

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: Garden Town Capacity Funded Studies - Update	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides a progress update on the Garden Town programme of studies and activities funded from Government capacity grant.

2. Garden Town Studies

2.1 Bicester Masterplan

Workshops with officers and key stakeholders took place in September and a workshop with Councillors from CDC, OCC and the Town Council is due to take place on 16 November. The purpose of these workshops has been to review key issues and crosscutting outcomes; discuss opportunities and generate ideas for revitalising the town centre and improving movement and connectivity across the town. The outputs from these workshops will be supplemented by public consultation, programmed for the New Year and included into the Masterplan.

Although completion is now envisaged for March 2017, this delay enables specific proposals for intervention, improvement and development to be identified and discussed in a clearer, more tangible manner.

2.2 Feasibility of a new Motorway Junction

CDC, working with the County Council, has appointed JMP Consultants Ltd to appraise the implications and potential opportunity of a new junction on the M40 close to Bicester, which could help improve connectivity to the strategic highway network; relieve congestion through the central areas of the town; and support the management of traffic on the peripheral routes around Bicester.

By the end of the year this study will establish whether there is a need for this strategic highway project, and if applicable, identify broad potential opportunities for a new/improved junction. The broad options will be informed by a thorough understanding of technical and environmental constraints. Early next year these options will be fully assessed to identify the better performing solutions and in turn a preferred option.

2.3 Socio-Economic Profile of Bicester

An update to 2007 report has been commissioned and is due to be completed in early December. The profile will look to see how Bicester compares to the Cherwell, Oxfordshire and national averages and will provide evidence to shape and support other programmes - such as marketing Bicester to attract new employment and investment and the Healthy New Town programme - and project funding bids. It will collect information for example relating to:

- population change and household information
- health and wellbeing
- employment, education and skills.

Options for collecting similar information about new residents on the strategic housing sites are also being explored. When completed this profile will provide an informed and current baseline of Bicester against which the impacts of growth and change can be monitored.

- 2.4 Further capacity-funded studies focussed on utilities infrastructure; electric vehicle and charging infrastructure; and an economic investment prospectus are planned to be commissioned in the New Year.

3. Activities

- 3.1 During the garden town public consultation in March, residents identified Bicester's community spirit as one of the factors they cherish most about the town. To help voluntary groups grow and enhance that feeling a grant scheme (SPARK funding) has been established, financed by both garden town and healthy new town funds. The scheme will provide small grants over a three year period which will be delivered in phases. The deadline for the first round of applications is 12 December 2016 and will be followed by a second wave of funding with a deadline of 6 March 2017.
- 3.2 Additionally capacity funding part-sponsored the Sheep Street Dance event organised by the Oxfordshire Youth Arts Partnership Trust (OYAP Trust). The free event on 27 October featured performances by Motionhouse Dance Theatre, Young Anjali and Implexa Dance Company and was watched by over 300 people throughout the day. This was in response to residents' feedback expressing a desire for more cultural activity in the town.
- 3.3 With further garden towns/villages likely to be announced in the Autumn Statement, maintaining Bicester's garden town profile is essential. The council hosted a visit from Treasury officials in August and arrangements are being put in place to host a visit by senior officers at DCLG.
The council has also provided DCLG with a short statement on progress that can be used by Government to illustrate a place that is expanding with government support. In addition to housing delivery, this statement references the extensive consultation undertaken to create a future vision for Bicester as a garden town and the masterplan as a means of delivering that vision.
- 3.4 In the media Bicester endeavours to develop its profile: Dan Cruickshank's programme about the Garden Cities – 'Green Cities from Bricks & Mortar' – which referenced Bicester and self-build in particular was broadcast on Radio 4 in October.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

- 4.1 Capacity funding from government provides the financial resource to identify the infrastructure needs of Bicester through a programme of studies, the outputs from which will be used to inform future bids to Government for capital funding.
The opportunity to secure additional capacity funding continues to be explored with DCLG.
- 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.