



Making 'NW Bicester' a reality

A Statement from Cherwell District Council
16th July

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DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Introduction

The Government has today named NW Bicester, Cherwell District Council's proposal for a 5,000-home eco-development at Bicester, as one of the new eco-town locations in the Eco-Towns Planning Policy Statement (PPS).

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Cherwell District Council has, with all-party support, promoted NW Bicester to Government because it believes that the building of an exemplar eco-town in this location offers an opportunity to re-position Bicester as a place where new communities are built to high environmental standards and where people across the town enjoy more sustainable lifestyles built on features such as first-rate public transport and zero-carbon technology.

Details of the evolution of the NW Bicester eco-development concept are available from the council's website section on eco-towns (www.cherwell.gov.uk/ecotowns). Web references for all the specific eco town documents mentioned in this statement can be found through this link.

The scheme for a larger, freestanding, eco-town at Weston-on-the-Green (known as Weston Otmoor) has been rejected by Government.

Cherwell District Council campaigned against Weston Otmoor from the start because of the threat it posed to the future vitality and viability of Bicester and Kidlington and the adverse impact it would have had on the surrounding environment.

In promoting NW Bicester the council placed some caveats on its support, summarised in the *Ten Point Plan* for Bicester which is reproduced at the end of this document. One of the most important pre-conditions which the council made was that the Government would need to invest significantly in the future of Bicester. In light of the progress we have already seen against many aspects of the *Ten Point Plan*, the further support we are expecting in the short-term, and the investment of up to £10million growth point funding we anticipate from the Government, Cherwell District Council is committed to working with local communities and partners at national, regional and local levels to realise the vision for NW Bicester and, with it, the council's ambitions for Bicester as a whole.

This document summarises the approach that Cherwell District Council will now take to make NW Bicester a reality.



Development of the NW Bicester concept

Halcrow study

In December 2008 Cherwell District Council commissioned independent consultants Halcrow to establish whether the concept of an eco-development at NW Bicester is practical and viable. Halcrow concluded that it is and identified a number of possibilities to integrate this new community with the rest of Bicester. Halcrow's report became part of our submission to Government alongside the *Ten Point Plan*.

However, as the *Ten Point Plan* makes clear, this study was a high-level piece of work that required further detail and land owner participation to implement. Some significant further work has been undertaken since the council's submission to Government in March.

Transport strategy

Cherwell District Council acknowledged in the *Ten Point Plan* that there was more work to be done on NW Bicester's transport strategy and commissioned Halcrow to do this. Halcrow's updated report, published today, examines the overall transport strategy for the development and includes ideas for a much-improved bus network and other measures to encourage more environmentally-friendly travel in the town. The update looks in more detail at the idea of constructing a public transport link between NW Bicester and Bicester North railway station by running a guided bus along the railway embankment to within a very short walk of the current railway station. This idea has potential, but more work needs to be done to understand operational and financial viability. Now that we have confirmation of NW Bicester's inclusion in the Eco-Towns PPS, Cherwell District Council will talk in more detail to Chiltern Railways and other rail industry bodies about how this link might be realised.

Landowners and prospective developers

Cherwell District Council is very pleased to be in early discussions with P3Eco about their interest in facilitating the development of NW Bicester to the PPS requirements. P3Eco Ltd is a newly-formed company created to fund and facilitate eco-developments throughout the UK. P3Eco has established a consortium of well-respected partners to work on the NW Bicester project, including masterplanning architect Sir Terry Farrell, internationally renowned engineers Arup, Eco2H2O, (whose eco-house design featured prominently at the recent national Grand Designs exhibition) and A2Dominion, a housing association with a strong presence in Oxfordshire. P3Eco has also established a partnership with Oxford Brookes University which has substantial capability in sustainable development.

The consortium has begun to develop its proposals for an eco-settlement on the site within the context of an eco-led regeneration of Bicester as a whole. This will include proposals for bringing new employment to Bicester, including jobs in the new eco-industries and businesses which will offer substantial employment growth opportunities in the years ahead.

The consortium's interest was expressed to the Government last month in a letter which makes it clear that owners of some of the largest landholdings on the site are prepared to consider putting their land forward to become part of the eco-development. This is good news and confirms our view that we can anticipate a start to development without a need to consider direct public-sector intervention or compulsory purchase.

Now we have confirmation of NW Bicester's inclusion in the PPS, we will begin more detailed discussions with P3Eco about their vision for NW Bicester, its integration with the rest of the town and the arrangements we can make to work together to ensure the best possible design and implementation

plan for this development. The aim will be to satisfy the PPS requirements by building in the highest environmental standards.

An early step in this work will be the production of a "masterplan" for the site and for its integration with the rest of Bicester. This plan will be the subject of substantial consultation locally to ensure that the ideas and concerns of communities living in the surrounding area are heard. The masterplan will provide the basis for an outline planning application for the whole eco-development.

Cherwell District Council also intends to work with P3Eco to bring forward proposals for an early 'demonstration' phase of development that could start quickly while fitting within the overall masterplan. This small first phase of development would not only bring to life the look and feel of NW Bicester but will present a real opportunity to help close the gap in planned affordable housing which has been opened up by the recession.

The planning process

Where NW Bicester fits

Housing growth requirements in Cherwell are enshrined in the South East Plan. This was published in its final form in May 2009. It confirmed that 6,400 new homes are required in Bicester and its surrounding area by 2026. These numbers flow directly into Cherwell's Local Development Framework (LDF).

Cherwell District Council had been working on this basis when in 2008 it consulted on a number of options for the location of future housing growth in Bicester. This consultation finished in November 2008, when we put the decision-making on hold while we waited for the publication of the Eco-Towns PPS. In light of confirmation of NW Bicester's inclusion (and the likelihood that 3,000 homes will be built in NW Bicester by 2026) we can now complete the work on our LDF Core Strategy. This will propose

the location of development in the district, covering details of how housing requirements in Cherwell as a whole will be met, including phasing. The council's executive will consider a draft strategy in the autumn and we anticipate submitting the final LDF Core Strategy to Government in spring/summer 2010.

The work to complete the LDF Core Strategy will take account of all the views we received in 2008, although the submissions we had then will have to be considered in light of the Eco-Towns PPS. The PPS's designation of NW Bicester as an eco-town location makes the development part of national planning policy and, as a result, a fixed input to our LDF Core Strategy. The LDF is of course the mechanism through which we will promote higher eco-standards for all new housing in Bicester to deliver our aspiration to see more of the town meet such standards.

The timing of any planning application(s) for the site will depend on the progress made by P3Eco, Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and other partners working together on the masterplan and supporting planning agreements. Given the scale and nature of the work that still needs to be done, it is unlikely that we will receive a planning application for the whole site for at least 12 months. However, we will almost certainly need to determine a planning application before the formal adoption of the LDF Core Strategy which is likely to happen in 2011/12.

Local consultation

Our LDF Core Strategy and planning applications will be subject to full consultation. This will give parish councils and local people the opportunity to make representations about the detail of what is being proposed. We intend to start working with partners immediately on preparing the plans for NW Bicester and are committed to intensive and detailed consultation. This consultation will start with the NW Bicester masterplan.

A 'new deal' for Bicester

'Growth Point' funding

The *Ten Point Plan* looks for substantial growth point funding for Bicester to help provide infrastructure improvements before NW Bicester is built. The Government has confirmed that new 'Growth Point' funding has been ring fenced as "pump priming" money for the approved eco-town locations. Like the other eco-town locations we now need to make a bid to Government for a share of these funds. We are expecting details of the bidding process shortly and will work with partners locally to develop our bid. We need to see that the final amount awarded to Bicester is in line with our expectations of around £10million.

Cross-Government investment in Bicester

Since our submission of NW Bicester as a potential eco development in March, Cherwell District Council has had discussions directly with a number of Government departments and agencies. At the same time we have seen much evidence of the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Government Office South East (GOSE) working to foster cross-Government discussions about Bicester and its needs. We have continued to engage the South England East Development Agency (SEEDA) in our thinking. The *Ten Point Plan* seeks action by individual Government departments and a co-ordinated approach to their investment in the town:

- **Oxford to Bicester rail improvements:** Chiltern Railways are pursuing an ambitious and welcome range of improvements. We look forward to hearing that the Government proposes to accept these and support their implementation.
- **Changes to Junction 9 of the M40 and/or consideration of a Junction 9a:** Now that it is clear that Weston Otmoor will not be going

ahead we anticipate that the Department for Transport will re-instate the plans already worked up for the enhancement of Junction 9 and schedule this work into their programme. The very recent announcement of a smaller scheme to improve traffic flow is welcome but this does not release the capacity required for the ongoing development of Bicester's new business park and other employment areas. Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council are meeting with the Department for Transport in August and we anticipate confirmation then of their plans.

- **Integration of Home Office and Ministry of Defence Plans for Bicester.** We have been in discussion with both these departments since March. We are awaiting confirmation of whether the secure asylum centre planned at Bullingdon will be the first to be built by the Government. We continue discussions with the Ministry of Defence about the medium to long-term plans for their various landholdings in the town. We are pleased to have been able to meet Kevan Jones, MP, under secretary of state for defence and minister for veterans, in May and have other meetings with the Ministry of Defence already scheduled over the next few weeks.

We know the Government is intending to make help available to each eco-town location in areas such as economic development, green technology, innovation in education and social services provision, and institutional structures for community building and governance. We will explore the detail of what is on offer in order to maximise the support which comes to Bicester.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is now of particular importance to us as it will take on responsibility for the delivery of eco-towns and the associated programme of national support now that CLG's policy work is finished.

We are already working with CLG, the HCA and Government Office for the South East to bring a range of Government departments, agencies and local partners together at a Bicester summit

in early autumn. We hope that this and a number of associated meetings will ensure that plans for Bicester and its infrastructure are developed in a co-ordinated way and to a timetable that fits with the development of NW Bicester.

Delivering NW Bicester

Affordable housing

In the *Ten Point Plan* we indicated our concern that the housing numbers of any eco development must not be just added to Cherwell's housing requirement. We have been reassured that NW Bicester's 5,000 homes will "count" towards the requirements in the South East Plan. The provision of affordable housing to meet Cherwell's local needs remains a priority for NW Bicester. We have already started discussions with the HCA and P3Eco's Housing Association partner A2Dominion and will now accelerate these.

Delivery arrangements

It is Cherwell District Council's intention to put in place special partnership arrangements for the delivery of NW Bicester. This is in recognition not only of the project's scale but also of its special nature in terms of its provenance, its influence on the wellbeing and growth of Bicester and its surrounding communities, and its position in the national (and maybe even international) spotlight. The council also wants to lead a programme of strong engagement with local stakeholders and the public by all the delivery partners.

It is also Cherwell District Council's intention to ensure that the development is delivered in the most cost-effective way by effectively joining up private and public sector resources and by leveraging the expertise of existing organisations. The council wants to see as much of the available resource as possible spent on the ground in Bicester to deliver the

eco-town vision, with the least amount spent on new delivery structures.

Strong leadership and sound co-ordination of partners' efforts will be needed. To this end, and in anticipation of today's decision, Cherwell District Council's executive has already resolved to consider establishing a small, single-purpose councillor committee charged with all the decision making on implementation issues for the development area of north west Bicester. Led by Cherwell District Council, this committee, working with Oxfordshire County Council and Bicester Town Council, will facilitate effective local decision-making.

Cherwell District Council is seeking direct involvement of Government in the committee through the co-option of key agencies, to include the HCA, the South East England Development Agency, Government Office for the South East, and other relevant Government bodies and agencies.

Cherwell District Council will be establishing a dedicated, multi-disciplinary team to provide project management, administrative and technical support for the committee. We will be talking to local, regional and national partners about how they contribute to the work of this team, through secondments, funding or other support.

The council is also exploring appropriate mechanisms for engaging with the private sector on the implementation of NW Bicester – initially for liaison and eventually for formal partnership and agreements.

Outline timetable

Autumn 2009

- Local Launch Summit – examining ideas for a demonstration project and Government investment in Bicester
- Establish local delivery partnerships and mechanisms (special purpose committee)
- Firm up Government support and funding

Winter 2009/10

- Consultation on masterplan

Summer 2010

- Submission of LDF Core Strategy including NW Bicester
- Earliest possible date for partnership committee approval of masterplan and detailed planning application for demonstration project

Autumn 2010

- Earliest possible start on-site for the demonstration project

Winter 2010

- Outline planning application for whole site based on approved masterplan

Summer 2011

- Earliest likely start on-site for phased development including infrastructure investment and related whole of Bicester community initiatives

2011/12

- LDF Core Strategy approved

Conclusion

We are issuing this statement on the day of the Government's publication of the Eco-Towns PPS. We now need to consider the full detail of the Government's new policy and develop our own plans in detail with our partners. However, we are confident that the thinking and work we have already done in anticipation of the Government's decision will provide a robust foundation for our work to make NW Bicester a reality over the next weeks, months and years. In the autumn, after the planned Bicester summit, we will be publishing a detailed timetable for the work we lay out above, including the planned consultations with local people and businesses.

Ten point plan for Bicester

This council supports the inclusion of the NW Bicester location (as defined and presented through the council's NW Bicester Eco-Town Concept Study – Draft February 2009) in the Government's Eco-Towns Programme and Planning Policy Statement, but only with the following caveats:

Status and content of the concept study

- 1.** That the NW Bicester concept study is regarded as illustrative only. A formal planning brief will be prepared and approved by Cherwell District Council as local planning authority and final detailed plans for the development are also decided by Cherwell District Council.
- 2.** That NW Bicester is being put forward as an alternative to the Weston Otmoor scheme and that Weston Otmoor does not go forward as a programme/PPS identified location.
- 3.** Development at the NW Bicester location is to be planned in detail and brought forward for implementation within a context set by Cherwell's Local Development Framework (LDF), thus allowing for cohesive and sustainable planning of Bicester as a whole. This approach does not rule out other housing (including eco-housing) developments being assessed through the LDF.
- 4.** That we acknowledge that there is much more detailed work to do to develop this concept and to consult on it. Specifically, in the short-term we need to develop the thinking on the transport strategy, including the potential of a direct link between the site and Bicester North

Continued overleaf

Ten point plan for Bicester (continued)

railway station. There is also much more discussion to be had with landowners and prospective developers. However, we are confident that early discussions have confirmed the potential for the development of an eco-extension to NW Bicester on this site.

A 'new deal' for Bicester

5. That Government provides a "new deal" for Bicester in the form of substantial and continuing financial support for the Eco-Town development - through a partnership with Cherwell District Council and Bicester Town Council that undertakes to channel significant growth point funding to the town as a precursor to housing expansion.
6. That Government also delivers a joined up approach to accelerate cross-Government investment in the Bicester area including Oxford to Bicester rail improvements, changes to J9 of the M40 and/or consideration of a J9a, and integration of Home Office and Ministry of Defence plans for Bicester. This should also include the work and plans of Government agencies such as the Learning and Skills Council (or its successor).

Policy support for delivery of national and local priorities

7. That Government provides clear policy and decision-making support to make the eco-town standards set out in the PPS achievable.
8. That housing numbers provided in Cherwell via the eco towns programme will count towards SE Plan Regional Spatial Strategy housing requirements for the district (as distinct from being part of any wider sub-regional commitment).
9. That all social rented (RSL) housing provided will be on the basis of grant of nomination rights to CDC.

Delivery

10. That the delivery of NW Bicester is led and controlled by Cherwell District Council supported by formal agreements with Government and its agencies, to include the Homes and Communities Agency and allocated funds for affordable housing.

The information in this document can be made available in other languages, large print braille, audio tape or electronic format on request. Please contact 01295 227001

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać. 01295 227001

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如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。01295 227001

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