

Land at North West Bicester

Cherwell District Council

Assimilation Strategy

Prepared on behalf of P3Eco (Bicester) Ltd and A2Dominion Group

November 2010

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CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION1

2.0 BICESTER TODAY3

3.0 THE ECO DEVELOPMENT5

4.0 THE EXEMPLAR PHASE8

5.0 CONCLUSIONS 10

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 : SITE LOCATION PLAN

APPENDIX 2 : SPATIAL PHASING PLAN

APPENDIX 3 : LAND USE MASTERPLAN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Land to the north west of Bicester has been identified as the location for an Eco Development comprising circa 5000 dwellings, with associated local employment opportunities and social and community facilities. The proposals will be set out in a master plan and development brief, which will summarise the key elements of the scheme and its implementation.
- 1.2 Planning permission is being sought for an exemplar first phase with subsequent phases to be the subject of applications for planning permission and submissions in respect of the emerging planning policy framework in due course.
- 1.3 The Eco Development will not be a free-standing town, but will serve as an expansion of the existing community of Bicester. As such consideration needs to be given as to how the Eco Development relates to the existing town and the form of the new community and both the Eco Development as the wider community develops.
- 1.4 Cherwell District Council (CDC) in conjunction with other stakeholders that form the Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board have prepared a visioning document entitled 'Eco Bicester – One Shared Vision'. The document seeks to assist in moving Bicester forward to ensure that the anticipated population growth of 10,000 people by 2026 can be accommodated and that physical and social infrastructure is improved to fill the current gaps that lead to out-commuting, unacceptable congestion and insufficient facilities.
- 1.5 That document sets out the vision for Bicester as:

"To create a vibrant Bicester where people choose to live, to work and to spend their leisure time in sustainable ways, achieved by:

- Effecting a town wide transition to a low carbon community triggered by the new eco-development at North West Bicester;**
- Attracting inward investment to provide sustainable jobs and commerce, especially in green technologies;**

- **Offering transport, health and leisure choices while emphasising zero carbon and energy efficiency; and**
- **Ensuring green infrastructure and historic landscapes, biodiversity, water, flood and waste issues are managed in an environmentally sustainable way’.**

1.6 This note seeks to set out how the Eco Development will evolve into a new community and how it will relate to and be assimilated with the existing community thereby assisting in achieving the overall vision for Bicester. The objective is for the Eco Development to act as a catalyst for regeneration of the existing town and together, to take Bicester into the 21st century as a thriving community, offering a range of residential, employment and leisure opportunities which respects the physical and psychological links to its historic centre.

1.7 In order to identify how the community will function in the future, it is necessary to understand how Bicester functions today, the projections for Bicester and the Eco Development, in terms of population and land use and form of development, and the rate at which the Eco Development will develop.

2.0 BICESTER TODAY

- 2.1 Cherwell district as a whole in 2007 had a population of 137,624 of which some 29,850 (21.7%) lived within Bicester (Draft Core Strategy February 2010). The current population of Bicester has experienced a significant increase over the last 30 years during which time only limited works have been undertaken on the social and physical infrastructure. As a direct consequence of this 'Bicester is suffering from high levels of out-commuting, unacceptable congestion and insufficient facilities to support the population' (Eco Bicester – One Shared Vision).
- 2.2 Moving forward it is anticipated that the population of Bicester will rise to circa 40,000 by 2026 which will be brought about through the south west Bicester development (outline consent has been granted for 1,585 units), the construction of the eco-development, and other residential developments that will occur in and around Bicester. As such the District and County Councils and other key stakeholders are anxious to ensure that the social and physical infrastructure is improved to support the new development but also to fill the gaps that currently exist.
- 2.3 Having reviewed the quantum of service provision in and around Bicester ('Social Infrastructure Provision' Document 12) it is clear that there is existing capacity in nearby facilities including:
- Primary Schools;
 - Secondary Schools;
 - GP practices;
 - General Community Facilities;
 - Emergency Services Locations / Facilities; and
 - Open Space Provision.
- 2.4 With regards to employment it is of note that 81% of Cherwell's working age population are economically active and 78% are employed compared to the national average of 77% and 71% respectively and regional averages of 80% and 75%)¹ respectively.

¹ Annual Population Survey, resident analysis averaged 2009-10.

- 2.5 Of those employed, 26.6% work part time, compared to 24.7% nationally, 25.7% regionally and 25.4% across Oxfordshire.² Rates of self employment, as measured in 2001 and 2006-9 are slightly lower than other comparators. Both measures (Census and Annual Population Survey (APS)) estimated that 12% of Cherwell's economically active (Census) and employed (APS) residents were self employed. Rates in England, the South East and Oxfordshire were typically higher.³
- 2.6 Cherwell's residents are less likely to be employed in managerial, professional and associate professional occupations than national and regional averages. This is more pronounced when comparing the district to Oxfordshire generally, which has a high proportion of residents working in these occupational groups. Cherwell residents are more likely to be employed in personal service occupations, process/plant and elementary occupations than other comparators.⁴
- 2.7 As might be expected, the broad sectors of agriculture; distribution, hotels and restaurants; and particularly manufacturing are over-represented in Cherwell. Manufacturing strengths are particularly in evidence in Bicester, where a number of specialist manufacturing sectors are well represented. Retail, wholesale trade, publishing and power/water supply are also strongly represented in the town.⁵

² Annual Population Survey, resident analysis averaged 2006-2009.

³ Census 2001 – Percentage of economically active residents self employed (2001) & Annual Population Survey – percentage of employed residents self-employed (averaged 2006-2009)

⁴ Annual Population Survey, resident analysis averaged 2006-2009.

⁵ Annual Business Inquiry 2008.

3.0 THE ECO DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The Supplement to PPS1 issued in July 2009 identified 4 potential locations for an eco-town, including land at NW Bicester. The Council having promoted NW Bicester is supportive of the principle of bringing forward an Eco Town and the principle of allocating land is identified in the emerging Core Strategy. The PPS1 Supplement sets out a number of criteria to which the Eco Town should respond. In addition, it provides for the promotion of an Exemplar phase.
- 3.2 The emerging Core Strategy identifies over 400 hectares of land to the north west of the town as being the search area for an Eco development. A master plan is being prepared which will set out the principles of development for the wider site whereas the exemplar site (located to the north-west to of this area) equates to 21.1 hectares (the Site).
- 3.3 The site forms part of a swathe of undulating agricultural land that wraps around the north western boundary of Bicester. The eastern boundary of the site is currently denoted by the town's ring road (A4095) which provides indirect road access to the centre of Bicester. To the north the site is bounded by the B4100 which links Bicester with junction 10 of the M40 and the villages in between such as Caversfield and Bainton. To the south are further fields that form part of the wider masterplan area and the B4030 which links the site with Middleton Stoney, and the western boundary is denoted by fields serving the adjoining farms. A rail-line bisects the masterplan site on an east – west axis. Appendix 1 includes a location plan.
- 3.4 In essence, the overall masterplan scheme will seek to provide for:
- A development of 5,000 homes;
 - A development that will be a zero carbon development as defined in the PPS;
 - A high quality local environment taking into account climate change adaptation;
 - Homes that achieve a high level of the Code for Sustainable Homes;

- Access to one employment opportunity for each new dwelling within easy reach by walking, cycling and / or public transport;
- At least 50% of trips originating from the development being made by means other than the car; and
- 40% of the total gross site area will be provided as green space of which half will be public open space.

The Masterplan and Phasing

- 3.5 A masterplan is being prepared which will set out the basis of the proposals and will inform the wider planning strategy. The latest draft of the masterplan is set out in the Masterplan Statement (Document 25).
- 3.6 The development will be brought forward in phases, although the spatial and temporal order of delivery is to be determined apart from the initial exemplar phase that will form the first phase of the overall development. Details of the exemplar phase are set out in section 4 below.
- 3.7 The masterplan is predicated on a polycentric development model, whereby the eco development develops organically centred on four hubs or villages. The phased development of the scheme will therefore be determined by the 'village structure'.
- 3.8 As set out in the Design and Access Statement (Document 24) and the Masterplan Statement (Document 25); each hub or village will contain a range of services and facilities and will be functionally linked to the previous phase(s). The development will draw upon the existing community and the town in terms of services and facilities and will provide new and additional facilities where necessary.
- 3.9 Appendix 2 sets out spatial phasing of the wider proposals (as per the current iteration of the masterplan). It is clear from this that the spatial phasing of the development can evolve over a period of time without the need to rely on any phase occurring in any particular order. For example the exemplar phase could be constructed at the outset with the next element of development not being the rest of that village but in fact another proposed village at the southern end of the site.

- 3.10 Each part of the development needs to support itself with the joint provision of homes, employment, community uses and other ancillary uses but this can be provided for as set out within the masterplan on a per development parcel basis as opposed to through a rigorous order of development.

Implementation and Build Rates

- 3.11 The draft Core Strategy indicates that Cherwell District Council is forecasting 3,200 units would be provided on the overall masterplan site by December 2026. Assuming development starts in June 2011 this will allow 15.5 years for that target to be achieved. Averaged out (on the basis that only 50 units will be provided for in year 1 as set out in section 4 below), this allows 14.5 years to build 3,150 units i.e. an average of 217 units per annum. Of the residential development, 1500 dwellings are forecast to be made available on an affordable basis.
- 3.12 The County Council consider that an overall average occupation of 2.6 persons per dwelling should be assumed for the Eco Development. No evidence has to date been provided on this matter but on the basis of this forecast the following population increase would occur. Assuming 3,200 units will be built by December 2026 the Eco Development will generate by that time a population at the County's estimate of 8,320 persons (564 people per annum assuming a build rate of 217 dwellings per annum) over the same time frame.

Future Villages

- 3.13 In addition to providing the residential units to accommodate the increased population there is a need to ensure that further facilities are provided to complement those developments. For example there is a need for each village to contain employment opportunities, educational facilities, retail units and social and community facilities. These facilities will complement each village and will be provided for as set out within the land use masterplan for which a copy is attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.14 Therefore each application for development will need to be brought forward with the associated infrastructure and non residential uses to complement the residential units to ensure that the provisions for PPS1 are provided for at each stage. Without the non residential development, as without such development the residential elements will not be supported at a local level.

4.0 THE EXEMPLAR PHASE

4.1 The exemplar phase of development that provides for:

“Development of Exemplar Phase of NW Bicester Eco Town to provide for 394 residential units, a nursery of up to 350 square metres (use class D1), a community centre of up to 350 square metres (sui generis), 3 retail units of up to 770 square metres (including but not exclusively a convenience store, a post office and a pharmacy (use class A1)), an Eco-Business Centre of up to 1,800 square metres (use class B1), office accommodation of up to 1,100 square metres (use class B1), an Eco-Pub of up to 190 square metres (use class A4), an energy centre of 400 square metres, and a primary school site measuring up to 1.34 hectares with associated access, car parking, landscape, amenity space and service infrastructure.”

4.2 Of those units, the applicant has indicated that the anticipated build rates for the residential units will be:

Year:	Nos. Completed Units:
1	50
2	100
3	100
4	100
5	43

4.3 In addition to the provision of the residential units there will be the provision of the complementary development including open space, the retail units, the land for the school and the other elements set out in paragraph 3.4 above.

4.4 On the basis that the exemplar phase of 394 units has an average occupancy of 2.6 persons per dwelling the population yield arising will be some 1022 persons. Annualised across the build out rates set out above there will be the following population increase:

Year:	Nos. Completed Units:	Population:
1	50	130
2	100	260
3	100	260
4	100	260
5	43	112

- 4.5 Whilst the non residential uses will not all be provided for at the outset their phased delivery will be promoted as the facilities will complement the residential units as and when they are constructed and the units become available for occupation.
- 4.6 In due course as further elements of the overall eco-development are brought forward the completions per year and population will increase to ensure that the annual target to achieve the 3,200 dwellings by December 2026 is achieved.
- 4.7 In addition to the provision of residential units the application proposals seek to provide a number of facilities that will be for the benefit of both the exemplar development and also the wider Bicester community. In this instance through the exemplar application the following facilities will be provided:
- Retail Units;
 - A Community Centre;
 - Office accommodation;
 - A Nursery; and
 - Land for a Primary School.
- 4.8 In addition subject to other matters being resolved and as set out in the application description and drawings the scheme will also provide for an eco-pub and an eco-business centre.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The development of the exemplar phase will result in an increase in the population of Bicester as set out above, with the exemplar scheme creating an additional population of circa 1,022 persons and the masterplan scheme creating an increase of 8,320 by 2026. This addition to the population along with the population increase brought about through other developments in and around Bicester will have an impact in Bicester and the social and physical infrastructure it contains.
- 5.2 However this eco development seeks to support the population that is created and also some other local residents thereby creating a scheme that will complement Bicester and link in with it rather than forming an independent and isolated development away from the town. Therefore subject to each village providing the land uses as set out within the masterplan it is clear that Bicester will be able to support the increase in population that the development will create through the facilities to be provided therein.
- 5.3 This will be demonstrated through all applications for development at NW Bicester where complimentary uses will be co-located so as to ensure that the wider aspirations of the PPS1 supplement are adhered to throughout.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1
SITE LOCATION PLAN

APPENDIX 2

SPATIAL PHASING PLAN

APPENDIX 3
LAND USE MASTERPLAN