is likely to require upgrading and a proposal has been outlined to identify what would be required. It is essential that a development phasing arrangement is agreed to ensure that the upgrades are implemented prior to, or in line with the development to avoid pollution. There should be no occupation of the homes until the necessary upgrades are in place.
- Including water efficient devices within the development will reduce the volume of water going to the sewer network. However, we recommend a margin of error is built in to the network so there is no risk of overloading in the future by any changes that may be made within the houses.

4. Water quality

- The Eco-town development must not result in deterioration in water quality and should take steps to ensure water quality is improved. Further work is required on this element to ensure the likely impacts of the development are fully understood and there is confidence that it is feasible to address them.
- In addition, there should be an outline of the steps that will be taken towards water neutrality. There is currently insufficient detail to show how this development can contribute to this aspiration.

5. Fluvial flood risk

- We have reviewed the fluvial flood model to inform the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and while there are no significant issues with it, we do require some further explanation as to how the hydrology used within the model has influenced the outputs.
- we are supportive of the FRA objectives which identifies that all

development will be located in Flood Zone 1 (low risk) and therefore the risk of fluvial flooding will not be increased.

- As a precautionary measure, we recommend that the internal floor levels of all buildings are set no lower than 300mm above the 1 in 100 year climate change flood level. This will ensure the development is resilient to any future changes in flood risk. It is not clear from the details of the application whether this is feasible within the current design parameters of the development.

6. Surface water drainage

- It is proposed that surface water will discharge via soakaway wherever feasible and the remaining runoff managed through attenuation features with a controlled discharge to local watercourses.
- We welcome the commitment within the drainage strategy to limit surface water discharges from the site to the Greenfield runoff rate of 40 l/s for all rainfall events up to and including the 1 in 100 year (including a 30% allowance for climate change).
- Both the FRA and the drainage strategy have concluded that a certain number of properties will be able to drain via soakaway. However, there have been only 3 drainage tests carried out and these conclude that there is variable infiltration potential across the site. We are concerned that the size of the attenuation features relies on those property numbers being drained by soakaway but there is no clear explanation or evidence to show that level of soakaway is feasible. If the required volume of storage needs to be increased, the size of the attenuation features may need to increase and we are concerned that there will not be sufficient space to allow this within the current layout.
- Although the proposed discharge rate is to be limited to Greenfield rates, discharged from the site will increase as a result of the development, a volume has not been stated. This presents a risk of increasing flooding downstream, particularly at the confluence of the River Bure (to which the site will discharge), the Pingle Stream and Langford Brook.
- Any increase in the rate or volume of water leaving the site should be avoided or mitigated on site through storage, re-use and infiltration

7. Sustainable Drainage (SuDS)

- We are very disappointed to see the inclusion of sub-surface attenuation in the form of tanks as part of the design. Although tanks will attenuate surface water, they do not deliver any further benefits that other SuDS features can. They also have the disadvantage of traditional drainage systems as they are below ground, which can lead to maintenance difficulties and hide any potential blockages and failures within the system.

We would not wish, or expect, to see tanks within the drainage system of an exemplar environmental development on a greenfield site of this size and would like to see them replaced.

- We also note the proposal includes decking and walkways over a number of the SuDs ponds. This also can hinder maintenance through the accumulation of litter, debris and silt. We advise that access to the ponds be limited to the edge so not to obstruct maintenance access.

8. Ground Water flooding

- The FRA identifies that parts of the site may be at high risk from groundwater flooding and that mitigation measures will be required to manage this risk. However, it does not identify which parts of the developments will be at risk, quantify the level of risk or detail the mitigation required beyond generic examples. Without understanding and mitigating this risk the development could be susceptible to prolonged periods of flooding. Any mitigation must be designed with consideration of other environmental factors such as avoiding surface water and fluvial flood risk, and not depleting groundwater levels.
- The conclusion of the FRA is misleading as it states the risk from groundwater flooding is low, this is only the case if suitable mitigation is provided.

9. Bridges – flood risk

- To ensure no obstruction to the flow of the watercourse and maintain a natural watercourse corridor we would wish to see bridges on this site be of clear span design and not culverted as shown on the plan.
- The culvert is shown to be undersized, impinging on the natural banks of the watercourse. This will restrict flows on the watercourse especially during flood events, increasing flood risk upstream. The large heavily engineered headwalls also reduce the aesthetic value of the watercourse corridor through what is meant to be an environmentally sensitive development.
- The erection of flow control structures or any culverting of a watercourse requires the prior written approval of the Environment Agency under s.23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 or s.109 of the Water Resources Act 1991. As we have concerns with the current design, we may refuse this consent.

10. Biodiversity

- The assessment of risks to nature conservation is inadequate by virtue of being incomplete and the mitigation measures do not ensure the achievement of net biodiversity gain.
- Although there has been a significant range of ecological surveys to support the development, a number of these (i.e. wintering bird survey) were

completed too late to substantially influence the design of the scheme. The results of the wintering bird survey must therefore be integral to the assessment of the impacts on the local biodiversity resource, and also to the appropriate design of mitigation measures, and is therefore pertinent to support the overall conclusion of net biodiversity gain.

- Without a more robust design of a mosaic of wet features in the stream corridor, carefully designed to allow some access but with areas which are less permeable to people and are therefore less disturbed, it is not clear how the stated claim for net biodiversity gain can be secured in the Exemplar site.
- The achievement of this net gain is also predicated in the Biodiversity Strategy on the future management of the habitats to be established, but although the Strategy sets out options to achieve this management, none of this has been secured nor demonstrated to be viable.

11. Development close to watercourse

- An adequate buffer between the development and watercourse is essential to support biodiversity and link spaces to allow wildlife to move between suitable habitats, currently it is shown to be inadequate.
- The stream corridors in the Exemplar site are an essential component in the Biodiversity Strategy for securing net biodiversity gain. The current design shows built development, a NEAP and access routes in close proximity to the Bure which all serve to reduce the potential for the stream corridor to achieve the objective of net biodiversity gain.
- The development claims 40% GI, with 20.5% claimed as 'enhancement' to provide biodiversity net gain, which in principle we support. However, the design does not demonstrate an imaginative use of the stream corridor to provide the multiple benefits of GI to biodiversity, flood risk management and amenity which will allow all these objectives to be achieved successfully. .
- Of particular concern is the requirement for the stream corridor to provide a dark foraging and transit route for bats – although this is acknowledged as an important design element, the proximity of the development and the lack of clarity in the lighting strategy as to whether access routes through and across the corridor may be lit, provides no confidence that this objective can be achieved.

12. Bridge design – biodiversity

- Culverting of the River Bure will have a damaging impact on nature conservation and landscape; in particular it deteriorates the river and bankside habitat while interrupting the wildlife corridor.
- The current proposal for a box culvert with concrete wingwalls and earth embankments severs this corridor, compromising its value for wildlife movement in general and in particular disrupting the flight path corridor for

bats, an attribute recognised as important by the developers. The current design also detracts significantly from the natural landscape characteristics of the stream corridor.

13. Waste

- We support the use of a Site Waste Management Plan (SWMP) linked to a Sustainable Resource Management Plan and the high recycling targets outlined.
- We accept that some materials may need to be placed in landfill, provided that this is the best environmental option.

14. Contaminated land & Groundwater quality

- We agree with the indication that levels of contamination on the exemplar site are low and therefore unlikely to impact groundwater quality. However, section 3.2 of the Interpretative report it states that the full results of the gas and groundwater monitoring will be issued as a separate addendum to this interpretative report, then Section 6.4 of the same report concludes that no remedial action is required. However, it is not clear how this conclusion is reached because no results for water analysis are included within that report. The interpretative report refers to a Factual Report which perhaps includes some groundwater quality data which has not been included within the application documents.
- This is particularly relevant because of the proposal to drain surface water via soakaway. We would not want to see any infiltration through contaminated soils as this would present an unacceptable risk to groundwater quality. The developer will need to demonstrate that this risk does not exist.

3.16 **Commission for Architecture of the Built Environment** cannot support the application as they comment that the execution of the first phase is disappointing and that the eco-credentials of the scheme are limited and that there is little deviation from the standard suburban housing model. They highlight that as this application needs to set a precedent for development in the area over the next 20 to 30 years it is crucial that the first phase sets high standards for the future, therefore the proposals must be more visionary in their approach if the requirements of the PPS1 Eco towns supplement are to be met. Details of their comments are below:

1. Masterplan

- It is unfortunate that the planning application for the exemplar phase has been submitted prior to the submission for approval of the overall masterplan. This is a back to front approach and makes it more difficult for the exemplar phase to be considered as an integrated part of the masterplan development, given that the masterplan is still yet to be finalised and agreed.

2. Site layout

- Convincing work has been undertaken to consider the flexibility of the landscape and to incorporate the existing field pattern into the site plan. This could successfully deal with the co-existence of the developed and undeveloped plots, by providing clear boundaries. It is inevitable that the phasing of the development will result in changes to the co-existence of different land uses, with fields directly adjacent to new homes when initial plots are developed,

which overtime will be built upon.

- We are encouraged that thought has been given to how the phases will link to one another by providing lanes that can continue into adjacent phases and not constrained dead ends. However we think that this work should be taken further. It is essential to the success of the masterplan that individual phases are not designed in isolation and we suggest that site layout plans are put together for adjacent plots from the outset in order to ensure that the design of different phases fit together. In light of this point, we question whether it is desirable to build right up to the site boundaries, which could lead the next phase to do the same which would then blur the development boundaries and lose sight of the original ethos of the site plan.
- We find that the arrangement of clusters provides a structure to the development which is more manageable than the whole. We suggest that different clusters could create different characters or types of development, providing choices for the future community. However we query how the different clusters relate to each other and how the clusters relate to individual plots.
- We find the layout of streets and spaces interesting, such as the single carriageway streets with passing places that could add interest and variety to the public realm. It needs to be demonstrated that sufficient access will be provided for emergency services and refuse trucks. We question whether the levels of maintenance required for this form of street design can be sustained, or will these spaces be adopted and maintained by the local highways authority?

3. Density

- We think that the density of the development is too low, lower indeed than that of the nearest areas of existing development. The idea behind an eco-town development is to provide an efficient and intensive scheme layout, however this scheme does not meet these requirements generated by the imperative of efficient use of infrastructure. The team has not demonstrated why such a low density development is being proposed as we see no reason why a higher density scheme would not be viable in this location. We are concerned that the low density will militate against the principles of the EcoTowns PPS principally greater resource efficiency and the reduction of car use.

4. Architecture

- We are encouraged to see that three different architects are working on the housing designs, but are disappointed that a greater variety of house types is not emerging to provide a greater choice for buyers. All the clusters of development are the same in terms of building typologies and architecture, and that there is limited variety in terms of the size of dwellings.

5. Conclusion

- For the exemplar site, we would expect to see a proposal that captures the essential aspirations of an eco-town: the current proposals fall short of that mark.

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3.17 **Thames Valley Police Authority (TVP)** fully supports the identification of the North West Bicester Eco town, however they wish for the Local Authority to consider the issues below when determining the application.

- The location for the whole North West Bicester Eco town has not been

subject to SEA as is required by the EU Directive and Government legislation.

- This speculative application has no adopted development plan, area action or masterplan basis that should similarly be subject of SEA.
- The location for this first phase of the eco town is based purely on land ownership and would not be the first choice for a sustainable development by any sensible town planner and indeed there has been no appraisal of alternative first phase locations to inform this choice.
- In an unfavourable economic climate, there is a danger that this development could remain an island of inappropriate development for some time in the future.
- The application proposals fall short of the PPS Eco town supplement to PPS1 in many respects and on a number of issues.
- TVP has developed a formula for calculating the level of contributions required from new developments in Cherwell to fund the additional police infrastructure needs generated by population growth arising from planned residential and business/commercial developments. Using the methodology, the proposed development of 394 dwellings and other proposed development subject to this application, would generated a financial contribution of £202,910, less the cost of any permanent on-site office provision. TVP see this as a starting point, based as it is on a national formula for new housing development, as it is recognised that this may be the first phase of a larger and fairly unique development. Unfortunately, there is no masterplan or outline application for the whole Eco town development to allow TVP to confirm the level of development it needs to police and how it would do so from an operational view.

3.18 **Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd** does not object to the planning application and cognises the eco credentials of the proposal along with the history to the site but they do raise the following concerns:

1. Planning Justification

- The key justification for the planning application therefore lies in the supplement to PPS1 on Eco-towns as the planning application documents clearly state throughout that the application is a departure from the adopted development plan, consisting of the saved policies within the Cherwell District Local Plan and the South East Plan.
- The application is significantly below the level set out in the PPS of a minimum 5,000 and 5,000 new jobs at 394 dwellings with an equivalent level of employment generating development. This is without greater certainty over the ability to deliver the remainder of the 5,000 dwellings and jobs, it is

surely inappropriate to rely upon the PPS as justification for the development of this site at this time. Also if the development is being brought forward in a piecemeal manner it is not allowing the Bicester Eco town concept to be tested.

- The eco town concept appears to be becoming outdated and liable to change as national policy thinking evolves over months and years. Within the Localism Bill there continues to be a need for LDF documents to be tested for 'soundness' and deliverability (PPS3) and at no point in the application does it state that developers have control of the wider land required to bring forward 5,000 residential units.
- The development should only be viewed as acceptable if it represents the first part of the Eco Town the Council may consider it appropriate to use planning conditions/legal agreements to ensure that an application does indeed come forward within a reasonable timescale for the remaining 4,606 residential units, employment uses and infrastructure.
- We consider it premature to bring a site forward on the basis of that draft allocation. The core strategy, along with the associated evidence base, has not yet been tested through public examination and remains open to potentially significant change.
- We have raised through the Core Strategy consultation some fundamental concerns over the evidence base supporting the strategic allocation of NW Bicester. These concerns still stand, and are reinforced by the fact that the Council is having to re-visit its evidence base for district-wide housing requirements, in the light of the forthcoming revocation of Regional Plans.

2. EIA

- The Local authority needs to have environmental information available for the whole site as part of the Environmental Statement (ES) so the whole NW Bicester development can be assessed as the planning documents clearly identify that the exemplar site forms part of the wider Eco town proposal. The point is raised again that the PPS1 states a minimum of 5,000 homes for an Eco town, therefore the application should be assessed as a whole development, because currently the validity of the submitted ES is questionable when the development is clearly part of a larger scheme.
- If this Exemplar Development proposal were to be permitted on the assumption that it is the initial phase of the wider Eco-Town, and it is this assumption that makes it acceptable, then the decision cannot be made in the absence of environmental information about the consequences of the entire Eco-Town project. Therefore the scope of the submitted ES would need to encompass the entire Eco-Town masterplan.
- It is accepted that the ES considers the potential cumulative environmental effects of the Exemplar development alongside the wider Eco-town scheme. This concludes that there would be little or no cumulative impact, as a range of mitigation measures will be put forward for the wider Eco-town scheme to alleviate any potential issues.
- The assessment has been done on a very broad basis, which means that

many key elements, such as traffic issues, have not been considered in a level of detail to provide any degree of certainty with regards the assumptions made in the cumulative assessment.

- As the applicant is also promoting the wider site, and goes as far as including a detailed master plan within the application documents, that in this instance a more detailed cumulative assessment should have been undertaken and that if the wider scheme is key to the planning argument then the entire development should have been assessed in an EIA context.

3. Transport

- WSP reviewed the transport assessment submitted in support of the exemplar proposal and a summary can be found below.
- The location of the 'exemplar' site is not conducive to sustainable modes of transport.
- All connections between the northern and southern site are channelled through the centre of the site. This is not permeable as per Manual for Street principles.
- The applicant makes a case for mixed-use to support internalisation but admits that significant employment provision to achieve this could only be realised with the wider NW Bicester Eco-town. This undermines the 'establishing mindset early' arguments made in the TA.
- It is unclear how modal shift assumptions can be achieved within the context of a stand-alone development when there is no certainty that the Eco-town would be deliverable/viable.
- Only local junctions have been assessed with no reference to whether the improvements are incremental or abortive in the long-term.
- No agreement has been reached with OCC/HA on wider impacts, these are described simply as 'subject to further discussion'. This is not considered sufficient for a site with such potentially far reaching transport implications.
- The majority of parking is off-plot, leading to uncertainty over how parking levels across the site will be enforced. This leads into further uncertainty over how the travel plan will be monitored and enforced.

4. General comments

- In the absence of vigorous testing and meaningful examination could result in what would be an incomplete development in an unsustainable location.

3.19 **Defence Estates** raise an objection to the planning application; they ask for the application to be refused on the following grounds:

- The application is premature in that its determination would have a prejudicial pre-determination impact upon the draft Core Strategy in contravention of the guidance set out in PPS1.

- The application does not have a current allocation and has no approved masterplan in contravention of guidance as set out in PPS1, PPS12, the Eco-Town supplement to PPS1, and policy NWB1 of the draft Core Strategy. Furthermore, in its development the local community has not been afforded adequate opportunity to shape the proposal through well managed community consultation which does not comply with the guidance, also set out in PPS1.
- The application fails to protect the natural environment by proposing unnecessary use of productive green field land, and housing development in an unsuitable and unsustainable location in contravention of the guidance as set out in PPS1 and PPS3.
- The application does not offer sufficient evidence that the proposed development can comply with the guidance set out for Eco-Towns in the supplement to PPS1 in terms of employment or transport modal shift;
- The eco-credentials proposed have not been sufficiently demonstrated, in particular, with the lack of a Water Cycle Study or a Sustainable Waste Resources Plan, and
- The application does not comply with policy R12 of the adopted Local Plan, Policies I3 or I4 in the draft Core Strategy, or guidance as set out in PPS3 or the Eco-Town supplement to PPS1 in regard to sufficient levels of sports and play provision;

1. Assessment of Prematurity

- The proposal is not in accordance with current development plans.
- It is of such a significant scale that it is likely to prejudice the outcome of the Core Strategy.
- The emerging Core Strategy is only at draft stage and there have been objections to the Eco-Town proposal contained within it.
- Alternative strategic housing sites have been put forward for consideration but have not yet been tested through the examination process, the application is considered to be premature.

2. Case for the principle of an Eco-Town to be progressed as a Supplementary Planning Document

- The proposed application has been submitted without the benefit of an allocation in the LDF and in the absence of any approval for a wider masterplan.
- A 4.5 year supply of housing has been identified. Sufficient time is available for the principle of an Eco-Town to be considered properly, and delivered in an achievable timeframe, if the principle of the proposed eco-town is determined by the local community as desirable and necessary.
- The proposed development does not:
 - a) Comply with an approved masterplan as set out in Policy NWB1 of the draft Core Strategy
 - b) Comply with an approved masterplan as set out in paragraphs

ET20.1 and 20.2 of the supplement to PPS1; or

- c) Set out clearly, in a draft Section 106 legal document, how the proposed development would progress in order to support the 394 dwellings proposed, in line with paragraph ET21.1, 22.1 or 22.2.

3. General Policy Considerations

- The proposed development does not comply with the policies in the SE Plan:
 - a) SP3 in that it does not support the urban focus;
 - b) CC1 as it does not constitute sustainable development; or
 - c) H5 in that it does not comply with the minimum density of 40 dph.
- The proposed development does not comply with the following policies in the adopted local plan:
 - a) EMP1 or EMP4 in that it is not an existing or allocated employment site;
 - b) C8 in that it constitutes sporadic development in the countryside; and
 - c) C28 and C30 in that there is no adopted design code, brief or masterplan for this development.
- The proposed development does not comply with the following policies in the non-statutory local plan:
 - a) H3 in that it does not constitute efficient use of land at less than 30dph;
 - b) H8 in that it is not a rural exception site;
 - c) H11 and H19 in that it is not within the built up limits of Bicester; and
 - d) S1 in that it is not located following the sequential approach.
- The proposed development does not comply with PPS1 in that it does not:
 - a) Protect or enhance the natural environment;
 - b) Make efficient use of previously developed land;
 - c) Take advantage of significant economies of scale; or
 - d) Demonstrate evidence of sustainability and deliverability of infrastructure.
- The application does not comply with the Eco-Town supplement to PPS1 in that it does not:
 - a) Set out facilities to support job creation... (of) one employment opportunity per new dwelling that is easily reached by walking, cycling and/or public transport;
 - b) Demonstrate evidence of sustainability and deliverability, including infrastructure;
 - c) Re-use land that has been previously developed; or
 - d) Safeguard wider policy objectives.
- The application does not comply with PPS3 in that it does not offer:
 - a) A range of community facilities
 - b) Good access to jobs, key services or infrastructure; or
 - c) Housing in a suitable location.

4. Community Consultation

- The proposed development does not comply with policy CC6 in the South East Plan in that it does not develop or implement a local shared vision as it is not an allocated site and is not in compliance with an approved masterplan.
- The proposed development does not comply with PPS1 in that the community consultation carried out has not:
 - a) Been an essential part in delivering sustainable development;
 - b) Enabled the local community to say what sort of place they want to live in at a stage when it can make a difference;
 - c) Enabled the community to put forward ideas and suggestions and participate in developing proposals and options – it has simply invited people to comment on proposals that have already been worked up; or
 - d) Provided or sought feedback.

5. Transport

- The application does not comply with the following policies in the non-statutory local plan:
 - a. TR1 in that it does not contribute to achieving the objectives of the local transport plan
 - b. TR2 in that it is not located in an existing centre
 - c. TR4 in that it does not include all appropriate mitigation measures required to support the development in an implementation strategy.
- The application does not comply with the policy set out in the Eco-Town supplement to PPS1 in that it does not provide walking and cycling connections at anything above the standard required in an attempt to overcome the sites isolated location. It would not provide a sufficient level of public transport provision in order to promote and encourage modal shift from private cars. The proposal does not go beyond national standards with the exception of a reduction in parking provision. Without sufficient public transport provision this is likely to be problematic. As car based travel is likely to be the dominant mode. The proposal does not comply with guidance as set out in the Eco-Towns supplement to PPS1 in paragraphs 11.1, 11.2 or 11.3.

6. Eco Standards

- All new dwellings will be carbon neutral by 2016. The building standards proposed do not outweigh the significant detrimental impact that would occur in building 394 dwellings on productive agricultural land, in an isolated location, in the absence of a demonstrable and pressing housing need.
- The application is not accompanied by a full Water Cycle Strategy or a Sustainable Waste Resources Plan which does not comply with the policy in the supplement to PPS1.

7. Public Open Space

- No sports provision is proposed to serve a 394 house development. This is in direct contravention of policy contained within PPS3 and paragraph ET14.1 of the Eco-Town supplement to PPS1 and does not comply with policy R12 of the adopted Local Plan. The proposed playspace does not comply with the minimum standards contained within policy I4 of the draft CS.
- The proposed allotment provision meets minimum standards only and does not appear to have been planned in an integral manner, but located in the left over spaces in the development.

3.20 **BioRegional** are working as part of the project team on sustainability and outline some concerns that need to be resolved:

1. Density

- On the exemplar, far too much space is taken up by roads, driveways, parking and garages. It results in really low density without the sense of ample quality space.
- The exemplar design is short on play space. The biodiversity areas have been squeezed. Net biodiversity gain has not been demonstrated.
- The draft travel plan has fallen short of demonstrating the modal shift needed. A higher density of homes would help make the bus, the car club and all the services at the village hub more viable.
- The majority of Milton Keynes has a density of 27dph and they have found bus services to be unviable without prohibitive subsidy. The newer parts of the city are 50dph and can support a good bus service.
- The energy solution put forward in this application opts for a district heating system, allowing for renewable centralised technologies. Energy Saving Trust and CHPA recommend at least 55dph for district heating to be financially viable.
- The home zones would be far more successful at an increased density as they would have the critical mass of households to be populated and vibrant.

2. Sustainability Statement

- Even though on p3 reference is made to enabling low carbon footprints, there is no mention of any analysis or strategy for achieving this either in the vision or in any of the Hyder Heartbeat headings. Whilst individual measures such as zero carbon buildings will help to deliver this aspiration, the Sustainability Statement should follow through and demonstrate how this core aspiration will be achieved and to what degree.
- P25 – Construction – best practice in minimising embodied impacts of construction materials should go beyond the use of the BRE Green Guide. Embodied CO2 should be monitored and managed and reduced.
- 1046 NW BICESTER Masterplan report 23-11-10 part 1

- Says all homes are within 800m walking distance of local centres. This is not true of the exemplar.
- It is questioned if there will be green roofs on all garages? (Document BIMP2_PA_05_200_GARAGES)

3. Design and access statement

- P56 Viewpoint 3 looks terrible and uninspiring.
- P131 – Lighting – says “request for dark corridors has been accommodated as far as possible.” What does this mean?
- No details is provided on street design or the degree to which junctions and street textures have been designed to prioritise walking and cycling

4. Environmental Statement Vol 1 Main Text p66

- The report suggests that the construction phase of the development will have no residual impact on the biodiversity of the site. This cannot be correct. Most birds and other animals will leave due to the noise and disturbance.
- What measures are in place to oversee good ecological practice during the construction phase?
- Need details on the construction phase lighting with a plan showing lighting free zones
- Need details on post occupancy lighting – plan showing lighting strategy

5. Economic Strategy

- What evidence is there that the eco business centre, office space, nursery and retail units will be viable and taken up?
- What measures are being proposed in order to promote and facilitate home working?

6. Bridge

- The box culvert bridge is ugly and it disrupts large areas of the supposed watercourse corridor.

7. Draft Travel Plan

- It is a technically robust report as far as it goes with a wide menu of sensible, intelligent and some novel measures, however the measures in this Travel Plan do not go far enough to deliver the targets or meet the PPS.
- A detailed table (also submitted by BioRegional), shows the list of measures proposed, the associated trip reductions and modal shifts due to each measure. If Hyder’s individual mode targets for walking, cycling, bus and train are achieved, then a modal shift of 49% (just short of the target 50%) is achieved. However, there are questions over whether each mode target is achievable. Targets for all 4 modes are ambitious and measures to deliver

them are falling short.

- When specific key journeys are examined, the travel plan shows that unless the resident is a cyclist (some 1-2% of UK population cycle regularly and some 5-8% cycle occasionally), then the measures proposed do not offer a quicker, easier alternative to the car. The alternative travel options for non cyclists therefore need to be improved.
- The plan rightly proposes to place a lot of emphasis on promoting cycling and positively attracting cyclists to live there, some of the ideas in this section are potentially exemplary and could be a UK showcase. However, detailed plans showing how cycle friendly the site is are missing. Bicycle storage facilities are nothing special and not particularly convenient.
- The density of the scheme is not sufficiently high to support the services needed to really deliver modal shift. Campaign for Better Transport recommend 100dph.
- The carbon reduction target, T5 is fine but from the work done to date, it is not possible to even start to assess the degree to which the travel plan delivers against this target. Some analysis of baseline transport related carbon emissions and potential reductions through modal shift and low carbon vehicles is needed.
- Measures to promote and incentivise low carbon motoring are not at all developed in this plan. There is a lot of potential for this scheme to pioneer alternative fuels and super efficient cars. A strategy and commitments to resource and promote these alternatives would be a good addition to this report.
- The Travel Plan relies heavily on travel behaviour work, travel planning, branding, marketing and promotion. It is not clear how well resourced these activities will be.

3.21 Cherwell's **Building Control Manager** has highlighted there is some information outstanding from the application that has made it difficult to give a complete set of comments. However his comments are below:

1. Communal Area (River Corridor) Dwr No. 8010-UA001881 & UP23D-01 and 8011-UA (etc)
Lack of 'spot' levels relating to the proposal; no details relating to the materials/surface finishes are available. Ramps are referred to a 'DDA compliant' which is meaningless. Also very little in the way of 'furniture' is provided which would be suitable for older or disabled individuals to watch or part take in activities.
2. Specific comments on 'access' section of DAS
No mention of - consultation/involvement conducted with user groups
- Imminent demographic change specially age profiles and

aging population (as well as those with impairments).
- Lifetime, home and neighbourhood standards within the DAS.

The DAS makes vague and meaningless reference to compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and 'relevant guidelines'. It's not clear what provision has been made for visually impaired individuals relating to way finding in and around 'shared spaces'. Reference is made in regards to refuse collection, however how will the designer ensure the bins do not become obstacles and barriers for those with sight limitations? Also how will the bins be moved for occupants with mobility restrictions? It does state that all integrated walking and cycling routes will be segregated.

Over all not convinced that the 'access' part of the DAS clearly demonstrates that the philosophy of the 'social model' of disability has been adopted as the design goal.

3. General comments relating to the application

Application should a) establish from the onset the appropriate technical standards which have been adopted as part of the access strategy b) justify any intended departures/variations from the national guidance relating to 'inclusive design' and c) aim to demonstrate that the 'social model' of disability has been adopted.

4. Specific comments relating to the application

- Housing should be no greater than 500m from primary and 800m from secondary services.
- All pedestrian footways should have gentle gradients not exceeding 1:20.
- Bicycle lanes should be separate from footways and clearly marked(already mentioned in DAS).
- Lifetime homes provide 'improved access' to dwellings for wheelchair users but does not make them fully accessible. It is recommended that 10% of all houses are built to 'Wheelchair Housing Standards' (which exceed LTH criteria).
- With respect to external information the house plans do not provide sufficient detail to conclude whether the proposals satisfy criteria 1 of the Lifetime Home Standards': (Also there appears to be conflict between the planning strategy of a reduction in vehicular use/ownership and the requirement of LTH's to provide a parking space (2.400m wide which has the potential to be increased in width to 3.300m) for every house (as all houses are required to meet the LTH criteria as required by the PPS1 supplement).

3.22 Cherwell's **Ecology officer** comments that the application has not made the most of opportunities enhance and conserve biodiversity within the development as might be expected in an Eco town exemplar.

- Low levels of space given to the more natural areas is disappointing when taking into account the pressures these areas are likely to experience in terms of disturbance.
- Not clear if the Eco town PPS is and PPS9 requirements for 'net

biodiversity gain' will be achieved as incorporating designs to benefit wildlife have not been maximised.

- Retainment of hedgerows is welcomed; however the value of the translocated hedgerows will be reduced once removed from the agricultural context, this could to some extent be mitigated for with large buffers adjacent to the hedgerows limiting disturbance.
- The Environmental Strategy outlines that the 'majority' of hedgerows will have a buffer of 3m. However for those hedgerows which may have less of a buffer than this their value to wildlife will probably be less than current, despite the intended sympathetic management. I note the hedgerow survey undertaken by Arups recommends buffers of at least 10m either side of the hedgerows managed for biodiversity not amenity in order to retain value which does not appear to have been taken into account.
- If the habitat creation and retention proposed along the riparian corridors are achieved in their entirety these are likely to be beneficial in terms of biodiversity. However there seems insufficient proof and inadequate detail and clarity which make its achievability uncertain.
- There is little information on how the hydrology may be manipulated to achieve the wetter areas along the Bure corridor for the proposed wet grassland and the inclusion of orchard planting within these areas seems inconsistent. Even if it is achieved there is potential that the value of these habitats will be reduced by other impacts i.e. lighting strategy on road, footpaths and play areas within and adjacent to the river corridors which is not fully detailed.
- The design of the bridges which currently do not appear sympathetic to wildlife movement and are likely to fragment the corridor. There should be some strategies in place to discourage high intensity usage of these areas for recreation and dog-walking etc in order to provide some level of refuge and space for wildlife.
- There is little mitigation for the loss of habitat for farmland birds. I understand the wintering bird survey is still ongoing, the results of which should determine the value of the site in this respect. As it is not possible to mitigate for the loss of open space and foraging ground for birds on site compensation for this aspect off-site should be sought.
- The proposals for biodiversity enhancements within the built areas of the development should deliver some benefits for wildlife if carried out – green walls, green roofs on garages, higher levels of planting, suds features (lack of detail)
- The 'classic homezones' appear to deliver comparatively little of benefit to biodiversity or green connections. Could the enhancement proposals not be carried through these as well?
- The Environmental Statement that allotment areas can achieve some of the biodiversity aims on site forming quite an extensive area of transitional habitat in parts. It is unclear whether this is achievable when such areas are to be managed by residents and therefore cannot be guaranteed to be managed in a wildlife friendly way.
- The mechanism for management of the created and retained habitats is not yet agreed nor have the viability of the various options in terms of achieving the funding and management required been outlined. The long-term management and monitoring of the green spaces on site is critical for the successful delivery of the biodiversity enhancement

objectives and to prevent deterioration of the retained habitats. This needs to be fully outlined before it can be assessed whether there will be clear gain in biodiversity on site.

3.23 Cherwell's **Strategic Housing Officer** provided their comments and submitted draft Heads of Terms. Details can be found below:

1. Affordable housing mix and tenure

- Although 30% affordable housing is being offered in line with current policy this is not at CDC's current policy mix –a suggested mix has been put forward. A total of 102 units, 18 of which would be for affordable rent and 120 for shared ownership (Table of detailed mixture was submitted).
- The mix of size and types has been agreed. Affordable rents (including eligible service charges) will need to be set at a level that is deemed affordable against local market rents.
- There are particular concerns with regard to service charge costs and the affordability of these which will need to be addressed.
- We will need to determine an approach to fixed term tenancies.
- We would expect shared ownership units to be sold at a variety of shares between 25 and 75% with an average share across the scheme of between 40 and 50%. We believe there is a healthy market for shared ownership units within Bicester and would like the number of units available as shared ownership to be increased on the wider application.
- A block of 2 bed flats is to be kept for special downsizing units for older people releasing family homes. This will be of a higher spec than the other blocks and age restricted to 55 years. The majority of flats in this block should be for rent.
- One of the 2 bed terrace and an adjoining 3 bed terrace will be set aside for the re- provision of Lucan House, teenage parent's project and leased to Stonham for that purpose. This will have an exit strategy for reconversion to general needs and a separate referrals procedure.

2. Location

- CDC policy is for a well integrated mix of tenures and we have not generally accepted clusters of more than 15 units, with the rented and intermediate housing mixed in each cluster. We would prefer to see the affordable housing more integrated throughout the development than the current plan shows to achieve a mixed and sustainable community and a consistent stream of delivery..

3. Standards and Design

- PPS 1 lays down standards for the new build which this application achieves. Standards include:
 - a) Code level 5 and Carbon Neutral
 - b) CABE –Building for Life –silver level
 - c) Lifetimes Homes Standard
- Wheelchair units are to be designed to standards laid down in the Habinteg design guide (2nd Ed) but agreed at internal design stage with CDC Housing team as these may be tailored to individual needs.
- Lucan House internal layout is to be agreed with CDC and Stonham Housing.
- The affordable housing should be tenure blind in design.
- Housing Services would like sight of the revised plans to be able to comment further on the wider design issues.

4. Delivery triggers

- These will need to be set in line with the build programme but would want to see the affordable housing come forward simultaneously with the private sale units.

5. Nominations and Local Lettings Plan

- All housing will be subject to our standard nominations agreement and processes but will also benefit from a local lettings plan both of which will be attached to the planning agreement. The lettings plan will give priority to Bicester applicants and seek that new residents have a pre-tenancy qualification which covers residents being in work or training or actively involved in community work and their intention to embrace a greener living agenda.

3.24 Cherwell's **Design and Conservation Manager** has made the following comments on the application:

1. Local distinctiveness / appropriate to context

- The palette of elements of construction, elevational detailing, windows and doors is not derived from local architectural styles. Given the very contemporary elevational treatment, the untraditional roof profiles, the buff brick and the timber proposed for elevations and the particularly regimented approach to layout, the design does not appear appropriate to its context.
- It is the role of the DAS to explain the design rationale behind the proposal and how this has been informed by an analysis of context etc. There is little in the submitted DAS to explain these matters.

2. High Quality Inclusive Design

- The architecture of the housing relies very heavily on very similar floor plans with repetitive pattern of openings and three elevational

treatments. The effect is repetitive with a risk of monotony and many dwellings and terraces are visually unappealing, particularly the affordable bungalows and flats. The gabled elevations, particularly those with differential widths and heights or asymmetrical pitches or extended roofs, create a discordant image.

- Some of the “enriched” house types are visually stimulating but have little in common with their neighbours. This does not appear to constitute high quality design.
- The house types are grouped into enclaves, with streets composed of single house types. This does not constitute inclusive design that creates well mixed and integrated development which avoids segregation. Although the 2 and 3 bedroomed houses are tenure blind, the affordable bungalows and flats are distinctively different by virtue of their scale and appearance and thus their design could not be described as inclusive.
- There is a rigidity of building line, a lack of variety, a lack of change of scale, a lack of public spaces within the housing areas, a lack of landmarks, lack of successful corner buildings, etc and the resultant places do not create high quality streets, open space, public realm or places to inspire and delight.
- The layout does not offer continuity and enclosure, consistent with local character, because the perimeter blocks are too small. The distorted grid layout has high permeability but movement for pedestrians and cyclists and legibility through recognisable routes is not clear due to the repetitive layout and a lack of landmarks to help people find their way around. All dwellings outside the High Street centre are designed for residential use without opportunities for other uses, even working at home for most, included, and no expressed adaptability through building types that enables their use for different purposes over time.
- The development is designed to meet Code 5 but the layout of the street grids does not maximise solar gain through layout and orientation of buildings. The PV panels on the gable fronted terraces results in asymmetrical pitches and the requirement to lift the PV panels above the shadow line to increase their efficiency results in an aggressive roofscape.
- The housing layout is inefficient, with a high proportion of highway to dwellings. Despite the resultant relatively low density, the size of private gardens attached to the terraced houses is small and some of the gardens of the affordable homes will be dominated by cycle and bin stores and their sheds.

- The inefficient layout compromises the amount of green space.
- The size of some private gardens result in some dwellings having a very small area of private amenity space, some north facing.
- The master plan for the whole site is in preparation. It is not clear that the detailed design of this layout has been considered in relation to the interface with subsequent adjacent phases. As the aspiration for the non residential elements on the High Street is very specific in terms of height, elevational treatment, order, symmetry etc and is to be delivered by different developers at different times, a design code will be needed to ensure consistency.

2. Density / efficiency of layout

- The layout of the housing is inefficient, with small perimeter blocks and a high proportion of road to dwelling. This results in a relatively low density development, which is inefficient in terms of district heating and encouraging measures such as the provision of a viable public transport service, car clubs etc to encourage modal shift.
- The pattern of field boundaries has been followed in the layout of streets such that the orientation of buildings does not maximise solar gain. The reliance of PVs as a significant source of electricity has required a high proportion of gable fronted terraces and the pitches of some are asymmetrical and others need to be extended to ensure sufficient solar gain. Not only does this produce a visually discordant street scene but it also conflicts with policy requirements for locally distinctive development.

3. Green Infrastructure

- 44.92% of the whole exemplar site is to be Green Infrastructure and 37.69% of the exemplar site is to be public Green Infrastructure, but this largely comprises hedgerow buffers (27.72% of total GI and 33.04% of public GI) and water course corridors of high biodiversity value (18% of total GI and 21.47% of public GI), where development is not possible.
- The buffers are linear features, mainly around the edges of the site and, although they incorporate some amenity planting and allotments, are of little value to the whole community because of their peripheral location. The water course corridor is required to accommodate a range of potentially conflicting uses, which could compromise biodiversity and existing vegetation.
- There are no amenity green spaces within the net housing areas and this is a loss to residential amenity and successful place making. A further 21.26% of the total GI (25.22% of the public GI) is due to come from the

Home Zones but information on this has not been provided.

4. Car parking

- Oxfordshire County Council and the District Councils across the County have worked together to develop residential parking standards, taking account of empirical evidence about actual levels of car ownership in recent housing developments in the County. The parking provision proposed is higher than the local standards.
- All dwellings are provided with a garage, but the dimensions of these are intended to ensure they do not count towards parking provision so additional parking spaces are also provided. All spaces appear to be allocated, although there might be the intention to enable visitor parking within Home Zones. It is unlikely to discourage the use of the private car in favour of public transport, walking or cycling and so is unlikely to contribute to modal shift.

5. Design and Access Statement

- The DAS submitted with the application was lacking in many respects and additional subject areas were requested to enable the application to be registered. A contents list for a further, fully revised DAS was agreed and the revised document is awaited.

3.25 6 Letters have been received with regard to the planning application. These letters comprise 5 objections to the proposals and 1 letter which neither state support or objection but that raise interesting and specific points regarding issues in the application. The main points of the letters have been summarised below.

3.26

Traffic

- Bicester already has the Kingsmere development being built, and if this development is also built, I do not see how the roads in Bicester will cope with major increase in traffic.
- Lords lane is already heavily used 7 days a week,
- Bicester Village traffic brings the roads around it to a standstill in the weekend.
- A41 & A34 are gridlocked on a daily basis, and not sure if the widening of J9 will help with this.
- Will new residents at the development be enforced to walk and cycle everywhere?
- Appalling conditions of many major and minor roads within Bicester and the surrounding local area is where the money should be spent.

- Increase in traffic will increase traffic pollution and noise to houses backing on to Southwold Lane. This is already a problem and will only be exacerbated by heavy lorries during the building stage. What will the council plan to protect these houses?

Environment

- The farmland and wildlife that the development will be built on will be demolished and the surrounding villages will be engulfed.
- loss of valuable rural land & agricultural land and how it will be lost forever while the land is in such desperate need for an ever growing UK population.

Location

- possibility of alternative brown field sites in Gravel Hill, Bicester RAF and former US Air Force base at Heyford.

Planning policies

- the application does not accord with the development plan and that no material considerations have been put forward to the residents of Bicester.

Funding

- How much taxpayers money has already been spent on this ecotown?

Local services

- Money used to fund this development should be used to improve local road infrastructure, General Hospital and Secondary/Academy schools for the current population. It should also be spent on the local police and libraries with threats of closure.

Growth of the town

- There were too many building projects occurring in Bicester, such as Kingsmere. Bicester should retain its rural status and not become another Milton Keynes.

Masterplanning

- the masterplan seemed to be put together as the proposed development evolves.

Materials to be used

- Will materials to be used on the development be organically grown?

4. Relevant Planning Policies

National Policy Guidance -	Documents	PPS1 and supplements, PPS3 as amended, PPS4, PPS7, PPS9, PPS10, PPG13, PPG17, PPS22, PPS23, PPG24, PPS25.
South East Plan 2009 -	Policies	SP1, SP3, CC1, CC2, CC4, CC6, CC7, CC8, RE5, H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, T6, NRM1, NRM2, NRM4, NRM5, NRM9, NRM10, NRM11, NRM12, NRM16, W2, W8, C4, C6, BE1, BE4, S2, S3, S5, CO1, CO2, CO3, CO5.
Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996	Saved Policies	H3, H5, S28, TR1, R12, C1, C4, C7, C9, C28, C30.

Other Policy Considerations

Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011	Policies	H1a, H2, H3, H4, H5, H7, TR1, TR3, TR4, TR5, TR6, TR9, TR11, TR19, TR19a, R4, R8, R9, R10a, R11, EN1, EN5, EN6, EN11, EN13, EN15, EN16, EN21, EN22, EN24, EN27, EN30, EN34, EN35, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D9,
LDF draft Core Strategy	Policies	SD1, SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5, SD6, SD8, SD11, SD13, NWB1, H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, I1, I3, I4, I5, BIC6
One Shared Vision for Bicester	Document	The document sets out the aspiration for Bicester and includes development standards that reflect those contained in the Eco Towns supplement to PPS1.
Emerging Local Transport Plan	Document	

5. Appraisal

5.1 Issues raised by the application

- 5.1.1 It will be necessary to address a number of significant issues when the application is determined. In particular the committee will need to look carefully at the content of the Environmental Statement, the Development Plan position, national planning policy and emerging national and local policy, compliance with PPS Eco Town standards and the scope to provide infrastructure as part of what could be the first phase of what is eventually to be a much larger development.
- 5.1.2 At the present time amendments are being made to the application to address the detailed consultation responses to the submission proposals. This report therefore

outlines the issues and indicates the current progress. A full report will be brought back to the committee following the receipt of amendments for the Committee to determine.

5.2 Environmental Statement

5.2.1 The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES). The ES contains information describing the project, outlining the main alternatives considered, aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development and measures to prevent or mitigate any identified impacts. Where an ES has been submitted an application the Local Planning Authority must have regard to it in determining the application and can only approve the application if they are satisfied that the ES provides adequate information.

5.2.2 The ES accompanying the application considers landscape and visual assessment, ecology, flood risk and hydrology, air quality, noise & vibration, built heritage and archaeology, contaminated land, agriculture and land use, human health, socio economics and community, waste, traffic and transport and cumulative effects. At present the ES is still being assessed to ensure it provides the right information to support the determination of the application.

5.3 Development Plan Policy

5.3.1 The development plan comprises of the saved policies in the adopted Cherwell Local Plan and the South East Plan. Section 38 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act requires that applications should be determined in accordance with the development unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The adopted Cherwell Local Plan dates from 1996 and planned for growth up to 2001 and therefore does not identify the application site for development. As such the proposal is a departure from the adopted local plan.

5.3.2 The adopted Cherwell Local Plan was due to have been replaced by the Non Statutory Cherwell Local Plan but the plan was never formally adopted due to changes to the planning system. The plan has however been approved by the Council for development control purposes. This plan was produced to cover the period up to 2011 and identifies the land at SW Bicester as the primary site to meet housing need and that site is now has planning permission and is being developed. The proposal is clearly a departure from the adopted local plan and also does not feature in the non statutory local plan. However there is a special, and quite complex national and local policy context created by the Government policy

approach to Eco Towns over the last few years.

5.3.3 The South East Plan was published in 2009 and set out the regional spatial strategy (RSS). The Secretary of State Eric Pickles has since announced that the RSS's are to be removed and there is provision within the Localism Bill to abolish them. In the mean time they remain part of the development plan, although it could be argued that in view of their pending abolition less reliance might be placed upon them. The RSS contains a number of relevant policies in particular identifying the Central Oxfordshire sub region area for growth and Bicester as one of the main locations within it for that growth. The RSS also seeks sustainable and distinctive communities and the delivery of 6,400 new dwellings within that part of Cherwell falling within the sub region. The RSS leaves local development documents to identify the location for growth. The RSS had been through the examination before the Eco Town proposals were finalised. Therefore RSS policy H2 requires that in planning for housing delivery local planning authorities will take account of considerations including the need to facilitate any proposals that are agreed for growth points and eco towns to be assessed through the next review.

5.3.4 The proposal needs to be seen in primarily in the context of "other material considerations" that go beyond the formal Development Plan, in particular the draft Core Strategy which sets out the Council's approach to delivering housing to 2026 and the National Planning Guidance. These are considered further below.

5.4 LDF Draft Core Strategy

5.4.1 The LDF draft Core Strategy sets out broadly how the district will grow and change over the period to 2026. The draft Core Strategy was published in February 2010 and has been the subject of public consultation. The draft Core Strategy will now be amended to take account of the changed circumstances such as the abolition of the RSS before a submission draft Core Strategy is published which will then be considered at an examination in public before formal adoption. The draft Core Strategy as an emerging document can not carry the weight of adopted policy but does set out the Council's strategy for growth within the District.

5.4.2 The draft Core Strategy identifies NW Bicester as the strategic direction of growth for Bicester (policy NWB1). The policy requires development in accordance with the standards set out in the Eco Towns supplement to PPS1. Delivery of the exemplar scheme from 2012 to 2017 would broadly be consistent with the expectations of the Draft Core Strategy (Table 18, p.134) which suggested that 500

homes could be provided at North West Bicester by 2016.

5.4.3 Although further work has been done on the housing need for the District to provide a robust position in the LDF when the RSS is abolished this still identifies the need for significant growth in the District and supports the strategic allocations identified. Without prejudice to consideration of the application, the exemplar site has been included as a deliverable site in the district's 5 year housing land supply (see the 2010 AMR). This in itself carries no weight. Nevertheless, if the site was ultimately shown not to be deliverable, then it would need to be removed from the district's land supply. Under current circumstances, this would mean that the district would not be able to maintain a 5 year land supply for the period 2010 to 2015 and paragraph 71 of PPS3, requiring favourable consideration of planning applications for housing (subject to other policy considerations) would come into effect. Although, the district would continue to have a 5 year land supply for the next 5 year period beginning in April 2011 (2011-2016), without the exemplar scheme a significant change in circumstances could leave the district with a more vulnerable housing supply position.

5.4.4 At its meeting on 19 July 2010 Full Council considered the emerging planning strategy afresh in the light of the Government's intent to abolish the RSS. The resolution confirmed the council's commitment that the nationally designated eco town site would be a central part of the development strategy stating:

'This Council welcomes the letter from Eric Pickles MP signalling a clear intent to release us from the constraints of the SE Plan. The Council instructs Officers to continue work on a Local Development Core Strategy, but to progress on the basis of meeting the locally proposed housing target originally endorsed by Councillors and included in the submission of the draft plan to the Government (11,800 to 2026). In general terms the Council anticipates this may result in a Core Strategy that creates less pressure on Banbury to expand beyond its natural boundaries, less pressure on Rural Areas to accept housing growth, and a firming up of housing growth for Bicester in line with its Eco Town status. More recently (7 March 2011) the Council's Executive gave more detailed consideration to local population and household change projections and confirmed revised figures for growth within the District.

5.5 National Planning Policies

5.5.1 A number of the planning policy guidance and statements issued by the

government are relevant to the current proposals. Of particular relevance to the principle of development is the Eco Towns supplement to PPS1. This PPS issued in 2009 and identifies NW Bicester as one of four locations nationally for an Eco Town. The PPS advises *'The policies set out in this PPS should be taken into account by regional planning bodies in the preparation of revisions to regional spatial strategies¹, by the Mayor of London in relation to the spatial development strategy for London, and by local planning authorities in the preparation of local development documents. The policies may also be material, depending on the particular circumstances of the case, to decisions on individual planning applications.'* The PPS goes on to advise when considering planning applications that *'This PPS including the list of locations set out in Annex A will be material considerations that should be given weight in determining planning applications for eco-towns.'* Never the less the PPS does indicate where there is an up to date development plan that makes provision for adequate housing applications can be refused. As set out above the District does not currently have an up to date development plan and the draft Core Strategy identifies NW Bicester as the location for the growth of Bicester. Cherwell's emerging Development Plan is thus picking up and endorsing a strong national policy approach.

5.6 PPS 3 & Housing Delivery

- 5.6.1 PPS 3 requires at paragraph 57 *'the supply of land should be managed in a way that ensures that a continuous five year supply of deliverable sites is maintained ie at least enough sites to deliver the housing requirements over the next five years of the housing trajectory'* Members will be aware from other applications that recently the District has not been able to demonstrate sufficient housing delivery to meet housing targets. However the AMR for 2010 does show that the position on housing delivery improves during 2011/12 and exceeds targets in 2012/13. The AMR identifies 400 houses at NW Bicester delivering from 2012 as one of the deliverable sites that contributes to the five year housing land supply. The inclusion of a site in the AMR does not justify the grant of planning permission but the inclusion of housing at NW Bicester is consistent with the Council's draft Core Strategy and strategy for growth.
- 5.6.2 The PPS goes on to advise at para 71 that ;
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'Where Local Planning Authorities cannot demonstrate an up-to-date five year supply of deliverable sites, for example, where Local Development Documents have not been reviewed to take into account policies in this PPS or there is less than five years supply of deliverable sites, they should consider favourably planning applications for housing, having regard to the policies in this PPS including the considerations in paragraph 69.'

Para 69 states;

'In general, in deciding planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should have regard to:

- Achieving high quality housing.*
- Ensuring developments achieve a good mix of housing reflecting the accommodation requirements of specific groups, in particular, families and older people.*
- The suitability of a site for housing, including its environmental sustainability.*
- Using land effectively and efficiently.*
- Ensuring the proposed development is in line with planning for housing objectives, reflecting the need and demand for housing in, and the spatial vision for, the area and does not undermine wider policy objectives eg addressing housing market renewal issues.'*

In seeking to achieve the standards in the Eco Town PPS the application will address the issues around quality and mix of housing, environmental sustainability, effective and efficient use of land and these issues are considered further below.

5.6.3 A number of the representations received have suggested that the application should not be considered until the Core Strategy is adopted. However PPS 3 advises at para 72 that where there is not a five year housing land supply that; *'Local Planning Authorities should not refuse applications solely on the grounds of Prematurity'* . Although the five year housing land supply is improving there remains a need to deliver housing to meet targets. It is not considered that a refusal reason relating solely to prematurity in advance of the draft Core Strategy could be successfully defended at the current time, given the time it will take to get the draft Core Strategy adopted and the identification of NW Bicester in the Eco Towns PPS.

5.6.4 In summary although the proposal is contrary to the adopted Cherwell Local Plan the identification of the location as the Council's strategic allocation in Bicester for growth and the identification in the Eco Towns PPS, as well as the need to deliver houses supports the consideration of development proposals on the site at the present time.

5.7 Eco Town Standards

5.7.1 The Eco Town PPS sets out the government's objectives for eco towns as achieving sustainability standards significantly above equivalent levels of development in existing towns. It goes on to advise that eco towns should develop unique characteristics by responding to the opportunities and challenges of their location and community aspiration. However it also requires standards set out in the PPS to be met. These standards have also been incorporated in the Eco Bicester One Shared Vision for the town which has been approved by Bicester Town Council, Cherwell and Oxfordshire County Council. These standards and the response of the current proposals to them are central to assessment of the application. This is considered further below.

5.7.2 **ET7 Zero Carbon**

The PPS defines zero carbon as 'that over a year the net carbon dioxide emissions from all energy use within buildings on the eco town development as a whole are zero or below. The planning application is accompanied by an energy statement. In summary the statement proposes Solar PV on all residential properties as well as non residential buildings together with heat and power generation by gas CHP (combined heat and power system) and bio mass boiler. These latter elements would be located within the proposed energy centre.

5.7.3 The proposed energy sources, together with building properties that have high levels of energy efficiency, would deliver zero carbon development. However further work is being done on the details and deliverability of the proposals and it is anticipated that a revised energy strategy will be received.

5.7.4 Given the planning permission that has now been granted for the incinerator at Ardley the use of waste heat from that process is being explored. However given the development timescales being worked to it is unlikely to be an option for the first houses to be built on the site.

5.7.5 **ET8 Climate Change Adaptation**

The PPS requires eco town developments to be designed to minimise future vulnerability in a changing climate. The application specifically addresses this the design of buildings and in considering impacts of rainfall on the scheme. Buildings will have high levels of insulation but also consideration has been given solar shading and mechanical ventilation to control temperatures and prevent over heating. In considering the impacts of rainfall on flooding and drainage an allowance has been made for climate change. Consideration has been given to the

use of most up to date data that is available at a sufficient level of detail and the Environment Agency are satisfied the data used is the most appropriate.

5.7.6 ET9 Homes

The PPS requires developments to achieve Building for Life Silver Standard and Level 4 for the Code for Sustainable Homes as a minimum, meet Life Time Homes Standards, have real time energy and public transport monitors, high speed broadband, potential digital access to support assisted living, 30% affordable housing, demonstrate high levels of energy efficiency, achieve carbon reductions of at least 70% relative to current building regulations. These requirements are reflected in the One Shared Vision although that seeks Code for Sustainable Homes Level 5.

5.7.7 Building for Life is a method for assessing housing schemes and recognising good design. The current proposals have been assessed and have fallen short of the Silver Standard required. The scheme is therefore undergoing redesign to address a range of concerns that have arisen in respect of the layout and design including the need to meet Silver Standard.

5.7.8 The application is accompanied by a completed Code for Sustainable Homes Pre Assessment Estimator form. The Code for Sustainable Homes covers levels from 1 to 6 with 6 being the highest. A development is scored against the requirements of the code which cover a wide range of issues including energy, water, materials, surface water, waste, pollution, health & well being, management and ecology. The pre assessment indicates the scheme achieves a Level 5. This exceeds the minimum level required by the PPS and meets the Shared Visions requirement.

5.7.8 Life Time Homes Standards have been designed to ensure dwellings can be adapted to accommodate the changing needs of the occupants if for example they are wheelchair bound. The application states all properties will be to lifetime homes standard.

5.7.9 The application states that real time energy monitors and high speed broadband will be provided to all homes and real time public transport information will be provided at bus stops. However to achieve a change in the way people travel and reduce car use it is important that real time public transport information is available in peoples homes, as set out in the PPS, as well as at bus stops. This is being taken up with the applicants.

5.7.10 30% affordable housing is proposed as part of the application (120 dwellings). The

affordable housing is a mixture of rented properties and shared ownership and includes flats, bungalows and houses. The Homes and Communities Agency has also confirmed that it will provide grant support to deliver the affordable housing on the site.

5.7.11 The buildings will have high levels of energy efficiency and together with the energy generation on site will deliver the carbon reductions sought. This would be delivered through by achieving Zero Carbon and meeting Code for Sustainable Homes level 5 (100% improvement on CO2 emissions rate over building regs).

5.7.12 **ET 10 Employment**

The PPS identifies the importance of creating mixed use communities and minimising unsustainable commuting. The PPS requires an Economic Strategy to accompany planning applications. The strategy should set out facilities to support job creation to achieve as a minimum access to one job per new dwelling that is easily reached by walking cycling and/or public transport. The application is for mixed use and includes in outline an eco business centre, neighbourhood store and retail provision, public house, children's nursery and site for a school. This is a greater level of mixed use provision than might normally be provided with an application for this number of homes and reflects the PPS requirement for mixed use and the need to encourage sustainable lifestyles and reduce the need to travel, although the non residential elements of the scheme are in outline and further information is required to understand the timing of delivery of these elements. The application is accompanied by an employment strategy which identifies employment in the non residential elements of the scheme and further employment generation is identified through construction jobs, services to the population and home working. The strategy has been subject to considerable negotiation and a revised strategy is anticipated shortly.

5.7.13 **ET 11 Transport**

The PPS identifies the need to support people's desire for mobility whilst achieving the goal of low carbon living and design to give priority for walking cycling and public transport and reducing the reliance on the private car. The PPS therefore advises all homes should be within ten minutes walk of frequent public transport and neighbourhood services. Travel plans are to be provided which demonstrate; how the town's design will enable at least 50% of trips originating in eco towns to be made by non car means with the potential to increase to 60% over time, good

design principles and how transport choice messages, infrastructure and services will be provided from day one and how carbon impact of transport will be monitored. The PPS goes on to identify that where an eco town is close to an existing higher order settlement planning applications should also demonstrate options for ensuring key connections do not become congested and include significantly more ambitious targets for modal share than 50%. The PPS also seeks sufficient headroom in energy generation where schemes for electric vehicles are proposed, that private vehicles will not cause congestion and that the maximum walking distance to primary schools is 800m.

- 5.7.14 The design of the application proposals include a link for walking cycling and public transport between the northern and southern sections of the site and therefore give advantage to these modes over the use of the car in this respect. The proposals include a school site centrally located and accessible by walking. The scheme also includes cycle storage for residential properties and a bus route has been identified that is accessible to all properties. However the scheme also includes parking for private cars of at least 2 spaces per dwelling and more for larger properties. Further work being undertaken on the design and layout but it is unlikely to impact on the accessibility of school or bus provision.
- 5.7.15 The application is accompanied by a Transport Assessment (TA) and a draft Travel Plan. The TA does not indicate any off site impacts from the proposal that could not be mitigated but the Highways Agency has suggested a condition seeking off site works for which further details have been sought.
- 5.7.16 The draft travel plan shows 45% of trips originating the eco town being by non car modes by 2016 and 50% by 2026. This is below the target for eco town sites adjacent to higher order settlement. However it does reflect the ambitious and challenging nature of the target for modal shift and the high levels of car ownership and use within the area. The travel plan does identify measures such as a travel plan co ordinator to be in place at the start of the development and traffic counters to monitor traffic and carbon. A 30 minute frequency bus service is currently proposed. Further work is being done to consider potential further measures to support modal shift including a more frequent bus service.
- 5.7.17 **ET12 Healthy Life Styles**
- The PPS advises that Eco Towns should be designed and planned to support healthy and sustainable environments and enable residents to make healthy

choices easily. The scheme includes mixed use facilities to meet basic everyday needs of residents, measures to encourage walking and cycling and green infrastructure including provision for play, informal recreation and allotments. A commuted sum has been sought for off site formal sports provision. Amended layout, including increased green infrastructure provision is anticipated shortly. The Primary Care Trust has advised that no new provision is required for a doctor's surgery on this part of the site.

5.7.18 ET 13 Local Services

The PPS advises applications should include a good level of service provision, proportionate to the size of the development. The mixed use nature of the current application is set out at 5.7.12 above. This is considered to potentially provide a good level of services for the size of development proposed. Further work is required around certainty of delivery of the non residential elements of the proposals.

5.7 19 ET14 Green Infrastructure

The PPS seeks 40% of an eco town's total area to be green space of which at least half should be public. The PPS advises that a range of greenspace should be provided, that it should be multifunctional and particular attention should be given to local food production. The Cherwell Local Plan contains a policy R12 which requires a minimum of 2.43ha of open space per 1000 population as part of new developments. The draft Core Strategy policy I4 seeks 3.73 ha of open space per 1000 population.

5.7.20 The application proposals do include a plan showing over 40% green infrastructure (approx 10ha) but including some of the homezones within the calculation. Revisions to the design are anticipated that will increase the green infrastructure by providing a larger green corridor along the water courses crossing the site and introducing green areas central to the development of the northern fields. The green spaces will be multifunctional in that they will address play, informal recreation, biodiversity and drainage functions. Further assessment and calculation of GI will be required on receipt of amended proposals.

5.7.21 ET 15 Landscape & Historic Environment

Planning applications should demonstrate that they have adequately considered the implications for the local landscape and historic environment. The ES accompanying the application includes the assessment of Landscape and Visual

Impact and Built Heritage and Archaeology. The application site is not subject of any landscape designation but is an attractive stretch of countryside. The ES concludes that *'The visual influence of the proposed development is in keeping with landscape character through carefully considered design, with the retention of open land and/or provision of planted landscape buffers, around heritage features, safeguarding the majority of existing vegetation , extensive green infrastructure proposals, and proposed built form in response to local settlement'*. In assessing the proposals it is clear that development around the perimeter of the site will be visible in local views to the site and, despite some screening, the regular form of the development proposed would not blend with the existing landscape character or reflect local settlements relationship with the surrounding landscape. The revision to the design of the scheme is expected to address the landscape impact of the proposals.

5.7.22 There are no listed buildings within the site but Home Farmhouse, to the west of the B4100 and separated from the site by fields, is listed as well as St Lawrence's Church, grade II*, that lies to the east of the B4100. The development would inevitably have some impact on the settings of these buildings given the development is on existing farmland. However the Church is separated from the site by the B4100 and existing boundary enclosures, which will remain, and Home Farmhouse will remain within the existing buildings at the farm, which form its immediate setting, and with the retention of the surrounding fields it is not considered that the settings will be so adversely impacted as to make the development unacceptable. The ES advises that the impact is slightly adverse. An archaeological field investigation including trial trenching has been carried out on the site. There is considered to be low potential for archaeological remains within the site, based on the evidence from the investigation that has been carried out.

5.7.23 **ET 16 Biodiversity**

Eco Towns should show a net gain in bio diversity. A strategy for conserving and enhancing local bio diversity should be produced to accompany planning applications for Eco Towns. The site has no designated sites within it and hedge and stream corridors have been identified as the areas of greatest bio diversity value and these are retained. The site is used by protected species, for example the stream corridor is an important route for bats. The applicant's ecologist has also made a case that the scheme will deliver net bio diversity gain but Natural England,

the Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust and District and County Ecologists are not convinced (see representations). Amendments anticipated to the scheme will increase the area adjacent to the watercourses and introduce further green space to seek to address the concerns and demonstrate further bio diversity gain.

5.7.24 ET 17 Water

5.7.25 Eco Town are required to be ambitious in terms of water efficiency and to ensure water quality in their localities. A water cycle strategy is required and eco towns in areas of serious water stress should aspire to water neutrality. The incorporation of sustainable urban drainage (SUDs) systems and proposals for its long term maintenance and management.

5.7.26 Bicester lies within an area of water stress and the application is accompanied by a water cycle strategy. Code for Sustainable Homes also includes requirements regarding efficient water use. The application includes proposals for rainwater harvesting to reduce water use and includes SUDs. The revised design of the layout will include revisions to the SUDs proposals. The water cycle strategy is general in nature and it s not clear the details of the measures proposed as part of the development or proposals to move towards water neutrality.

5.7.27 ET18 Flood Risk Management

5.7.28 The PPS advises that Eco Towns should reduce and avoid flood risk. The application site is mainly free from flood risk except for areas along side the water courses that run through the site. These areas are to be left free from development and form part of the green infrastructure. The Environment Agency have raised a number of concerns of the details of the flood risk assessment which needs to be revised to address the concerns.

5.7.29 ET 19 Waste

5.7.30 The PPS advises that applications should include a sustainable waste and resources plan which sets targets for residual waste levels, recycling levels and landfill diversion which are substantially more ambitious than the 2007 National Waste Strategy targets for 2020. The design of development needs to facilitate the achievements of targets, consideration of the use of waste for CHP is required and no construction waste should be sent to landfill unless this is the least environmentally damaging option.

5.7.31 The application is accompanied by a waste strategy which proposes that the existing district waste collection is extended to the proposed residential

development with a target for recycling of 70 % and a residual waste target of 330 kg per household. A number of measures are suggested to help to achieve targets including a reuse repair centre, community composting project, incentivising the residents and a site waste management plan. Further negotiation is required to ensure delivery of measures to meet the waste targets.

5.7.32 ET 20 Master Planning

5.7.33 The PPS advises that all Eco Town application should be accompanied by a masterplan and demonstrate how eco town standards will be met. Design codes are identified as an approach to deliver high quality design and a high level of engagement and consultation is sought.

5.7.34 The application is for just a part of the eco town site identified at NW Bicester. As set out above it is unusual to consider an application for part of a large site without first having an agreed masterplan. In this case an emerging masterplan accompanies the application and shows how the application scheme could link into further development on the NW Bicester site. However the emerging masterplan requires further work to be completed. It is anticipated that the masterplan will be submitted accompanying an outline application later this year. The masterplan accompanying the application provides a framework that shows how the current application could link to further development in an acceptable fashion.

5.7.35 ET 21 Transition

5.7.36 The PPS advises that planning applications for Eco Towns should set out a detailed timetable for the delivery of neighbourhoods, facilities and services. This is to include delivery of services to underpin low levels of carbon emissions, health and social care, support for formation and growth of community , encouragement of environmentally responsible behaviour , annual monitoring, how carbon emissions from construction will be limited managed and monitored.

5.7.37 The matters covered under the transition standard relate to the delivery of facilities and services, reduction in carbon and monitoring. The level of services and community infrastructure to be provided and the timing of delivery are still areas being negotiated to ensure the development enables people to live more sustainable lifestyles. The Department of Communities and Local Government has funded the development of a monitoring tool for eco towns. This is currently being trialled and it is anticipated that it will be available by the time development takes place at NW Bicester.

5.7.38 ET 22 Community and governance

5.7.39 The PPS advises that a long term approach is necessary to ensure that the integrity of an eco town is maintained and is able to manage change in a planned way. A long term governance structure is therefore required. The application is accompanied by an outline of an approach to governance and further discussions are on going to establish the most appropriate short and long term approach to governance of the new development.

5.7.40 The PPS and Shared Vision Standards provide a comprehensive framework against which to assess the application proposals and in meeting them ensure that a scheme is produced that goes beyond the approach that is otherwise likely to be taken and to ensure the delivery of a much more sustainable development. There is policies in the development plan, non statutory local plan and in other national policy statements that also address many of these issues but the PPS and Vision standards seek a higher level of provision and therefore have been referred to above.

5.8 Design

5.8.1 The Eco Town PPS standards do not make specific reference to design but PPS 1 states *'High quality and inclusive design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process.'* The PPS also highlights the importance of design in creating attractive and robust environments. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) accompanying the application is considered deficient in a number of areas and a number of problems with the design and layout of the scheme have been highlighted. A revised DAS is anticipated to accompany amendments to the design and layout of the scheme.

5.9 Planning Obligation

5.9.1 All large scale development, with the resulting increase in population, would put pressure on existing facilities. Some facilities may have spare capacity but others will require expansion to enable them to accommodate increased demand form increased population. Work has been undertaken to identify the necessary community infrastructure to support the proposed development and mitigate its impact, this includes a mixture of on site and off site provision. The application includes a supporting statement on social infrastructure provision. However this document does not take account of the PPS standards and the need to produce sustainable development and address travel behaviour. It has to be recognised that

there are additional development costs associated with achieving some of the PPS standards such as the development of homes to high Code for Sustainable Homes levels. As a result negotiations are on going regarding the securing of essential community infrastructure and the ability of the scheme to deliver these.

5.10 Conclusions

- 5.10.1 The development of a sustainable extension on land identified at NW Bicester is part of the Council's strategy for accommodating necessary growth within the District. Furthermore as set out in the One Shared Vision for the town the aspiration is to integrate growth and to lever wider benefits for the town, reducing the impact of development and residents on the environment whilst creating a vibrant place where people will choose to live, work and spend their leisure time. The application, once in an acceptable form would contribute to meeting these aims.
- 5.10.2 This application for a first phase of development within the NW Bicester site has sought to address the requirements of the Eco Towns PPS and whilst the application site is not immediately contiguous with the existing built development in the town it is within easy walking and cycling and over time it is anticipated that further development will take place between the site and existing development. It is also unusual to consider an application for part of a larger site allocated for development before an outline application has been granted as a whole. However in this case the application proposals were, following consideration with Government after the publication of the PPS, invited as an exemplar for a wider development. The, proposals are capable of being amended to deliver a scheme that can stand alone and provide the opportunity to test this form of development and the deliverability of a scheme to the PPS standards which has not previously been done on a large scale scheme. This will be able to inform other development proposals that also seek to meet standards.
- 5.10.3 Never the less achieving the PPS standards and delivering the high standard of development sought is challenging and the application proposals, as submitted, have drawn a number of criticisms and comments. Revisions to the proposals and supporting documents have been discussed with the applicants and are being prepared. These are anticipated at the beginning of April and will be subject of further consultation. The application is therefore not yet ready for determination and this report is to update Members on the progress in processing the application to date and some of the issues the application raises. Not only is progress on the

application of interest to Members of the Planning Committee but also other organisations particularly those who have representatives on the Strategic Delivery Board for Eco Bicester such as the HCA who have identified funding to support the provision of affordable housing on the site.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee notes this report on the significant progress now being made in assessing the application and also recognises the very encouraging commitment shown by the applicants to meeting the challenges set by the Eco Town Standards.

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