

**By email only: [areamovementandplacestrategies@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:areamovementandplacestrategies@oxfordshire.gov.uk)**

1<sup>st</sup> December 2025

Attn: Tim Snazell

Movement and Place Strategies Technical Lead Officer  
Oxfordshire County Council  
County Hall  
New Road  
OXFORD  
OX1 4ND

Dear Mr. Snazell,

**Bicester and Mid-Cherwell Movement and Place Plan – Response of Oxford Bus Group**

Oxford Bus Group is pleased to submit its comments and observations on the Science Vale Movement and Place Plan.

The Oxford Bus Group comprises the City of Oxford Motor Services Ltd. trading as Oxford Bus Company (“OBC”), Thames Travel (Wallingford) Ltd. (“Thames Travel”; “TTW”) and two other companies operating within the plan area: Pulham and Sons (Coaches) Ltd. (“Pulhams”) and Carousel Buses Ltd. (“Carousel”). The former mainly operates in West Oxfordshire, though does provide a large number of school services in Cherwell, in particular to the Warriner School, and the latter has a small presence in the Plan area, but mainly operates in Buckinghamshire.

These four companies are together run as part of Go-Ahead Group’s UK Bus interests. Collectively, Oxford Bus Group is the largest provider of public bus services in Oxfordshire. Our businesses, principally Oxford Bus Company and Thames Travel, run the majority of all scheduled bus mileage in the City of Oxford. We also run an increasing number of bus services in Bicester, including town service 21, and the Bicester Village shuttle service.

We understand this is a daughter document to the adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (“LTCP5”). Its principal purposes are not entirely explicit. However, the published draft sets out a locality specific portrait of transport challenges and policy objectives, and then outlines a series of committed, potential and possible areas of interventions to address these. This creates a single up-to-date synopsis of anticipated transport projects and studies.

It supersedes policy in the County Council's "Bicester Area Strategy" which sat within the Framework of "Connecting Oxfordshire" which represented Local Transport Plan 4 ("LTP4"). Bicester is a designated Garden Town, having previously been one of the only examples of the previous Labour administrations "Ecotowns" that was progressed to confirmation and some degree of implementation. This followed principles set out in then-current PPG1a (2010), that included a wide range of sustainable transport objectives. These principles and parameters have been directly translated into current Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 Policy for North West Bicester, Policy BIC1.

This document therefore replaces transport policy for Bicester and its environs currently set out in the Bicester Area Strategy, in the light of much more ambitious current transport policy set out in LTCP5.

The scope of the draft MaP plan extends to the rural hinterland of the town. This has itself seen considerable growth in almost all the significant villages, much brought forward outside the plan-led system. This has seen particularly substantial development in Ambrosden, Launton and Chesterton, though by no means restricted to these. Not all these villages have a good public transport choice, or especially attractive active travel links.

We also recognise that within the MaP Plan area, Upper Heyford is one of very few sites selected as part of the current national administration's New Towns programme. A planning application for a proposed 9000 dwellings on this site, in addition to substantial complete and committed development, has been lodged with the Local Planning Authority. This involves a form of high-density development, almost exclusively flatted, on a site that stands off significantly from both established rail and bus services, while also being extremely advantageously located for long-distance out-commuting using the M40. Meeting the mobility needs of this development, much of which will be for small younger households and held on private rental tenures, will represent a challenge that has never previously been attempted in the County or beyond. The Plan was apparently drafted just prior to the announcement of the selection of Heyford Park and as such we note that the County anticipates the need to review and revise the MaP Plan accordingly.

After decades during which rapid residential development took place, with much less market demand for employment development, this has markedly changed. Bicester is now a rapidly growing employment cluster across a wide range of sectors, including innovation and high value-added sectors, especially automotive. Extensive employment land allocations that stood vacant to the south of town are now rapidly being taken up. Major additional strategic employment allocations have additionally been consented at M40 junction 10, and at Junction 9, with the draft Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042 seeking to capitalise on the strategic advantages of the area by allocating an employment-led development corridor along the A41 between the town and the M40.

Most of the development committed and anticipated lies a significant distance from the rail stations at Bicester North and Bicester Village – increasingly, beyond the scope of easy active travel choices. This being the case, while the imminent opening of East West Rail and substantial enhancement of the rail frequency from Bicester Village to Oxford will transform the mode split on the main flow between Bicester and the City, it should not be assumed that bus is a mode that is being replaced or eclipsed by the railway.

First while it is noted that station-to-station, trips from Bicester Village to Oxford take just 17 minutes, this is a portion of the overall journey. To the extent true origin and destination involve

the need for connectivity to and from other modes, the overall generalised journey time will typically be considerably longer, especially from much of the committed new development at BIC1 North West Bicester. To destinations in North Oxford, for example, the existing S5 bus corridor is likely to remain quite competitive. It is notable that the opening of the initial Evergreen project with a 30 minute rail service saw only a 13-14% reduction in patronage. Most of that was believed to be associated with trips to the Bicester Village retail complex.

Secondly, much of the new and enhanced rail offer will not effectively duplicate or replace the existing bus or coach offer, but be complementary or indeed entirely additional to it. As one very topical example, should the Chiltern or East West Rail trains extend to use the Cowley Branch Line to terminate, then this represents a public transport offer from Bicester that bus today simply cannot credibly offer on a very competitive basis. This is more likely to re-mode current car-borne journeys To Oxford Science Park and ARC Oxford.

Indeed, far to the contrary, in the context of higher level policy in LTCP5, and in the context of the broad objectives of this MaP Plan, that seeks to greatly improve sustainable connectivity within the town and to its hinterland and wider region. Realistic transport choices for a lot of trips in the plan area have not been widely available to date.

The bus offer that historically has been heavily dominated by the link to Oxford City Centre offered by Stagecoach S5 and X5, will need to see an unprecedented uplift in frequency and connectivity in the Bicester and Mid-Cherwell area, including:

- To provide high quality rail connectivity for longer-distance journeys especially at Bicester Village, but also Bicester North and at Heyford for journeys to Banbury, and the Midlands.
- To provide for a much higher proportion of local trips in a much-expanded town, with development now expected to extend up to 4km from the Market Place to the north west, west and southwest. This includes the leisure development at Great Wolf Resort, and employment on the A41 near Wendlebury.
- To provide for staff and visitor journeys from the Bicester rail stations, residential areas and hotels to the major new leisure development at Puy De Fou, for which a planning application is currently under consideration.
- The need to maintain and substantially enhance direct public transport connectivity from many parts of Bicester to destinations that are not on the rail network, nor, credibly, ever will be. This includes much of the Oxford Eastern Arc around Headington, including the hospitals and Brookes University, and much of the University of Oxford's footprint north and east of Oxford City Centre. The H5 service funded by the County Council offers an important first step but frequency, journey times and hours of operation need to be substantially enhanced, and this has been identified as a priority for funding from the Workplace Parking Levy, once implemented.
- The need to transform connectivity between Bicester and Heyford Park, on a high frequency basis 7 days a week, continuing no doubt to Heyford Station and then, potentially to Banbury.
- The need to reinforce wider connectivity beyond the MaP plan area. This includes Brackley and Banbury; and Aylesbury, Existing regular bus links exist but are relatively slow, infrequent and commercially fragile. The links provided by Stagecoach X5 to Buckingham – which is not directly served by East West rail, and parts of Milton Keynes will remain relevant and should be seen as retaining an important strategic value,

especially given ongoing intense development in both places, including to the west of Milton Keynes. The absence of direct public transport connectivity from the area to Silverstone Park, Towcester and Northampton via the A43 trunk road is an egregious connectivity gap that should be addressed as soon as possible.

Local internalisation for journey to work in Bicester has been low – only 35%. The railway is likely to drive future trends that tend to maintain a very substantial commuting outflow, albeit not by car, and to a wider variety of destinations including London and Birmingham. However, the rapid rebalancing of economic against residential development – and the former has led for several years now – provides an important opportunity to look to increase internal trips and secure a much higher active travel and bus mode share in the town and immediate area, which historically has been highly car-dominated. We note the extensive commentary of the public health impacts of car dependence on the MaP Plan area, which are serious.

We note that 88% of households have access to a least one car and half more than 2. In fact, the failure to deliver nearly all the strategic housing allocations in Bicester since 2014 will have allowed the employment footprint to substantially expand, and we expect that this helpful employment-led trend is likely to persist until at least 2030, which will be very helpful in this regard.

Existing mainly residential allocations around Bicester reflect a relatively compact form of development. However new allocations are starting to extend somewhat beyond a convenient walk or cycle of the centre of town and the station, in many cases. The new proposed employment-led allocations along the A41 sit alongside the existing strategic inter-urban bus and coach corridor. Thus, in principle, active travel and public transport ought to credibly be able to offer a high-quality relevant choice, subject to urban design and rational phasing of infrastructure and service delivery. Where development takes place on this kind of scale, this can be quite problematic.

We can point to the effect of the combination of compact development strategy and effective high quality urban design at Kingsmere (South West Bicester) in suppressing the use of private cars, even when car ownership is high. The development is now all but complete. Sustainable modes account for well over 55% of all peak trips, based on detailed Travel Plan surveys done over the last few years by the developer. Proximity of the rail station and the immediately adjacent inter-urban bus corridor substantially assist. More recently the delivery of large-scale employment development on the far side of the A41 should be expected to further support use of active modes for journeys to work. Both primary and secondary education is available on the development.

### **Planned Infrastructure Delivery**

The draft recognises that a considerable number of schemes in the Plan area have been implemented, or are close to implementation.

This includes – among other interventions listed:

Ploughley Road/ A41 junction improvements including signalisation and provision of active travel measures.

- A41 Oxford Road corridor: Widening of A41 for right and left turn lanes and new signalised pedestrian and cycle crossing.

- Highway capacity improvements to peripheral routes - western corridor: Improvements to Howes Lane / Bucknell Road Junction: North West Bicester Ecotown Phase 1.
- Highway capacity improvements to peripheral routes - western corridor: Provision of a new tunnel under the railway at Howes Lane / Bucknell Road (LGF funded)
- Pioneer Roundabout improvements
- Improvements to Middleton Stoney Road roundabout western end: Shakespeare Drive and Howes Lane roundabouts
- Charbridge Lane crossing: Conversion of former level crossing of A4144 Bicester eastern perimeter road with Oxford- Bletchley Railway line into grade separated overbridge (East-West Rail).
- Bus facilities at Bicester Village Station, including a bus turning head and new bus stops on London Road.
- North West Bicester Ecotown railway crossings (underpass) 2 crossings: One to support road realignment and another for pedestrians and cyclists
- Delivery of public transport from all Strategic Sites to Bicester Town Centre and Rail Stations: South West Bicester Phase 1/2 (operated today as Stagecoach 26) and North West Bicester Ecotown Phase 1 (Exemplar site) (Stagecoach 500) Gravenhill (currently operated as Stagecoach 29/H5)
- Improvements to A41 corridor: New southbound bus stops on A41, adjacent to Bicester Business Park and Holiday Inn Express.

Bus frequencies to the major residential developments are no greater than every 30 minutes. Evening and Sunday services are generally not provided. As such it cannot be legitimately said that the current offer is “high quality” as the document states – it is demonstrably of lower quality than services in the Science Vale, whose MaP Plan states that services there are “limited” and of “low frequency.” We would consider that current service levels are broadly adequate to provide for a reasonable baseline service offer, for those without access to a car.

OBC is of the strong view that broadly speaking, it remains vital to supporting the very high level of employment and population growth committed in the adopted Local Plan in Bicester Garden Town, and in the emergent Review to 2042, that these interventions are implemented as far as possible as envisaged.

## **Objectives and Actions**

This section is clearly tied back to key policies in LTCP5. There are clear references to quantifiable LTCP5 objectives allowing clear and transparent monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness. This is **commendable and welcome**.

The explanatory text offers evidence and exemplars of how the approaches proposed can be expected to work. While the direct relevance and applicability of these might at times be challengeable, it underpins the basis for ambitious objectives and actions that tackle the roots of key problems effectively. We **strongly agree** that that perpetuating previous policy approaches is neither appropriate nor able to secure important national and local transport policy goals.

### ***Objective BIC1 Creating a sense of place through implementing a healthy place-shaping interventions***

We welcome and support the intention to reduce the dominance of private car use especially in and around Bicester town centre. This adversely affects the experience of the place, but importantly seriously frustrates efficient and reliable bus service delivery. Congestion-related delay is now widespread and chronic, especially west of the town centre, where most bus routes circulate.

We **support** the objective.

We are concerned that progress has been made on the proposed redesign of Bicester Market Place with little or no input from ourselves, and, we fear, the other major bus operator. The project is being managed by the District and Town Councils, rather than the Local Highways and Transport Authority which credibly explains this. We have tried to establish the detailed designs to ensure that they will accommodate bus movements as intended. To date we have been unsuccessful. However based on what is known publicly we are largely content that subject to a very substantial reduction of other vehicular traffic, the project will function well enough for bus.

In villages and local centres, the Objective ought to secure more attractive bus stop/stand facilities as far as possible. We urge the Council to note that bus stops at these locations are likely to be timing points where buses might need to wait time on occasion. This being the case, off-carriageway stands are often important to prevent stationary buses blocking traffic flow. It should not be assumed that lay-bys and pull-ins can or should be removed, without potentially material difficulties arising for the safe passage of traffic, including cycles.

***Objective BIC2 Deliver a comprehensive and inclusive walking, wheeling and cycling network***

This objective simply repeats higher level LTCP5 policy. As such, it really does little to advance or clarify actions, save to point to the development of LCWIP within the MaP Plan area, something already stated in LTCP5 and thus a higher level commitment.

We agree that the nature of Bicester, in terms of topography and urban structure, well lends itself to support a high level of walking and cycling. We also recognise significant barriers to making cycling an attractive choice. Equally the draft states that *“There is limited space on routes within Bicester to create the space where all modes of travel can coexist without conflicts. We will need to look at innovative ways such as reprioritising road space to enable and increase in walking, wheeling and cycling.”*

It is important that measures to promote cycling, especially on key radial routes, do not serve to make bus operations slow, unsafe or in practical terms, impossible. We would highlight the approach to accommodating segregated cycling tracks adjoining bus stops that is subject to recent legislation in the Bus Services No.2 Act 2025, where new national design guidance is imminent.

Most bus journeys involve a walk at both the start and end of the trip. A significant and rising number can involve cycling. We **support** the objective, alongside other Objectives to improve bus stop infrastructure and local inter-modality.

We are not, however of the view that powered micro-mobility offers public benefits and relevance that exceed its quite considerable disamenities, including the effect of the behaviour of e-scooter riders on the experience of walking. Introducing a scheme will need legislative change, in any event. Nor is it clear that there would be a sufficiently strong commercial case to introduce such a scheme in Bicester. We by contrast would naturally be supportive of a shared

cycle scheme subject to its operation and management being effective, such as the Beryl cycle hire scheme in Hereford.

### **Objective BIC3 Enhance bus infrastructure**

*3.1. Working alongside public transport operators to develop a strategy and action plan for a bus route hierarchy and to implement bus prioritisation/SMART infrastructure along key movement corridors including as per Infrastructure Delivery Plan:*

- a. Bus priority on B4030 and Vendee Drive Roundabout improvements.*
- b. Improvements to A41 corridor; infrastructure improvements and bus priority to enable greater reliability on the A41 corridor to/from Junction 9 to Ploughley Lane.*
- c. B4100 between Baynard's Green roundabout and A4095 junction.*
- d. Bus only link, west of Howes Lane – link to the Howes Lane and Lords Lane realignment.*
- e. Through route for buses between the A4421 Charbridge Lane and A41 Aylesbury Road. (deliverable by the developer through Wretchwick Green)*

We **welcome and support** this initiative and these specific interventions strongly.

The Vendee Drive Roundabout and the access to and from the Park and Ride site is especially important and needs urgent prioritisation. We note that this has emerged as an accident black spot for serious injuries.

*3.2. Develop a strategy and action plan with local community and stakeholders to identify opportunities for the improvement of bus infrastructure/hubs (e.g. waiting facilities, location for new bus stops, Real Time Information, AI, raised kerbs, lighting, shelters, CCTV, onward travel maps and greening/solar.) including the following:*

- a. Town Centre interchange at Pioneer Square.*
- b. Bus routes into strategic employment and residential sites.*
- c. Bus routes through North West Bicester and Middleton Stoney Road.*

We recognise that these are the priority areas for attention regarding bus routing, urban design and bus infrastructure provision. We **strongly welcome** the recognition that existing bus stop provision in the town is both highly inconsistent and across much of the installed sites, quite poor.

Where major new development is concerned, significant formal bus operator input has already been offered into the current application for the main EcoTown Site, as well as the reserved matters to the initial phases at Himley Village. The approach taken to bus penetration into the much-enlarged Heyford Park new town scheme is going to be important and likely to pose some unusually large challenges.

It is essential that County officers in Transport Development Management and Roads Adoptions pay due regard to this input, and where necessary engage with operators in technical dialogue. We again would emphasise the recently published second edition of “*Bus Services and New Residential Developments*” (April 2025) jointly produced by Stagecoach and Go-Ahead Group, that is aimed to give clear and consistent advice on these matters.

*3.3. Work with stakeholders to investigate the opportunities to enhance bus stops and public realm at Pioneer Square and assess future needs.*

This is likely to be essential not least if a larger number of services (such as to Heyford Park and the EcoTown) and higher frequency services are to be provided. Better turning arrangements at the eastern end of the Pioneer Square area on Manorsfield Road are likely to be needed, slightly increasing the inscribed circle of the existing mini-roundabout. Zero-emission buses also require updated pavement buildup to cope with higher static and torque loads exerted on the carriageway surface.

We **strongly support** this initiative.

*3.4. Explore solutions where there is conflict between public transport and other transport modes.*

We **welcome** this. We commit to working collaboratively and constructively with the Council and other delivery partners and technical consultants to arrive at appropriate solutions that seek to best and most effectively manage conflicts between objectives, and secure the optimal balance between modes having regard to wider transport policy objectives.

*3.5. Work with public transport operators to deliver a zero-emission bus fleet within Bicester and Mid-Cherwell.*

OBC within the wider Go-Ahead UK bus business, are at the forefront of fleet decarbonisation. We have already deployed battery electric buses onto the Bicester Village contract, within the MaP Plan area, and these can also regularly be seen operating on the Bicester Village P&R services utilised on busier days.

We are actively considering how wider decarbonisation can be effected within the Country beyond the Oxford Smartzone, where we and Stagecoach have together replaced the entire bus fleet with 159 battery electric buses, one of the largest deployments outside London. On 27<sup>th</sup> November, we were pleased to learn that we had been successful in a bid to the County's inaugural Vehicle Improvement fund for £1.2m in match funding to support the deployment of 9 further zero-emission vehicles for our Oxfordshire fleet. This project will include the first smaller single deck zero-emission vehicles introduced in Oxfordshire, which are expected to be used on our 21 service on occasion.

However, one challenge to widespread adoption of zero-emission buses in the Bicester and Mid-Cherwell area currently is the lack of a suitable bus depot facility. Our services in the area operate from depot sites remote from the area, while Stagecoach maintains an outstation in the Murdock Road area which is little more than a parking yard. With the high levels of proposed growth in the plan area in the near future, it is essential that a site for a suitable bus operating centre is identified, along with the necessary power supply to support the charging of electric vehicles.

**Objective BIC4 Enhance bus services.**

The baseline position for bus use in Bicester is **agreed to be quite weak**. This reflects a historic focus on a single direct main route to Oxford, that only penetrates a single residential neighbourhood at Glory Farm. While the situation is evolving, including more S5 journeys that directly serve established neighbourhoods west of the town (and furthest from the rail station) substantial action is needed to improve bus network coverage and frequency if bus use is to

materially rise. Achieving this in the local context will involve a highly well-advised approach, and success will be highly sensitive to a number of parameters being met.

*4.1 Develop a strategy and action plan with stakeholders and partners to identify opportunities to deliver and fund long distance coach services which link to regional and national locations.*

Bicester is about to become a nationally significant rail hub, with direct rail services offered to all cardinal points of the compass on at least an hourly basis. As recently as 2016 it was a branch line offering about 9 trains a day to Oxford, with an hourly service calling between Birmingham and London. The level of service offered would very seriously truncate the demand for coach links.

As described earlier in the response, there is nevertheless a major strategic connectivity gap between Oxford, Bicester and Northampton on the A43 corridor. Recent significant service improvements have been made on this corridor between Brackley and Northampton within West Northamptonshire. However, this is a local bus offer and it unclear how relevant and effective this will be. It does not connect with services from Bicester. It is developer-funded and it unclear if the service will be self-sustaining, especially without the benefit of through traffic from Oxfordshire.

There has been a 20+ year history of trying to address this link, that has to date proven incapable or supporting a sustainable offer. This has been because one or all of the following compromises have been involved:

- Inadequate/irregular frequency: at least hourly is needed
- “one-ended” operation from Northampton, greatly constraining the first journeys from and last journeys back to Bicester/Oxford
- Little or no through service, lack of resilience with connections
- Insufficient hours of operation, and no Sunday service
- Indirectness and poor journey times due to multiple convoluted village diversions
- Poor quality vehicles not ideally suited to the length and nature of the service

All these need to be tackled to offer something closer to the former X5 Oxford-Bicester-MK offer, which since COVID-19 has been downgraded from high specification coaches to city -specified local buses.

*4.2 Work with operators to provide new services to existing communities, new residential areas and existing/new employment, community and bus services linking to surrounding villages.*

The committed growth in the Garden Town will extend considerably further from the town centre and station than current development, most of which lies within about 1800m, and is thus walkable or cyclable. The relevance and role of bus for local journeys is likely to substantially increase, and it must do to avoid perpetuating and even aggravating already exceptionally high levels of car use.

One major challenge is the very low level of internal self-containment for peak trips – about 35%. The competitiveness of bus against car rapidly declines in general terms, with distance, especially if a connection is needed from a local to a longer distance service. The same is

broadly true for bus-rail connections, though the prospect of frequent rail services at Bicester Village does make it possible to envisage a much greater role for bus from North West Bicester if a sufficient bus frequency can be sustained – see below.

*a. NW Bicester bus service connecting to the town centre.*

North West Bicester (the former EcoTown, current Local Plan Part 1 allocation BIC1) has always been treated as a unity. Practically speaking, and certainly in urban design terms, it is two discrete developments separated by the Chiltern Main Line railway. It has long been considered impossible to serve with a single efficient and effective bus route.

Furthermore, land control is divided across the railway.

Land to the east is largely in a single control, with an application for 3100 dwellings pending determination. This complements the existing “exemplar” site and a much more recent consent adjacent to that that together will provide about 950 dwellings. The “orphaned” nature of the 394 exemplar units meant that the local shuttle service provided as E1 for many years never came close to being sustainable. This part of the allocation is now served by a diversion of the Bicester-Brackley service running broadly hourly as Stagecoach 500 under contract to the County Council, but this frequency is insufficient to be a broadly relevant choice for local journeys. Ultimately, in principle approximately 4000 dwellings at a policy compliant level of affordable tenures ought to support a 2-bus operation; subject to urban design offering efficient operation that ought to allow a 15-minute frequency service to be achievable and broadly sustainable. This is crudely equivalent to the maximum frequency achieved on Banbury town services, though it should be stressed that Banbury has a greatly larger and more vibrant town centre offering.

Lesser capacity will be delivered west of the railway, spread over two land controls. Capacity is considered higher than assumed with the original BIC1 allocation. Himley Village is consented, and now under construction for up to 1700 dwellings, and adjoining land at Aldershot Farm is subject for a pending allocation for 1000 dwellings. A small amount of land nominally exists within the allocation beyond, but it is prudent to assume that about 2700 dwellings is deliverable.

There is some cause to suggest that any service might combine with Kingsmere, that would provide a link to the secondary school and also to substantial and growing levels of employment at London Road, as well as add about 2500 dwellings to the hinterland of a service. However, such a route would be more indirect. However, a tradeoff with higher sustainable frequency is likely to exist, and may be worth making, if it allows for a 15-minute frequency, which would demand very great attention to efficient and productive bus routing through all the residential areas served, especially on the EcoTown.

The delivery of any bus service will need very substantial financial support over what will be long delivery periods, each of at least 10 years and more likely a good deal longer. It will also demand rigorous attention to the phasing strategy and agreed triggers for delivery of bus routes within the developments – something that there is a poor track record for. Having been agreed, these milestones need to be observed and where necessary, subject to vigorous enforcement action.

The southern edge of the Himley site also lies on the Middleton Stoney Road and thus the route to Heyford Park. However, achieving a successful diversion of that service into Himley Village is likely to extend journey times from there to an unacceptable degree. Thus while initial occupations can no doubt depend on this for a while, it should not in our view be assumed that a great deal of synergy exists between the New Town and the EcoTown.

*b. Investigate the potential of providing a new bus service to strategic employment sites (developments to fund additional services).*

Two sets of sites exist: a pair of major sites for warehousing/distribution (B8) class uses at Baynards Green near M40 junction 10 (with a third subject to an appeal) either side of the B4100; and along the A41. Both sites thus benefit from a level of baseline access by bus.

To the extent that stops exist or are to be provided on the A41 London Road, a regular service to Bicester (including Glory Farm) Kidlington and Oxford will be available, 7 days a week, including early morning and late evening services from these strategic allocations. It may prove necessary to offer specialist shift change buses, but these are likely only to be needed if there are capacity problems or if substantial employment extends more than about 500m – 600m walk from the bus stops. The demand for any such services will be highly dependent on employment density and the source labour markets for the sites – which can only be determined in the light of experience. However, experience at Didcot suggests that operatives are not necessarily locally resident. We also note ambitious proposals for segregated cycling infrastructure along the A41.

Shift change reinforcement of the 500 to/past the B8 sites at Baynards Green will be necessary, and this needs to be specified in line with the operational requirements of occupiers.

Bicester Motion benefits from the hourly X5 at stops at Caversfield that have recently been improved. Significant but smaller scale employment development at BIC1 west of Howes Lane is directly served from Middleton Stoney Road, again only about every hour, with limited evening and weekend services.

*c. Heyford Park.*

Bus operators have long voiced serious concerns about the provision of a bus service to this site that will be sufficient to offer a relevant choice. The site is relatively remote from any higher-order settlement, while the M40 and the B430 link to the A34 is immediately accessible, understandably making car-borne commuting the default option.

Bicester is the nearest credible bus destination. Unhelpfully it is just a little too far distant to allow a single bus to offer a reliable hourly service, or two buses, a half-hourly service. Historically a direct link was operated to Oxford but the standard of local roads, as well as the distances involved, poses fundamental operational as well as commercial problems. OBC group businesses operated both these services as 25/25A, and 250, for several years and thus we have had direct and extended exposure to the issues involved. The County Council has subsequently struggled to procure operators for the existing service.

The site benefits from several permissions over and above the original which is essential complete for 1077 dwellings, and a supplementary site for 276 units (16/02446/F). The second

involves 1175 (18/00825/OUT), but has barely started. A further 230 dwellings are consented on third party land to the east (21/04289/OUT), and another discrete holding to the south east is under promotion for 225 dwellings.

The most recent proposal in part replaces the 2018 permission. It has a scope of about 9000 additional homes, employment and associated facilities. The urban form extends across the entire extensive former flying field and as such significant mileage will need to be operated on the site whereas today the service runs along Camp Road that the current development is neatly bisected by.

The entire scale of development potential is thus clearly in excess of 10,000 dwellings. Most of these will be multi-storey flats, and the whole urban form will most closely resemble an inner-city metropolitan regeneration, albeit vast expanses of open space along the current runway will be retained between two very high-density lobes of built form. Internal circulation is indicated on submitted plans, but the inordinately intricate circulation for vehicles including buses, offers great certainty that bus operation will be slow and the route will be complex and hard to understand, if this is how the development ultimately comes forward. Development south of the runway will all lie within about 750-800m of Camp Road, and it may prove most appropriate to retain the bus service here, with enhanced facilities for cycle parking etc. at the existing neighbourhood centre.

It remains to be seen how off-site mobility can be provided for most effectively. The distance of Heyford Park from a wide range of major potential destinations severely limits how far bus can provide direct links to destinations beyond Bicester. There is a clear aspiration on the part of the promoters of the New Town to rely on Heyford Station, where it is understood that “Project Churchward” involving new bi-mode rolling stock, will allow uplift of passenger frequencies south of Banbury serving Oxford and intermediate stations including Heyford to rise to every 30 minutes. However, providing a seamless shuttle bus offer will probably need to be free of charge at the point of use, and this begs innovative funding solutions from residents, likely to be tied to annual service charges/management fees. It would be hard, albeit probably not impossible, to incorporate this provision into a core Heyford Park-Bicester service.

This rail offer at Heyford, if delivered, is likely to satisfy trip demands to Banbury town centre and Oxford, and beyond towards Didcot, sufficient that it is very hard to see why further direct bus services would be justified. Rather, as demand grew, it would be more advantageous to progressively reinforce the core Bicester (including Bicester Village Station) - Heyford Park-Upper Heyford – Heyford Station service, with a view to raising frequency to at least every 15 minutes – also making connection times in all directions at Heyford Station credibly achievable within reasonable wait times. This level of service ought to be able to penetrate the full development, subject to substantial review of the submitted master plan to ensure rational and efficient bus routing is provided.

*d. Other areas across Mid-Cherwell.*

The main additional areas for bus connectivity enhancement relate first to the direct link to Headington via Gravenhill and Ambrosden, currently operated as H5 by Stagecoach. This hourly service needs to be reinforced to every 30 minutes to start to provide a credibly relevant choice for employment – as is planned under the strategy for bus services put forward for the proposed

Oxford Workplace Parking Levy. Unfortunately, Arncott cannot realistically avoid being orphaned by this arrangement. Carriageway reinforcement across Otmoor is likely to be necessary. There may also be a case to consider demand management measures to reduce the effect of rat-running traffic on this route, as well as junction alterations at the Bayswater Road crossroads.

A new service west of Bicester to Chesterton and beyond to the consented Great Wolf Resort has been agreed as part of planning obligations. It is very unclear to us, however, that credibly foreseeable demand will ever reach a level that this will outlive a subsidy period, especially since a separate parallel free shuttle bus for staff and visitors is also required. We would suggest looking to combine these into a single service, as exists with the Bicester Village shuttle service.

The links through Launton towards Aylesbury have existed in a variety of forms with Council support for many years. The former commercially operated hourly extension to S5 has been subsumed into this arrangement. It now appears that an extension of the Chiltern line from Aylesbury Vale Parkway to meet East West Rail at Calvert is not to progress, which makes this link more important, especially given that both Bicester and Aylesbury are designated Garden Towns with very high levels of plan-led growth committed, and in the case of Aylesbury, underway on multiple development fronts.

Beyond this, and the existing X5 and potential A43 link towards Northampton, that we discuss at length elsewhere, it is hard to see what further potential exists.

*4.3 Work with partners to provide faster bus services, with consideration given to increasing frequencies (including "turn up and go" services) and express, or limited stop services and the optimisation of existing services.*

The essence of achieving a step change in bus speeds and ultimately, in frequency and patronage, will certainly involve ensuring buses are prioritised over general traffic across the MaP Plan area and beyond.

We and Stagecoach, the principal other operator, have long highlighted the areas of the most serious congestion on the network. Within the Plan area and outside it, serious chronic congestion remains, with no clarity on how it will be addressed in particular on the A34 between Pear Tree and M40 junction 9 at Wendlebury. This lies entirely under the purview of National Highways. We would hope that planned major alterations on the A41 under County control, between Bicester and the same junction can be effected to include comprehensive bus priority, especially southbound.

The objective of making buses consistently faster and more reliable along entire corridors would of itself serve to release current operating resource to increase frequency.

Bicester itself has a quite unusual history, with planned expansion at scale taking place since 1987 on large urban extensions at Southwold (from 1986) Langford Village (from 1989) and Bure Park (from 2000) before the more recent Kingsmere and current Local Plan allocations commenced since 2010. By virtue of location and urban design, most of these are impossible to penetrate with bus services, but they also "turn their backs" on the arterial routes of

Buckingham Road and Banbury Road, the latter of which has historically not had much if any bus provision in any case. These neighbourhoods have benefited from good local self-containment, and also are relatively close in to the town centre, which also has seriously truncated the development of services within easy reach.

Langford Village did benefit from an hourly bus service as an extension of the S5 from the town centre, for many years, operated commercially by Stagecoach. The indirect route to the town centre and relatively extended journey time to Oxford beyond hardly helped support a high level of use. However, the site also lies directly on the A41 and the A4421 Outer Ring Road and presents unusually attractive choices for car-borne travel including using the SRN. The very near proximity of high quality rail services at Bicester Village station is a relatively recent benefit that should serve to replace a large number of otherwise car-borne journeys, but makes it hard to see how bus will at any stage in future sustain a sufficient level of demand to support a relevant offer in the longer term.

Prior to 2016, a network of supported town services existed before the budget was removed, many of these having been operated by Thames Travel between 2013 and 2016. The lack of bus services and bus stops anywhere near most of these homes has strongly perpetuated car dependency.

We would also stress there is an inherent tension between fast and direct bus services, and running routes for extensive distances through new residential areas where bus speeds are intended by design to never exceed about 18 mph. This will be crucial in both portions of the North West Bicester Eco-town. 20mph limits on the bus routes will reduce the effective frequency that can be offered by at least 30% and possibly more compared with a 30mph limit, simply because so great a proportion of the operated mileage will be within the development. We have long emphasised that major development spine roads should be expected, generally speaking, to have a 30mph limit for this reason. As it is these streets generally now incorporate extensive off-carriageway cycling tracks.

A very significant proportion of the existing bus network between Bicester and surrounding towns runs direct and with few if any stops. This is not just limited to the express services running along the A34, such as Stagecoach S5 and X1. It also includes Stagecoach 500 between Bicester and Brackley along the B4100 and A43; and X5 on the A4421/A421 towards Buckingham, that runs virtually non-stop, alongside the almost non-stop link between Bicester Village and Oxford stopping only at West Parade for Summertown. It is thus quite unclear what is meant or anticipated by the Plan in this regard.

The Plan would benefit from a clear and evidenced view as to where the opportunities to advance these important objectives lie. One area of immediate interest needs to be substantially augmenting the H5 corridor between Bicester and the Headington Hospitals via Gravenhill and Ambrosden.

We agree that maximising cross-town connectivity will be very important to achieving this objective. Through working of Stagecoach 26 with 29/H5 from Kingsmere to Gravenhill and beyond is a good start towards effecting this.

In addition, development of existing strongly-performing local services such as route 21 to include more comprehensive evening and Sunday services should be a priority.

*4.4 Work with bus operators and employers to ensure improved reliability, attractiveness and resilience of services.*

Naturally we **strongly support** this objective. It is of foundational importance to achieving the kinds of uplift in public transport use necessary to support the achievement of wider LTCP5 goals to reduce single-occupancy car trips by half by 2040.

We point back to our comments above under Objective 4. Early action to deliver significant strategic bus priority measures need to feature strongly in early capital investment programmes, including in and around Bicester Town Centre on the B4100 and on the A41.

*4.5 Work with partners to develop a digital strategy to support the bus network within Bicester and surrounding areas.*

OBC has invested heavily for over a decade in digital customer facing and operational infrastructure. We are probably the UK leaders in this field, having pioneered among other things, tap-on-tap-off (TOTO) and daily and weekly fare-capping. App-based information and payment has been in place for years at this writing. Our digital information systems also carry the details of other operators' services.

Fulfilling this Objective is certain to require a multi-operator approach across the whole of Oxfordshire, and, potentially a more extensive Combined Authority area in due course. This theme is already a standing focus of the Oxfordshire Statutory Enhanced Partnership.

**Objective BIC5: Create a network of mobility hubs**

OBC and Stagecoach have long advocated for these, locally and nationally. OBC's parent, Go-Ahead, published a major technical advisory document alongside ARUP in 2021. This is viewable at <https://www.go-ahead.com/mobilityhubs> Therefore the principle is **strongly supported**.

We broadly agree with the four identified locations at the two Bicester stations, Pioneer Square and at the Bicester Park and Ride.

Beyond these and a clear need for a facility at the Heyford Park Local Centre in due course, the main candidate location is likely to be at the Caversfield stop on the X5 near Bicester Motion, also serving a much wider residential hinterland; and possibly at one of the stops on the Oxford Road serving Kingsmere and the Business Park.

This objective ought also to signal that the scale and function of these facilities will vary with context. The capital cost and upkeep of substantial facilities is something that it is not clear that the County can sustain on any material scale. A somewhat larger number of small suitably equipped facilities on key corridors, leveraging other amenities such as at neighbourhood centres, is likely to be more effective and more deliverable.

**Objective BIC6: Work alongside partners to improve rail services and infrastructure**

The future investment pipeline in the railway network, nationally and more locally, will sit entirely with the Secretary of State for Transport. The 2025 White Paper on Local Government Reform also sets a clear expectation that the new Combined Authority Tier, that would sit above Oxfordshire, will be that that is expected to have the responsibility for shaping rail services and investment strategy at a sub-national level.

Notwithstanding, the list of interventions here is clear and focused on areas where the Council and local stakeholders have much greater potential ability to influence, fund and on occasions directly support delivery of projects. This includes a high level of focus on facilitating inter-modality. All this is **welcome and supported**.

***Objective BIC7 Support the development of a car club network and car share schemes.***

Oxford Bus Group is well aware of the evidence that car clubs reduce the pressure on households to commit to the high fixed costs of personal car ownership, which then incentivises car use for most journeys. The avoidance of second car ownership releases individuals to take advantage of a wider range of choices depending on journey purpose. This includes active travel or public transport use.

The wide roll-out of car clubs also serves to reduce the density of car ownership and thus, on-street parking in residential areas. This is one of the biggest hindrances to efficient bus operation in residential areas, especially newer ones, as is discussed at length in the joint Go-Ahead-Stagecoach guidance on urban and street design for new residential development.

Car share is an even more powerful tool to reduce car mileage, and both congestion and parking pressure, and has relevance to a very wide range of trips for which public transport use is unlikely to ever provide a realistic choice by virtue of origin-destination and distance.

The available platforms are now multi-modal travel planning tools, most notably the transition of the Liftshare.com offer to a multi-modal “Mobilityways” product. This provides a direct means of accessing the full range of choices for any potential journey, regular or occasional. It is a particularly powerful behavioural change tool, when used by major employers or destinations such as hospitals or sporting venues. We have long recognised this potential and urged the Council to seek to support its broad roll-out, not least within the City of Oxford.

**We thus strongly and unequivocally support the Objective.**

We urge the County to go further, and faster, to support the uptake of tools including the Mobilityways platform, including in residential as well as employment travel plan strategies. Prioritising multi-modal personal travel planning, and requiring dedicated car-sharing parking as part of County Transport Development Management requirements where major trip-generating uses are proposed, should take place, to drive action. Objective 7.3 needs to be modified to this end.

**Objective BIC8 Demand Management**

We note and welcome the comprehensive background narrative and evidence set out under this theme heading. We agree that existing conditions demonstrate the need for and the potential positive impacts of this Objective.

We again note and commend the very clear and explicit tie-back of this policy area into the parent LTCP5 policy. Most demand management measures are politically contentious and a robust justification is accordingly both appropriate and necessary.

A number of areas are highlighted in the text. One is the oversupply of car parking in the town centre, much of it free of charge, at least for up to three hours. The severance impact of high level of car traffic on Buckingham Road/Kings End is also clearly an issue where achieving a shift to active travel modes is concerned, as well as presenting significant problems for the reliable and efficient operation of public transport.

National evidence is plentiful that restricting parking at residential origin has no impact on reducing car ownership or use. It merely increases parking pressure on the highway, including footways. This blocks footways, cycle provision – including flagrant abuse of segregated tracks – and hinders efficient bus movement. Demand management at major employment destinations be possible, however this would require a greater degree of engagement with asset owners / employers than is currently happening in the Plan area. There is no District General Hospital in the MaP Plan area to which such measures credibly might also be applied.

Naturally **we would broadly** support the removal of on-street parking along identified routes and high footfall areas, to facilitate the LCWIP schemes, DCC, SATN and priority bus routes and to support the delivery of cycleways, where appropriate. This will be especially appropriate in the inner area of Bicester. Care will need to be taken to retain appropriate levels of access for deliveries and servicing.

Consideration for the provision of new or extended Controlled Parking Zones is **supported in principle**. How far it is justifiable or necessary in the MaP Plan area is likely to be quite limited. Most of the built environment has been purpose designed to accommodate on-curtilage parking as it has been developed since 1980.

### ***Objective BIC9: Deliver movement infrastructure schemes***

We **agree strongly** that it is simply not credible, appropriate nor expedient to assume that all additional future mobility demand can be accommodated by active travel, supported by public transport, given the current baseline position and the scale of development already committed, which is likely to grow further, not least with the Heyford Park New Town.

We recognise and agree that to achieve the maximum scope to increase active travel and public transport use, principally within the inner area of Bicester, diversion of through traffic out of the area is necessary and justifiable, through the South East Peripheral Route. This route is also likely to greatly assist the future delivery of rational bus service connectivity between allocations east of the town employment on the A41, and Kidlington/Oxford, depending on alignment and design.

#### *9.1. Support the delivery of:*

##### *a. A4095 realignment (NW Bicester).*

This relates to the established requirements of the EcoTown and its approved framework plans, and is **supported**. This is also necessary to better distribute through traffic, including HGVs

away from the congested inner area and corridors, freeing up road space in this area for sustainable modes.

*b. Highways and environmental improvements to the central corridor: Kings End to Queen Ave.*

This should support substantial improvements for active travel and public transport on what is today a busy and congested link. Improvements to bus priority and bus stop infrastructure should be secured as part of this scheme. This ought to be facilitated by improvements to Vendee Drive and Howes Lane separately proposed. This is **strongly supported**.

*c. Improvements to Middleton Stoney Road / Kings End / Oxford Road roundabout.*

Most bus routes use this junction today, and there is no question that the future development of bus services, both local and longer distance, will make this even more frequently traversed. One consideration is the likely removal of any link for buses east from the market Place via the current level crossing on London Road, in which case, it is quite likely that at least one bus service heading towards the east will need to divert round via Oxford Road and the existing A41 link, through this area.

Given the adjacency of the Bicester Village retail destination, and an intersection with a key east west sustainable travel connection towards the Station through it, the improvement of active travel facilities through this area is no doubt another important priority.

Notwithstanding, we urge that the opportunity is fully taken up to secure bus priority between the Pingle Drive junction and Kings End through the substantial diversion of through traffic. In fact, there is a strong case to entirely remove general vehicular traffic between Middleton Stoney Road and Pingle Drive from the Oxford Road through introduction of a mode filter.

We **strongly support the principle**, subject to the opportunities to rebalance the transport offer towards sustainable modes and public transport in particular, being identified and fully taken up.

*d. Caversfield junction improvements (Junction of Aunt Ems Lane and B4100).*

This scheme relates, broadly, to the EcoTown (north). It is at an advanced stage. It is **supported**.

*e. Western corridor Changes and improvements to Howes Lane/Bucknell Road Junction: North West Bicester all other phases.*

As previously signalled this relates to the immediate access and movement requirements arising from both sides of the EcoTown, as well as a wider strategic need to de-emphasise vehicular traffic crossing the town's central area, and provide an alternative effective peripheral route. Accordingly, it is **strongly supported**, subject to its design facilitating efficient and direct bus access from the EcoTown to Bucknell Road. This is likely to be the main radial route for local bus services serving the EcoTown.

**Objective BIC10: Deliver future movement infrastructure schemes**

As stated previously we **strongly support** these in principle.

We note that **little or nothing is said in the Plan about** the approach to the **London Road Level Crossing**. Network Rail intend to close this shortly.

It is on a significant bus route, being the only direct link from the town centre to the east, including committed local plan strategic allocations at Gravel Hill and Wretchwick Green. Beyond that the H5 service continues to Headington and JR Hospital. In time we would expect the service to extend to the major employment cluster around Oxford Brookes University/Old Road/Churchill Hospital/Warneford College.

We note the very recent announcement on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2025 that after years of controversy and pressure, Network Rail has now agreed to progress an underpass offering limited vehicular access to replace the level crossing. This involves a limited headroom (unclear currently) and single-track shuttle working. It is far from clear to us what the capacity of this arrangement would be to address current levels of traffic using the level crossing.

The probable dimensions **will not permit operation** by future zero-emissions buses, all of which are over 3m high. The Council and all other stakeholders need to be clear about this matter and the future impact on bus network connectivity.

There is also a very clear mutual dependency on the future approach taken to traffic and demand management in and around the town centre, including Market Place, Manorsfield Road and Kings End. If as seems likely all routes to the east need to take an alternative route, either to the west and south via Kings End/Oxford Road/A41; or to the north via Launton Road and A4421 Charbridge Lane/Wretchwick Way, then this will unavoidably reduce the attractiveness and relevance of certain services, especially for more local journeys. While routes to Aylesbury currently route via Launton, those towards Headington and Eastern Arc will be especially compromised.

**We therefore urge the County and Network Rail to review the position urgently**, and with a broader view as to what the investment in the level crossing replacement is intended to achieve, and what other mitigation strategies are necessary to maintain access by all sustainable modes towards the east.

#### *10.1. Progress the current ongoing schemes in the pipeline:*

##### *a. Eastern Peripheral Movement Corridor.*

We are not quite clear to what this refers.

#### *10.2. Work with partners to develop the following previously identified schemes:*

##### *a. A41 Corridor / South East Peripheral Road.*

As signalled above, we **strongly support** the principle of this for the reasons previously outlined.

Detailed alignment design and integration with the existing highways network must ensure that the opportunities to facilitate effective new public transport links are identified and delivered. This is essential to be in conformity with the wider policy goals set out in LTCP5.

*b. Vendee Drive / A41 highway improvements.*

This is another major scheme, needed to support anticipated further plan-led growth, mainly employment led. The character of the A41 between Bicester Village and the M40 has already substantially changed, north of Vendee Drive, and we understand that this scheme extends the broad thrust of the changes in character to the M40, pursuant to committed and planned major development in this area to the north of the A41 in the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042. We **strongly support** this subject to the scheme properly facilitating high quality bus services and access to and from them.

It is essential that comprehensive bus priority is secured especially southbound towards the M40 junction 9.

Appropriate bus stop and crossing facilities should be provided at what we anticipate to be two new all-movement signalised junctions.

The opportunity should be taken to substantially rationalise and improve access to and from the Bicester Park and Ride site from both the A41 and Vendee Drive. The existing 5<sup>th</sup> arm arrangement set against traffic speeds on the circulatory carriageway is clearly as prone to serious delay, including for buses exiting, as it is hazardous. This substantially undermines the efficiency of the P+R operation and tends to undermine the case to maintain the current level of services entering the site. We suspect signalisation of at least some arms of the Vendee Drive roundabout is required.

***Objective BIC12: Deliver infrastructure and placemaking schemes which are resilient to changing climate***

This objective is broadly **supported**.

***Objective BIC13: Utilise emerging and future technologies to develop innovation in Bicester***

This Objective reflects long-standing political and policy aspirations. This Objective, in principle easily laudable. Furthermore, the area, and wider Oxfordshire, has already been at the forefront on innovative demonstration projects. This includes including the autonomous bus trial undertaken at Milton Park with implementation in 2023-24, near Didcot.

Oxford Bus Group within Go-Ahead UK Bus, has its own ambitious programme to support innovation and roll-out of new technology of all kinds, customer facing, vehicle/drivetrain and in support functions.

We are looking to build on the successful electrification of the whole bus network within the city of Oxford and its environs. We have already extended the scope of electric bus operations beyond the area originally intended, to Abingdon, Thame and Bicester.

The Plan does not properly acknowledge that ambitious innovation comes both with costs and high levels of risk. The ability of the County to properly assess financial and technical risks is not demonstrated across all the areas set out in this draft policy. The role of specialist investors and partners is not acknowledged – and this will be crucial to achieve success. There are also

significant opportunity costs for the Council in pursuing some of these schemes, drawing political attention and organisational resource aside, when the benefits and costs are not clear, to the detriment of other important projects and initiatives that may well be more effective and present a much higher risk adjusted rate of return. The policy needs to be ready to acknowledge this as well.

The commitment of the Council to support and facilitate innovation in the round is **welcomed and supported**. We trust that we can rely on this commitment as we progress decarbonisation plans for our operations in the MaP Plan area.

### **Concluding Comments**

We trust that the foregoing commentary and feedback suitably meets the Councils needs and expectations at this stage.

We trust that the point we made can be given due consideration and weight as the draft plan progresses.

There is, additionally, a wider need for our business to be included in wider stakeholder dialogue within Cherwell District on a more consistent basis. Accepting we are not the largest operator in the District or the Bicester locality, it is also clear that the bus market is relatively fragmented. Furthermore, our presence is significant and is likely to grow.

Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned in the first instance if you wish to discuss this response further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "N. O. Small". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'N'.

**Nick Small**

Head of Built Environment and Infrastructure