

## Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

<b>Date of meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM NO:  10</b>
<b>Report title: Green Infrastructure in Bicester</b>	
<b>Author: Jenny Barker Bicester Delivery Manager</b>	
<b>Tel: 01295 221828</b>	
<b>Email: <a href="mailto:jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a></b>	

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the consideration of matters with regard to green infrastructure in Bicester.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 Green infrastructure is defined by the EU Commission as 'a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services such as water purification, air quality, space for recreation and climate mitigation and adaptation. This network of green (land) and blue (water) spaces can improve environmental conditions and therefore citizens' health and quality of life. It also supports a green economy, creates job opportunities and enhances biodiversity.'
- 2.2 They go on to define green infrastructure planning as 'a successfully tested tool to provide environmental, economic and social benefits through natural solutions and help reduce dependence on 'grey' infrastructure that is often more expensive to build and maintain.'
- 2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework takes a slightly more succinct definition, defining green infrastructure as 'A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.' The NPPF recognises the importance of green infrastructure as one of the strategic priorities that policies should address and its role in health and well being, addressing issues such as air quality, climate change, flooding and drainage.
- 2.4 The Cherwell Local Plan has a number of policies that are relevant to green infrastructure provision put specifically policy ESD17 which seeks to ensure that green infrastructure networks are maintained and enhanced and that green infrastructure considerations are 'integral to the planning of new development.' The Local Plan also has specific policies on the both the protection of existing recreational spaces and ensuring that new development is planned to include new provision. Specific standards of provision is required as set out below;

Type of provision	Quantitative standard	Accessibility standard	Minimum size of provision	Threshold for on-site provision
General green space (parks and gardens/natural semi-natural/amenity green space)	2.4 ha per 1000 urban dwellers	5 minute walk (amenity open space) (400m)	200 sq m	10 urban dwellings
	2.74 ha per 1000 rural/urban edge dwellers	15 minute walk other (1200m)		6 rural/urban edge dwellings

Play space (combining provision for younger and older children including MUGAs)	0.78 ha per 1000 people	5 minutes walk (400m) except for NEAPs 15 m walk (1200m)	LAP- 100 sq m activity zone; 400 sq m including buffer  LEAP- 400 sq m activity zone; 3600 sq m including buffer  NEAP- 1000 sq m activity zone; 8500 sq m including buffer  NB In some cases a combined all-age area of play will be preferable to provision of LAPs/LEAPs/NEAPs.	10 dwellings (for a LAP)  50 dwellings (for a LEAP and LAP)  100 dwellings for a NEAP and LEAPs/LAPs.
Outdoor sports provision (combining tennis courts, bowling greens, golf courses and playing pitches) (to be accompanied by changing facilities where appropriate)	1.13 ha per 1000 people	Football, rugby, cricket: 10 minute walk (800m) urban areas, 10 minute travel time (8km) rural areas  Tennis courts: 15 minute walk (1200m) urban areas, 15 minute travel time (12km) rural areas  Bowling greens, golf courses: 15 minute travel time (12km)	0.12 ha	65 dwellings
		Hockey: 20 minute travel time.		
Allotments	0.37 ha per 1000 people	10 minute walk (800m)	0.2 ha	275 dwellings

### **3. Green Infrastructure in Bicester**

- 3.1** Green infrastructure in Bicester has been developed as the town has grown. Large new recreational spaces have been provided at Langford Village and Bure Park and more recently at Kingsmere. Plans for new development at Graven Hill, NW Bicester and SE Bicester also include large areas for sport and recreation. Some of the open space that has been provided has also included areas that flood, surface water drainage features as well as areas for bio diversity. However I think it is fair to say that planning has generally focused on recreational needs although elements of eco systems services particularly floodable areas and surface water drainage have also been included. Recently, in response to people not being aware of the green spaces in the town a map of the green spaces has been published. This aims to highlight the opportunities available to access the larger green spaces close to where they live and encourage their use.
- 3.2** In the light of the scale of new development and the importance of securing well designed multi-functional green space a project was entered into with Oxford University Environmental Change Institute (eci) looking at tools for planning green infrastructure. This project tested various tools that might assist in taking a more holistic approach to planning green infrastructure as well as looking at the value of green spaces. This has provided a lot of information and the different tools provide slightly different outputs. Of particular note is the high value put on open spaces by residents and the monetary value that can be put on such spaces based particularly on their contribution to health and wellbeing (see appendix A).
- 3.3** The work by the eci has been extended to natural capital mapping, which was tested in Bicester, across Oxfordshire, through a further successful funding bid. At a recent workshop this was being considered as to whether it will form part of the base line to the Oxfordshire Plan. There were some concerns about how the outcome of the work might be interpreted to influence the location of development particularly when it was undertaken at quite a high level across the County.
- 3.4** There have been concerns in Bicester that open spaces might be under threat from development. Most of the publicly accessible green spaces in the town are owned by the Town Council and the District Council, and therefore are not under threat. However there are some sites the public have used are in private ownership and not designated as open spaces and development proposals have come forward on these. For example the land off Skimmingdish Lane that is now being developed for a care home. Requests have been made for the designation of Local Green Spaces and this is a matter that will be dealt with through the review of the Local Plan.
- 3.5** There have also been some work on existing spaces, for example the Town Council reviewing all the small spaces at Bure Park, replacing the playground and providing the café at the Garth, grant funding for signage, bridge repair and the planting of a wildflower meadow at Bure Park. Some work was also undertaken in 2018 by an Oxford Brookes student on Bure Park. This included interviewing park users about their experience of the park and what they would like to see to enhance their experience.
- 3.6** The local community are also involved in the Green Gym, which undertakes environmental works primarily in the open spaces in the town but recently they have also taken on the planting area at Bicester North Station. A community group also manage the community

orchard at Langford Park where an event was recently held to celebrate the Meadow Day. A 'Friends' group has formed that are very keen to be involved in the laying out and maintenance of the Burnehyll Community Woodland on the land between Vendee Drive and Chesterton and a community garden has also been developed by Grassroots Bicester at Studio 02. There is therefore strong public interest in open spaces and involvement in a number of them.

- 3.7** Generally green spaces in Bicester are well maintained and well used. There is work going on around the planning and delivery of new open spaces, although not all these will be transferred into public ownership as some developers are electing to set up management companies to cover future maintenance. There has also been some work around upgrading and changing the parks primarily by the Town Council and through some grant funding that has been secured.

#### **4. Green Infrastructure Looking Forward**

- 4.1** Bicester's green spaces have the potential to be a key and attractive feature of the town as it develops. They support health and wellbeing but also have the potential to be multifunctional providing eco system services as well as recreational benefit.
- 4.2** Garden Town funding has provided the opportunity through capacity funding (revenue) to support some future work on green spaces particularly through funding studies where this will support the delivery of housing in the Town and build on the work that has taken place with the eci. This can therefore be used to help develop the policy for the review of the Local Plan, development of proposals and volunteering for existing spaces and also look at how access to the countryside might be improved. The outcome of work to inform the Oxfordshire Plan is awaited to ensure any further work on Bicester is complimentary. In the meantime work is progressing to prepare a brief to explore further opportunities to increase access to the countryside.

#### **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1** It is recommended that the Board note the content of this report and that updates will be provided through reporting on the Garden Town funding.