

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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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 use of capacity funding from government and findings from consultations.

2. Funding

- 2.1 The second tranche of capacity funding (£750k) has now been received thereby enabling further feasibility assessments to be commissioned. We continue to work closely with DCLG in order to secure additional future capacity funding. As advised at the March Board, 'in principle' capital funding (£19m) across 2017/18 and 2018/19 was secured through last year's Autumn Statement. Detailed business cases are required and these will be prepared later this year.
- 2.2 Capacity funding facilitated the town-wide engagement event in March, the outputs of which are provided in the engagement update section below. Those findings are being fed into a new Bicester Masterplan, which was commissioned in June and is due to be completed in October. This new masterplan will set out how and where aspirations and physical change will take place in order to stitch the whole of Bicester (existing and proposed growth) together in a comprehensive and integrated manner.
- 2.3 In addition, CDC, working with Oxfordshire County Council, is currently seeking to appoint consultants to assess the implications and potential opportunity of a new M40 junction, which could help improve connectivity to the strategic highway network; relieve congestion through the central areas of Bicester; and support the management of traffic on the peripheral routes around Bicester. The appointment is expected to be made by 10 August.

Capacity funding is also financing extensive traffic surveys undertaken in Bicester during June along with work to update the Bicester SATURN transport model, which is currently being undertaken and will be available for the motorway junction feasibility study.

- 2.4 Briefs for further studies are currently being scoped including an updated socio-economic profile of Bicester; an electric vehicle and charging infrastructure strategy; and a strategy for engaging young people in the arts/culture agenda. Additional studies will consider the cumulative impact of growth and infrastructure requirements such as utilities infrastructure, an economic investment prospectus and the recruitment of skilled personnel.

3. Engagement Update

- 3.1 Several methods have been used this year to engage with Bicester's residents in order better understand the priorities and aspirations of the local community. These have included a 3-day consultation event in Bicester town centre, an online 'light touch' questionnaire and shopper perception surveys in the town centre, the latter as part of the 'Retail Success for Bicester town centre' project which is commissioned by the council's economic growth team.
- 3.2 The consultation event was held on 10th to 12th March and was attended by 524 people. A total of 840 pieces of written feedback were received during the public exhibition and further feedback was gathered online.
- 3.3 The most important aspect of the town, identified by residents, is its sense of community feel and the friendly and neighbourliness of the people. Community events are particularly valued and people hope these are preserved as the town grows. The town centre and its retail offer are identified as very important; and location and connectivity rank highly. Additionally preserving and promoting the town's heritage are important and the environment and green spaces are well liked.
- 3.4 Improving the town centre and the retail offer are top priorities, followed by infrastructure including improvements to roads, rail, town centre parking and public transport. A number of people felt that the need for joined up planning for the town was important and further improvements to green spaces, parks and leisure facilities were needed.
- 3.5 We received almost 2,200 responses to the online questionnaire and those findings, along with the feedback from the shopper perception surveys, closely match the feedback from the consultation event.
- 3.6 The feedback from all these methods will be made available on the Growing Bicester website. In partnership with a number of key stakeholders we are currently working on a plan of 'immediate actions' in response to the feedback. Options that address more complex issues will be picked up through the masterplanning and economic investment commissions.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

- 4.1 Capacity funding from government provides resources to move forward the dialogue around aspirations and infrastructure needs of Bicester and a full programme of studies are planned for commissioning this financial year. Consultation with residents, businesses and stakeholders will continue as will close liaison with DCLG to secure further capital funding to meet the garden town's infrastructure needs.
- 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.