

LAND AT NW BICESTER, CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME

Background

Land to the north west of Bicester was identified by the previous Government as the location for one of four Eco-Towns (See PPS1 Supplement – July 2009). The PPS1 sets out a range of criteria to which Eco-Town proposals should respond. In addition, the PPS1 supplement provides for the promotion of an Exemplar first phase but also confirms that it is for local authorities if they wish to promote an Eco Town or whether its housing requirements can be met by more, more suitable means. The identification of NW Bicester is supported by funding, £9.6m of which has already been awarded and transferred to Cherwell District Council (Cherwell).

Cherwell support the development of an Eco Town at land at NW Bicester. The emerging Core Strategy, which was the subject of consultation at the Preferred Options stage (in February 2010), identified NW Bicester as providing for 5,000 dwellings, with 3,200 to be developed in the period to 2026.

Whilst the Government has now abolished Regional Spatial Strategies and with them, regional based housing requirements, Officers have confirmed the continued support for the Eco Town in meeting the District's housing needs.

Emerging policy NWB1 sets out the Council's proposed policy basis for the promotion of the Eco-Town, including net zero carbon; high quality local environment; achieve Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes; access to one employment opportunity for each new dwelling; at least 50% of trips originating from the development to be made other than by car; and 40% of the total gross site will be areas of green space of which half will be public open space. Representations have been submitted on behalf of P3Eco and we are working with Officers to formulate the final proposed wording.

Programme and Strategy

We have prepared a planning strategy which has been submitted to the Council. The strategy identifies three key levels of work:

- Core Strategy and Policy;
- Master Plan and Whole Site Application;
- The Exemplar Scheme.

A programme has been prepared and is attached. We are entering into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with the Council which will set out the timetable for the submission and consideration of the exemplar application.

Work on the Core Strategy has been delayed in light of the abolition of RSS9. At present, the Council has not yet published a revised timetable or Local Development Scheme.

However, it is the Council's view that the Eco Town and the Exemplar should be promoted in advance of adoption of the Core Strategy (this is provided for in the PPS1 Supplement at para ET 5.2).

In support of the promotion of the site through the Core Strategy, a development brief is being prepared, which will identify the principle of the Eco Town, in terms of phasing, yield, land use and key infrastructure.

Moving forward, the Exemplar application is to be submitted by 4 November 2010 and is scheduled to go before the CDC Planning Committee in late February/early March 2011. For the masterplan application, an application could be submitted for the entire identified site in July 2011 with a decision from CDC due some 14-18 weeks after submission.

Milestones

The key planning milestones can be divided into 2 key groups:

- Policy Milestones: Progression of the LDF and related policy documents;
- Project Milestones: Progression of the masterplan and planning applications.

These are summarised below.

Risks and Uncertainties

The planning risks, as opposed to the project risks (land and viability) include:

- **Review of Planning Policy:** The effect of the abolition of RSS9 is a delay in the preparation of the Core Strategy. The Council may well undertake an assessment of locally generated housing need, which in turn could lead to a review of the strategic housing requirement. Politically, we understand that the Council remains committed to the Eco Town principle and after all, has already received substantial Central Government funding.
- **Competing Sites:** A number of bids for Eco Town status were made to the Government, including Weston on Otmoor in Cherwell. Through the LDF process and potentially via any departure applications, alternative schemes to meet the District's housing requirements may be promoted.
- **Satisfaction of Eco-Town Criteria:** The preparation of the master plan and exemplar application will form the vehicle for testing the application of the Eco Town criteria as set out in the PPS1 Supplement.
- **S106 Costs:** Likewise, the application(s) and master plan will also form the basis of determining s106 and related charges. These costs have not yet been discussed but the exemplar application will incorporate 30% affordable housing, a renewable energy solution, a primary school and is located adjacent to existing facilities and highway routes in Bicester.

We have recommended that the formulation of the master plan and exemplar application is accompanied by a financial model that enables the viability of the scheme to be continually reviewed and modelled.

BARTON WILLMORE
August 2010

June 2010: Submission of Programme;

September 2010: Agreement of PPA;

October 2010: Submission of Exemplar Planning Application and draft master plan;

March 2011: Target for receipt of planning permission for Exemplar scheme;

July 2011: Submission of outline application in respect of master plan;

October 2011: Target for receipt of outline planning permission for the balance of the site.

TBC: Submission of Development Brief to support Core Strategy allocation;

TBC: CDC consultation on submission draft of the Core Strategy;

TBC: Submission of Core Strategy to Secretary of State;

TBC: Examination of Core Strategy;

(Core Strategy submissions to reflect revised Council programme).