

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

21 July 2010:	AGENDA ITEM NO: 1
Report title: Eco Bicester Update	
Author: Jenny Barker (Eco Bicester Project Team)	
Tel: 01295 221828 Email: jenny.barker@cherwell-dc.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of Report

To present the Board with an update of the current position on Eco Bicester and the current focus of the work of the Project Team.

2. Background

Following the identification of NW Bicester as a location for development in PPS1 on Eco Towns and it being identified as a strategic allocation in the draft Core Strategy work has been progressing on the delivery of the development and improvements within the town as a whole.

Previous reports to the Board have dealt with the governance arrangements for the project, of which the Strategic Delivery Board is part, and the Project Team to deliver the project. This report therefore focuses on developments since the last meeting of the Board in April 2010.

3. Update

Coalition Government Position on Eco Towns

Eco Towns were identified by the last government as a mechanism for addressing the issues of housing delivery and the need to address the impacts of climate change. They were conceived as national exemplar developments that would demonstrate approaches that could then be adopted through more main stream development. Growth funding was identified to support the eco towns programme to be paid in two stages. The first stage of funding for 2009/10 has been paid and Cherwell DC received £9.7m. Milestones were agreed for second round funding for 2010/11 with an indication that between £2-6m was available.

The current government had highlighted that it would look for changes to the planning system, particularly through the abolition of regional spatial strategies and allowing greater local determination of appropriate levels of growth. The government's position on eco towns is now emerging, most recently in a letter to local authority Leaders dated 2 July 2010 and with regard to second round funding for 2010/11.

Grant Shapps letter of 2nd July 2010 follows a review of spending programmes for growth funding and the current approach of the government (see appendix A). This emphasises the importance of continuing to deliver growth but the change of approach, removing top down targets and instead incentivising communities to accept growth. These changes will be embedded in the proposed Localism Bill. In particular the following criteria for the new approach are identified;

- (i) Putting the local community in the driving seat – giving real power to local people to control the way in which villages, towns and cities develop;
- (ii) Rewarding local communities so that development occurs where people see that building new homes is of direct benefit to them in terms of jobs, improving affordability and investment in the existing community and the infrastructure it needs;
- (iii) Creating a strong and well considered local plan, locally determined, which provides enough jobs and homes to meet the aspirations of the area.

The letter provides confirmation that growth funding has been protected, all be it at a reduced level, for 2010/11. However the government is seeking confirmation that local authorities and partners are securing real and local community engagement and that existing local communities will benefit from the funding.

The eco town proposals for NW Bicester emerged with local support represented by the three levels of local government, the Town Council, District Council and County Council, as well as local organisations such as Bicester Vision representing the views of local businesses. The proposals for NW Bicester are the local solution to development and growth of the town as opposed to the proposals for Weston Otmoor which did not have local support. Furthermore it was the opportunity for the town and existing residents to benefit from the proposed development through the investment and enhancement of infrastructure that led to the local support for the proposals.

Following the identification of NW Bicester in the Eco Towns PPS extensive consultation has been undertaken. Highlights of this have been the Bicester Summit that brought together key players with regard to the future of Bicester, the Bio Regional workshop with regard to what was necessary to create an eco development at NW Bicester and the LDF draft Core Strategy Consultation. Most recently, P3Eco's well attended Masterplanning in Partnership consultation for a week in Bicester has provided good feedback and support to inform further work on the project. Details of the P3's consultation are to be provided to the Board by them and therefore are not covered in detail in this report.

The proposed development is being planned using an approach to local support which is entirely consistent with the approach the government is advocating for growth. Furthermore there is a commitment to continue to engage with local people to ensure that the town develops in the way they wish it to as demonstrated through work on the emerging shared vision (which appears elsewhere on the agenda) and the appointment of a further part time officer to the project team to focus on community engagement.

Funding received from the government's growth programme is also focused on measures to support Eco Bicester including demonstration projects within the town to benefit existing residents such as the provision of affordable housing at Bryan House, work on travel behaviour including improvements for walking and cycling infrastructure in the town, the provision of a new sixth form at Cooper School and support for insulation measures in existing homes to address carbon reduction targets and rising energy costs for residents. Further funding is identified for an infrastructure fund (see report elsewhere on the agenda) to be allocated based on priorities identified in the shared vision for the town and work on infrastructure planning that is currently being undertaken.

The on going commitment of the government to growth funding is therefore welcomed and Eco Bicester continues to evolve in a manner that is entirely consistent with the government's approach

for locally focussed development and ensuring existing communities benefit from government funding.

NW Bicester Planning Progress

Work on the development of a masterplan for the whole site and a planning application for an exemplar first phase has progressed significantly since the last meeting of the Board. P3 have appointed Hyder as their consultant carrying out technical work to support the project including work on energy and waste solutions and transport assessment for the site. Barton Wilmore to provide planning advice and Farrells are undertaking design work for both the masterplan and exemplar. Ecological survey work is progressing with an emerging picture of the ecological importance of the site although the work will not be complete until September. There remain some potential gaps in the consultancy team, for example in landscape where a consultant is yet to be appointed and in economic development where P3 themselves are leading on producing the economic development strategy. However the current team is well placed to ensure the project progresses.

In the light of the complexity of the project, the amount of work required and the number of people involved work streams have been identified to focus on specific areas of work. These are on masterplanning, design and sustainable construction, energy, waste and utilities, transport and travel behaviour, green infrastructure, economic development and employment and community infrastructure. These work streams are now being set up with joint working between the developers' consultants and the local authority Project Team and other relevant staff. This approach to collaborative working will help to keep the project proceeding in accordance with the programme that has now been provided, however there is considerable work to do and interdependencies between the work streams and therefore this will need to be closely monitored to ensure issues that emerge do not adversely impact on the programme and standard of development.

Programme

Attached at appendix B is the developer's consultants headline programme for delivery of the exemplar application and masterplan. This is supported by detailed programmes for the work being undertaken by each of the main consultants. There remain some gaps such as the programme for work on the economic development strategy but it is anticipated these gaps will be filled as work streams progress.

The programme has suffered some delays and the exemplar application is now programmed for submission in November and a completed masterplan to be in the summer of 2011.

Vision for Eco Bicester

Setting out the shared vision for Bicester is an important area of work for the project team and is covered by a separate report elsewhere on the agenda.

Demonstration Projects

Early projects within the town, the demonstration projects, are an important area of work, showing how eco development can benefit the town. Attached at appendix C is a summary of progress on the demonstration projects.

Key projects are progressing well. Projects that demonstrate sustainable construction including the demonstration building, affordable housing at Bryan House, the community hall at Causeway and

the zero carbon sixth form at Cooper School are all progressing. Not only will these projects demonstrate the construction techniques that deliver more sustainable development they will also provide valuable facilities and affordable housing for the town. Work on travel behaviour is progressing with major survey work being undertaken in September to further inform the project which will support walking, cycling and the use of public transport for journeys within the town to benefit the environment, health and community and cost of travel. A scheme to retrofit existing properties within the town with inadequate insulation will commence shortly., enabling residents to take advantage of measures which will both reduce carbon and fuel costs. Work is also underway to try look at opportunities for skills training linked to construction. Over the next 12 months these project will deliver real benefits for the town.

4. Recommendations

The Board is recommended to note the content of this report and the attached documents.