This report is public	
Establishing Area Oversight Groups	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	4 November 2024
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property Councillor Lesley McLean
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	22 October 2024
Report of	Corporate Director – Communities, Ian Boll

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to seek authority from the Executive to adopt an area-based approach with the objective to strengthen community and stakeholder engagement into major growth sites across the District in support of delivering more holistic and sustainably planned developments, aligned to Council priorities.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

1.1 To authorise the adoption of the establishment of Area Oversight Groups (AOGs) for Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington as non-decision-making advisory groups.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 A key objective of an area-based approach is to focus on a 'bottom-up' system to strengthen partnership working alongside creating strong links to community leadership, provide opportunity for improved two-way communication and engagement (especially in areas experiencing significant housing growth) and provide for greater accessibility and accountability.

2.2 A well-established area-based approach has been operating in Bicester since the inception of the Garden Town Programme and has been predominantly funded by capacity funding via the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Garden Town programme. The opportunity is to develop Area Oversight Groups in other areas that builds upon the strengths of the Bicester model. We intend to establish these in both Banbury, in the context of both the remaining strategic allocations and the regeneration of the town centre, and 2020 local plan partial review sites across the four parishes of Kidlington, Water Eaton, Begbroke and Yarnton, referred from hereon as the Four Parishes area. At the same time, the Bicester model can also be improved and developed as part of a continuous and iterative process – which will also apply to the other two areas as they become established.

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2.3   Establishing Area Oversight Groups will allow us to both identify and leverage future funding opportunities for these areas and optimise delivery

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary		
Finance	The Area Oversight Groups will be set up within the current budget available. Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) 17 October 2024		
Legal	There are no legal issues associated with establishing this approach to engagement. Shiraz Sheikh 24/10/2024		
Risk Management	There are no major risks associated with establishing this framework. Any risks for identified for the individual boards will be captured in operational/project risk registers. [Shona Ware, AD Customer Focus 25 October 2024		
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				Not applicable
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				Not applicable
Climate & Environmental Impact				Not applicable
ICT & Digital Impact				Not applicable
Data Impact				Not applicable
Procurement & subsidy				Not applicable
Council Priorities	Supporting Environmental Sustainability		

	• Promote the green economy • Work with partners to improve air quality An Enterprising Economy with Strong and Vibrant Local Centres • Develop and implement area frameworks to support a coordinated approach to development and engagement • Work with partners to understand and unlock complex infrastructure issues that are preventing planned and support growth from successful delivery Healthy, Resilient and Engaged Communities • Identify community needs and produce shared solutions • Work with partners to identify community assets to strengthen safe and resilient communities • Working with partners to bring investment into the district to sustain communities Housing That Meets Your Needs • Complete and deliver our Local Plan to provide sustainable development which improves the local environment for residents, providing necessary infrastructure • Provide for affordable housing to meet the districts needs • Encourage a higher standard of design in new developments
Human Resources	Not applicable
Property	Not applicable
Consultation & Engagement	Not applicable

Supporting Information

3.   Background

3.1   The Council wants to continue to be positive about planned growth and wishes to increase the engagement across stakeholders and with existing communities to ensure they are an engaged part of the process.

3.2   Having a flexible, externally-oriented and accessible approach that can promote Cherwell's vision and objectives, and seek delivery against these in preliminary stages of business and development growth has proven to be invaluable but more can be done and this report sets out what this might be and how it can be achieved.

3.3   Furthermore, having more flexibility than the statutory roles of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) allow the council to be more manoeuvrable vocalising what it expects, wants, and does not want - without the encumbrance of pre-determination or prejudice to due process.

        This benefit can be further enhanced with the greater involvement of, and greater engagement with, communities. However, to be more successful this approach needs to be in the areas of major growth, visible to all players to ensure their contribution is not missed or an after-thought. It is also through this group that deeper partnership delivery can be formed with other major delivery partners like the County Council, Homes England, major infrastructure providers and statutory bodies including the Environment Agency, Network Rail etc.

4.   Details

Area-Based Proposal

4.1   **Establish three areas:** For effectiveness and efficiency, that the district be split into three distinct "areas" as the geographic basis for the area-based approach focussing upon the areas of significant growth and development; specifically, Banbury, Bicester and South Cherwell (consisting of the four parishes of Begbroke, Kidlington, Water Eaton and Yarnton). The three areas will be:

- Banbury
- Bicester
- Four Parishes (consisting of Kidlington, Water Eaton, Yarnton and Begbroke)

4.2   A lot of work has already been done in the recent past working towards these new arrangements, particularly in Bicester which has a well-established governance and work programme relating to its status as a Garden Town; many of the lessons learnt and structures adopted in Bicester will be considered for the other two areas – although empathetic to the differing needs and character of each area.

        In recent years, the Bicester programme has comprised:

- Engaging with developers on alternative delivery solutions to the North West Relief Road, also know as the A4095 Howes Lane diversion.
- Commencing engagement and design of a proposal for Market Square.
- Delivering minor improvements to Bure Place using UK SPF funding
- Developing a new public realm framework for Bicester
- Working with the Town Council on new cemetery provision
- Commissioning energy studies to develop a strategy to unlock electricity supply capacity issues
- Supporting the delivery of Growth Deal Fund infrastructure
- Supporting Bicester Vision, a CIC supporting businesses across Bicester

        For Banbury, a significant community engagement exercise has been undertaken which has paved the way for these new arrangements through the Banbury Vision work. In addition, the council has supported the delivery of Tramway through the Growth Deal funding and worked closely with the Banbury Improvement District (Banbury BID). A new public realm framework for Banbury has been developed and due to be published shortly.

Furthermore, a lot of work at the parish level has also taken place within the four parishes in the South of the district (Begbroke, Kidlington, Water Eaton and Yarnton) where a considerable amount of development is due to take place.

There will be a number of key infrastructure challenges that each area (to a greater or lesser extent) will need to grapple with which might include roads, water, energy and other matters that will emerge. This will require close co-operation and co-ordination with outside agencies such as the Country Council, water and energy providers and others.

4.3 **Area Framework:** The report recommends that to facilitate consistent service provision throughout Cherwell which sets clear ambitions for each area (and reflects differing needs and circumstances) that an **Area Framework** is established across each of the three areas. Subject to resourcing, the Area Framework will be developed over time to consist of (but this may grow further as required and appropriate):

4.3.1 Develop a medium to long term vision for the area in the form of an **Area Plan** which sets out the ambition for the area, the areas of planned growth, critical infrastructure to be delivered and needed as well as an investment framework – to engage with local businesses and attract inward investment.

4.3.2 Supporting the Area Plan, an **Infrastructure & Investment Plan** should be developed so there is complete visibility on future provision, gaps, who is delivering and what is needed to deliver the Area Plan (including funding gap and assessment of how such gap may be filled).

4.3.3 **Movement and Mobility Strategy**, developed by the County Council but informed by the district and the community in terms of planned transport infrastructure specifically.

4.3.4 A "**pen pic**" of the area will be produced which includes key demographic data (e.g. population size, age profile, in and out migration), business sectors, size and growth, travel to work data, etc. kept up to date and publicly accessible to provide clear evidence of what makes up the area rather than perception or historical reference.

4.3.5 Develop an **Engagement and Communications Plan** as part of The Area Framework. To assist with this a communication protocol, referred to here as an **Area Engagement and Communications Plan**, should be developed which sets out clearly the purpose and objectives of this area-based approach, how this approach will work (including terms of reference, meeting protocols, etc.) as well as how communities will be engaged.

4.3.6 Establish robust and appropriate internal and external **governance arrangements** broadly based upon the Bicester model

4.4 **Area Oversight Groups (AOGs)** Although not part of any formal decision-making process, setting up an **Area Oversight Group** (AOG) for each area would provide the Council with a significant conduit to and from the local communities.

4.4.1 This will include Chairs of relevant parish or town councils, selected business leaders, chairs of relevant community groups as well as the county council and any external agency which may have a significant role to play in that community (eg. Homes England, Network Rail, Environment Agency). Each Area Oversight Group will be chaired by the Council Leader, or delegated

Portfolio Holder responsible regeneration and economy who will be supported by the relevant officers.

4.4.2 These groups should meet quarterly with a regular agenda including programme updates, status of current major developments/ Infrastructure being considered and built. The Council may wish to consider setting up or re-energising existing business forums and developer networks. Regular and active members of each of these forums could be invited by AOG to discuss relevant growth plans or initiatives in the area. It is suggested these are invitation only meetings with public inclusion as and when a topic or issue warrants this. Suggested Terms of Reference are included as Appendix 1, for information.

4.8 **Developer Liaison Groups for each of the three areas** Establish groups which will enable more community engagement on early project development and to seek to positively influence current and future growth proposals (a developer forum has already been established in North West Bicester). For this to be effective and open in its proactive relationship with growth, it needs to regularly engage with development promoters. One of the significant benefits of having this is it can have "what-if" discussions as it seeks to gain clear understanding of how promoted development does or could fit with the Council's objectives and bring the most benefit for the community.

To help with this and to avoid informal ad hoc arrangements which can lead to misunderstandings of the Council's interaction with development proponents, developer and business forums should be established or re-energised for the district, meeting on a regular (quarterly) basis. Selected representatives of this group who are regular and committed developers and business leaders in an area could be invited to attend the relevant AOG to share proposals or for community engagement as part of developing proposals.

4.9 Once a year in each area a Community Engagement Forum could be held in each of the three areas enabling each AOG to share updates, feed back to their communities and receive comments and views.

5.   Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Do nothing (keep current arrangements in place) – this was rejected because there is a lack of consistency in each of the three areas and only Bicester has suitable arrangements in place and it is important that the other two urban centres, subjected to growth and development also benefit for local area based arrangements, aligned to local needs and aspirations.

6   Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that we establish Area Oversight Groups. The reason for this is set out in the report and will help to manage increasing development and housing

growth within some urban centres in Cherwell and help deliver an enabling and co-ordinated approach towards achieving Council priorities.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	Banbury Calthorpe and Easington, Banbury Cross and Neithrop, Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown, Banbury Hardwick, Banbury Ruscote, Kidlington East, Kidlington West, Bicester East, Bicester North and Caversfield, Bicester South and Ambrosden, Bicester West

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Area Oversight Groups (Draft) Terms of Reference
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Ian Boll, Corporate Director – Communities
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