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NW Bicester

Testing the Masterplan Brief Workshop

Wednesday 10 April 2013, 9am – 12.30pm

The Littlebury Hotel, Bicester



1. Introduction

This is a short report which summarises the workshop that was held on Wednesday 10 April at the Littlebury Hotel in Bicester. The workshop was organised by Cherwell District Council in partnership with a2dominion (North West Bicester developer) in order to re-activate stakeholder engagement on North West Bicester, ahead of the preparation of the comprehensive masterplan and outline planning application for the site.

The focus of the event was to explore the contents of the draft masterplan brief for the site and to ensure that it reflects the aspirations and intentions of Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Bicester Town Council and other relevant stakeholders.

The final agreed version of the masterplan brief will be used to guide the consultant team who act for the developers of the site in their preparation of the masterplan and outline planning application. It is anticipated that the comments / outcomes from the workshop will influence the final version of the masterplan brief.

2. The Workshop - What we did

The overall facilitator of the event was Henry Cleary, OBE, previously Deputy Director of Housing and Growth at the Department for Communities and Local Government and who has a good knowledge of the project from this previous role.

27 representatives of invited stakeholders, drawn from political, community, business and voluntary organisations in and around Bicester were welcomed to the event by Henry who explained the purpose of the event. Participants then listened to introductory presentations about the development, the masterplan brief and the process towards preparing the masterplan, given by Jenny Barker (CDC) and Iain Painting (Barton Wilmore - the developer's planning consultant).

This was followed by 2 exercises. The first involved 4 groups, each of 6 or 7 participants, moving around 4 tables every 20 minutes to discuss and give their views on the various topics contained within the masterplan brief as set out below:

Table 1:

Green Infrastructure / Biodiversity / Landscape and Historic Environment

Facilitators: Jenny Barker (CDC)/ Claire Mitchell (CDC) and Gary Young (Farrells)

Table 2:

Zero Carbon / Climate Change / Waste / Water / Homes

Facilitators: Andy Edwards (Bioregional) / Azul Strong (CDC) / Iain Painting (Barton Wilmore)

Table 3:

Transport / Employment

Facilitators: Andy Bowe (CDC) / Jacqui Cox (OCC) / Philip Harker (Hyder)

Table 4:

Local services / Community Building and Governance / Healthy Lifestyles

Facilitators: Caroline Clapson (CDC) / Louise Caves (A2D) / Alex Wilson (Barton Wilmore)

Each table was facilitated by an officer from CDC and / or OCC together with representatives from the developer's consultant team. Comments were recorded on large A0 size paper alongside each of the masterplan issues - additional topics which people thought the masterplan should address were added at the bottom of the sheets. People were also free to raise other issues, which although not necessarily directly related to the masterplan, were of relevance to the project as a whole. By the end of this exercise everyone attending would have had an opportunity to make comments on all subject areas covered by the masterplan brief.

After a short break, people were then given 12 sticky dots each and asked to visit each of the tables in turn to place their sticky dots on those items which they considered to be of priority importance for the masterplan to address - 3 dots per person, per table.

The event was concluded with a final short presentation by Jenny Barker setting out the next steps in the process, with Henry Cleary thanking people for their time and input.

Appendix A at the back of this report contains the attendance list including the names of the facilitators.

3. What People Said

This section draws out the key points raised by participants at each table and the results of the priorities exercise. Appendix B at the end of this report contains a transcript of the notes that were taken at each table and so represents a more full account of the discussions.

Table 1: Green Infrastructure / Biodiversity / Landscape and Historic Environment

The issues which attracted discussion and comment at this table were:

- **The aim of providing a local nature reserve.** People were keen to make sure that any provision would be based on an awareness of existing wildlife / conditions. They also gave examples of other successful local nature reserves and wanted to ensure that there would be access to wild areas within the reserve.
- **Accessible formal space for sports with the majority to be located near the secondary school site.** People were concerned that any provision should be complementary to that being planned at the SW Bicester development. They were also concerned that provision should be available ahead of the secondary school and should include swimming facilities, with good access and parking provision designed in at the start.
- **Extend green links from the development through the existing town to create green connecting routes.** People felt the routes should be two-way, from the town to the development as well as vice versa. (A key test of sustainability is the ease with which walkers and cyclists can reach the town centre). These links should include provision for cyclists and walkers, and the recreational role of such routes should be considered. Such routes would need to address the crossing of the railway.

6 additional aims / issues were added to the list of items that the masterplan should address under this heading. They include:

- Long term maintenance needs to be taken into account, including the role of the community and the appropriateness of planting.
- Consideration of locating the open space so that it encourages the integration of the old and new communities.
- Consider how the play space is to be provided - possibly a “Central Park” allowing a range of activity to take place.
- Consider the role of gardens and private space for contributing to biodiversity - also link to the history of the site.

Top 3 Priorities – Dots Exercise	Number of Dots
Protect the existing bio-diversity of the site and provide for a net gain	11
Extend green links from the development through the existing town to create green connecting routes	10
Provide a burial ground	7

Table 2: Zero Carbon / Climate Change / Waste / Water / Homes

The issues which attracted the most discussion and comment at this table were:

- **A place that is distinctive through low energy use and local energy production, achieving zero carbon.** People wanted to see NW Bicester being a catalyst for the benefit of the rest of Bicester. They were also concerned that consideration should be given to the use of more locally produced materials. There was much debate about the term “zero carbon”, with some scepticism as to why it is being targeted and a desire to see a change in terminology to something that is more easily understood e.g. a clearer link to helping people save as energy costs rise.
- **A place where local people could have a stake in the energy produced and used.** There was across the board support for exporting heat from the Ardley Energy from Waste Plant, which people feel has the potential to provide huge benefit to the scheme. People thought that if there will be local demand for photovoltaics, then ideally they should be manufactured locally or even on site, with the community being offered a discount for the bulk purchase of PV.
- **A place that includes a diversity of housing types and tenure – with examples.** There was support for this objective and much of the comment sought to augment the thrust of the masterplan brief in this respect. There was a strong desire for innovation expressed by participants, not only in environmental technologies within housing but also in the architectural design and tenure of homes, with potential community ownership of homes for rent being just one of the ideas raised. People don't want the standard fare of home design and types for NW Bicester.

13 additional aims / issues were added to the list of items that the masterplan should address under this heading. They include:

- Look at how buildings are built - transfer technologies from commercial buildings to domestic ones.
- Make sure communities are not segregated by NW Bicester receiving the entire new infrastructure. Integration is key to the success of the development.
- Building a strong and resilient “soft infrastructure” is as important as any built infrastructure.
- Will 2nd and 3rd generation owners also sign up to the eco lifestyle? Long term marketability is essential.

Top 3 Priorities – Dots Exercise	Number of Dots
A place that includes a diversity of housing types and tenure – with examples.	21
A place that is distinctive through low energy use and local energy production, achieving zero carbon	10
Support innovative local reuse and recycling facilities within the site	8

Table 3: Transport / Employment

The issues which attracted discussion at this table appear to be the additional aims that participants raised. These include:

- **Include proposals for public transport that will be safe, secure, cheap reliable, frequent with RTI (Real Time Information).** This generated comment along the lines that it should be phased in early to the development.
- **Look at the potential issues caused by the railway line in terms of segregation - how to reduce the impact.**
- **Look at transport linkages to existing town(s) / communities** - People commented that 3 separate transport systems - neighbourhood, local and regional needed to be considered in the masterplan. The treatment of Howes Lane is a matter of concern in that it is regarded as a barrier to future integration; there is some support for its future downgrading as part of proposals for a ring road.
- **Need to ensure that the employment allocation for the site is safeguarded and that it creates high end jobs. Reduce the space allocated for warehouses / storage.** It is evident that there are strong views against the inclusion of warehousing on the NW Bicester site. People are also concerned that the timing and phasing of employment is important to get right, as well as its location and issues surrounding why people commute out of Bicester need to be understood.

Top 3 Priorities – Dots Exercise	Number of Dots
Ensure the construction of the development contributes to local job creation	10
Create safe streets that encourage walking and cycling	9
Include proposals for public transport that will be safe, secure, cheap, reliable, frequent with RTI (Real Time Information)	7

Table 4: Local services / Community Building and Governance / Healthy Lifestyles

The issues which attracted discussion and comment at this table were:

- **Provide for excellent schools at the heart of the community.** There was uncertainty expressed by those present on the overall strategy for school provision in Bicester and a desire for OCC to provide clarity on this as soon as possible. There was also considerable enthusiasm for the school being of an innovative design and so providing an opportunity to look at the whole processes in procurement, designing, building and managing schools and pilot something different. Indeed much of the comment on this issue is relevant to all the agencies concerned with school provision – not just the masterplan team.
- **Design local services to be available on site to meet the day to day needs of new residents but to be integrated with town wide facilities.** Bure Park local centre was cited as a good example to look at for the design of local centres on the site, people expressed concern that facilities should be provided for all age ranges but particularly for youth - although care needs to be taken where these facilities are located. People were also keen to ensure that the masterplan provides a good means of transport and access to such facilities.
- **The creation of vibrant local hubs where community services, local retail provision, employment opportunities and residential uses contribute to the vitality of the place.** People were keen to ensure that there was some flexibility built into the masterplan so that the future community can have some influence over the facilities to be built. Similarly, there was a plea for community halls to be flexible in their design so that they can be used for several purposes and by different groups - but to avoid overprovision which could result in community halls being unviable to maintain. Some shared facilities could be provided by commercial space – to help reduce pressure as grant funding is reduced. People also thought health facilities could be usefully co-located in community hubs.
- **Build a community that is able to be sustainable to ensure the aspirations for the eco town are secured for the long term.** Bure Park Residents Association was cited as a good example of an effective community organisation. People thought that it would be important to develop a framework for governance and allow the new community to take it forward and that the new community should be consulted on the governance arrangements that will affect them. In particular, care was needed on getting a balance between encouraging the new community through the ability to manage its own affairs while also being a key part of Bicester.

1 additional aim was added to the list of items that the masterplan should address under this heading, namely that the location of the

cemetery should be carefully considered – and that it should be located away from residential properties.

Top 3 Priorities – Dots Exercise	Number of Dots
The creation of vibrant local hubs where community services, local retail provision, employment opportunities and residential uses contribute to the vitality of the place.	11
School provision needs to be recognised as part of the wider social development of the site	10
Build a community that assimilates and contributes to the social development of Bicester	10

Overall Conclusions

Table 1 Overview

All the comments made by people at this table were in effect augmenting and / or clarifying the masterplan brief actions; there seemed to be little dissent from the thrust of what is being proposed - with one exception. People wanted to change the wording of the action regarding the provision of the cemetery so that it is a stronger commitment and refers to the provision of a burial ground rather than a cemetery.

Table 2 Overview

It is clear from the comments that people are very animated by the concept of the Eco Town, particularly with regard to the environmental and technological improvements that will be built into the design of the place. There appears to be a strong appetite for innovation and lots of ideas about where this should most usefully be focused. However it is also clear that there is some confusion and even some scepticism about the term “zero carbon”, why it is being sought and exactly what it means. This does need to be thought through and addressed both in the masterplan brief and on the final completed masterplan and outline planning application.

Table 3 Overview

The general thrust of peoples’ comments is in broad agreement with the masterplan on these topics, however it is clear from the additional points added / raised that people are keen that the masterplan ensures there is good quality alternative provision to the car designed into the development and that any transport assessment needs to look at and address circumstances within the site but also within the town and further afield.

A couple of other significant issues were raised, which while not directly related to the masterplan, are of relevance to the context within which the project will operate. The first is the wish for the promotion and marketing of Bicester as a green employment location, with the relevant skills to attract inward investment and encourage businesses to relocate. The second issue concerns an aspiration for there to be one railway station to be created in

Bicester which would become a hub for east / west and north / south railway routes, as well as becoming the general transport hub for the town.

Table 4 Overview

The subject matter discussed at this table generated considerable comment from people and it was reassuring to note that people were interested in how NW Bicester would develop and integrate as a community, as much as they were in the built social infrastructure, acknowledging of course that the two matters are inextricably linked. In common with the discussions at the other tables, there was little disagreement with the thrust of the masterplan in this area; instead people were keen to add some detail on the specifics that should be addressed as well as citing some useful examples to be looked at.