

Bicester Sustainability and Reuse Centre
(Working title - see Appendix N, regarding 'Branding')

Business Plan
 version 10 September 2012

Executive Summary

The Bicester Sustainability and Reuse Centre (BSRC) will be a free-standing social enterprise, lead by the local community, and delivered in partnership with other organisations. It will

- Address several European, National and Local authority objectives.
- Serve the burgeoning population of Bicester, the surrounding villages and beyond
- Become a one-stop shop for all matters to do with sustainability and reuse.
- Innovate and develop, and respond to needs and opportunities as they emerge in the future.

This version of the Business Plan is presented to the Eco-Bicester Strategic Delivery Board meeting on 4 October 2012. A progress report accompanies this version.

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1. Who (see Appendix A)

The Bicester Sustainability and Reuse Centre (BSRC) will be delivered by a community lead social enterprise.

The concept of the Centre is supported by all three tiers of local government (Bicester Town Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council), the local community action group (Grassroots Bicester), and a range of other agencies and stakeholders (see Appendix A).

A Project Development Manager (PDM) is in post for 12 months from May 2012. The role of the PDM is to develop the business plan and set up a social enterprise in order to establish the BSRC in April 2013. The PDM is contracted and supported by Resource Futures.

2. Vision (see Appendix B)

The Centre will be a place where the people of Bicester can engage with each other to improve their town, to create a better Bicester, economically, socially and environmentally, all with an awareness that our actions have consequences for ourselves and for generations to come.

It will be the only place in Oxfordshire where the public can call in for a wide range of services, products and information in keeping with a theme of sustainability.

3. Aims and objectives

The aim of the Centre is to create a 'one-stop shop' for all aspects of reuse and sustainability.

The Centre's objectives are:

- To collect, repair, retail and deliver furniture and other useful items & materials that have been donated, and that might otherwise have entered the waste stream.
- To support those in need, by providing furniture, other household goods and useful materials to support independent living.
- To retail a range of goods that enable people to live more sustainably.
- To provide training and skills development (back to work skills) in the areas of reuse, recycling, retail, stock management, and enterprise.
- To engage different sectors of society in volunteering and contributing to the work of the centre, aiding social cohesion.
- To offer advice and training that enable Bicester residents to make choices that make their homes, lifestyles, and neighbourhoods more sustainable.
- To raise awareness of waste reuse, community projects, and sustainable living.
- To incubate and support other initiatives and enterprises in aid of sustainability and local community.
- To be responsive to new needs and to repeatedly innovate.
- To attract visitors from further afield & demonstrate best practice.

As the Centre becomes operational, the above objectives will become SMART targets. Key targets are likely to be based around:

1. Tonnes of goods diverted
2. Value of goods re-used/repaired
3. Employment, training and volunteering opportunities created

4. Legislative & Governmental drivers (see Appendix C)

The European Union's Waste Framework Directive favours reuse over recycling, generating energy or landfill; the WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment) Directive promotes re-use of electrical appliances, as more desirable than recycling or treating as hazardous waste, and the 2011 review of Government waste policy identified a vibrant reuse sector as a contributory factor in working towards a zero waste economy. The review identified promotion of reuse and changing attitudes to reuse as driving factors in meeting such aims.

Tough national carbon reduction targets mean that individuals will have to make decisions about improving the efficiency of their homes. The emergence of finance measures such as the 'Green Deal' demonstrates a strong drive to effect change in the building and home improvement sectors.

The Child Poverty Act, 2010, requires Government and Local Authorities to adopt strategies to support families out of work to live with dignity, and to support families unable to work by addressing their particular needs. Volunteering is specifically mentioned in the Dept for Work & Pensions 2010 "Building Bridges to Work".

The Big Society emphasises the value of community lead social enterprises in addressing the needs identified by local communities.

5. Local authority drivers: (see Appendix D)

a. Oxfordshire County Council Corporate Objectives

The Centre will address priorities from three sections of the current Corporate Plan:

World Class Economy The centre will provide support and training for those needing assistance to enter the workforce, and an incubation service for new ideas and projects in the field of sustainability, a proportion of which may develop into commercially viable enterprises.

Healthy & Thriving Communities. 'Localism and the Big Society', and 'Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation' will both be addressed by the Centre. Household goods and furniture will be provided at low cost to families and others in particular need, mitigating some of the effects of adult and child poverty. The incubation service will include provision for neighbourhood and community leaders to initiate and develop their own ideas and projects to enhance their areas and address local issues they identify as important. The localism agenda aligns well with the importance that the County Council places on encouraging volunteering and enabling communities to address for themselves the issues that matter locally.

Enhancing the Environment.

Energy costs are high and forecast to rise. Fuel poverty is affecting between a quarter and a fifth of households. Drivers such as fuel poverty and carbon reduction targets offer an incentive and driver for energy efficient building improvements. The Centre will link community and business with funding, finance and information to confront these challenges.

Waste Management

Currently, potentially re-usable items are entering the waste stream, and ending up as residual waste. This has a public cost, both in waste of resources and in carbon emissions, and a quantifiable cost to waste disposal authorities. In 2012 landfill tax is £64 per tonne and this will rise by £8 a year until at least 2014. This is in addition to a landfill gate fee. Once the Energy from Waste plant opens at Ardley, a gate fee will still apply to every tonne sent there (average gate fee for such plants is £82 per tonne). This Centre can expect to divert 200 tonnes per annum, saving 150 tonnes CO2 per annum and £14,400 in landfill tax alone. As well as the materials we handle, we expect to stimulate others to engage more in waste reduction.

b. Cherwell District Council Strategic Priorities

The Centre addresses three of the Council's Strategic Priorities:

- A District of Opportunity, by providing basic work skills, and stimulating new enterprises.
- A Cleaner, Greener District, by directly diverting materials from the waste stream, by indirectly encouraging others to value items that would otherwise become waste, and by providing information and products to increase energy efficiency.
- A Safe, Healthy and Thriving District, by offering opportunities for volunteering, and encouraging local residents to develop new projects.

The Centre also directly addresses several elements of the 'Eco Bicester One Shared Vision', especially in the areas of local community involvement, low carbon living, and reduction of waste.

The Bicester Masterplan, presently under public consultation, builds on 'Eco Bicester One Shared Vision', and explicitly includes "Establish a 'shop' as an eco-centre to promote, educate and inform residents of how to live an eco life."

6. Governance & Stakeholders (see Appendix E)

An independent organisation will be registered, to establish and manage the Centre and its activities. Trustees will be sought, and selected for the skills they bring to the organisation.

Our culture will be strongly entrepreneurial, encouraging imagination, experiment and risk-taking. This will be a conscious choice, and may result in some failures. This will be mitigated by the measured and managed way we conduct ourselves and our willingness to report learnings from our successes and from our failings. The organisation will be committed to transparency and openness, and will report fully to the local community and stakeholders.

Meetings, newsletters and active networking ensure that local residents are informed and involved in the centre and its activities. The enterprise will be orientated to change and will be open to developing partnerships with new stakeholders.

7. Partnerships

Many of the activities offered will be done in partnership with existing organisations.

- A charity or furniture reuse organisation will run a furniture reuse operation: collecting, retailing and delivering furniture. Such a partner will do this as part of an existing operation, utilising spare capacity and existing systems. They would focus on donated items that could be sold. Anything requiring testing and repair would be passed to BSRC. Anything that could easily have value added (such as furniture suitable for re-painting) would also be offered to BSRC. We are in discussion with interested partners.
- Orinoco would benefit from a satellite warehouse, significantly increasing their storage capacity, and therefore their ability to expand in several ways. Even if we do not have spare capacity for this, they would provide scrapstore materials and paint from their existing operation, in Headington, Oxford.
- We will further explore with Oxford Wood Recycling the possibility of us providing a retail outlet for some of the reclaimed wood they collect.
- We are keen to support Bicester Babystore in developing their service: collecting and distributing donated babywear and equipment. They have identified a great demand

for baby buggies and other equipment that is beyond their current capacity, and we would be keen to fill that need.

- We have commenced discussion with other potential partners, including The Oxfordshire Sustainable Construction Network (provision of courses and events for construction businesses - *see Appendix F*) the Energy Saving Coop (provision of renovation services for home-owners), and Reachability (provision of training courses in active citizenship and community activism).
- We are open to developing partnerships with others, to deliver various aspects of the Centre. See 'phasing', below.

8. Products and Services (see Appendix G)

There will be a variety of products and services that serve the broad aims of sustainability:

- Provision of goods for reuse, including those that require some repair, testing or refurbishment, or which are suitable for decoration or alteration to increase their value. This will include furniture, household goods, electrical appliances, baby goods, and bicycles. Alongside this, a 'useful materials' operation to provide a similar service regarding paint, reclaimed wood, and 'scrapstore' creative play materials derived from commercial surpluses, etc.
- Some testing (especially PAT) and simple repair work and advice.
- Provision of new goods, that reduce energy consumption or in other ways support a more sustainable lifestyle.
- Provision of advice and support, about sustainable living, reuse and recycling and the wide range of measures and products now available that support this. This would be the only 'drop-in' centre open to the public offering such a service.
- Provision of advice, support and networking for those wishing to initiate or develop new ideas and projects to improve their neighbourhoods.
- Provision of training opportunities and supported skills development (back to work skills) for those currently not in the workforce. This will include, retail, stock management and reuse & repair skills.
- Provision of specialised advice and training courses and events around sustainable construction, and other aspects of sustainability.

If premises are suitable for running training courses on-site, this facility will also be made available for community groups to use.

If suitable premises are found, a small cafe will be provided on-site.

9. Market (see Appendix H)

Bicester is growing fast, and this will continue for decades to come. As well as a larger catchment population, this also means there will be many newcomers to the town, and many new households. The existing town includes areas where a high proportion of the residents depend on benefits or have low incomes.

The Centre will offer a range of products and services, and therefore there are a range of audiences and markets.

There are several charity shops in Bicester, primarily offering clothes. None supply or collect large items of furniture, electrical goods or bicycles.

There are no outlets in Bicester for reusable paint, wood, baby buggies, or scrapstore materials, although local 'Freecycle events' run by Grassroots Bicester are very popular.

'Eco Bicester' is stimulating interest in sustainability and the new NW Bicester development will attract several thousand new residents, for whom sustainability is likely to be a key concern. The centre of gravity for all things 'eco' in the region will move to Bicester, attracting visitors with an appetite for information, inspiration and encouragement.

The Government is about to launch the 'Green Deal' later this year, stimulating interest in measures to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes, – the role of impartial advisor will be invaluable.

10. Income

There will be several income streams:

- For collection of donated large items.
- For sale of all items – possibly all dual-priced: all at reasonable rates, with additional 50% reduction for those in receipt of benefits.
- For delivery of large items purchased.
- For PAT testing for other organisations (filling the statutory requirement that all 'portable appliances' be shown to be tested regularly for safety).
- Provision of facilities to other, compatible operations (eg bicycle refurbishment & repair workshop).
- For training courses, in the form of participants fees, grant support and product manufacturer sponsorship).
- If the premises are suitable, hire of the training facility.
- If premises are suitable, from cafe.
- As a permanent information point for the Oxfordshire Sustainable Construction Network there is significant potential to generate rental income from events and product demonstration sponsorship.

11. Finance (see *Appendix J* and *Appendix K*)

There is a need for some grant funding initially, and then a small surplus generated in the first year which can act as essential reserves for the next two years. These figures are based on an assumption that the enterprise will break even as soon as possible. It is anticipated that lessons learnt in the first two years will guide decisions in year three that will generate additional income, allowing small surpluses to be generated in order to provide for further development and support of new projects in line with our aims.

12. Funding (see *Appendix L Funding*)

The very least required to start the Centre is £20,000. Up to £100,000 would greatly improve the chances of success. Applications will be submitted to two potential funders that might provide a substantial portion of this. A further number of funders have been identified that might provide smaller amounts of the money required, and applications will also be submitted to these.

13. Operations and logistics

a) Staff & Volunteers (see *Appendix M Staff & volunteers*)

Initially, there will be a Project Manager, with overall responsibility; a Centre Manager coordinating all advice/retail/repair elements; and a part-time Administrator; with several

volunteers (retail, advice, repair and 'up cycling' personnel). Directors (unpaid) will attend to finance, fundraising, business development and promotional work.

b) Premises

BSRC requires approximately 200m² (50m² for sales, 50m² for office/meeting space and 100m² for repair/upcycling/storage) alongside the major partner. The FRO requires 300m² for the reused furniture warehouse.

The location needs to be easily found, visible and accessible, with parking nearby. There must be sufficiently easy access for large items of furniture. The ideal is to be central, with 'ownership' by the whole of Bicester, rather than in one part of the town.

c) Equipment

Basic office equipment, some tools and equipment for repair, refurbishment and decoration of furniture, household goods, bikes etc, and storage & display racks will be needed. Stock management and sales equipment (labelling & digital cash registers) will also be needed. The FRO partner would operate a vehicle. BSRC will use this once per week for collection/delivery and movement of goods and materials.

d) Supplies

Ardley HWRC. At present small items suitable for reuse are diverted to a charity shop in Banbury. Large furniture, bicycles, children's buggies and electrical goods are not diverted, but put into recycling or landfill. The operator is expected to support reuse in preference to recycling, and staff are keen to see more of the usable items rescued.

Personal Donations & Collections. Other furniture collection schemes in the County report that the main constraint on supply is their ability to handle calls and arrange collection. The FRO partner would expand their collection service in this area. Collections of non-large furniture items will occur as a result.

Other sources of supply. Some social enterprises in the County, such as Oxford Wood Recycling and Orinoco, have capacity for collection that is greater than their ability to retail (owing to their locations) and mutual cooperation would be sought.

There is nobody at present in the Bicester area promoting the re-use of commercial surplus materials currently being disposed of as waste: this is a niche requiring more development.

14. Promotions and marketing (see Appendix M)

a) Branding: the present working title will be replaced by a distinctive name as soon as possible. Subsequently a visual identity will be derived, and maintained in all communication materials. The logos of key partners may need to be included in visual branding.

b) Audiences and messaging: different audiences have been identified for the reuse and repair operations, and much communication will initially be focussed on specific audiences: primarily people in later stages of life, women aged 25-44, less affluent families, and enthusiastic greens.

Messaging will address the factors that motivate the likely audiences: concern for neighbours, for the future, for the environment, and the irresistible appeal of finding bargains.

c) A communications strategy: has been developed, using low-cost mechanisms to reach to target audiences. A comprehensive list of communications activities has been drawn up, in keeping with the strategy, showing specific actions with objectives, dates for completion and means of evaluating their effectiveness.

15. Phases & future possibilities

By the end of the first year of operation, we will be exploring a range of additional services and partners, and focus on different subjects at different times, e.g.

- Support for cycling (repairs, spares, classes, route info)
- Repair service for furniture, household goods and small electrical appliances.
- House renovation – displays and impartial data about techniques, materials, suppliers and experts, especially with regard to the Green Deal.
- Community sales, encouraging local small producers and traders, as well as private individuals disposing of surplus possessions.
- Incubating other enterprises.
- Discovering synergies with other organisations/activities.
- Expanding into new niches in waste/resource management locally.
- Focussing on water, transport, childhood, retirement, food, gardening, community issues, sport, etc

16. Risks and mitigation

Risk factor	Mitigation measures
Failure to secure established furniture reuse partner	Develop Contingency B – starting up stand-alone project in smaller premises
Start up of innovative enterprise	Combine several elements, including some already shown elsewhere to be viable, eg furniture re-use.
Failure to secure essential funding	Submit applications to several potential sources, and continue to do so.
Changes in viability of niches within reuse and recycling sector	Maintain close contact with professionals and other organisations in this field, in order to identify approaching threats and opportunities
Changes within Bicester, leading to new demands and needs.	Encourage volunteers to be ‘ambassadors’- representing the organisation in diverse arenas, and as ‘scouts’, gathering information.
Challenge of managing volunteers	Allow for sufficient staff time and for training. Make management of people a higher priority than management of task.
Identity too diffuse and complex for easy grasp	Clear branding and messaging that emphasises underlying inter-relatedness
Inexperienced management staff and volunteers providing a slightly chaotic service, at risk to reputation	Training, and a repeated emphasis on exemplary customer service, impartial advice and actual human contact
‘Overstretch’ into too many new areas at once	Reporting and governance structures that manage risks knowingly
Loss of goodwill, cooperation and support from public, other agencies and organisations	Monitoring, evaluating and reporting of our performance against our social and environmental goals, including our learnings from failures.