

Design and access

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1.2.5 Other technical documents deal with wider issues, such as planning policy (the planning statement), the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process, the environmental statement (ES) and detailed issues associated with access and movement (the transport assessment). These documents are referenced throughout this statement as and when further technical details are considered to be useful in the understanding of the proposals.

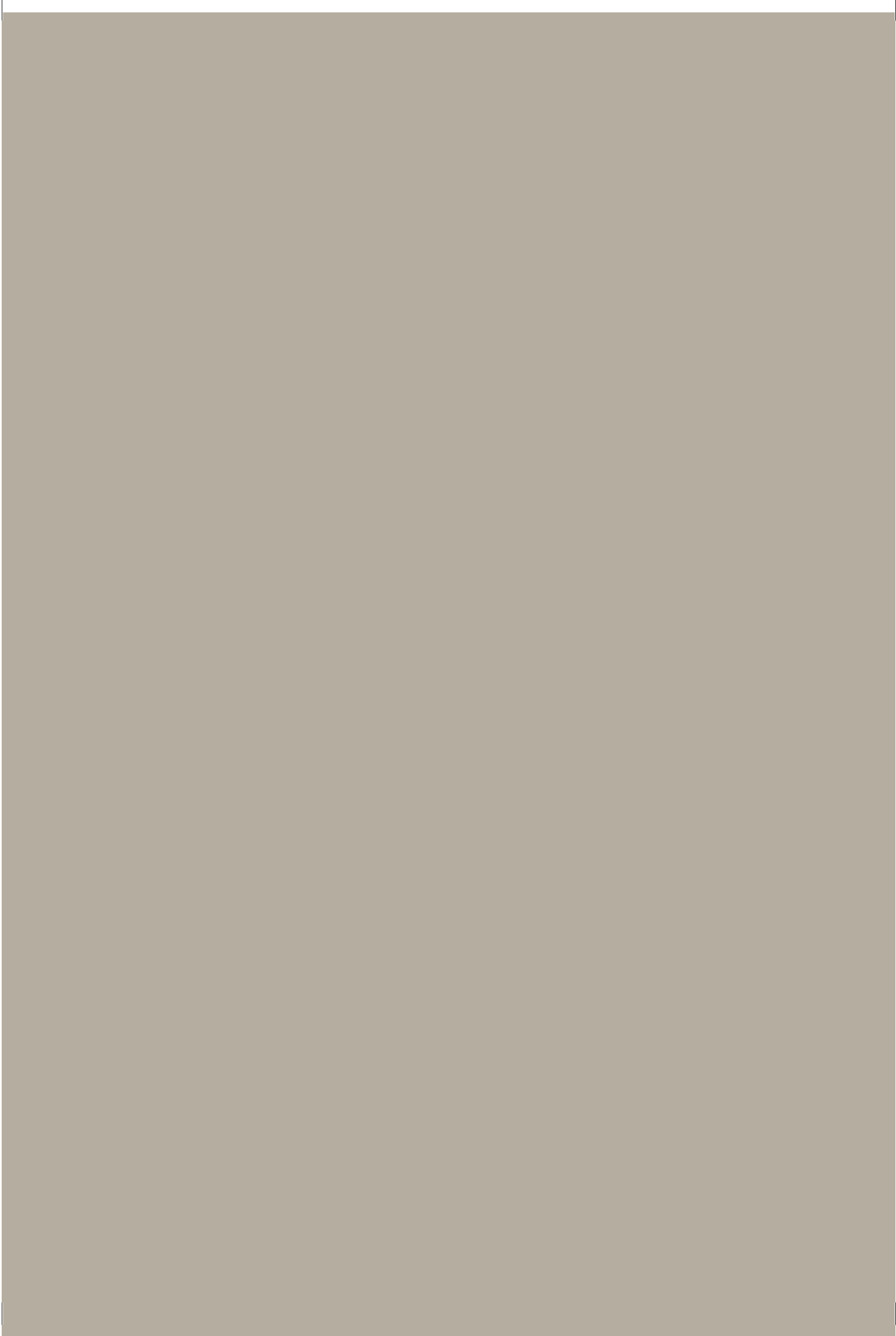
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The Whitelands Farm complex in the centre of the site



Market Square and the church tower, Bicester



2 Assessment and evaluation

2.1 Physical context

2.1.1 The assessment covered the site and its surroundings, Bicester and surrounding villages. This analysis contributes to the understanding of the nature of Bicester and surrounding villages aiming to inform the appropriate design and access of future development.

The Bicester context

2.1.2 Bicester is an attractive market town with a lively mixed-use centre located in the heart of Oxfordshire, close to the M40 motorway, midway between London and Birmingham. The town's development has mainly been focused along the

principal historic routes, which bisect at the town's market square. Along these main routes, the urban form has primarily consisted of terraced buildings, rich in detail and using a wide range of materials including render, brick and stone. The continuity of building form creates an intimate sense of enclosure along these main routes.

2.1.3 Bicester has a network of secondary routes radiating from the main routes. These develop into a complex and irregular pattern of narrow lanes, fronted by semi-detached buildings, which lead out to green open spaces. Outside of the core central area, are a series of suburbs with local centres that provide residents with a variety of services and facilities.



Church Lane in Bicester town centre

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Church Lane in Bicester town centre

2.1.4 The history of Bicester goes back to Saxon times. Its origins are as a market town which grew up at the junction where the Banbury, London and Oxford roads met. For much of the last 300 years, Bicester remained a small market town with little change in its size or scale. However, the town has experienced rapid growth over the last 50 years, without the commensurate growth in services and facilities. The town centre is much the same size today as it was 300 years ago, yet the size of the settlement is much greater. This rapid growth is shown in the sequence of diagrams.

2.1.5 The proposed development at south west Bicester, while expanding the town further still, is an opportunity to redress this balance and provide a range of services to benefit the whole town.

2.1.6 The assessment of Bicester revealed the following positive features, primarily found in the older parts of town, that the master plan has drawn on for inspiration:

- An area rich in detail and character
- A diverse range of building types creating continuous frontage
- A clear distinction between public and private space
- A good definition of space generally
- A network of views and vistas
- Good visual mix comprising built-form, stone walls, parks, green open space
- Squares overlooked, good places to watch the world go by
- Different types of space – informal and green; formal, triangular and paved
- Clear gateways that create a sense of arrival
- An intimate sense of enclosure formed by narrow lanes
- Wider expanses of green space on the edge giving a feeling of open country

2.1.7 The assessment also revealed the following negative features, predominantly found in the more recent parts of town. The master plan strives to avoid these features in the design:

- Poor connections between the suburbs and the centre
- Poor internal connections within the suburban areas
- Indirect pedestrian routes that do not feel safe or secure
- Pockets of incidental or uncared for 'left-over' space
- Poor quality edges that 'turn their back' to open country
- Wide fast roads that are difficult for pedestrians to cross
- Housing which fails to face the street, instead leaving backs on display
- Lack of gateways to define entrances and arrival points
- A general visual monotony due to lack of variety in colour, texture and appearance
- Layouts that accommodate the car at the expense of other users
- Lack of visual landmarks and views to aid orientation

2.1.8 Analysis of the different forms of development in Bicester show that the more historic parts provide a better quality living environment.

2.1.9 Development in the last 30 years is mainly in the form of cul-de-sacs, while older parts of Bicester are made up of a series of connected streets and spaces.

2.1.10 This assessment of the town has assisted the master planning process by capturing the essence of different parts of town and providing an easily identifiable guide to the sort of place that should be created by the south-west urban extension.

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