

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: Garden Town Report	
Author: Jenny Barker, Bicester Delivery Manger	
Tel: 01295 221828	
Email: jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is to update the Board on the Garden Town and matters arising within the last quarter.

2. Garden Town Capacity Funding

- 2.1 Since the inception of the Garden Town Programme MCLG has supported sites in the programme with capacity funding to support high quality housing delivery. This support for Bicester has enabled a team to be established and funded and the delivery of a range of projects including work on the Healthy New Town, funding bids to be pursued, feasibility studies to be commissioned and community engagement.
- 2.2 For 2017/18 an invitation was received from MHCLG to bid for part of a £7m fund to support the development of the Garden Town with a deadline of July 2018 for the submission of bids. The prospectus advised;

‘The focus of the bidding process will be on identifying and supporting those places that have made or are making significant progress towards delivery of their garden community and demonstrating a sustained commitment to high quality place making and innovation in delivery. The aim of the Garden Towns and Villages programme is to foster the delivery at pace of a new generation of attractive and sustainable communities that are exemplars of good design and best practice.’

The prospectus went on to identify the following criteria for bids;

1. Scale of housing numbers likely to be delivered.
 2. Evidenced expenditure of the previous capacity funding awarded in 2017/18 to put in place measures to progress the garden village or town project towards delivery.
 3. Evidence of appropriate resources in place within the local authority to drive forward the garden village or town project.
 4. Evidence of continued progress towards meeting key milestones identified for delivery of the garden village or town and delivery of housing numbers
 5. Implementation of measures to secure quality outcomes in the project.
- 2.3 A bid was made for Bicester which was able to demonstrate the work that had been done and was being undertaken. New funding was sought against the project criteria for £1.06 million (see attached table). The bid focussed on increasing delivery particularly focused on actions coming from master planning work undertaken, strategic infrastructure, supporting high quality development, innovation and staff resource.

- 2.4 The outcome of the funding round has now been announced and Cherwell has been allocated £770,000. The funding has not yet been received but is anticipated shortly. As a result the way that the spend was originally proposed has been reviewed and in the light of funding received, the bid criteria, previous Garden Town consultation and current priorities. Set out below is the key areas that it is proposed are progressed.
- 2.5 It is proposed to use work from the emerging master plan to progress development and design briefs for town centre sites and progress the design of environmental improvement of Market Square. As well as facilitating housing delivery this would help to support the town centre and the work to revitalise it. Furthermore it was agreed that a more visionary plan for the town is required and funding would support the development of this. Funding would be used to commission consultants to undertake the work.
- 2.6 It is also proposed to continue to use funding over two years to provide capacity to embed healthy place making, particularly focused on the built environment and new development areas. The NHS funded Healthy New Town Project has made good progress particularly in engaging and activating the community. However the short term nature of the project has limited the progress on influencing the new developments being delivered. Additional capacity will support the creation of a stronger policy basis for the built environment and healthy and sustainable new development. In addition the capacity would support the negotiation on development proposals to ensure future development achieves a healthy environment. This will complement and support the work already underway to achieve healthy and sustainable communities.
- 2.7 The creation of high quality green spaces is central to a Garden Town. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) identify 'Development that enhances the natural environment, providing a comprehensive green infrastructure network and net biodiversity gains, and that uses zero-carbon and energy-positive technology to ensure climate resilience' as one of the key principles for garden towns. To rebalance the focus on new building and address local feeling that the town and green spaces are under threat from development, it is proposed to develop further the green infrastructure in the town. It is proposed to develop a Natural Capital strategy for the town, support enhancement of existing spaces and ensure new spaces, delivered through new development, will meet the Garden Town principles and support health and wellbeing. In addition the original Garden Town Bid included the creation of a large area of accessible countryside. Whilst it is difficult to see a route to deliver this currently, funding is proposed to explore the potential for the creation of access to the countryside along public rights of way. Funding would be used to commission the work and provide expert advice.
- 2.8 Funding to support infrastructure is identified focused on feasibility and design and includes pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the south of the town, the design of the central corridor, rail opportunities from the military railway and work to support and engage of an updated transport strategy for the town. Funding would be used in collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council to commission work.
- 2.9 The MHCLG Garden Town Team are concerned about the quality of development in the places they are supporting and are looking for high quality development and more than business as usual. As a result funding is identified to support design quality and proposals would be developed with Planning Policy and Development Management to provide practical approaches to support good quality development.
- 2.10 Under the innovation work stream it is proposed to use funding to commission work looking at how a lasting legacy could be secured for the town, to create an opportunity for long term

investment similar to the first garden towns which are still benefitting from funding from their development. This would be commissioned with the involvement of local organisations and the Town Council. A small amount of funding to support cultural activity is also proposed.

- 2.11 Finally staff funding was included in the bid and it is proposed to use it to support the Bicester team and dedicated communication resource. This will also enable continued participation in the MHCLG Garden Town forum where learning is shared.
- 2.12 Cherwell is the accountable body for the funding so the outcome of the Board's consideration of this report will be reported back to Cherwell for its consideration and approval of the spend outlined above.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Board are recommended to support the proposals for the use of the Garden Town Capacity funding as set out.