

Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is to advise the Board on the continuing requirement to progress measures to facilitate and support travel on foot and cycle for journeys made within Bicester to address wider transport, health and air quality objectives.

2. Background

- 2.1 Achieving an increase in walking and cycling for journeys made within Bicester is fundamental to supporting planned growth within the town. Measures to encourage behaviour change will have limited effect without improvements to urban environment support active travel. The Bicester Sustainable Transport Strategy, which informed the LTP, concluded that:

“Walking and cycling within most residential areas is relatively easy, but the main radial roads have limited or poor quality provision – with the exception of Banbury Road north of the London-Birmingham railway”

And

“Infrastructure improvements are critical to creating an environment where sustainable travel is the most popular choice, but this will be most effective when supported by the management and implementation of a smarter choices and active travel programme.”

- 2.2 The Oxfordshire LTP 2015-2031 sets out that:

“There is a need for a significant increase in the proportion of trips to be made by public transport, cycling and walking if the anticipated level of growth is to be accommodated.”

- 2.3 LTP Policy ‘BIC2’ sets out how OCC will work to reduce the proportion of journeys made by private car through the implementation of a sustainable transport strategy that includes the provision of new sections of urban pedestrian and cycle routes to better connect residential developments with the town centre and key employment destinations. Highway capacity is being delivered on peripheral routes to support growth and to enable delivery of improved sustainable linkages within the town.
- 2.4 A Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is currently being prepared by OCC for Bicester as part of the Government’s new strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at a local level. This emerging plan identifies the Central Corridor as a ‘priority improvement’ in recognition of its importance within the overall walking and cycling route network for the town.

3. Healthy New Town Programme

- 3.1 Increased walking and cycling will support wider objectives identified by the Healthy New Town Programme which seeks *“to create a healthy community by making it easy, attractive and affordable for people of all ages to live healthy, sustainable lifestyles and to replicate the learning to elsewhere.”*
- 3.2 Bicester’s two key priorities are:
- *To increase the number of children and adults who are physically active and a healthy weight*
 - *To reduce the number of people who feel socially isolated or lonely in order to improve their mental wellbeing*
- 3.3 A programme of active initiatives is being funded by the Healthy New Town. The smarter choices and active travel programme is being implemented in Bicester with the appointment of a Community Travel Planner and the ongoing work of development related travel planning overseen by OCC. However, it should be recognised that to create a step change in the number of people walking and cycling these actions need to be underpinned by infrastructure improvements.
- 3.4 The following initiatives are being developed for Bicester by the Community Travel Planner for 2019:
- Monthly Dr Bike sessions in Sheep Street (programmed for the last Saturday of every month);
 - Re-ignition of cycle hire scheme in partnership with Bicester Green;
 - L2 and L3 Bikeability Training for secondary school children as part of existing holiday club schemes (uses funding from OCC Bikeability Grant);
 - Adult cycle training sessions (from absolute beginner to more advanced);
 - Working with A2D (NW Bicester) to deliver Bicester Bike Day/cycling events;
 - Working with new schools on achieving modal shift through travel plan commitments;
 - Creation of a forum of Bicester Travel Plan Coordinators to achieve more collaborative working across the town and to provide CDC support where appropriate.
- 3.5 Funding has also been granted through the Healthy New Town programme for an environmental planting scheme within the Central Corridor. The project seeks to improve the visual amenity for pedestrians and cyclists and offer some mitigation of air pollution within the corridor. However the benefits of the scheme will be limited in the absence of measures to reduce traffic speed and volume.
- 3.6 Walking and cycling provides opportunities for physical activity and social interaction and has a central role in addressing these two priorities. In 2014, Bicester was granted Garden Town status by the UK government, in recognition of its ambitious vision for holistic, sustainable growth. This includes high quality provision for walking and cycling.

4. Air Quality Action Plan – Bicester Central Corridor

- 4.1 Within Bicester, one area has been identified as not meeting national air quality objectives for nitrogen oxides and has therefore been designated as an Air Quality Management Area

(AQMA). Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) are declared when there is an exceedance or likely exceedance of an air quality objective. In this instance the objective is not to exceed a concentration of 40µg/m³ of nitrogen dioxide. The Bicester AQMA area extends between the mini roundabout at Kings End through Queens Avenue to the Field Street mini roundabout, including St Johns. In 2017 the annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentration exceeded 40µg/m³ in Queens Avenue and Kings End. Road traffic is the primary source of air pollution in this location. Monitoring of air quality is undertaken using diffusion tubes with monthly samples taken throughout the year.

- 4.2 This is a key route for pedestrians and cyclists, providing access to leisure facilities, schools and the town centre. Measures to reduce through traffic, traffic volume and speed would directly benefit these existing users (which include a high proportion of children) in terms of reducing their regular exposure to poor air quality and improving the quality of this route thereby facilitating more travel on foot and by cycle.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Improvements to the walking and cycling environment are required to realise Bicester's sustainable transport, health and air quality objectives. The Board are asked to:
1. Note the programme of activity being delivered through the HNT funding as outlined within Section 3.4;
 2. The Sustainable Transport Strategy identified a number of 'easy wins' and it is recommended that these are implemented in the short-term. This included the removal of unnecessary and restrictive barriers in the Southwold area. These have been repeatedly highlighted by members of the public as problematic and feature in previous reviews of the quality of Bicester's cycle route network. A quote for undertaking the work has been provided by OCC (cost £2107.45).
 3. That measures to reduce traffic speed and volume in the Central Corridor are given high priority and opportunities sought for a scheme that is subsequently developed to deliver a connected cycle route network in this location with reference to the emerging findings of the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan being developed for Bicester.