

Chief Executive's Office

Ian Davies Interim Chief Executive



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NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

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Dear Mr Dare-Edwards

Enterprise Zone for Bicester

I am writing to you in my capacity as lead advisor to the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board (SDB). The Board was established by Cherwell at the request of Government to provide strong public sector leadership, and a partnership steer, for development of the NW Bicester Eco Town. The Partnership also provides a catalyst to achieve wider growth benefits for the Town. It includes all three tiers of local Government, Central Government (via CLG, with links into BIS, DTp and the Technology Strategy Board), the Homes and Communities Agency and representatives of the local business community (Bicester Vision).

I have been following with interest the Government's proposal for a new generation of Enterprise Zones to be proposed by LEPs where there is Local Planning Authority (LPA) support. I note that, as an incidental part of the proposal, EZ's are seen as providing a dedicated funding stream for LEPs and that this could provide a way of creating stronger Partnerships.

County Councillor Mitchell has spoken to Members of the Board about this topic as well and suggested that it may have relevance to Bicester. Recently I received a copy of Oxfordshire City Region's expression of interest in an EZ for Oxfordshire. I see that you intend there to be a dialogue with Government, but that you have not put forward a specific proposal.

I would like to make you aware that I feel sure that the Board would offer strong and enthusiastic support for an EZ designation for Bicester. I am also confident that that my own Council as LPA would be prepared to back a designation with an appropriate Local Development Order giving the significant planning freedoms needed to act as an incentive to encourage job creating development.



My view is that the LEP does need to firm up its potential EZ proposal quickly if there is to be any chance of Government considering a designation. I think we could do this by making a very specific and realistic proposal for Bicester.

There is in fact only one realistic option for a Bicester EZ, as much of the land planned for future employment development will take some time to come forward. The site that could work now is a part of the Ministry of Defence Bicester Garrison site. It offers the following advantages:

- MOD have identified a significant area of land as surplus to operational requirements and available for disposal now
- The land is in single, public sector ownership, and can therefore be the subject of a coherent EZ strategy without problems of achieving the support of multiple, or private sector, property owners
- The MOD are currently seeking public sector planning support for development. Their suggested housing proposals are in direct conflict with the emerging development plan, but my Council has always offered strong support for employment development and rationalisation / continued growth of the military uses on the site
- The site is served by existing infrastructure suitable for employment uses; including rail freight connections that could be upgraded
- The site is generally developed, but at very low density, giving considerable opportunity for regeneration within a strong landscape framework (that can protect the overall environment of the area)

The existing built environment is not of high quality and could be redeveloped via EZ planning freedoms without undue risk to wider planning objectives. Introducing a strong incentive for employment development and inward investment in this location could be complementary to the aims of Eco Bicester because the early focus of eco development projects is on delivering housing development, small scale employment premises and social infrastructure; with sites for larger scale employment development only likely to be ready later in the development process.

I sincerely doubt there is a better proposition for a designation that meets Government intentions elsewhere in the County. I hope you will agree on that. I should add that Cherwell is also part of the South East Midlands LEP. SEMLEP is, I think, likely to pursue its own EZ proposal in one of its big urban areas, but I think it would accept that a Bicester proposal could successfully be proposed as falling in a cross LEP location and not therefore in breach of the one EZ per LEP "rule".

I would like the opportunity to consider this matter in more detail with you at the earliest opportunity. I and appropriate Members of the Board would be pleased to meet you and other LEP Members. We could use the opportunity to tell you more about Eco Bicester generally. We are also happy to present a proposition to the LEP.

Yours sincerely



Ian Davies
Interim Chief Executive