

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

Date of meeting: 8 October 2015	AGENDA ITEM NO: 3
Report title: Garden Town Update	
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1. Purpose of Report

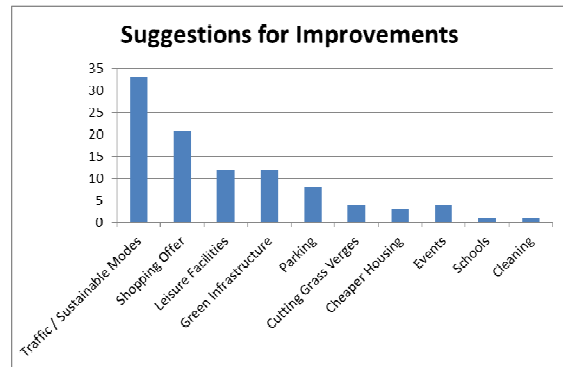
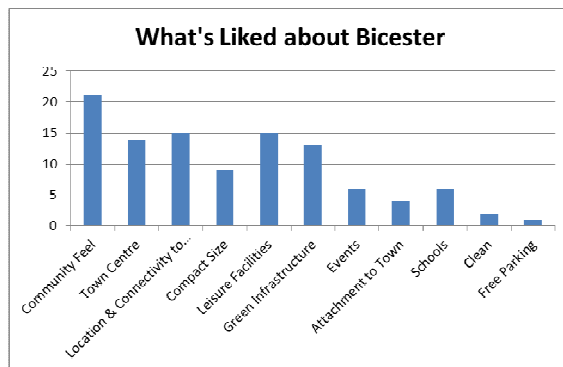
- 1.1 This report provides a progress update on on-going Garden Town work including central government funding and findings from consultations.

2. Funding

- 2.1 Feasibility assessments, funded by the initial tranche of capacity funding from Government, are starting to be tendered. The first commission will look to refresh Bicester's One Shared Vision to incorporate its designation as a Garden Town through engagement with stakeholders. This work is expected to commence in mid-October and be concluded by February 2016. The brief to assess the opportunity for a new junction on the M40 motorway is being revised to reflect Oxfordshire County Council's separate study into the impact and deliverability of the South East Perimeter Route. Consideration is being given to how both studies can be combined in the future to achieve a solution that brings the greatest benefits to Bicester. Further studies into the cumulative impact of growth, infrastructure requirements, delivery approach and community engagement together with recruitment of skilled personnel will be commenced this autumn.
- 2.2 The bid for capital funding through the Spending Review (approximately £29.5m) was submitted in June. DCLG has confirmed that two of the submitted projects, namely grid reinforcement and forward funding the expansion of the town's leisure centre have not progressed to Treasury. The business cases for the remaining projects (£22.6m) are now with Treasury for consideration through the Spending Review, although it is acknowledged that securing capital funding will be difficult.

3. Engagement Update

- 3.1 The 'light touch' questionnaire, designed to better understand what residents think about Bicester and previously used at the Bicester Big Lunch, was used again at the Town Council's Teddy Bears' Picnic and Activity Day in August. The combined key findings are shown below.
- 3.2 Bicester's community feel continues to be the aspect that most respondents like about the town. The town centre and Bicester's central location and ease of connection to other places remain important but an increasing number of residents also value the town's leisure facilities and green infrastructure.



- 3.3 As previously reported, traffic issues are overwhelmingly cited as the key area that needs improving in the town (a third of responses received). Almost a fifth of all responses also suggested the town's retail offer needed enhancing, with improvements to leisure facilities and green infrastructure in the town also featuring strongly.
- 3.4 The questionnaire will continue to be used at upcoming events to gather residents' views and help shape future work. It is available on the EcoBicester website and is being promoted in current articles in the EcoBicester Newsletter and CDC's 'garden town' insert in the Garth Gazette (see Appendix A).
- 3.5 A business-focussed version of the questionnaire has been designed with help from CDC economic development colleagues. Its aim is to better understand the reasons behind investment in and the main benefits of Bicester as a business location.
- 3.6 In terms of strategic engagement, Victoria Prentis MP met several elected members and representatives from the Bicester team towards the end of July. The topics discussed were wide-ranging covering public engagement, utilities including broadband and raising Bicester's profile with Ministers. Following the meeting Victoria Prentis has written to Treasury about the difficulties arising from the limited pooling of financial contributions secured through Planning Agreements.
- 3.7 During September Jenny Barker gave a presentation to the architecture group of the University of the Third Age. Andy Bowe gave the annual presentation to spatial planning students at Oxford Brookes University and is due to meet and advise project management students, using NW Bicester as the focus of project work. Maria Curran spoke at the Planning for Housing conference in London, which is a national gathering for the public and private sectors to debate the challenge of delivering enough housing every year to meet the rapid growth in demand.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

- 4.1 The successful capacity funding bid provides resources to move forward dialogue around the future vision for Bicester and commission key studies that will guide infrastructure delivery in a holistic and sustainable manner and across the whole town. Consultation with residents and businesses will be maintained as part of the work to refresh the Vision. Work on securing capital funding to meet the Garden Town's infrastructure needs, both from Government and other opportunities, will continue to be explored.
- 4.2 The Board is asked to note the progress with the capacity funded studies and the promotion of Bicester as a garden town and to continue to receive further regular updates.