

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: Thursday 4 October 2012	AGENDA ITEM NO: 5
Report title: Affordable Homes in Eco Bicester	
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1. Purpose of Report

- To update the Strategic Delivery Board (“the Board”) on the progress of affordable housing and related initiatives within Eco Bicester.

2. Background

- The provision of affordable housing is an important element of the approach to Eco Bicester. The Board was last updated on progress of the provision of affordable housing in October 2011. This report provides a subsequent update to the Board on both the provision of affordable homes and other housing initiatives.

Affordable Homes Delivery 2011-12; and 2012-13

- **Bryan House Eco Demonstration project** – the first two units were completed in late 2011 by the Sanctuary Group, and the remaining 21 units achieved practical completion in September 2012, with a launch scheduled for 26 October 2012.
- **South West Bicester Phase A** – the first four units of shared ownership have been delivered and are part owned by the Bromford Group. The next six units of shared ownership should be complete in December 2012, whilst the first ten rental units are scheduled for December 2012/January 2013 through the Paradigm Housing Association.
- **London Road Extra Care 20 units** – the first Extra Care units in Bicester are complete and are being allocated. This scheme is now called “Centurion House” at the suggestion of older people, and is managed by Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association
- **First Buy initiative** – this government funding stream was made available to support First Buy on new developments to help housing applicants get their foot onto the property ladder. The first six units have been delivered in Cherwell – all at SW Bicester – through Bovis Homes and Taylor- Wimpey. Two further completions are expected imminently. The Catalyst Group raise awareness of the scheme as well as undertaking signposting and administration.
- **George Street Garage site, Bicester** – four x three-bed houses will be delivered by Sanctuary Group in December 2012.
- **Mortgage Rescue Scheme 2012/13** – two Bicester households were assisted in April 2012 meaning they stayed in their home by converting home ownership into rented units from a Registered Provider.

Affordable Homes – 2011-15 and moving forward

- Officers are working with partners including the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to take forward future affordable housing opportunities as part of the National Affordable Homes Programme.
- Through its Investment Partner status with the HCA, Cherwell DC is overseeing a Build programme that will secure self build opportunities across the District up to 2015. One example is the site KM21 at South West Bicester which will provide 21 units built to a water tight shell for “self finish” through a partnership with the developer Leadbitters.
- Further affordable housing delivery at SW Bicester will be achieved as follows: 2013/14 – 36 units on parcel KM4; 2014/15 – 33 units on parcel KM12 and 36 units on parcel KM3.
- North West Bicester – see below for full update
- The Cherwell Local Plan is now in formal consultation stage as a proposed submission draft and identifies new site proposals for strategic housing/mixed use development in Bicester – North West Bicester, SW Bicester Phase 2 and Graven Hill and East Bicester. It also identifies the approved sites SW Bicester Phase 1 (approved), Gavray Drive (approved), and DLO Caversfield (approved) which adjoins Caversfield village.

Other Delivery

- The HCA is working with City and Country regarding their bid to the Get Britain Building fund to bring forward 145 units on the Garden Quarter, Caversfield. This relates to the Caversfield site (north of Bicester) where Planning Permission was granted last year for most existing buildings that were associated with military use covering conversion of buildings and an element of new build. Members did not approve affordable housing in this case on viability grounds.
- This funding relates to Round 1 of the GBB funding, and arose from the competitive process (as opposed to the nomination process that involves direct consultation with local authorities), although the HCA worked closely with Cherwell

Bryan House

- Since the last Board meeting, a great deal of progress has taken place on this development. All properties have now achieved practical completion. The first tenant (Mr Brassington) moved into his first floor flat in December 2012 and is monitoring his energy use for the wider benefit of future residents. The completion of the whole scheme in September 2012 is timely as start on site is imminent on the NW Bicester Exemplar site.
- 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.
- The work is due to start as the properties are now complete 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.
- An Area Lettings Plan has been agreed for Bryan House that gives greater priority to Bicester residents in the allocation of the properties and which has asked future tenants to buy into an Eco Bicester lifestyle.
- The formal launch of Bryan House is set for 26 October and invitations to the event have now been distributed.

Retrofitting

- Cherwell District Council officers have hosted events with Registered Provider partners to consider eco friendly measures within both the structure of their properties and within the behaviour and lifestyles of their tenants. It is envisaged any reinvestment programmes should have a positive impact towards the objectives of Eco Bicester. The Sanctuary Group has committed to investing in Colne House and Evenlode House and this work is currently underway. This work includes insulation, new boilers and solar pv panels.
- Highfields – a small area urban study was commissioned for Highfields in Bicester, an area of mixed housing types and tenures. Oxford Brookes University carbon mapped approximately 300 homes, using a variety of methods including thermal imaging and satellite images. As a result the Sanctuary Group added approximately 70 homes to its insulation programme.

North West Bicester

- Affordable Housing contributions and a Nominations Agreement and Area Lettings Plan with a supporting Eco Charter have been agreed for the Exemplar scheme. This work has recently secured positive national coverage for Eco Bicester in the Inside Housing publication – as arranged by A2 Dominion.
- Following Start on Site by the end of this year, the profiling of affordable housing completions has been outlined by A2 Dominion and the relatively high proportion of affordable housing delivery in Phase 1 of the development will be particularly beneficial in addressing housing need through the provision of affordable rent and shared ownership products. A total of 119 affordable homes will be provided – 23 shared ownership and 96 affordable rents.
- Research in anticipation of the main application and the master planning process has taken place – this work has resulted in potential for self build opportunities, extra care housing, an Emmaus project and other opportunities. (Emmaus Communities offer homeless people a home, work and chance to rebuild their lives in a supportive environment. They rely on donations of good quality furniture and household goods from the public which are sold in Emmaus shops).
- As part of the plans to establish a Local Management Organisation (LMO), a business plan is considering the impact of joint work with a Community Land Trust.

Community Development

- In addition to the related initiatives raised above, Cherwell DC is also enabling greater community involvement on the SW Bicester site by working closely with a number of partners such as the local church. It is intended this work will allow greater coordination of community activity given the strategic sites that are being brought forward.

Insulation Programme

- Cherwell DC's private sector housing team and Eco Bicester project team has coordinated a range of insulation initiatives resulting in over 1,350 benefitting from the retrofitting programme.
- It is of particular interest that Southwold Community Centre has recently benefitted from the insulation scheme, and other community centres were being urged to follow suit. It is the only community building in the town to benefit from subsidised insulation available through the Eco Bicester project. The project received funding from the Eco Bicester insulation programme and it is unlikely the work would have been undertaken without the funding.
- Southwold Community Association faced enormous annual energy bills of up to £1,900. It managed to obtain a grant to part-fund replacement of doors and windows but the building was

still losing heat. So the Association contacted Cherwell District Council to see if Eco Bicester could help out.

- The work cost around £1,200 and the Southwold Community Centre management committee has contributed a quarter of this sum.

Green Deal

- The Green Deal is the coalition Government's initiative to support the implementation of energy efficiency measures to households and businesses and is due to be launched in October 2012. Cherwell District Council is a founding member of a Green Deal Community Interest Company set up by the United Sustainable Energy Agency (USEA) and it will operate as a Green Deal Provider. Cherwell DC is involved to ensure good access to the scheme for local residents.

Visit by the HCA Chairman

- The HCA Chairman, Robert Napier, visited Bicester in May 2012 in an event that was attended by key partners such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships, Communities and Local Government and Cherwell District Council. An overview of the Eco Bicester project was presented and he was given a tour of key sites and opportunities, and the need for future HCA support was reaffirmed.

Cherwell Housing Strategy 2012-17

- The new Cherwell Housing Strategy 2012-17 was approved earlier this year and has the strap line "Enterprise – Innovation – Empowerment"
- Strategic Priorities are:
 - Increasing the supply and access to housing
 - Developing financially and socially sustainable communities
 - Housing our most vulnerable residents
 - Ensuring homes are safe, warm and well managed
 - Preventing homelessness
 - Maximising Resources – Investment Ready District
- The principles of the District being "Investment Ready" and customers being "Housing Ready" are integral to the housing strategy.
- In addition to the Housing Strategy, a Cherwell Tenancy Strategy 2012-15 has been produced which provides guidance for Registered Providers operating in the Cherwell District. It sets out the Council's position on the provision of affordable housing including the use of Flexible Tenancies, Affordable Rents and the use of the private sector tenancies for homeless households.
- The following link allows access to both documents:
<http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/housingstrategy>
<http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/tenancystrategy>

3. Recommendations

- To note progress on Eco Bicester on affordable homes and related issues.