

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: Communication Strategy for Eco Bicester 2011	
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1. Purpose of Report

To enable members to consider the communications strategy set out below.

2. Background

2.1 The need for a Communication Strategy

The Strategic Delivery Board, Cherwell District Council, Bicester Town Council and Oxfordshire County Council have all approved the *Eco Bicester – One Shared vision*. The Shared Vision promotes a lifestyle change for residents, to create a vibrant Bicester where people choose to live, to work and to spend their leisure time in sustainable ways. It is therefore imperative that we communicate clear coherent messages, to enable residents and surrounding communities to embrace and understand our shared vision for a better Bicester.

The nature of Eco Bicester as a large scale, long term project also means that there are a large number of agencies involved and as such communication is a complex issue. We need to set up mechanisms to allow all agencies and partners to collaborate so that we make the best use of resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

2.2 Strategic objectives

The aims of the Eco Bicester Communication Strategy are to:

- create a coherent communication strategy for the projects that are part of Eco Bicester
- present a positive message about the benefits of Eco Bicester for everyone
- establish a basis for local people to engage more fully with decision making for Eco Bicester
- raise the profile of Eco Bicester
- provide the public with a point of reference for all information relating to Bicester's development and future

3. Service area background

Bicester was identified as an Eco Town location in July 2009 and since then the Department of Communities and Local Government has awarded the local authorities a grant of £9.7 million to deliver a significant new development at North West Bicester and to begin work transforming the town to deliver the Shared Vision. Eco Bicester is introducing a range of initiatives as the first steps towards achieving the Shared Vision such as the Bicester insulation scheme,

improving opportunities for environmentally friendly transport and developing a zero carbon sixth-form at Cooper School. At the same time there are plans for the first phase of development of approximately 400 eco-homes to the North West of Bicester. The full development is likely to take place over the next 30 years and culminate in the development of 5,000 eco-homes.

4. Project background and partnership working

In 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government announced a competition to build eco towns, intended to stimulate house building and achieve exemplary standards of sustainability. From an initial list of nearly sixty, four locations were eventually chosen, one of which is Eco Bicester. The bid for Eco Bicester was initiated by Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Bicester Town Council. Partnership working has been strong from the start, partly because each of the organisations worked together to challenge a rival bid at Weston Otmoor, which would have had an adverse social and economic impact on Bicester as a whole.

From its inception Eco Bicester has been differentiated from other eco town proposals by our conviction that the initiative provides the opportunity to re-position the town as a whole as a place where new communities are integrated in to the existing town as well as being built to high environmental standards and where people across the town enjoy more sustainable lifestyles.

The first projects that are part of Eco Bicester are a series of community based initiatives as well as the development of 393 homes outlined below:

- 393 homes (the first of around 5,000 total)
- a travel behavior project to promote transport by other means than the car across Bicester
- an insulation scheme *The Bicester Deal* to help people keep warmer, save money, as well as using less energy
- a new Eco Bicester community hall the *John Paul II Centre* which is built to Passiv Haus standards; that is ultra low energy consumption for heating and lighting
- a demonstration building at the Garth for promotion of all aspects of Eco Bicester
- a zero carbon sixth-form at Cooper School
- 23 affordable homes in Chapel Street; a redevelopment of brownfield land
- a new Eco technology and skills centre, launched by Oxford and Cherwell Valley College which is based at its current campus in Innovation Drive. It will incorporate a Renewable Energies Innovation Centre, which will deliver an embryonic range of eco training provision, taster courses and eco experience from January 2011.

5. Partnership working

Eco Bicester began as a partnership led by Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Bicester Town Council; brought together in the Strategic Delivery Board with others so all three local councils speak with one voice. The partnership is working with:

- BioRegional: environmental sustainability expertise
- A2Dominion: housing development
- Bicester Vision: economic development and community engagement

- Government Departments etc, Department for Communities and Local Government, Homes and Communities Agency, ATLAS (Advisory Team for Large Applications) and the Energy Saving Trust: high level direction and financial support
- P3Eco: NW Bicester site promoters and prospective developers
- The Environment Agency: flood risk, air pollution, water and sewerage

6. The wider context of eco towns

There are three other eco towns in England all of whom have communication and marketing strategies which are at various stages of development. We share a website with them which is being managed by the TCPA (Town and Country Planning Association).

The three other eco towns are:

- Whitehill Bordon: <http://www.whitehillbordon.com/>
- St Austell: <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=23347>
- Rackheath: <http://www.rackheatheco-community.com/>

7. Communication and Engagement for Eco Bicester

The strategy for Eco Bicester communication and engagement will span the full spectrum from awareness raising to supporting independent community initiatives outlined in figure 2 below. It is the purpose of this document to focus on communication since this is an essential element for enabling participation and engagement.

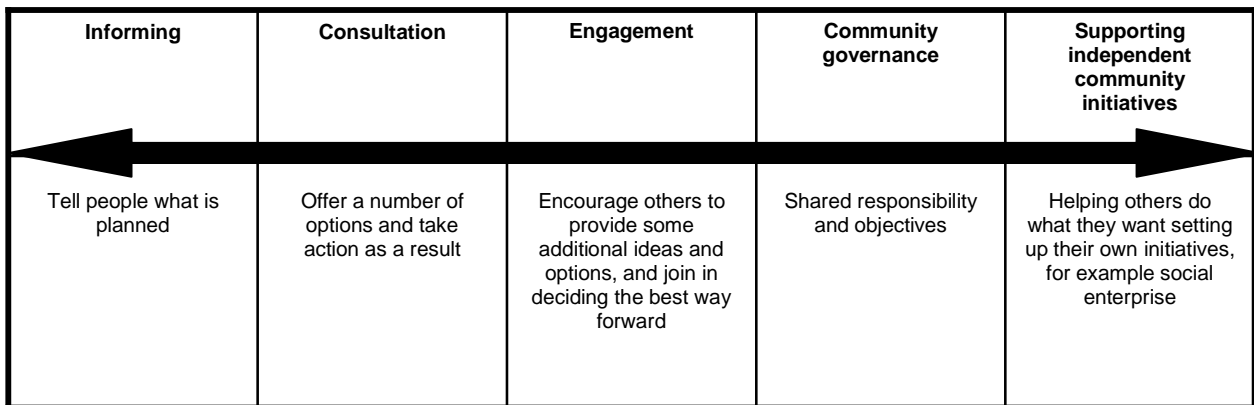


Figure 2 Communication and Participation Spectrum

8. Communication Strategy Objectives for Eco Bicester 2011

Priority 1 Communication: ‘telling people what is happening and the benefits for them’

Priority 2 Promotion of Bicester: ‘Benefits of living in a vibrant Eco Bicester with an emphasis on employment opportunities’

Priority 3 Laying the foundations for further engagement: ‘establishing robust communication channels that allow for increased two-way communication with the community’

9. Target audience(s) or stakeholders and what we would like to communicate

Segments	Impact
Residents of Bicester:	It is thought that the eco-town and other developments in Bicester will increase the population of 30,000 to around 50,000 over time.
Businesses	We want to create a nationally recognised hub of the low carbon economy and the location of choice for business and inward investment.
People outside Bicester	Impression of the town

We want to focus our communication primarily on the majority of people, not the minority of dissenting voices, whilst recognising the diversity of views about Eco Bicester and responding responsibly to all communication.

It is our intention to fully engage all sections of the community in communication and engagement, for this reason we will use a full spectrum of communication channels especially including grass roots organisations.

10. How we will deliver our messages

For each message we need to explain how we will deliver what we propose. For example, if our message is 'Eco Bicester will make Bicester an even better place to live, work and bring up a family', we need to know exactly how the existing residents will benefit in their lives, work and family. So, if residents are going to spend less time in traffic jams because there will be more sustainable transport, we could have a scheme for the media to follow one or two families as they hand over their car keys and live without a car for a week. This is just one example of a cost effective way of generating media interest and a good news story. A particular benefit of this type of strategy is that we can show existing residents how they can benefit from Eco Bicester now.

11. Risks and opportunities

Here are a series of risk and opportunities you may wish to consider in relation to communication:

11.1 Financial transparency

There is currently transparency about the financing of Eco Bicester, since budgets are presented to the Strategic Delivery Board at regular intervals. Due to the considerable duration of the project (30 years), some money is currently held to finance long term infrastructure requirements. To ensure that we present the public with a true picture of how the money is allocated we will provide meaningful information; that is cost against specific projects. We want to avoid providing only high level information about finance, because this is not meaningful to residents and the wider community.

11.2 Resident expectation in the light of the project's duration and complexity

The long project duration and complexity of development means that there is a necessary time lag between when decisions are made and when residents can see change, particularly in respect of construction projects. There is a risk of a loss of momentum for the project. However, there is an opportunity to communicate clearly and coherently about all the demonstration projects some of which are launching from January 2011.

11.3 Eco Bicester - what does it mean?

There is a risk that residents may think that Eco Bicester is purely about housing development in Bicester. However, there is also an opportunity that we could have a simple recognisable brand for all projects that are part of Eco Bicester and in so doing provide the project with a greater profile. This could be achieved simply and effectively without additional resource, since the Local Authorities include resources to address this.

11.4 Managing expectations

Eco Bicester – One Shared Vision has high level aspirations for the development of Bicester, which is entirely the aim of the document. However, there is a risk that the aspirations are so high that aspects of the project may fail to live up to expectations. A strategy for managing expectations is to ensure regular communication about each stage of the project and to prevent 'over selling' the project's benefits.

11.5 Large number of agencies working on the same project

There are very many agencies working on Eco Bicester and there is a need to coordinate messages. Sometimes we may not initially agree priorities so we need to establish a forum for discussion so that we can constructively reach decisions.

11.6 Lack of or inadequate communication

If we do not communicate clearly and accurately to residents and businesses there is a higher risk of low engagement and increased opposition because in the void people may make assumptions about the project that are not accurate.

11.7 Constantly changing brief

Eco Bicester as a whole is constantly evolving and as such the communications and engagement strategy need to be flexible and responsive. This means doing as much forward planning as possible with all the agencies involved.

11.8 Comparison between Eco Bicester and other eco town sites

Each eco town development is a national exemplar and so there is a risk that we will not be compared favourably with other sites. However, there is also an opportunity that we can share resources and work together to help each other have a higher profile and be more successful.

12. Key messages and propositions

Tone and use of language:

Tone and use of language needs to be jargon free, easy to understand and eye catching. There is an emphasis on the benefits of the scheme for residents: saving money, more jobs, being healthier and breathing fresher air.

Key over-arching messages:

- Eco Bicester helps make Bicester a great place to live, work and bring up a family.
- All communication must be consistent with *Eco Bicester – One Shared Vision*

13. Key messages for the demonstration projects of Eco Bicester 2011

The following table outlines objectives for 10 demonstration projects for Eco Bicester. It is anticipated that these are the first of an evolving series of projects that are part of Eco Bicester and so will need to be updated regularly.

	Demonstration project	Publicity objectives	Project Team Lead officer	Timing
1	Phase One Eco Bicester	To enable local residents to engage with the first phase of the NW Bicester development	Jenny Barker (CDC)	Dec 2010 Plans submitted
2	NW Bicester Master Plan	To enable local residents to engage with the Masterplan of the NW Bicester development	Jenny Barker (CDC)	September 2011
3	Retaining & Attracting Business	We want to inspire people to keep their business in Bicester and start up new eco projects and businesses.	Andrew Bowe (CDC) and local businesses	Ongoing
4	Bicester Deal Insulation Scheme	To have a high level of take-up for the insulation scheme so that Bicester reduces its use of energy.	Azul Strong (CDC)	Current and ongoing for the next 3 years
5	Demonstration Building (at the Garth)	To let people know how green technology can work and become a focal point for communication and engagement for Eco Bicester.	Azul Strong (CDC)	Jan/Feb 2011 launch
6	Eco technology and construction training centre (building improvements by OCVC)	To let businesses know that Bicester is a place which produces a highly skilled workforce.	Andrew Bowe (CDC)	Jan 2011 (phase 1)
7	Travel behaviour project	Promote transport by other means than the car across Bicester.	Jo Fellows (OCC)	May 2011 launch A series of approx 9 more projects
8	Construction of new community	To let people know that Eco Bicester has enabled them to have	Parish of the Immaculate	Sept 2011 Launch

	hall facilities John Paul II Community Centre	a new community hall, the largest in Europe built to Passiv Haus standards	Conception/ Ian Inshaw (P3Eco)	
9	Cooper School	To let people know how new technology can benefit young people.	Jane Farrow (OCC)	Sept 2011 launch
10	23 affordable homes in Chapel Street	To let people know that Eco Bicester has resulted in the development of 23 environmentally friendly, affordable homes for Bicester.	Jenny Barker (CDC)	Pending

USP/Differentiator

From its inception Eco Bicester has been differentiated from other eco town proposals by our conviction that the building on the edge of Bicester provides the opportunity to re-position the town as a whole as a place where new communities are built to high environmental standards and where people across the town enjoy more sustainable lifestyles.

What do we want residents and businesses to do?

- We would like businesses (especially those that are high tech) to move to Bicester and businesses to stay in Bicester.
- We would like residents and businesses to get involved with the future of the town
- We would like residents and businesses to support demonstration projects.
- We would like the vast majority of people in Bicester to welcome Eco Bicester.

14. Implementation

All the demonstration projects and NW Bicester are already in action and have project managers/responsible officers. In order to establish coherent messages two strategies are suggested one of which is in place:

14.1 In December 2010 we established a communications team comprising members from Bicester Town Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, Bicester Vision and Pall Mall Consult. The aim of the group is to coordinate and prioritise communications for Eco Bicester Projects. The group will meet as demand dictates and in relevant formats, ie sometimes we will communicate face to face, other times by phone or in small groups, to ensure that it is efficient as well as effective. The communications team will work closely with the media to establish regular human interest stories on all aspects of the project.

14.2 To ensure that each demonstration project manager establishes the following communication protocols:

- SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timescale) aims for communication
- A clear time frame for activity, communication and engagement
- Monthly updates of projects to the Strategic Community Engagement Manager
- Commitment to joined up approach with other Eco Bicester projects

- Monthly Eco Bicester Communications Bulletins by the Strategic Community Engagement Manager about communication from all demonstration projects and development projects in Bicester
- All messages should be consistent with *Eco Bicester – One Shared Vision*
- Provide a baseline summary of communication and engagement prior to 2011
- Keep a record of all communication and send this to the Strategic Community Engagement Manager

14.3 For the Strategic Community Engagement Manager to establish monthly contact with all other medium and large scale developers and other initiatives in Bicester and to include these in the Eco Bicester Communications Bulletin.

15. Measurement and evaluation

Goal	Indicators
1. Create a coherent communication strategy for the projects that are part of Eco Bicester	Approval and implementation of this document by the Strategic Delivery Board
2. Present a positive message about the benefits of Eco Bicester for everyone	Each Demonstration Project Manager to adhere to communication protocols (14.2 above) The Strategic Engagement Manager to collate a record of the type and impact of communication (how many people were reached, or estimated to be reached? by which communication channels and what was the response rate?)
3. Establish a basis for local people to engage more fully with decision making for Eco Bicester	As point 4 below.
4. Raise the profile of Eco Bicester	Demonstration Project Managers and Strategic Community Engagement Manager to collate a list of all promotion activity to date calculating the likely number of people reached by communication to date. Increase the level of communication by 10 percent by the end of 2011 Use joint branding for Eco Bicester where this is appropriate
5. Provide the public with a point of reference for all information relating to Bicester's development and future	The Strategic Community Engagement Manager to establish a monthly Eco Bicester Communications bulletin that provides up- to-date information about demonstration and development projects in Bicester The Strategic Community Engagement Manager to establish a better web presence providing up to date human interest stories based on the current projects

16. Budget

The budget for communications will normally be met from existing resources, however, there may be instances where additional campaigns are required and if so these will be presented to senior managers and/or the Strategic Delivery Board for approval.

17. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Leading Member Group:

- Approve the Eco Bicester Communication Strategy for 2011
- Endorse the use of standards for communication for Eco Bicester Project Managers (14.2 above)
- Approve the use of joint branding for Eco Bicester for a wider range of projects subject to agreement that they are compatible with the Shared Vision (11.3 above)
- Support the role of the Strategic Community Engagement Manager as a coordinator of communications in Bicester as far as is practicable
- Recommend that a Communications Briefing be periodically included on the agenda for the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board