

Division(s): Banbury Easington, Banbury Grimsbury & Castle, Banbury Hardwick, Banbury Neithrop, Banbury Ruscote, Bicester, Bicester South, Bloxham, Deddington, Kidlington & Yarnton, Otmoor & Kirtlington, Ploughley and Wroxton.

CABINET– 16 OCTOBER 2012

CHERWELL LOCAL PLAN PROPOSED SUBMISSION DRAFT

Report by Director for Environment, Economy and Customer Services

Introduction

1. Cherwell District Council has published the Cherwell Local Plan Proposed Submission Draft (hereafter referred to as the “Draft Local Plan”) for consultation ahead of its submission to Government towards the end of the year. A public examination is expected to follow in 2013, with the Plan adopted by March 2014.
2. The Draft Local Plan will shape development in Cherwell for the period to 2031. Growth is focused primarily at Bicester and to a lesser extent at Banbury, with more limited growth at Kidlington and in the larger villages.
3. This report and its annexes sets out the County Council’s response to the consultation and highlights the key issues for this authority over the next 20 years in Cherwell.
4. The focus of the Draft Local Plan is consistent with the County Council’s strategic objectives for economic growth. It is also consistent with the emphasis in the National Planning Policy Framework on building a strong, competitive economy.
5. Whilst the County Council has some minor representations to make on the Plan, outlined in Annex 3, there are no fundamental areas of concern. As a consequence this report focuses on highlighting those aspects of the Plan where there is an opportunity to reinforce our current working arrangements.

Background information

6. The Draft Local Plan is supported by and takes account of the emerging master-plans for Bicester and Banbury. The master-plans have been jointly commissioned by the County Council and Cherwell District Council and provide a strategic vision for growth and regeneration of these two key urban centres over the life of the Draft Local Plan and beyond.
7. A master-planning approach for the key settlements has enabled work on economic development, land use planning and movement strategies to be more closely aligned. Such an approach has enabled synergies across policy

areas to be more easily identified. This in turn feeds into the preparation of the infrastructure plan which forms the framework for delivery.

Draft Local Plan Headlines

8. The key policies and proposals set out in the Draft Local Plan will:
 - Extend the Plan period to 2031;
 - Focus on jobs-led growth, with a strong emphasis on strengthening the economy;
 - Identify significant new employment land identified at Bicester and Banbury;
 - Identify the need for 16,750 homes to be built across the District;
 - Seek to deliver at least 30% affordable housing at Bicester and Banbury, 35% in the rest of the district;
 - Help strengthen the role of existing town centres;
 - Prioritise the investment required in support of economic growth; and
 - Result in a local review of the Green Belt in the vicinity of Oxford Airport/Langford Lane, Kidlington to meet employment needs.

9. A plan showing the proposed development sites in Bicester is outlined in Annex 1 and the headlines for Bicester are:
 - The allocation of 104ha of land for employment purposes – with sites already identified at North West Bicester and at the Bicester Business Park, plus new sites at Graven Hill, Bicester Gateway, North East Bicester and East Bicester.
 - 6,579 new homes on strategic development sites, including North West Bicester (albeit delivered at a reduced rate), South West Bicester Phase 1 and Gavray Drive plus new sites at Graven Hill, Phase 2 of South West Bicester and land at East Bicester.
 - Further expansion of the town centre, potentially towards Bicester Town railway station and Bicester Village, in order to ensure that a town centre suitable for the size of town is delivered.
 - Restating the strategic importance of delivering improvements at both junctions 9 and 10 of the M40, whilst making provision for a strategic relief road on the south east and east of the town in order to facilitate delivery of growth opportunities. Support is also given for a rail freight interchange at Graven Hill as well as improved linkages between the key employment sites, the town centre and Bicester Town railway station (including an improved cycle and pedestrian network)

10. A plan showing the proposed development sites in Banbury is outlined in Annex 2 and the headlines for Banbury are:
 - A focus on employment-led growth and regeneration, in particular in and around the Central M40 and Canalside locations;
 - 4,142 new homes on strategic development sites, including Bankside phase 1, Canalside, west of Bretch Hill, North of Hanwell Fields plus Bankside phase 2 and Southam Road; and

- Expansion of the town centre retail offer into part of Bolton Road, Canalside and Spiceball Development Areas.
11. The Draft Local Plan does not propose identifying strategic employment and housing sites for Kidlington or the rural areas, these will be dealt with through a later Development Plan Document once the Local Plan has been adopted.

General Comments

12. The County Council believes that the Draft Local Plan broadly meets the tests of soundness as outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework, namely that it is:
- Positively prepared;
 - Justified;
 - Effective;
 - Consistent with national policy.
13. There are a few representations that the County Council will need to make and these are outlined in Annex 3. However, it is anticipated that these minor concerns can be overcome and the representations outline how this could be achieved.
14. Increasing emphasis is given to the importance of the planning regime facilitating and supporting sustainable economic growth. The policies and proposals in the Draft Local Plan represent a significant step forward in this regard. As our experience of joint working increases, the County Council will look to work with Cherwell to refine the policies and proposals further so as to ensure they are expressed in terms of the outcome sought. Such an approach would represent an evolution from the more traditional approach to land-use planning.
15. The County Council continues to work closely with Cherwell District Council on the preparation of an infrastructure plan. The infrastructure plan will provide delivery partners with the flexibility to respond to development opportunities within the certainty that a longer term framework provides.
16. The infrastructure plan will also provide the underpinning for the subsequent introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Our experience of joint working on prioritisation of Government funding for Bicester gives the two authorities a solid basis on which to build our future work on infrastructure.
17. The Draft Local Plan includes generic policies that support the role of town centres and the need to encourage economic growth. Whilst such policies are in themselves laudable their influence in enabling future growth of the town centres is limited.
18. Where the two authorities have developed a strong narrative for specific towns – such as with Bicester – we should aspire to use this to develop

bespoke policies and proposals that set out the scope of our shared ambition for those localities. It is envisaged that this will be picked up through the Bicester and Banbury master-plans and any subsequent Area Action Plans.

19. Such an approach will help ensure that the content of the infrastructure plan is better defined. This in turn should help ensure delivery of priority infrastructure is more effective.
20. Since the publication of the Draft Local Plan, there have been a number of Government announcements that will significantly enhance the rail network throughout Oxfordshire and Cherwell, in particular. These are the Government's commitment to the delivery of the East West Rail project as well as the electrification of the majority of the railway in Cherwell.
21. The new rail station at Water Eaton will substantially improve connections to London for key employment sectors in the Kidlington area. In so doing it will support the role of Oxford Airport as a gateway for business aviation services serving the wider Oxfordshire economy.
22. It will be important that the Draft Local Plan is amended to refer to this latest thinking and to ensure that the potential opportunities and economic benefits that these investment will bring to the area are not missed.

Bicester

23. The narrative that has been developed jointly for Bicester is driven by the importance of economic-led growth. The Draft Local Plan identifies a number of new employment areas, primarily to the south and east of the town. Continued close working with the business community will be central to realising the potential of these sites.
24. Further investment in infrastructure will be required to unlock the employment opportunities. The success in securing 'Pinch Point' funding for Junction 9 of the M40 is positive. Further investment in the highway network is proposed as part of the development proposal for Bicester Village and the Bicester Business Park. Quite quickly however delivery of the South East Perimeter Road will become a priority.
25. Discussions are already underway with the MoD with regard to their proposal for the Graven Hill site that could deliver part of the perimeter road. Discussions are also underway with Chiltern Railways with a view to tying in their work required as part of their investment in the new Oxford to London via Bicester service.
26. The County Council has recently committed funding to assess the options and to develop the detail of the proposed Eastern Perimeter Road. Such preparatory work will ensure that the authorities remain well placed to react to potential funding initiatives from Government should they arise. In the meantime the two authorities continue to work closely with the Homes and

Communities Agency to ensure that the needs of Bicester remain visible nationally.

27. The combination of further growth in Bicester, both in terms of employment and housing, will require investment in education and skills. As part of the work to develop the infrastructure plan we will ensure that the requirements for new primary and school provision are identified. With the switch to academies and free schools so our role in delivering new school provision will fundamentally change. However, experience suggests that a pro-active approach by the County Council to support delivery of new school provision could be significant in ensuring that the skills needs of future employers are met.
28. Previous proposals led by Oxford and Cherwell Valley College to secure Government's support for a University Technical College have been unsuccessful. Whilst the Draft Local Plan promotes such a facility, greater flexibility may be required to allow for alternative options for the provision of secondary and further education to be considered. This is of even greater importance now that the approval of the all-through free school on the Upper Heyford site has been given and it will impact on the viability and timing of additional educational facilities within Bicester.
29. The master-planning work for Bicester has identified the need to expand the size of the town centre so as to better reflect the needs of a community of potentially up to 60,000. The master-plan identifies the potential to create a number of new 'quarters' as part of the expanded town centre. The County Council's property assets provide an opportunity to help realise some of the ambition for the town centre: a potential that is being explored further as part of the work on the infrastructure plan.

Banbury

30. Work on developing the narrative for Banbury is slightly behind that for Bicester. Building on the success achieved with Bicester, the two authorities have jointly commissioned master-planning work for Banbury. This work is underway, with the outcome available in time to support the submission of the Draft Local Plan to Government later in the year.
31. Whilst Banbury will receive growth, the emerging work is also looking at the potential regeneration of key sites throughout the town. The identified development sites of Canalside, Bolton Road and Spiceball will provide the opportunity to strengthen the town centre as well as providing opportunities to enhance the transport hubs of the rail station and bus station.
32. A transport movement strategy is also being progressed to ensure that the highway network is able to cope with the increased demand placed upon it from the growth that is proposed.

33. Like in Bicester, the County Council's property assets provide an opportunity to help realise some of the ambition for the town centre: a potential that is being explored further as part of the work on the infrastructure plan.

Green Belt Review

34. There is an emerging cluster of industries in the area adjoining Oxford Airport including high technology, office and airport related businesses. This cluster takes advantage of the airport's business aviation role supporting Oxfordshire businesses.
35. In order for the potential of this emerging cluster to be fully realised Cherwell is proposing to undertake a small-scale review of the Green Belt to meet the needs of business.
36. Given its focus on enabling employment opportunities to be realised, officers are recommending that the County Council support the review of Green Belt land in the vicinity of Oxford Airport and Langford Lane Technology Park.
37. Whilst it is not currently being promoted by the District Council, officers are also recommending that the County Council should encourage Cherwell to expand the small-scale review of the Green Belt to include the land in the vicinity of the Begbroke Science Park for key sector employment growth. This would provide longer-term certainty for the Technology Park and give the University the confidence to continue its investment in this location.

RECOMMENDATION

38. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to inform Cherwell District Council that:**
- (a) **Oxfordshire County Council believes the Draft Local Plan is broadly sound, subject to our representations in Annex 3 being addressed;**
 - (b) **In principle, Oxfordshire County Council supports the strategic allocated development sites that have been identified in the Draft Local Plan;**
 - (c) **Oxfordshire County Council supports the proposed Green Belt review at Langford Lane/Oxford Airport but requests that this is expanded to incorporate the land in the vicinity of Begbroke Science Park to be considered for key sector employment growth; and**
 - (d) **Oxfordshire County Council requests that the detailed officer comments as outlined in Annex 4 are taken into account before the Plan is submitted to Government.**

Huw Jones
Director for Environment, Economy and Customer Services

Background papers: Cherwell Local Plan Submission Draft (August 2012)

Contact Officer: Daniel Round, Cherwell Strategy & Infrastructure
Manager
Tel: (01865) 815623

October 2012