

## Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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<b>Report title: Implementing Employment Strategies</b>	
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### 1. Purpose of Report

- To outline the various employment policies and the relevant economic strategies that include Bicester
- To identify the gaps in the strategies to support economic development in Eco Bicester
- To set out the issues, options and approach to implement the various economic strategies as part of an employment delivery plan
- To make recommendations for implementation of economic strategy.

### 2. Background

Further information is provided in the Cherwell Economic Development Strategy

The coalition government policy aims to create growth, whilst tackling the deficit and cutting carbon emissions. A raft of government policy has been published following the "Planning for Growth" Paper" in the March 2011 budget including:

- Local Growth White Paper – Local Growth Realising Every Place's Potential, Oct 2010
- National Infrastructure Plan, HM Government, 25 October 2010
- The path to strong, sustainable and balanced growth, HM Treasury, November 2010
- Enabling the Transition to a Green Economy, August 2011
- Blueprint for Technology, HM Government, November 2010
- Regional Growth Fund, October 2010
- Enterprise Zones Prospectus, March 2011

Further information is contained on the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills website ([www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk)). In summary the Government's policy aims to create strong, sustainable and balanced economic growth. The Prime Minister in his speech to the CBI on 25 October 2010 set out the Government's role in promoting growth which is to provide a framework that creates the conditions for sustainable development and promotes a new economic dynamism by exploiting the UK's strengths and helping new companies and innovations to flourish.

The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) was initially a key player in the delivery of employment for the Eco Bicester project. Following the announcement of the closure of Regional Development Agencies by March 2012, it has played little part in the delivery of economic strategy to support employment in Eco Bicester.

Locally, the framework for economic development at the district level is provided by the emerging Local Development Framework Draft Core Strategy and the Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership's Economic Development Strategy. The Eco Bicester One Shared Vision sets out the aspirations

and ambitions for the new Bicester economy. It does not contain an action plan although this may be considered appropriate at a later date. The proposals for the first phase of development at North West Bicester are supported by an economic strategy with actions for implementing the strategy. The actions are attached at appendix 1.

An Employment and Commerce Review has been prepared for Bicester Vision which looks at the challenges for Bicester in terms of business location, growth and opportunities. Bicester Vision is currently going through a partnership review process. An update report on employment issues was presented to the Strategic Delivery Board meeting in May 2011. In summary, the following documents support economic growth in Bicester:

- The Eco Bicester One Shared Vision, December 2010
- Cherwell Local Development Framework Draft Core Strategy, February 2010
- The Cherwell Economic Development Strategy, September 2011
- North West Bicester Economic Strategy for the Exemplar development, Resubmission Version, March 2011
- Employment and Commerce Review, Bicester Vision, September 2011
- The Town and Country Planning Association's Economy Worksheet provides the framework for preparing the economic strategy in accordance with the Eco towns PPS.

The Project Team has to date: worked with the facilitators of the NW Bicester eco development to implement the employment standards set out in the PPS; coordinated an employment working group and sub group to progress the preparation of an economic strategy; provided an input into the preparation of the emerging economic development strategies for Bicester; met with partners including the representatives of the local business community and liaised with economic consultants on the masterplan proposals for employment uses.

### **Eco Bicester One Shared Vision**

The Vision for Eco Bicester seeks to attract *"inward investment to provide environmentally friendly jobs and commerce, especially in green technologies, whilst recognising the very important role of existing employers in the town"*.

### **Cherwell Draft Core Strategy**

The Draft Core Strategy sets out the following vision for Bicester:

*"By 2026, Bicester will have grown significantly to become an important economic centre in its own right.....it will have become a more attractive place to live and work and will be significantly more self-sustaining both economically and socially. Bicester will have established itself as a location for higher technology businesses....Its economy will have become more knowledge based and the town's importance as a centre for retail and leisure will have increased...."*

It also includes policies for developing a sustainable local economy and builds on the Cherwell Economic Development Strategy.

### **Cherwell Economic Development Strategy**

The Cherwell Economic Development Strategy 2011-2016 was approved by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2011. It sets out a framework of issues and themes for delivery over five years in an action plan identifying how partners will combine their resources. The Strategy is available on the CDC website.

The monitoring of the Strategy and updating of the Action Plan will be facilitated by CDC's Economic Development service and then appear as part of the work programme of the LSP Management Group. The first review of the Action Plan will be in March 2012, although this is likely not to be significant given how recently the Strategy has been produced and the principle that detailed delivery plans will be developed to tackle each theme. A full review of the Action Plan will take place by March 2013, however this will be brought forward should this be necessary in response to the demands of the local economy.

It is important not to overlook positive steps that are already being taken to deliver economic growth within the District and available in Bicester. These include;

- Oxfordshire Business Enterprises operates in the area and provides business support. Start-up and micro businesses, operated by local residents, provide particular scope for expansion of economic activity.
- Bicester Job Club providing support to job seekers looking for work and supporting companies looking to recruit.
- Cherwell Investment Partnership (CHIP) which maintains a accessible data base of available commercial properties including those in Bicester.

### **Utilities Audit**

A report on the findings of the utilities audit led by the Eco Bicester Project Team has been presented to the May 2011 meeting of the Strategic Delivery Board and it will continue to be developed as part of the preparation of the infrastructure plan to support the proposals for Eco Bicester contained in the Cherwell Core Strategy.

### **Cherwell Employment Land Review**

The Cherwell Employment Land Study was produced in 2006 and is being updated to support work on the preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy. The updated study will provide further evidence with regard to existing employment land and the future needs.

### **Eco Business Centre and other issues**

From the Economic Development Strategy accompanying the exemplar application some actions are already being progressed. For example proposals for an Eco Business Centre are being developed separately. The legal agreement accompanying the application will ensure opportunities for local businesses in the construction work advertised, work on filling job vacancies is undertaken with the job club, apprenticeships are provided during construction and home working is promoted in the development.

It should not be overlooked that other partners are progressing proposals around employment issues as well. As well as the Strategic Delivery Board and Project Steering Group individual meetings, other partners also have an interest in employment issues. For example Bicester Vision and the local college are both progressing proposals to promote employment growth in the town.

These discussions and actions would now benefit from being pulled together with a common purpose for partners to deliver an agreed set of economic objectives/vision for Eco Bicester.

## **3. Proposals**

### **North West Bicester**

The Eco Bicester Project Team through Andrew Bowe, will continue its input into employment issues as part of the preparation of proposals for North West Bicester, particularly the economic strategy to be provided by the facilitators of NW Bicester to support the masterplan. It will seek to ensure job creation, employment facilities, skills, training and education is delivered by the proposals and the economic strategy brought forward by the North West Bicester eco development.

The immediate priority is to progress the proposals for an Eco Business and Innovation Centre on the first phase of development at NW Bicester whilst providing input into the emerging NW Bicester masterplan proposals and investigating the opportunity to develop a public sector led strategy for attracting inward investment into Eco Bicester following the unsuccessful bid for an Enterprise Zones. To be implemented through a detailed planning consent following determination of the hybrid application.

The next step will be to continue to work towards supporting the preparation of the masterplan strategy for the eco development. Meeting the PPS standards of providing access to employment for every new dwelling requires P3Eco to prepare and submit an economic strategy to support the masterplan proposals at NW Bicester. It is hoped that partners will also assist in progressing the preparation of the economic strategy to support the masterplan proposals at North West Bicester.

Finally, it is clear that there is a wider ambition to address employment in Eco Bicester and the implications are considered further below.

a) Wide range of partners involved

There are a wide range of partners involved in economic development in Bicester. These are listed below:

- The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)
- The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills
- The Ministry of Defence
- The 2 LEPs for Bicester (South East Midlands and Oxfordshire)
- Bicester Vision
- OCC skills and training team
- Cherwell Investment Partnership (CHIP)
- Oxfordshire Business Enterprises
- Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership
- Bicester Chamber of Commerce
- West Northants Development Corporation Construction Futures Team
- Economic Development support from the relevant officers at District and County Councils providing a link into core services they provide, their various economic development networks and contacts
- Any other organisation with an interest in developing the Eco Bicester economy, for example, in promoting the Eco Business Centre Proposals with Oxford Innovation.

b) The need to align others work

The partners listed above are all contributors to the Bicester economy and some are involved in setting the economic agenda for the town. However, there is a need for the work of the various organisations and bodies with a stake in Bicester's economic growth to align their work to maximise the potential benefits for the town.

### c) Eco Bicester Economic Development Framework

The existing policies and strategies on economic development will continue to provide the framework for the focus on economic development in Eco Bicester. The Cherwell Economic Development Strategy envisages implementation through engagement with, and the commitment of, partners.

#### **Identified Gaps**

There has been a significant amount of work done as part of the economic baseline. The Economic Development Strategy (EDS) provides a good framework going forward and is accompanied by an action plan. However there remain issues and these are explored further below.

- EDS provides a framework but does not have clarity over target sectors and specific actions for growth in Bicester. Some partners have felt Bicester needs to have more detailed guidance
- Uncertainty over the LEP(s) input
- The capacity of economic development services at District and County Councils to support the wide ranging ambitions for the town
- The need for increased co operation with OCC and others to input into strategy eg broadband discussions, and work to develop skills in conjunction with the opportunities the eco town presents
- NW Bicester Exemplar economic strategy still needs to be developed
- Alignment of the Core Strategy and EDS
- A delivery plan focused on Bicester

#### **Key issues**

The key economic issues have been discussed in some detail by those involved in the eco Bicester project and include:

- Reducing out commuting
- The quality and quantity of employment land and commercial property
- The skills base
- The expectation and ambition for the eco development to act as a catalyst to the existing economy and facilitate the transition to an “eco economy” (this needs to be defined).

The issues related to delivery of the economic strategies highlighted in this paper include, the capacity of the Eco Bicester project team to input into the economic development process; the capacity of the existing economic development resource, the ability and commitment of partners to deliver economic growth.

#### **Tasks**

Going forward, the following tasks could be considered to assist in economic development:

### 1) Understanding the Issues

- Further work is required to understand the existing economic context, analyse the existing evidence.
- Forecasting future economic trends in order to target future sector of growth.
- Update the Cherwell Employment Land Review and expedite progress towards the adoption of the Core Strategy.

### 2) Identifying Partners

- Understand and clarify the role of Bicester Vision with a view to increasing it's involvement in progressing the growth of the local economy
- Continue to work with OCC and other public, private and social sector partners to implement and the economic strategies to the benefit of eco-Bicester.

### 3) Taking Action

- Develop the elements of eco-Bicester set out in the framework provided by the Cherwell Economic Development Strategy,, developing and co-ordinating actions around the “golden thread” of maximising the benefits of the “green economy”.
- Existing support for businesses to be reviewed to ensure that the needs of eco-Bicester are met.
- The delivery of skills and training including apprenticeships through new and existing schemes.
- Work with the Local Enterprise Partnerships to stimulate and promote the Bicester economic offer.
- A meeting with P3Eco's economic consultants and partners needs to be arranged as part of the NW Bicester masterplan programme and it will be important that opportunities for engagement are built into the timetable including the involvement of the wider employment group.

An outline of an emerging delivery plan for employment is contained in Appendix 1. It shows the various components of the strategy, actions responsibilities and an indicative timescale. The delivery of infrastructure and construction will also enable economic development and should be an integral part of the implementation of economic strategy.

### **Options**

This report recognises that there is potential for more to be done to deliver economic development in Bicester. However, there are issues about the current capacity of the existing Economic Development Resource and Eco Bicester Project Team to meet the very high expectations for the role of the public sector in Bicester.

The report therefore has looked to review the current delivery approach and set out some emerging thoughts for taking the work forward. At present the resource within the Eco Bicester project team is focused on inputting into the Economic Development Strategy for NW Bicester to ensure that it meets the standards in the Vision. Wider economic development resource has focused on providing the Economic Development Strategy for the District and delivering specific actions such as the job clubs to support local employment in the current climate.

However it has also to recognised that the District is currently reviewing resources for the economic development including setting up a Member group to steer work in this area, Oxfordshire

County Council is amending its structure and that Bicester Vision has a new Partnership Manager and has been refocusing its work. It is therefore possibly too early to have clarity around the level of resource partners might be able to provide but the following broad options are set out for the Board to consider:

Option 1 – To continue to work through existing resources focused on the strategy to deliver employment in association with NW Bicester and work in partnership to deliver the EDS actions for the town as set out in the document.

Option 2 - To promote additional resource to support the implementation of the Cherwell Economic Development Strategy within Bicester. Currently there is limited spare capacity in the Economic Development teams at both District and County level. This would support additional work to work with key players within the local authorities including Economic Development Officers and the LEP(s) to create the delivery plan, translating the economic development strategy

Option 3 – To identify additional resource for specific focused areas of work, for example, supply chain development in connection with building construction taking place in the town

## **Conclusions**

As set out in this paper, creating eco-Bicester is a highly complex task with potentially a massive amount of work to do by those involved in delivering economic development in Bicester. The Eco Bicester Project Team on its own cannot build a new economy, it is the local business leaders, entrepreneurs and individual workers that build an economy. The Eco Bicester Project Team has a clear role in working with the developers at NW Bicester to ensure the scheme meets the standard of one job per dwelling in a way that fits with the wider EDS. The EDS itself provides the framework for delivering the economic development required to support the growth but there is limited resources currently to focus on Bicester.

Given the current reorganisation/restructuring that is taking place it is around economic development it is prudent for the Board to highlight the need for resources to be focused in Bicester to meet the ambitions for the town. It is recommend therefore that a further report is brought back to the Board on wider economic development resources within the local authorities in the new year. At this stage it would also be appropriate to identify specific work that can not currently be covered by the available resource. In the mean time it is important that other work progresses with the resources available.

## **4. Recommendations**

This reports sets out the following recommendations:

1. The Strategic Delivery Board considers the need for partners to review resources, and make additional resources available, to deliver the economic strategy for Bicester.
2. The Project Team to input into the preparation of a economic strategy in relation to NW Bicester to address the eco town employment standards and implementation through the masterplan proposals for North West Bicester
3. The Project Team continues to input with partners into employment issues and when opportunities arise promote the economic objectives for Eco Bicester and the delivery of the action plan set out in the Cherwell Economic Development Strategy
4. A further report is returned to the Board in the new year setting out wider resources within the local authorities and identifying critical gaps in the work that can be carried out.