

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 19 July 2012	AGENDA ITEM NO: 5
Report title: Progress of Development Proposals for Bicester	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report seeks to provide an update for Board Members current proposals and which are likely to be of relevance to the Board. The report is divided into the following sections to cover the wide range of activity currently taking place in the Town;
- Policy Development
 - Development Proposals
 - Demonstration Projects
 - Other matters

2. Policy Development

2.1. National Policy

2.1.2 National Planning Policy Framework

On 27 March 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It came into effect immediately, superseding the 2011 consultation draft. It replaces a considerable amount of planning guidance previously issued by the Government, which was withdrawn on the publication of the NPPF.

The Government's stated objective in publishing this new guidance is to reduce the amount of national planning guidance, so that key principles guiding the land use planning system in England are contained within a document of about 50 pages rather than in a large number of guidance notes (Planning Policy Statements / Planning Policy Guidance) that amount to over 1300 pages of advice as has been the case up until recently. Key points arising out of the NPPF are;

The Plan-Led Approach

The NPPF strongly reinforces the existing plan-led approach as the key way to deliver sustainable development over the long term, allowing for proper engagement with communities. The most important change in the NPPF is the introduction of a new presumption in favour of sustainable development which is referred to as the "golden thread" which will run through plan-making and decision taking.

The presumption in favour of Sustainable Development

Throughout the NPPF, the emphasis is on sustainable development and the planning system's role in facilitating such development. In practice this means that local plan policies will need to

be written to reflect the NPPF defined sustainable development principles and planning applications determined in accordance with them. Where there is no up to date local plan (as described in para 3.2 above), then planning authorities should grant planning permission for development unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly outweigh the benefits.

13 objectives for “Delivering Sustainable Development”

1. Delivering a strong, competitive economy
2. Ensuring vitality of town centres
3. Supporting a prosperous rural economy
4. Promoting sustainable transport
5. Supporting high quality communications structure
6. Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes
7. Requiring good design
8. Promoting healthy communities
9. Protecting Green Belt land
10. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
13. Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals

Further details regarding the NPPF and its potential impact on Bicester are attached at appendix A.

2.1.3 Garden Cities (2.1.3)

There is a passing reference to Garden Cities in the NPPF that bears closer examination. The NPPF supports large scale development that follows garden city principles. The Town and Country Planning Association have recently published a report entitled “Creating Garden Cities and Suburbs Today” which identifies principles for the Garden Cities, to explore what practical steps could be taken by the Government and local planning authorities to put this initiative into practice.

It is understood that the Government are to produce their own Garden City Prospectus which will contain guidance on Garden City development principles for public consultation in the near future. Current consideration appears to be about how the principles might apply to the largest new developments (5000 dwellings or more) rather than a more general application of the principles. However there is on going consideration by DCLG about the proposed prospectus and this focus may change.

Eco Towns were also an attempt to provide new settlements that would be highly sustainable. There is therefore the potential for Eco-Bicester to re-align itself with this new policy initiative from Government, but a clear appraisal of the benefits, along with any adverse impacts from doing so would need to be carried out before this could be properly considered. Also in advance of seeing the Government’s published Garden City Prospectus, it is not clear how easily all the Eco-Bicester principles would translate into Garden City principles. A paper to the District Council’s May Executive Meeting can be viewed at the link below

<http://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=2128>

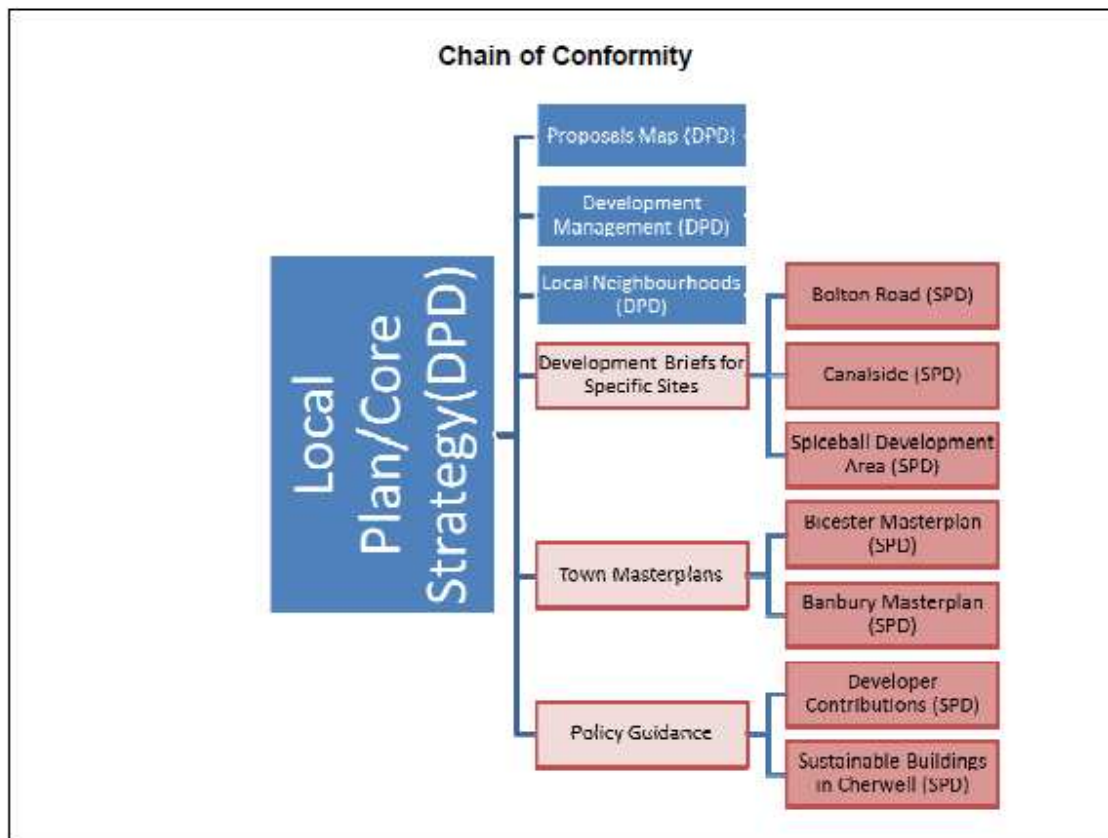
The Executive agreed that DCLG should be contacted to explore the identification of Eco Bicester as a next generation garden city.

2.2. Local Policy

2.2.1 The Cherwell Local Plan proposed Submission Draft

The planning act requires the determination of planning applications to be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan is therefore a key document in guiding development within the area it covers. The development plan for Bicester currently comprises of the South East Plan and the adopted Cherwell Local Plan. The South East Plan, will go when regional spatial strategies are withdrawn. The adopted local plan is dated and therefore carries limited weight and importantly sites identified for development have now largely been developed. It is therefore important that a replacement plan is progressed and adopted as soon as possible.

The Development Plan may contain more than one document and the attached diagram sets out the suite of documents proposed in Cherwell.



The Cherwell Local Plan submission draft amends the previous draft Core Strategy to reflect changes in legislation and government guidance and is the next step towards achieving an adopted local plan to guide development within the District. The proposed Cherwell Local Plan submission draft was reported to Cherwell District Council's Executive in May 2012. The document and accompanying report can be viewed on CDC's web site; <http://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=2128>

The following timetable was provided to Cherwell's Executive for the progression of the plan to adoption.

Document	Milestone	Regulation	Date
Local Plan/Core Strategy	Plan Preparation		2004 - 2012
DPD	Proposed Submission Consultation	Reg 20	June – July 2012
	Submission to Secretary of State	Reg 22	October 2012
	Consideration of Representations	Reg 23	November 2012
	Independent Examination	Reg 24	December 2012/January 2013
	Publication of Recommendation	Reg 25	February 2013
	Adoption	Reg 26	March 2013

The Cherwell Local Plan submission draft is divided into a number of sections. The following sections are of particular relevance to Bicester; section A, which sets out the vision and strategy for the District, section B development policies and section C1 which sets out the policies for Bicester whilst the infrastructure delivery plan is identified in section D.

A draft of the plan accompanies the report to Executive. During the consultation period organisations and individuals will have the chance to make formal comments with regard to the plan.

2.2.2 The Bicester Masterplan

The Bicester Masterplan is proposed to be a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). SPD provide greater detail on policies within the development plan. They do not need to go through the same rigorous examination as the local plan although consultation is required prior to adoption. During the consultation period organisations and individuals will have the chance to make formal comments with regard to the plan.

The emerging Bicester Masterplan was reported to the SDB in January 2012. Below is the timetable reported to Cherwell District Council's Executive in May for progressing the masterplan. The report to the Executive can be viewed on the Cherwell District Council web site.

<http://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=2128>

Bicester Masterplan	Commencement		November 2011
SPD	Executive		Monday 28 th May 2012
	Consultation	Reg 12	June – July 2012
	Adoption	Reg 14	September 2012

2.2.3 Housing Strategy

The Cherwell Housing Strategy 2012-17 "Enterprise - Innovation - Empowerment" has been approved by Cherwell DC. In addition, a Cherwell Tenancy Strategy 2012-15 has been agreed which further supports the District being "Investment Ready" and customers being "Housing Ready". The Housing Strategy reaffirms the District priority to developing high quality and environmentally sustainable low carbon homes and the wider housing and housing-related activities supporting Eco Bicester. A full report on affordable housing progress will be presented by the Strategic Housing Manager to the next Strategic Delivery Board.
<http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1791>

3. Development Proposals

3.1. Current Development Proposals

- 3.2. This section of the report aims to provide the Board with an overview the current position on the most significant development proposals affecting the town. The attached appendix to the report identifies the major schemes that have planning permission, those where a planning application has been submitted and finally those where there has been public consultation or screening or scoping for environmental impact assessment.
- 3.3. Of the developments with planning permission the most significant being implemented are the town centre redevelopment scheme and the development at south west Bicester (Kingsmere).
- 3.4. There are major sites with planning permission where development is yet to take place. Of these the oldest is the planning permission for residential development at Gavray Drive (permission since 2006). Planning permissions at Bicester Business Park (2010) and Skimmingdish Lane (2005) for employment development also remain to be implemented.
- 3.5. Since the last meeting of the Board planning permission has been granted for the Exemplar Development at NW Bicester, following the completion of legal agreements. This scheme will achieve dwellings built to high standards and deliver zero carbon development which has not been achieved at scale within Oxfordshire previously.
- 3.6. A planning application for the development at Graven Hill and C site is currently being processed and is yet to be determined. Remaining issues include the viability of the scheme, protected species, landscape impact, compliance with the Cherwell Local Plan.
- 3.7. There has been recent public consultations on several major proposals. These include an extension to Bicester Village retail outlet centre, provision of a new Tesco store at Bicester Business Park and commercial development at Howes Lane Bicester. The NPPF encourages developers to carry out consultation prior to submission of planning applications. It could therefore be anticipated that applications will be submitted on these sites in due course.
- 3.8. The level of applications highlights the level of interest in developing in and around the town. It is important that development proposals are carefully considered to ensure they meet the aims for the growth of the town and that inappropriate development is not permitted. The Local Plan has a key role in identifying the appropriate locations for growth within and adjacent to the town.

4 Demonstration Projects

4.1 Demonstration Building

4.1.1 In the short time since opening, the building has been used for a variety of purposes symbolises of partnership approach adopted by the Eco Bicester project. To take account of the high demand for information and initial interest in the project, the building opened five days a week. However, since April 2012 the opening hours have reduced to reflect the current visiting patterns and staffing levels. Since its opening there have been around 2,500 visitors in total to the building. Monthly visitor numbers peaked at approximately 350 visits in June 2011 and were lowest (approximately 100 visits) in December 2011. On average approximately 200 people a month have visited the building with higher numbers for particular events, following promotion of various schemes or when there has been other publicity. The public reaction has been generally positive and is recorded in the visitors' book.

4.1.2 In the past six month's the building's use has adapted to reflect the need for community meeting/ exhibition space and a focal point for the Eco Bicester project. The building has been used for Grassroots Bicester's monthly meeting, Green Gym AGM, and training sessions for "The Carbon Conversations" project. Local groups that have visited include:

OxCAN (Oxfordshire Climate Change)

The Registered Social Landlord (RSL) Development Group and Residents Panel

Bicester's Women's institute

Grassroots Bicester

Bicester Green Gym,

Bicester Brownies

Bicester Schools

Oxford Construction Excellence and

The Bicester in Bloom Regional Judges presentation

4.1.3 An evaluation of the construction of the building has been written by BioRegional (an environmental charity supporting the Eco Town project team to deliver NW Bicester). The case study includes details on what makes the building different, construction information and the challenges faced in its development. This important documentation of the project is attached as a link to the Eco Bicester website (www.ecobicester.org.uk) and in the Eco Bicester newsletter for those who want to find out more. The summary report is attached for information to this report at Appendix C.

4.2 Cooper School

4.2.1 The zero carbon sixth form centre has been constructed and opened in pupils in September 2011.

4.3 Insulation Scheme

4.3.1 To date there have been 1742 referrals with 1363 completed installations, (this is approximately 10% of Bicester's housing stock). All the community halls which are eligible under the extended scheme have been contacted and West Bicester Community Hall is in the process of getting a free survey done. Since the last SDB, CDC has launched a free scheme (to end in September before the introduction of Green Deal), that allows all home owners and private tenants to have cavity wall and loft insulation for free subject to meeting specific eligibility criteria. The scheme also includes loft top ups, which makes Cherwell DC the only local authority in the UK which is currently providing this free. However the existence of the

Green Deal will mean that the Insulation Scheme as currently developed, will come to a natural end, to avoid a duplication of efforts / resources. It is envisaged that a review of the implications of the Green Deal for Bicester will be reported to the SDB in October.

4.4 JPII centre

- 4.4.1 Although the John Paul II Community Centre has been opened and operating successfully since last August there had been no evaluation of the sustainable benefits that it provides and the lessons learnt from its construction. Now, a case study has been written by BioRegional (an environmental charity supporting the Eco Town project team to deliver NW Bicester) evaluating the building. The case study includes details on what makes the community centre different, construction information and the challenges faced in its development. This important documentation of the project is attached as a link to the Eco Bicester website (www.ecobicester.org.uk) and in the Eco Bicester newsletter for those who want to find out more. The summary report is attached for information to this report at Appendix D.

4.5 Bryan House

- 4.5.1 The first block of two units (Thyme Court) is complete and the remainder of the units will be ready by September 2012 and will be allocated to applicants with reference to a Local Lettings Plan that sets out criteria for occupancy within an eco setting. There is an increased emphasis on the links between access to affordable homes and employment, with a target of 70% of lettings being made to applicants who are either working, in training or able to demonstrate a positive contribution to the community. The Lettings Plan also includes a Green Charter for tenants.
- 4.5.2 The Sanctuary Group have been successful in obtaining Technology Strategy Board funding to undertake a post-construction and occupancy study into the Bryan House units delivered to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. This means a comprehensive study of the effectiveness of the design and construction of the homes and of the residents ability to use the technology to reduce bills can be undertaken.
- 4.5.3 The work will start once the properties are complete in the early autumn and will last for four months. The independent study will be carried out by Oxford Brooks University and will result in a series of workshops to disseminate any learning and a final report. It will provide important learning for future Eco Bicester and other projects where higher sustainability standards are sought.

4.6 Eco Bicester Travel Demonstration Project Update

Since the update to the Board in April, the Cycle for Bicester project has seen an increasing number of people signing up to take part and benefit from a free cycle loan over a four week period.

The current cycle loan period has eleven out of the fleet of 20 bicycles out with the public and it is looking likely that they could all go out during the next loan period which starts at the end of July. The feedback being received from those taking part has been very positive, including one lady from the last session who said her family were considering selling their second car as the cycling had been so popular with her and her child.

The 'bike fix' sessions at Southwold and Sheep Street were well attended and adult training sessions completed at Southwold too. Good progress has been made by visiting businesses

in the town and this has resulted in a lot of interest in the bike fix sessions and employees signing up for training sessions too.

The walking and cycling map has been completed and will be delivered to every household shortly by the Royal Mail. Copies were handed out at the Grassroots Bike Fix event in June and have been dropped off to the businesses as they have been visited about the cycle package. They have been very well received.

A need for increased levels of cycle parking at various locations in the town has been raised by the public and by the delivery board. Quotes have been received for ten Sheffield stands at either end of Sheep Street and five at bus stops on Boston Road, Churchill Road and at Pingle Field; confirmation of the cost of installation is awaited.

At promotional events the public are being encouraged to inform officers of other locations that need stands. The main response has been about the shops in the community areas and the Caversfield bus stop. These will be investigated further and the board updated on progress.

4.7 Reuse Centre

- 4.7.1 The Reuse Centre proposals are progressing well. A Project Development Manager, Cliff Jordan, has now been appointed and is working out of the Demonstration House at The Garth at least one day a week. A project steering group has been set up which meets monthly and involves representatives from CDC, OCC, Oxfordshire Community Action Groups and Resources Futures.
- 4.7.2 A project inception meeting was held at the start of May for all stakeholders and alongside this, 1-1 meetings have taken place with individual stakeholders such as Grassroots Bicester, Emmaus Oxford, and Oxford Wood Recycling to consider what role they might be able to take on in progressing the project. In terms of future engagement activities, a meeting is being arranged (with Grassroots Bicester), for all charity shops in Bicester, to increase cooperation in that sector, and to reassure them that new centre is intended to augment existing initiatives, not compete with or harm them.
- 4.7.3 Work is currently focussing on researching other successful reuse and sustainability projects around the country as well as compiling a list of potential funding sources. This information will be used to refine the Project Business Plan, and to generate a Funding Plan to illustrate how the project could be resourced going forwards. OCC premises in Bicester that are surplus to their current requirements are being assessed to establish their suitability for use as the Reuse Centre.

5 Future projects

5.1 Collective switching energy

- 5.1.1 Options for setting up and running a collective switching scheme in Bicester have been investigated by the Project Team. The advantage of collective switching would be to use bulk purchasing to reduce costs of energy for individuals. A scheme might also be devised to support renewables.
- 5.1.2 Cherwell District Council was contacted by a small internet company called iChoosr, based in Belgium following a meeting with the Energy Secretary to discuss collective switching of

energy in the UK. iChoosr has been in discussion with the Department of Energy and Climate Control (DECC), Consumer Focus and several Local Councils to implement collective switching schemes similar to those it has been running in Europe since 2008 for over half a million people. iChoosr offers practical information for local authorities on collective switching schemes for energy and acts as an intermediary between the energy supply companies and customers using the local authority website platform to register and agglomerate interest. This approach would probably need to be used on a District wide basis to generate the level of interest required.

- 5.1.3 Other options to deliver energy savings through bulk purchase include setting up a Council run scheme as in the approach taken by South Holland District Council led by the Council Leader. There are other schemes available for residents such as the nationwide Which? "Big Switch" and the smaller scale, not for profit scheme set up by the Peoples Power organisation. Neither of these schemes requires the involvement of the local authority. The Rural Community Council in Cornwall are also piloting a scheme. On the other hand South Lakeland District Council is working with iChoosr to launch a pilot scheme in August 2012 with a larger scheme being launched via a membership website (at this stage details are unknown) and the scheme being rolled out in England in late 2012. The options and approaches to collective switching could equally be used in the bulk purchasing of other goods and services and iChoosr, among others, is looking to extend its offer into this area.
- 5.1.4 The introduction of a District wide scheme using iChoosr or other provider would require the support of the District Council and is yet to be formally considered. However it is a matter that is being actively considered and it is possible that a scheme could be piloted in Bicester.

5.2 Water Project

- 5.2.1 Bicester is located within the South East which is an area of water stress. The town is located in the Thames River Basin catchment. A River Basin Management Plan has been produced to identify the pressures facing the river basin and actions to address them. The aim is for every aspect of the water environment to be improved. The catchment summary can be viewed at <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/125035.aspx>
- 5.2.2 New development will increase demand for water, which if unregulated could have severe impacts on the environment. The Environment Agency, Waterwise and Thames Water have all indicated a commitment to work with the Eco Bicester Project Team to deliver a project to reduce water use in existing properties through retro fitting to reduce water use (and also save money) and measures improve water quality. It is anticipated that other organisations at both a national and local level may also be interested in being part of such a project. Details of a project are currently being worked up and will be reported to a future meeting of the Board.

6 Other Matters

6.1 M40 Junction 9 Improvements

The Oxfordshire LEP with support from the South East Midlands LEP, Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council submitted a bid to the Highways Agency for funds to improve the capacity of M40 Junction 9. Annex 1 provides an scheme diagram for what the works entails.

At the beginning of July, it was announced that the bid had been successful, with the Highways Agency committing up to £6.5m towards the improvements. Given the importance of the

improvements for Oxfordshire and Bicester, in particular, as part of the bid, the County Council had committed up to £2m, meaning that there is now £8.5m available to improve Junction 9.

Discussions are now being held with Highways Agency to agree a way forward on how and when the scheme could be delivered. The £6.5m is currently programmed for 2014/15.

6.2 Broadband

It is widely accepted that business and residents need to have unfettered access to online resources and the ability to conduct transactions digitally.

National Government expects the County Council to prepare on behalf of the wider community a digital strategy that will provide the framework through which private and public sectors will work to deliver the digital infrastructure required for the 21st Century.

The County Council's role in this programme is to provide a mechanism for investment in improving the infrastructure. This will be accomplished through coordinating national, local authority and community investment, leading on the procurement, as well as leading on partnership and engagement with communities and partners. The 'investment' will be with a private sector partner on an outcome basis (improved digital infrastructure for a number of premises).

Our ambition is that Oxfordshire should have 90% coverage of next generation broadband by 2015 (defined as having access to a speed of at least 24Mbps), with the remaining 10% of the population having access to a basic level of service (defined as having access to a speed of 2Mbps).

As local planning authorities, the district/city councils will have a key role to play in the implementing the ambition for Oxfordshire. Specifically the roll-out of next generation broadband may require larger cabinets to be installed in our communities.

Given the importance to the economy of rolling-out next generation broadband as quickly as possible there may be benefit in looking to the district/city councils adopting a similar approach to responding to the planning issues: this group may wish to consider whether this is a matter best addressed through the Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership.

Despite the restricted targeting of funding for the programme, there are complementary projects to improve digital infrastructure to meet other strategic objectives for economic development. The Oxonline programme can offer technical, legal and commercial support for communities, businesses and other groups interested in enhancing local provision irrespective of their current or future broadband status.

The Board will be kept informed as this project continues to progress.

6.3 Bicester Town Centre Access Improvements

Oxfordshire County Council is currently undertaking a public consultation on a scheme to improve access for all modes of transport into Bicester town centre.

Bicester town centre is currently undergoing a major redevelopment and this scheme aims to enhance access to the centre of the town. The proposed scheme is designed reduce congestion and improve traffic flow, enhancing provision for walking and cycling whilst improve

journey time reliability for buses and cars. An overview of the scheme can be found at Annex 2.

The main elements of the proposed scheme are:

- Two way access to/from St John's Street;
- Converting the current signalised junction at St John's Street, Queens Avenue and Field Street to a three-arm mini-roundabout;
- Converting the five-arm roundabout at Buckingham Road/Banbury Road to a three-arm roundabout with Field Street by closing off Roman Way/North Street arms onto the roundabout;
- North Street is transformed into a two-way residential street and removing through motor traffic, bringing significant benefits for residents and creating a much improved cycling and pedestrian environment;
- Minor changes to Queens Avenue to improve traffic flow and prevent queuing traffic at the roundabout of St John's Street/Field Street.

The consultation commenced on the 9th July and runs until the 6th August. As part of the consultation a public exhibition was held at John Paul II Centre from 12th – 14th July and the proposals will be on view in the town centre drop-in venue in Crown Walk for the remainder of the consultation. Comments can be made on line by visiting: <http://tinyurl.com/bicconsult>

Following the consultation, a decision will be taken by the County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport on the 6th September and if the scheme is approved, then construction could commence early in 2013 and be completed in advance of the town centre re-development opening in August 2013.

7 Recommendations

The Board is recommended

7.1 to note the changes in relation to planning policy at a national level

7.2 to support the exploration with DCLG the opportunities for aligning Eco Bicester with garden cities

7.3 that the progress towards the adoption of a Local Plan is noted

7.4 that the timetable for the Bicester Masterplan is noted

7.5 Note the position on development proposals for the town

7.6 Note the progress on demonstration projects

7.7 Note the progress on other matters

Appendices

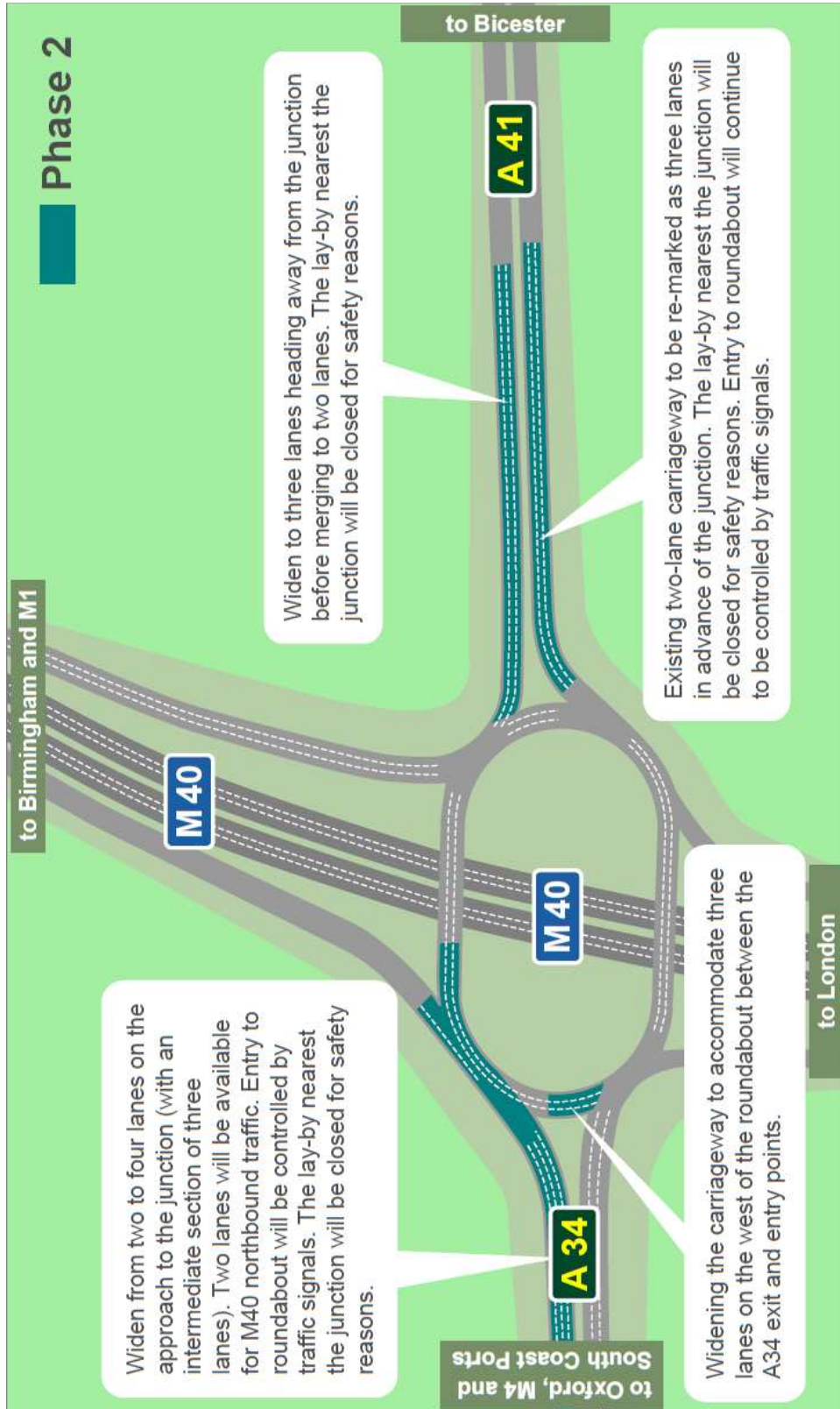
appendix A – National Planning Policy Guidance

appendix B – Development Proposals

appendix C – Demo Building Leaflet (draft)

appendix D – JP II Leaflet (draft)

appendix E – Review of the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board



Annex 2: Bicester Town Centre Access Improvements



<p><small>This drawing is the property of Oxfordshire County Council. It is to be used only for the purposes of the project for which it is prepared. It is not to be used for any other purpose without the prior written consent of Oxfordshire County Council. It is not to be used for any other project or for any other purpose without the prior written consent of Oxfordshire County Council. It is not to be used for any other project or for any other purpose without the prior written consent of Oxfordshire County Council.</small></p>					
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<p>Project ID: BICESTER TOWN CENTRE ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS</p>					
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Scale:	Drawn by:	Checked by:	Approved by:	<p> Date drawn: 07/07/12 Date checked: 07/07/12 Date approved: 07/07/12 </p>	
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