

## Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

<b>Date of meeting: 16 January 2020</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM NO:  8</b>
<b>Report title: Garden Town Report</b>	
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### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 MHCLG have sought to promote housing growth through their Garden Communities programme. Bicester was the first Garden Town in the programme, identified in 2014, which now comprises of Ebbs Fleet Garden City and a number of Garden Towns and Garden Villages. Garden Communities are defined by the Government as having the following characteristics;

- a purpose built new settlement, or large extension to an existing town
- a community with a clear identity and attractive environment
- it provides a mix of homes, including affordable and self-build
- planned by local authorities or private sector in consultation with the local community

As well as building new homes, the communities develop:

- job opportunities
- attractive green space and public realm areas
- transport infrastructure, including roads, buses and cycle routes
- community infrastructure, schools, community and health centres
- a plan for long-term stewardship of community assets

1.2 The Government has seen the Garden Communities as providing best practice and creating well planned and designed settlements and supported these with capacity funding.

1.3 The approach in Bicester has been to take a whole town approach to the Garden Town working to support the delivery of planned growth and to integrate it with the existing town and ensure the benefits of growth are realised across the whole town. This report aims to highlight key areas of work that have been progressed in the last quarter.

### 2. Garden Town Capital Funding

2.1 In 2014/15 when Bicester was identified as a Garden Town by MHCLG this came with an indication that there would be both capital and revenue funding available to support the growth of the Town. In total £19m capital was identified for Bicester, subject to the submission of a business case justifying the spend.

2.2 In 2017 agreement was reached with MHCLG to pay £4.25m to Cherwell to pay Network Rail part of the shared value payment to enable the rail bridge to be built at NW Bicester. This

funding is currently held by CDC. Negotiations continue with Network Rail and OCC over shared value to allow the construction of the new rail bridge at Howes Lane.

- 2.3 In April 2018 a business case was submitted for the remaining identified funding. This was based on undertaking three highway schemes;
- Pioneer Roundabout
  - Ploughley Road junction
  - Banbury Road roundabout
- 2.4 The business case for the delivery of these schemes is based on the acceleration of housing delivery and the schemes delivered a positive cost benefit. In addition the case was made that where appropriate and possible developer funding would be secured for the schemes and the original funding re circulated to provide additional benefit.
- 2.5 Since the submission of the business case MHCLG have requested further information to support the business case which has taken some time, however a first tranche of funding has now been received of £2,945,876. This is to enable the design work to be progressed on the three schemes and will cover the costs incurred to date.
- 2.6 The second tranche of funding (£11m) would be paid on the completion of the following the following actions;
1. Council formal decision to proceed immediately to procure a contractor or Council formal decision to enter a funding agreement with third party for delivery of the Pioneer roundabout (developer delivery route)
  2. Feasibility completed on Ploughley Road junction
  3. Planning Permission for the Banbury Road roundabout
- 2.7 All these works are achievable in the next 12 months. MHCLG is keen to work with CDC to ensure the delivery of the second tranche of funding in a timely manner and a meeting has been arranged to facilitate this.
- 2.8 As Cherwell will be the accountable body for the funding, reports are being prepared for formal authorisation to spend the grant, work with OCC to deliver the schemes and to seek agreement for the use of the funding released by developer contributions to the infrastructure.
- 2.9 Where appropriate S106 funding will be secured from the development benefitting from the schemes and this would release the Garden Town funding to be used to further the benefit to Bicester Garden Town. The business case outlines this approach with funding released ring fenced to benefit Bicester. It is therefore appropriate at this stage to establish an approach to the use of funding released. It is proposed that the approach outlined below is agreed.
- 2.10 One of the current challenges with increased awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of active travel and the declaration of the Climate Emergency is that in the future there is a need for less use of the private car and the Local Transport Plan identifies this as follows;

*'During this LTP4 period, we have a huge challenge to enable people to make the journeys they need to as the population grows, and avoid damage to the economy caused by severe congestion, as well as to protect the environment. So there needs to be a significant shift away from dependence on private cars, towards more people using forms of transport that use less road capacity and damage the environment less – where possible walking, cycling, and/or using public transport.'*

- 2.11 The area strategy for Bicester seeks a balanced approach to movement and was informed by the Sustainable Transport Strategy for the town. The LTP Policy Bic 2 states;  
*'We will work to reduce the proportion of journeys made by private car through implementing the Sustainable Transport Strategy'*.

The policy goes on the list schemes that would support a shift to sustainable travel.

- 2.12 A Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is also being developed by OCC for the town, which is further identifying improvements for cycling and walking.

- 2.13 Despite the Sustainable Transport Strategy for the town and the support in the LTP there has been limited improvement to the environment for walking and cycling within the town and the Board will be aware that it has not to date been possible to secure funding for many of the works the strategies identify. New development has generally made good on site provision for walking and cycling but only limited change has been made beyond site boundaries, although most journeys to key destinations in the town will require travel beyond a site. For this reason the Garden Town Bid stated;

*'Not only could this investment unlock the developments but it would also assist in reducing through traffic in the town centre to enable sustainable transport measures to be implemented to improve the draw of the town as a place to live and to support the vision for the Garden Town and Healthy New Town and create an attractive environment for investment.'*

- 2.14 It is therefore proposed that the Garden Town funding that is released through the securing of developer contributions is used to create a fund to be able to invest in walking and cycling improvements across the town. This Garden Town Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Fund could enable significant improvement in provision through implementation of schemes that have already been identified but for which there is no funding currently available. For example the improvement of walking and cycling across the southern side of the town and along the A41 is identified in Cherwell Local Plan policies Bicester 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 12. This would also support growth through providing positive measures to support sustainable travel, encouraging a shift from private cars, reducing pressure on the road network. Creating an environment for sustainable travel also supports the changes that are needed to address the Climate Emergency that has been declared and the encouragement of increased activity to improve health and wellbeing. This would also support the garden town principles and the creation of an attractive place to live and work.

### **3. Bicester Air Quality Management Area**

- 3.1 Funding was secured through the Healthy New Town programme to undertake an innovation project to design and implement a planting scheme to reduce the impacts of poor air quality in the Town's Air Quality Management Area. The first phase of this project has been to appoint Landscape Architects to develop options for the area. After a formal procurement process local firm Applied Landscape Design, a local company, were successful and have been appointed and have started work.

- 3.2 Work has commenced on the identification of opportunities for planting and a programme including engagement. A report will be brought to the next meeting to provide a full briefing on the project.

#### **4. Southern Connectivity in the Town for Walking and Cycling**

- 4.1 A brief has been prepared to appoint consultants to undertake a feasibility on potential routes to improve walking and cycling between the major developments at Graven Hill, Wretchwick Green, Kingsmere and commercial sites on the southern side of the town. This is subject to discussions with the Bicester Bike Users Group taking place this week and Oxfordshire County Council regarding the A41.

#### **5. Town Centre and Market Square**

- 5.1 Work on the Town Centre has highlighted the importance to the Market Square in providing connectivity with Sheep Street and Crown Walk and also as a focal point when accessing the town centre from the south and Bicester Village. It also has the potential to provide space for events and activities. The Garden Town funding provides the potential to review the previous design to alter market square and explore the opportunities to create a destination space within the town centre. Some funding is held to implement a scheme but it is unlikely to be sufficient on its own to provide for a high quality scheme. Given the importance of the town centre and the Market Square it is proposed that the remaining Eco Town Capital funding is ring fenced to support a scheme to be implemented.

#### **6. Graven Hill Community House**

- 6.1 Work has taken place with Graven Hill Development Company, Bromford Housing Association and the Communities team to provide a temporary community facility in advance of the permanent community hall being built. This was an approach that was one of the innovations from the Eco Town at Elmsbrook and supported early community development and hosted a wide range of meetings and events for and by the community. A temporary community house has been agreed and equipped and will be available to the community at Graven Hill. Developer funding is also enabling a part time community development worker to be secured to support the growing community.
- 6.2 Discussions have commenced on the design and delivery of the permanent hall which will be delivered in accordance with the S106 agreement for the site.

#### **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 Work continues on the growth of Bicester and measures to support the town as it grows. The provision of funding for infrastructure is supporting the delivery of strategic allocations. The Garden Town funding also provides the opportunity to make a step change in measures to support walking and cycling in the town.

#### **8. Recommendation**

- 8.1 The Board are recommended to note the progress on the Garden Town as set out in the above report and;
- Note the receipt of Garden Town Capital funding to support the delivery of infrastructure
  - Confirm their support for the establishment of a walking and cycling infrastructure fund