

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: NW Bicester Employment and Skills Update	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Board on the progress towards the delivery of the outcomes contained in the Employment and Training Management Plan (ETMP) for Phase 1 of NW Bicester. This is timely because work started on the site in May 2014.

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 for development in the emerging Local Plan and Bicester Masterplan.
- 2.2 Since the identification of the site at NW Bicester for an eco development, the Eco Bicester project team has been working with potential developers to deliver an exemplary sustainable development that will function as part of the growing Bicester town.
- 2.3 A key underlying principle of the Eco Towns PPS guidance is that the eco town should be economically sustainable. The guidance contains an explicit requirement that applicants should prepare an economic strategy to accompany planning applications for eco towns that demonstrate how access to work will be achieved.
- 2.4 Therefore the S106 Agreement which was attached to the Phase 1 Exemplar planning consent stipulated that the developer (A2 Dominion) had to submit an Employment and Training Management Plan (ETMP) for approval by CDC and that once approved, should comply fully with its requirements.
- 2.5 The S106 Agreement set out 6 key objectives that the ETMP had to include:
- Arrangements setting out how the developer and their contractors will work directly with local employment / training agencies to identify employment, skills and training opportunities related to the construction of the development, to assist people living in Bicester, to access job opportunities;
 - Arrangements setting out how the developer will deliver workshops in conjunction with Bicester Job Club to introduce construction related opportunities to people living in Bicester and assist employers to recruit;
 - Arrangements setting out how the developer will promote and market home working across the site;

- Arrangements setting out how the developer will deliver local supply chain events to promote opportunities for companies local to Bicester and how such opportunities will be made available during the construction of the development;
- Arrangements setting out how the developer will provide a minimum of 10 apprenticeships for local people living in Bicester (or within 5 miles) related to the construction of the development.
- Arrangements setting out how the developer will set up and maintain until completion of the development, a website to attract local suppliers to allow them to compete for work on the construction of the development.

2.6 A2 Dominion duly submitted their EMTP in February 2014, which was subsequently approved by CDC as it met all the above requirements. The EMTP can be viewed at the following link: <http://www.publicaccess.cherwell.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=externalDocuments&keyVal=LCOSLYEM09000>

3. Progress on Delivering EMTP Outcomes to Date

3.1 A2 Dominion have prepared a short report which sets out how they are progressing on meeting the above key requirements of the EMTP, but excluding how they will promote and market home working as this is still to be determined by them. This is contained at Appendix A of this report. The following distils the main points.

Working with Local Employment and Training Agencies as well as Bicester Job Club to Identify Job, Skills and Training Opportunities

- 3.2 The first 2 objectives contained in the S106 agreement are closely related, hence are covered as a combined update. A2 Dominion state that they and their contractors are working closely with Bicester Job Club and Job Centre Plus to introduce prospective local candidates to the variety of construction and career opportunities that are available, using real life case studies and the support of specialist sub-contractors.
- 3.3 They state that the construction of the Exemplar Phase 1 offers a range of opportunities for local people, from full-time employment and vocational apprenticeships to 6 month work placements and 2 week work experience opportunities. Based on previous experience they have set a goal of achieving 20% local labour during construction and have created a registration form that can be complete on-line or sent by post for prospective candidates. This was launched at a dedicated event in September where 80 people attended during the day. This prepares the way for the first round of recruitment which will coincide with the expected commencement of new homes being constructed on site in October. A2 Dominion state that the current workforce on site is approximately 50 operatives, of which with 23% are local.

Delivery of Local Supply Chain Events to Promote Opportunities for Local Companies

3.4 A2 Dominion have said that they are committed to deliver supply chain events to allow local businesses to directly engage with them and their main contractor. The ETMP sets out that A2 Dominion will deliver one event at the start of each of the 4 construction phases of the Exemplar. 2 such events have been held so far, one in April 2012 where 100 local businesses attended and 1 in May 2014 which was attended by 70 local businesses. The main objective of these events was to inform attendees about the potential work packages on the scheme which

they would be eligible to tender for. In addition to these events, A2 Dominion have presented at business forums in the District.

Provision of Apprenticeships

- 3.5 In order to meet their objective of creating a minimum of 10 apprenticeships throughout the build-out of the Exemplar Phase 1, A2 Dominion state that they will be using the services of a national Apprenticeships Training Agency (ATA) in partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and local further education colleges to deliver the first apprenticeships on site. However A2 Dominion only announced the apprenticeship scheme in September so this is still in its infancy - nevertheless they expect to recruit their first apprentice by the end of October 2014 and a further 2 more within the first year of construction on site.

Setting Up and Maintaining a Website to Attract Local Suppliers

- 3.6 In April 2012, A2 Dominion launched its Business Portal on the NW Bicester Project website. The Portal enables local companies within a 50 mile radius of the site to register an interest in the scheme. Companies are then contacted when appropriate opportunities arise to tender for work on the development and are prioritised on their ability to provide a quality product or service at a competitive price and to deliver to the Exemplar build timetable. To date 198 businesses or individuals have registered an interest. Currently 15 work packages on Phase 1 have been let, with 11 of these to companies from within a 50 mile radius of the site. Further work packages are in the process of being let and further details of these are contained in Appendix A.
- 3.7 In addition to this A2 Dominion state that their main contractor is using 6 local businesses to supply building materials for the site and that they themselves continue to use a range of local Bicester suppliers for community engagement related activities such as commissioning artists via OYAP, using local printing companies, photographers, face painters and caterers for events as well as on site for its workers.
- 3.8 A2 Dominion state that they have worked hard with their main contractor (which manages the Business Portal on their behalf) to manage the expectations of companies that register and have initiated a number of actions to provide improved communication with them, as set out in Appendix A.

Other Initiatives of Benefit to the Wider Business and Community Sector

- 3.9 A2 Dominion also list a range of complementary activities that they have undertaken which provide benefits to the local business / community sectors including:
- Sponsoring 'New Business' Category in the 2015 Cherwell Business Awards
 - Promoting Bicester as a destination to live and work through significant external exposure at regional and national conferences and by hosting international delegations.
 - Recently awarded funding of just under £5000 to local charities Grassroots Bicester and Bicester Green to deliver sustainability and education themed projects that benefit the wider Town.
 - Winning £100,000 TSB funding award in 2012 - for a smart demand project with Bicester lighting company, Zeta, Carnego, BioRegional and A2Dominion to research the use of a low energy DC lighting circuit within domestic homes.
 - Supporting OCC and the MOD Bicester 23 Pioneers Regiment through its disbandment and redundancies – attending all employment events at the MOD Bicester with their

main contractor to talk to the 150 effected personnel offering guidance about the construction industry, training opportunities & transferable skills in an effort to retain the skills of the Pioneers Regiment locally.

- Co-ordinating and delivering three Annual Bicester Bike and Family Fun Days in partnership with local groups and organisations.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 In summary, although the build out of the Exemplar phase has only recently started, A2 Dominion appear to be making good progress on the delivery of the ETMP objectives. Eco Bicester Project Team officers will continue to monitor outputs achieved by A2 Dominion and their main contractor against ETMP objectives, to ensure that they are on track to deliver significant and demonstrable outcomes in line with what they have committed to.
- 4.2 It is worth noting that A2 Dominion's performance in this respect to date goes well beyond what would normally be expected of building developers. This is because the requirements for Eco Towns set out in the PPS1 Supplement provides legitimacy for CDC to seek the type of employment related initiatives set out in the Exemplar Phase 1 S106 agreement. The PPS1 Eco Town standards significantly exceed those set out in the National Planning Policy Guidance which is the planning guidance that applies to all other developments. As such, at the present time, it is unlikely that this type of approach will be able to be replicated in other developments with other developers across the Town and District to the same extent.
- 4.3 This paper focuses on the Exemplar which is effectively a pilot for the rest of the NW Bicester development. It is expected that the lessons learnt and feedback from A2 Dominion regarding these initiatives will help us roll out something similar across the whole site - naturally this will involve other developers / landowners – so it will be important to achieve their buy in if this is to be a success. The announcement by The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that the PPS 1 Eco Towns Supplement will be withdrawn however adds a degree of uncertainty over the future delivery of such initiatives.
- 4.4 Notwithstanding this, one idea Eco Town Project Team officers are currently exploring is an approach to deliver a sustained programme of apprenticeships throughout the build out of the entire NW Bicester development. To date a number of positive discussions have taken place with local training colleges, OCC and Oxfordshire Apprenticeships around an emerging approach which:
- creates a scheme which is easy and relatively risk free for developers of NW Bicester to sign up to
 - is cost effective
 - meets the objectives of the participating partners
 - is locally driven and delivered by local organisations
 - provides a top quality educational experience for apprenticeships
 - creates jobs in the local area for local people to benefit the construction industry and other related trades - and in doing so would support future development growth in the area.
- 4.5 The idea is that we would secure this approach through the S106 agreements attached to future planning consents at NW Bicester. Initial discussions with A2 Dominion have revealed that they would be interested in signing up to such a scheme. We are currently developing the concept with a view to submitting bids to the Local Enterprise Partnerships (both OXLEP AND SEMLEP if eligible) in due course to support the set up of the scheme and its implementation.

Ultimately the aim would be to apply this scheme firstly to NW Bicester, and if successful it is hoped that we could roll it out on other Bicester developments and potentially to the wider District in time.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Board is asked to:
- i) note the progress being made by A2 Dominion on meeting the objectives set out in the Exemplar EMTP
 - ii) note the potential direction of travel of future employment and skills initiatives that could be rolled out across the entire NW site.