

This report is public	
Request for Strategic Development Funding	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	16 June 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report.	Leader of the Council - Strategic Leadership and Regeneration, Councillor Lesley McLean
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	27 May 2026
Report of	Executive Director Place and Regeneration, Ian Boll

Purpose of report

To request an allocation of £250k from the Strategic Development Fund reserve (£400k) to progress economic development and regeneration activity.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To agree to an allocation from the Strategic Development Fund of £250k to commission:
 - i. An Economic Plan for Cherwell district
 - ii. A masterplan for Bicester town centre.

Monies would be spent according to CDC financial and procurement regulations led by the Regeneration & Growth (R&G) service.

- 1.2 To agree to renew Ambassador status with Experience Oxfordshire (£15k) for 26/27, utilising existing service budgets and to agree to consider allocating funds in future years as part of the budget-setting process.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Regeneration & Growth (R&G) service is seeking to draw down £250k from the Strategic Development Fund reserve to enable commissioning of two key pieces of work as outlined in this report:

- i. A district-wide Economic Plan
- ii. A Bicester town centre masterplan

- 2.2 These commissions will help to position the council strategically, setting out a clear vision and action plan for economic growth as well as a comprehensive framework for one of the district's primary urban centres. This is particularly important given the scale of development envisaged in the Bicester area over the coming years.

Cherwell District Council

- 2.3 R&G will comply with procurement and legal regulations relating to consultant appointments.
- 2.4 R&G is also proposing to renew the council's Ambassador status with Experience Oxfordshire utilising current budgets. This arises due to a previous decision to withdraw membership to release savings. The visitor economy is a critical part of the district's economic potential and it is recommended that this is renewed to support growth of this key sector. This is, however, likely to create an in-year financial pressure on the service.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	<p>I can confirm that there is £400k available of the Strategic Development fund of which £250k will need to be a request for use of reserves to fund £150k to commission external consultants to carry out the work relating to the masterplan for Bicester town centre and £100k for Economic Plan for Cherwell district. The £15k for Ambassador membership with Experience Oxfordshire will be met within existing budget for 26/27, however, this will need to be addressed as part of the future budgeting process.</p> <p>Kimberley Digweed, Finance Business Partner, 20 May 2026.</p>
Legal	<p>There are no legal implications arising directly as a result of this report.</p> <p>The report notes that if allocated the funding will be spent in accordance with the relevant procurement rules and spending decisions will be made in line with CDC's scheme of delegation.</p> <p>The report does not specify who will be making the final decision on appointing contractors or spending decisions around the funding and so it is important that this is kept in mind should the money be allocated.</p> <p>The report provides a series of deliverables for the success of the spending to be measured against and it is important for the Council to interrogate these and ensure that the funding is meeting its set aims.</p> <p>Denzil – John Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 11 May 2026</p>
Risk Management	<p>These commissions are proposed in part to mitigate a risk that our urban centres are not treated equally, as well as the need to ensure that economic growth is reflected spatially and with future changes (such as LGR) in mind.</p>

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?				N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				N/A
Climate & Environmental Impact				N/A
ICT & Digital Impact				N/A
Data Impact				N/A
Procurement & subsidy				N/A
Council Priorities	<p>Economic prosperity. Delivery of a district-wide Economic Plan will enable the council to understand challenges alongside economic growth opportunities, identifying deliverable actions that seek to enhance economic prosperity across Cherwell.</p> <p>Quality housing and place making. A robust place-based masterplan will support quality place-making, ensuring that our key centres can benefit from planned growth and support delivery of a focused and more holistic approach.</p>			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	Any implications for CDC assets will be considered during this commission with substantive input from Property service as required.			
Consultation & Engagement	N/A – appropriate stakeholder engagement will take place during each of the respective commissions.			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 In the 2026/27 budget, the council established a Strategic Development Fund of £0.400m, which has been made available for planning and investigatory work for strategic projects across the district.
- 3.2 Regeneration & Growth is seeking a £250k allocation to undertake two specific commissions as described in this report:
- i. To develop a district-wide Economic Plan for Cherwell; and
 - ii. A Masterplan for Bicester town centre.
- 3.3 These commissions will help to position the council ahead of future LGR, setting out a clear vision and action plan for economic growth as well as a comprehensive framework for one of the district's primary urban centres. This is particularly important given the scale of development envisaged in the Bicester area over the coming years.
- 3.4 It is also proposed to renew the council's Ambassador status with Experience Oxfordshire. This has arisen due to a previous decision of the Council to withdraw from this membership to release savings. We are requesting this is reviewed due to the increased importance of the visitor economy in the district as described in the report.

4. Details

- 4.1 During 2025 the council embedded an area-based approach to growth through the creation of Area Oversight Groups (AOGs) for Bicester, Banbury and Kidlington (Five Parishes).
- 4.2 This area-based approach strives to take a holistic view of the development and infrastructure needs in each area and seek to ensure that local representatives can understand proposed growth and assist in shaping infrastructure responses. Each area has the core AOG that meets on a quarterly basis, with a secretariat function provided by the R&G service.
- 4.3 One of the core roles envisaged through the area-based approach was to develop a medium to long-term vision for the area, reviewing and monitoring the delivery of critical infrastructure, engaging with local communities and businesses, and actively seeking to attract inward investment. These objectives are being actively pursued.

Developing Frameworks and Masterplans

- 4.4 For the Kidlington area, the council is working with the Oxfordshire Growth Commission and Homes England in the development of an 'area framework'; a masterplan is being developed for Banbury in partnership with Oxfordshire County

Council; and so it is recommended that the Council allocates resources to develop a Bicester masterplan.

- 4.5 The town centre of Bicester requires a comprehensive masterplan to complement the established framework guiding North West Bicester Eco Town, which benefits from a clear Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and masterplan. While North West Bicester is being delivered through a coordinated, vision-led approach, the town centre is at risk of evolving in a more fragmented and reactive way. A wider masterplan for Bicester would ensure that it develops with the same level of strategic coherence, aligning regeneration, land use, and infrastructure with the wider ambitions for Bicester. As part of the Homes England work in North Bicester the SPD is being reviewed and proposals developed as to how the plans could evolve, this could be incorporated within a unified Bicester masterplan.
- 4.6 A town centre masterplan is particularly important to ensure integration between new and existing communities. As North West Bicester delivers significant housing and employment growth, the town centre will play a critical role as a social, cultural, and commercial hub. Without a clear plan, there is a risk that the centre will not adapt to meet the needs of a growing population, leading to missed opportunities for vitality and footfall. A coordinated vision would strengthen connections - physical, economic, and social—between the eco-town and the historic core, ensuring that growth on the edge of Bicester reinforces rather than competes with the centre.
- 4.7 There is a need to address the changing role of town centres in response to shifting retail patterns and economic pressures. With the continued success of Bicester Village drawing significant visitor numbers, the traditional retail function of the town centre must evolve to benefit from this economic growth. The masterplan will assess how connectivity and the wider offer of the town can better integrate with the success of Bicester Village and the growth taking place outside the town centre.
- 4.8 A masterplan would provide the framework to diversify uses - such as leisure, residential, cultural, and community spaces - helping to create a more resilient and attractive destination. This would enable the centre to complement, rather than compete with, existing retail anchors while capturing more of the economic benefit generated locally.
- 4.9 R&G service is requesting £150k allocation from the Strategic Development Fund which would be used to commission external consultants. This budget is slightly lower than used recently by Oxfordshire County Council to procure consultants for the Banbury Masterplan but reflects expectations of likely cost for a Bicester Masterplan, given existing work that has been undertaken in Bicester.
- 4.10 The Masterplan would develop a strategic spatial framework vision for Bicester's future that should seek to:
- Position the town as a strong destination for both investment and sustainable growth
 - Identify how key sites could be redeveloped to support regeneration
 - Propose how movement and connectivity should be improved to unlock both town centre and edge of town development sites

- Provide a route map and delivery plan for transformation that identifies deliverable interventions that will act as a catalyst for change to create a healthy, sustainable and prosperous place.

4.11 It should be a joined-up strategy for Bicester that is commercial and deliverable and attracts investment from both the private and public sectors.

4.12 Specific deliverables are likely to include:

- **Stage 1: Baseline Insights and Benchmarking.** This will focus on spatial analytics and will involve a review of the strengths and weaknesses of Bicester as a place. It should benchmark Bicester versus comparable towns.
- **Stage 2: Vision.** This will develop a distinct, focused and ambitious vision statement for Bicester, setting out a deliverable vision for a healthy, sustainable and economically resilient place for all. A set of specific and measurable objectives should be created to support and guide delivery and ambition (for example GDP per capita, productivity, health and social metrics). It would use existing CDC governance and networks as well as direct stakeholder engagement with councillors, officers and members of the Bicester Area Oversight Group, and Portfolio Holders to align thinking and inform the output.
- **Stage 3: Framework Masterplan.** This will deliver a long-term spatial masterplan to guide Bicester's growth and development. It will align with the town's vision and objectives, seeking to identify areas of focus to drive high-impact and meaningful change. The output will provide a blueprint to support decision-making, prioritise investment and establish clear parameters for development. It will seek to address key themes, likely to include land use, housing and economic growth, strategic movement and connectivity, green and blue infrastructure, sustainability and climate impact, health and wellbeing, and infrastructure needs.
- **Stage 4: Delivery Action Plan.** This would establish a clear and actionable delivery plan for Bicester, outlining short, medium and longer-term steps to unlock regeneration opportunities. This stage will include defined milestones, success metrics and a recommended monitoring framework to track progress. The plan will detail priority projects, which may include both new and previously explored projects, all underpinned by robust evidence. It will align with existing local and national strategic objectives and seek to incorporate a comprehensive financial strategy to support implementation, as well as for delivering social value and investment in community infrastructure.

4.13 The masterplan and action plan combined will tie together different and sites within a cohesive and long-term framework which will provide commitment and confidence in the place.

An Economic Plan for Cherwell

4.14 The creation of a Cherwell Economic Plan is part of the Annual Delivery Plan for the Council and will aid area-based economic development activity, the wider work of the Council and engagement with external stakeholders and businesses. It will set out a strong vision for economic growth, providing a robust and evidence-led action plan to deliver prosperity within the district. Given Local Government Reform (LGR), it is imperative that this Plan is outward-looking and recognises the levers that the council has but additionally where others may be better placed to deliver.

- 4.19 Developing a Cherwell Economic Plan is important because the district has a distinct economic profile within Oxfordshire that requires locally tailored priorities and interventions. Cherwell's economy is more heavily weighted toward foundational sectors such as logistics, retail, manufacturing and visitor economy activity, alongside emerging strengths in advanced manufacturing, clean tech and future mobility linked to assets such as Motorsport Valley and Bicester Motion. This Plan will build upon visitor economy and high streets-specific work that is ongoing.
- 4.20 Without a clear strategy, there is a risk that growth remains fragmented or overly dominated by lower-value activity, rather than being deliberately shaped to support higher productivity, better-paid jobs and a more resilient economic base. A Cherwell strategy will provide a coherent narrative about what kind of growth the district wants, where it should happen, and how existing strengths can be upgraded.
- 4.21 The strategy will become more valuable in the context of LGR. Even with all the planning being undertaken, structural change can weaken economic leadership, disrupt established delivery arrangements and create uncertainty for investors, businesses and partners. A well-articulated Cherwell Economic Plan provides strategic continuity through that change, acting as a shared reference point for officers, members and external stakeholders regardless of future governance arrangements. It helps ensure that Cherwell's economic priorities are clearly understood and not lost within wider reorganisation or emerging regional-level structures.
- 4.22 As new powers, funding mechanisms and delivery vehicles emerge post-LGR, areas with robust evidence base and a clear set of economic priorities will be best placed to attract investment, secure devolved funding and negotiate their role within wider economic partnerships. A Cherwell Economic Plan signals readiness, ambition and clarity of purpose, ensuring the district can advocate effectively for the interventions needed to secure inclusive, sustainable growth during and beyond local government reform.
- 4.23 Specific deliverables are likely to include:
- **Visioning:** setting out a shared long-term economic vision for Cherwell, its principal places and rural hinterland alongside its role within wider economic geographies both pre and post-LGR, aligned to the Cherwell Local Plan.
 - **Growth Plan:** setting out economic roles for our key centres, as well as identification of priority sectors, clusters and supply chains that can best contribute to long-term prosperity and future targeted approaches that will help stimulate job creation and business investment.
 - **Delivery Plan:** creating an implementable delivery plan setting out priorities, responsibilities, indicative costs / funding routes and proposed governance. This plan will have regard to the levers that the council has to deliver economic growth and will recognise that, where external stakeholders may be best placed to deliver, the role of the council and its successor authority needs to be clearly defined.
 - **Monitoring & Evaluation Framework:** setting out an action plan with robust KPIs to track progress in delivering the vision, as well as recommended mechanisms for refreshing the action plan on an annual basis.
- 4.24 R&G is seeking £100k allocation from the Strategic Development Fund to cover the commissioning of external consultants to prepare a strategy and actionable delivery

plan. This would go out to tender, so if the funding is not fully utilised any underspend could be returned to the Strategic Development Fund.

Ambassador Status with Experience Oxfordshire

- 4.25 As part of previous savings targeted by the Council, it was decided that retaining the council's Ambassador status with Experience Oxfordshire (EO) was no longer a priority and this budget line item was removed. R&G are requesting this decision to be reconsidered. Ambassador status is important because the visitor economy plays a vital role in supporting local businesses, jobs, and community development across the district. It is relatively low-cost c£15k per annum. This would allow us to renew membership this year and consider how to fund membership in the wider budget setting cycle.
- 4.26 In 2024, there were almost 6.7 million visitors to Cherwell district supporting around 10% of all employment in the district and generating spend of almost £500m. It is a critical economic sector that must be supported. Retaining membership is only one part of a strategy to maximise the economic benefits of this sector. As previously been reported a visitor and high street strategy is being developed with the support of EO, and retaining ambassador status will be essential in anchoring and embedding the strategy.
- 4.27 By promoting the area's attractions, heritage, and hospitality, ambassadors help increase tourism, which brings in revenue and strengthens the local economy. Their knowledge and enthusiasm also ensure visitors have a positive experience, encouraging repeat visits and enhancing Cherwell's reputation as a welcoming destination. Being fully part of Experience Oxfordshire going forward will harness their organisation and other ambassadors to the betterment of the district's economy. Hence the recommendation to renew our membership.
- 4.28 It is proposed to renew membership for 26/27 utilising current R&G budgets. This would result in an in-year financial pressure on the service. It is recommended that consideration be given to the inclusion of Ambassadorship contributions in future budget-setting processes.

Proposed Strategic Development Fund Allocations

- 4.29 The council in the budget for 26/27 established a Strategic Development Fund of £0.400m for planning and investigatory work for strategic projects across the district. R&G is seeking a £250k allocation to undertake work on an economic strategy for Cherwell District and a Bicester Masterplan as per the rationale described above.

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 not proceed with the development of an Economic Plan for Cherwell and a Bicester Masterplan. This alternative would not provide a good foundation for the delivery of the council plans of the coming years or foundation blocks as LGR is enacted.

Option 2: Do not proceed with the development of a Bicester Masterplan. This is likely to lead to a more fragmented approach to development and not address the needs of existing communities.

Option 3: Do not proceed with the development of an Economic Plan for Cherwell. As Option 1, this would not provide a good foundation block ahead of LGR and would not meet the action set out in the Annual Delivery Plan.

Option 4: Do not proceed with renewal of Ambassador status with Experience Oxfordshire. This is likely to have a detrimental effect on efforts to support and grow the visitor economy in Cherwell, as referenced by current work to develop a Visitor Economy and High Streets Strategy.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 This report seeks to agree to an allocation from the Strategic Development Fund of £250k to commission:

- i. An Economic Plan for Cherwell district
- ii. A masterplan for Bicester town centre.

Monies would be spent according to CDC financial and procurement regulations led by the Regeneration & Growth (R&G) service.

6.2 The report also seeks to agree to renew Ambassador status with Experience Oxfordshire (£15k) for 26/27, utilising existing service budgets and to agree to consider allocating funds in future years as part of the budget-setting process.

6.3 The proposed commissions will help to position the council ahead of future LGR, setting out a clear vision and action plan for economic growth as well as a comprehensive framework for one of the district's primary urban centres. This is particularly important given the scale of development envisaged in the Bicester area over the coming years.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected.	Economic Plan – all wards Bicester Masterplan - Bicester East, Bicester North and Caversfield, Bicester South and Ambrosden, Bicester West. EO Ambassador – all wards

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	None
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Peter Sharp, Head of Regeneration and Growth
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Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Executive Director for Place and Regeneration, Ian Boll, 21 May 2026