

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: NW Bicester Update	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The update the Board on the progress towards the delivery of the Exemplar planning permission and master planning for the NW Bicester site.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Eco Towns PPS identified NW Bicester as 1 of 4 eco towns to be developed nationally in 2009. The land at NW Bicester is identified as a strategic allocation in the emerging Local Plan and Bicester Masterplan.
- 2.2 In July 2012 planning permission was granted for an exemplar development of 393 dwellings, local centre and primary school. The proposed development is believed to be the largest Code for Sustainable Homes level 5 scheme and largest domestic PV array in the country. The proposal also includes rainwater harvesting, car club, high speed broad band, provision for electric vehicles, allotments, real time transport information to each home and 30% affordable housing.

3. Progress to Date - Exemplar

- 3.1 Work continues to clear planning permission conditions and requirements of the planning obligation for the exemplar development. Information has currently been submitted with regard to all the pre commencement conditions including; phasing, embodied carbon, tree protection, supervision of arboriculture works, ecological construction method statement, construction environment management plan, levels, drainage, flood risk, construction travel plan, site waste management plan, bike and bin stores, boundary details, parking, revised plot details and energy plan. Details of the proposed temporary community meeting facility, school site details and training and employment plan have been submitted in accordance with the requirements of the S106 agreement. All the pre commencement and first phase conditions have now been submitted and information to clear planning obligations is also now being submitted. Considerable work has been involved in ensuring the details of the scheme meet the high sustainability and design criteria for the scheme and good progress is being made in agreeing details.
- 3.2 The completion of S278 and S38 (highway) agreements had to await the completion of the site purchase. This is now in place and the agreements are due to be completed by the time the Board meets. This is an important step in allowing work on site to commence as the access from the Banbury Road will be the first works to take place.

- 3.3 A mini competition has now also been held to select the designer for the proposed primary school on the site. They are now progressing design options to enable the early delivery of the school. The school will be delivered by OCC.
- 3.4 P3 Eco advise with regard to the local centre that this is their responsibility and that that they *'are now actively reviewing the plans for it and vetting appropriate partners to deliver it in the required timeframe with the best outcome'*.
- 3.5 Public consultation has also taken place on naming the roads on the first phase and these will be named with a fruit and vegetable theme.
- 3.6 A2Dominon have now completed the purchase of the site through the exercise of the option. In the period since acquisition a detailed programme of works has been developed and pre-construction works in relation to hedgerow translocation works, water main diversion and electricity reinforcement works have been carried out.
- 3.7 The following outline programme has been provided by A2Dominion.

Basic Programme – draft as at 13/01/2014	Milestone Date
Sign S38 & S278	20th Jan 2014
Road traffic order	9 weeks
Erect initial signage	w/c 20 Jan 2014
Set out site boundaries	late Jan
Set-up temporary site accommodation	early Feb
Pre-start works	mid Feb/ early March
S278 works start	mid March 2014
Infrastructure works start	early July 2014
Energy centre start	late July 2014
Energy centre completion (Building only)	Oct 2014
Vital energy fit out of energy centre complete	March 2015
Phase 1 Housing start	early Aug 2014
Marketing suit	Jan/ Feb 2015
First Handovers	April 2015
Completion phase 1	September 2015
Phase 2 start	May 2015
Phase 2 Completion	May 2016
Phase 3 start	March 2016
Phase 3 Completion	March 2017
Phase 4 start	Sept 2016
Phase 4 completion	July 2018

- 3.8 The site is to be developed out in four stages starting from the Banbury Road entrance. The first works will be to construct the entrance road into the site from the Banbury Road (B4100) and then ground works to create the levels required to construct the spine road and for the development. The spine road will be provided, including the bridge, as far as the school site. The construction of the energy centre will follow together with the start of housing.
- 3.9 Development will then progress from the southern section of the site to the northern section as the scheme is built out. The first parts of the local centre (convenience store and community hall) are required to be provided prior to the occupation of the 250th dwelling. A project team has been set up to monitor progress of this key deliverable.
- 3.10 Work is currently progressing on the delivery of the Eco Business Centre to fit with the programme for housing development and the delivery of the local centre. This will be the subject of a further report at the next meeting.
- 3.11 The development will be unique in the sustainability that it incorporates and a national exemplar. A2Dominion have submitted the scheme for a national sustainability award and it has been shortlisted with the judges commenting that it was '*a really ambitious project*' with '*good carbon neutrality*' that would be '*very impressive if it delivers on its stated aims*'.
- 3.12 The work to date, and that on going on the detail of the scheme, can provide confidence that the scheme will meet the ambitious aims for the development.
- 3.13 A2Dominion and Cherwell District Council are working together on a promotional plan for the development of the Exemplar site and this will be shared with the Board in April 2014. It is key that we take up every opportunity to promote this exciting project.

4. Progress to Date - Masterplan

- 4.1 A framework masterplan was developed to accompany the exemplar application but it was acknowledged at the time that further work was required to complete the masterplan. A programme has been provided to complete masterplan work, to develop a masterplan to guide outline planning applications for the site. The programme sets out a 12 month process to get to a completed masterplan, working collaboratively with stakeholders including the local authorities. The aim is to complete the masterplan for Spring 2014.
- 4.2 Much base line work for the masterplan has been carried out including ecological and archaeological assessments of the site. This is informing further work on developing the masterplan which is being undertaken and reviewed through a series of work streams covering masterplan design, community infrastructure, transport, economy and employment, open space and bio diversity, water, energy and waste.
- 4.3 The first phase of work has been to complete base line work and develop options for the masterplan. This work has been supported by three stakeholder workshops inputting into the brief for the masterplan, considering options arising from the early work undertaken and focusing on travel and movement options for the site. These workshops have helped to inform the emerging masterplan.
- 4.4 Public engagement took place in December 2013 with a manned exhibition in a unit in Pioneer Square. At the time of writing the report the outcome of the consultation is awaited.

- 4.5 Board members will have the opportunity to review the latest status of the masterplan immediately ahead of the Board and hear some of the initial consultation feedback and areas requiring further review.
- 4.6 The work to date has resulted in some significant progress. This has included;
- It has been agreed that it is sensible to plan on the basis of the capacity of the site rather than a fixed number of homes. This has meant that it is possible the site could accommodate up to 6000 homes (as opposed to the 5000 originally targeted) without compromising on the quality of the environment or sustainability standards.
 - Population modelling has been undertaken on behalf of A2D and by OCC and this is providing a basis for planning for community infrastructure such as education, community halls, health, sport, and leisure provision.
 - Work on community infrastructure is progressing with refinement of original requests through review of opportunities for co location of facilities and site specific considerations.
 - The work has also led to an approach that looks to realign the existing Howes Lane into the proposed development site to enable the creation of a better relationship between the site and the existing built edge of the town. Work on walking and cycling and public transport are also progressing with options being refined.
 - Economic strategy work has identified the level of employment that might realistically be achieved on site in the context of Bicester and both the existing employment provision and the proposals elsewhere in the town. The strategy is identifying 4600 jobs on site of which the significant areas of provision are approximately 1100 through home working, 1100 in local centre hubs and 2000 in a business park. There is ongoing work on the nature of local centre hubs.
 - The masterplan is looking to provide 40% green space and net biodiversity gain. There is a desire for significant areas of space to be provided in one location rather than for this to be dispersed through the site. The emerging masterplan is looking to address this but there is further work required to reach a satisfactory distribution of green space to serve all the sport, recreational, movement and biodiversity requirements.
 - Potential energy options have been identified for the site.
 - There has been good progress on developing the Local Management Organisation and a series of workshops have been held with the local stakeholders. As the masterplan progresses it will also be possible to progress the detail of the long term management arrangements.
 - Engagement with Network Rail and the Highways Agency has taken place.
- 4.7 Inevitably not all of the workstreams are progressing at the same rate and there remain areas where more information is required to feed into the emerging masterplan. This includes the energy strategy and options for the water strategy for the site. The approach to assessing viability has been agreed but until the masterplan progresses further the development of the viability appraisal will be an iterative process.
- 4.8 Considerable progress has therefore been made on the emerging masterplan and it is anticipated that it will have progressed sufficiently to be provided to Cherwell in Spring 2014 and in line with programme.
- 4.9 Once the masterplan has been provided there is a need to consider the next steps. These fall into two areas, review of the master plan that has been provided and secondly, the extent to which the Board and Planning Authority (Cherwell District Council) wish to adopt or support the masterplan.

Review of the Masterplan

- 4.10 A lot of work has gone into progressing the masterplan and it is complex to deal with all the issues. The masterplan is still evolving as information becomes available. As a key document in shaping the future development it is important that it is of a high standard. It is therefore considered that it is important to review the masterplan against the emerging policy and aspirations for the site.
- 4.11 It is proposed this review is undertaken through consultation but also the use of experts. For example as part of the work to date the emerging scheme has been reviewed by Design Council Cade. A further review of the masterplan when complete would help to ensure that the masterplan meets aspiration to create an exemplary development.
- 4.12 It is anticipated that a review period of 4 weeks for consultation will be necessary and a further 4 week period for the consideration of consultation responses and incorporation of any amendments to the scheme.

Process for Masterplan

- 4.13 The process of agreeing or approving the masterplan will influence the weight that will be given to it in planning decisions. Formally adopted planning policy carries the greatest weight in planning decision making. The adopted local planning policy is currently provided by the Development Plan (Cherwell Local Plan (1996)). The adopted development plan is dated and a replacement plan, the draft submission Cherwell Local Plan (dsCLP), is shortly to be submitted for examination. Until this plan is adopted it carries less weight in planning decisions than an adopted plan. The dsCLP contains a policy, Bicester 1, that identifies the land at NW Bicester for development and sets out criteria for the development. Planning legislation requires planning decisions to be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.14 As well as local policy any planning proposals at a national level there are two policy documents that are of particular relevance. The first is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which sets out the government's planning policy and secondly the Eco Towns Planning Policy Statement which both identifies land at NW Bicester as an area for an eco town and sets standards for them. Both these documents are material considerations. The Eco Towns PPS sets standards for development.
- 4.15 The Board will also be aware of the work that is being undertaken on the Bicester Masterplan. This document is intended to both inform the dsCLP and in due course be adopted as a supplementary planning document (SPD). The Bicester Masterplan identifies land at NW Bicester for development and identifies some basic requirements.
- 4.16 Although the Eco Towns PPS and both the dsCLP and emerging Bicester Masterplan contain policies and criteria for developing land at NW Bicester, neither provides detailed site specific guidance about how the site should be developed and the eco town criteria should be met. For example neither seeks to deal with issues such as the co ordination and phasing of development, location of primary routes or key facilities or how employment provisions are met.
- 4.17 The site at NW Bicester is the largest site allocation in the emerging plans and therefore there is a case for providing site specific guidance for the development of the site that would ensure that as the site is developed out over the next 20 years that development is coordinated and

delivers in a comprehensive way. The masterplan and the supporting information could be the vehicle to provide this, particularly if the plan is embedded in planning policy.

- 4.18 The emerging local plan will provide the strategic policies for the whole district and therefore it is not appropriate to include detailed site guidance. Similarly the Bicester Master Plan would be unbalanced by detailed site guidance for one of a number of sites included in the document. It is therefore recommended that the NW Bicester Masterplan, once reviewed, forms the basis of site specific supplementary planning document (SPD) which could be formally adopted by Cherwell District Council following the adoption of the local plan.
- 4.19 There is a formal process that would need to be followed in adopting the masterplan as SPD and the time scales for adoption would be linked to the Local Plan adoption time scale. It is anticipated that it would not be possible to adopt SPD until towards the end of 2014 and it is possible that outline planning applications could be submitted in the meantime. Given the long term nature of the proposed development, it is considered that SPD would have value in guiding on going development even if its formal adoption is after submission of an initial outline application for some of the site.

Conclusion

- 4.20 Although not complete good progress continues to be made in developing a masterplan for the site. The development of the plan is iterative, needing to respond to information as it becomes available, to balance all the objectives and requirements for the site. There is further work now taking place to refine the masterplan to ensure it provides a robust framework for the development of the site.
- 4.21 The review of the plan through consultation and expert review will validate the plan produced and ensure it is the high quality sought. The embedding of the final masterplan in policy will provide the mechanism in planning to ensure that it provides an ongoing framework for this large scale and long term development.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Board is asked to
- i) note the progress on the Exemplar at NW Bicester
 - ii) note the progress on the masterplan for NW Bicester
 - iii) agree the outline proposals for the review of the masterplan when submitted
 - iv) support the incorporation of the masterplan into SPD for adoption by Cherwell DC as planning authority