

Joint Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Development, Regeneration and Housing

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AGENDA ITEM

Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan

Recommendation for Scrutiny Committee

That the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan be amended to take account of constructive comments received during the public consultation exercise, before being submitted to both Council Cabinets for their approval.

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - a) Give Scrutiny the opportunity to review the contents of the Proposed Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan and raise any appropriate questions they may have concerning the documents contents.
 - b) Provide Scrutiny with a summary of the six week public consultation exercise, undertaken between 19 June and 31 July 2017.
 - c) Indicate where changes are to be made to the document to take account of comments received during the public consultation process.

- d) Receive Scrutiny's comments on the document and determine, in the light of these comments, whether additional changes ought to be made to the Delivery Plan document.

Strategic Objectives

2. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan is a comprehensive document that explains what needs to be done to make Didcot an even better place to live, by balancing new housing development, most of which has already received planning approval, with the need for supporting infrastructure, more green spaces, better public realm and improved connectivity.
3. Once the Delivery Plan is approved by Cabinet, it is intended to incorporate this into the Council's planning policy framework through the creation of a Development Plan Document and/or Supplementary Planning Documents.
4. The Delivery Plan document, supported by additional, more detailed project appraisal documents will also act as a bidding document to secure the level of Government funding needed to implement the plan successfully.
5. Chapter 3 of the Delivery Plan document sets out a clear strategic vision for Didcot Garden Town and the remaining chapters outline the means by which this vision will be realised.

Background

6. Following the granting of Garden Town status to Didcot, in late 2015, South and Vale established a small team of technical experts to prepare an implementation plan for Didcot Garden Town project. It was recognised that the main task involved producing a masterplan to guide the development of Didcot up to 2031. However, this masterplan needed to take account of Didcot's economic situation, both now and in the future, the challenging number of new houses that need to be built to meet South and Vale's Local Plan commitments, the need for supporting infrastructure and more (and better quality) open spaces and the necessity to try and reduce the volume of traffic movements on Didcot's main roads. Many other factors needed to be taken account of when producing the masterplan and these are set out in the Delivery Plan.
7. How to realise or deliver the masterplan was also an important issue. The document was therefore called a "Delivery Plan" to emphasise the need for action and the need to manage these actions through effective governance. It is also recognised that securing constructive community involvement is also at the heart of successful delivery, as is the ability to fund the various projects set out in the Delivery Plan.
8. The content of the Proposed Delivery Plan was informed by regular meetings with individuals, companies and community organisations that were identified as being potentially key stakeholders in Didcot's future. A series of large scale meetings were also held in Cornerstone, where ideas and proposals were presented to the key stakeholders and members of the public. This community engagement process was wide and comprehensive and is summarised in Chapter 2, and Appendices A and B, of the Delivery Plan.

9. The process of producing the Delivery Plan was overseen by a Project Advisory Board, comprising four South and Vale cabinet members (both Leaders and the Lead Cabinet members for Development), South and Vale’s CEO and the Head of Development, Regeneration and Housing.
10. Unfortunately, although it was planned to undertake a public consultation process in May 2017, the calling of a General Election at short notice meant that the public consultation had to be postponed until after the election (it is Council Policy not to hold public consultations during election periods). This meant that the public consultation period started on 19 June and finished on 31 July 2017.
11. Didcot Town Council and a number of respondents felt that the consultation period should have been longer. However it was already two weeks longer than the minimum period set out in the Councils’ public consultations policy guidelines. Had the period been extended beyond 31 July, it would have been impossible to produce the papers needed for Scrutiny and both Cabinets, and obtain the approvals needed to give the document some weight when engaging with Government to seek funding support for the delivery plan before they finalise their November 2017 Budget Statement. Failure to obtain funding in 2017 could create a year-long delay in implementing some of the Garden Town’s key projects. It would also mean that Didcot would be competing with a much larger number of towns and villages that have recently been granted Garden Town or Garden Village status. This extra competition would make it much more difficult to secure a reasonable amount of government funding. Meeting the project approval deadlines of 5 and 6 October was therefore regarded as essential to the future success of Didcot Garden town.
12. The Proposed Didcot Garden Town Draft Delivery Plan and Appendices is available for download at www.didcotgardentown.co.uk and paper copies of the main report have been made available to Scrutiny Committee members (Appendix 3). Officers would be pleased to answer any questions scrutiny members may have in relation to the documents contents.

The Formal Public Consultation Process

13. As already mentioned, the formal public consultation process took place following a more informal, and relatively long, community engagement process.
14. A total of 458 people (residents, businesses and other interested parties) participated in the consultation and these participants generated a total of 1925 individual comments. This number of responses compare favourably with other public consultation exercises conducted over recent years. These consultations and the number of participants in each are shown in the following table:

Consultation	Conducted by	Date	Number of responses
Cornerstone Survey 2015	South Oxfordshire District Council	December 2015	378
South Oxfordshire Local Plan – Issues and scope	South Oxfordshire District Council	February 2015	771
South Oxfordshire Local Plan – Refined options	South Oxfordshire District Council	July 2015	750
South Oxfordshire Local	South Oxfordshire District	August 2016	1371

Plan - preferred options	Council		
Vale of White Horse Local Plan Stage 1 – Part 1	Vale of White Horse District Council	February 2014	500
Vale of White Horse Local Plan Stage 1 – Part 2	Vale of White Horse District Council	November 2014	1002
Vale of White Horse Local Plan Stage 2	Vale of White Horse District Council	May 2017	573
Strategic Economic Plan	OxLEP	August 2016	262
Section 106 Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document	South Oxfordshire District Council	April 2016	23
Accessing Shops and Facilities in Didcot	South Oxfordshire District Council	January 2016	156

15. It is also worth noting that the garden town consultation ran at the same time that SODC were consulting on the proposed Local Plan (to 2031). The Local Plan (to 2031) refers to the principles underpinning the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan and 301 comments made specific reference to the garden town. Of these 301 comments, 16 objected to the Garden Town proposals, 57 related wholly to the retention of the Ladygrove Loop, including the stretch between Cow Lane and Aldi, 13 addressed other points and 215 comments were wholly supportive of the garden town proposals.
16. It should also be noted that during the course of the public engagement process a large group of concerned Ladygrove residents protested against the inclusion of initial proposals to build a Technology Institute on land at Ladygrove Park. A petition was started before plans for the Technology Institute had been made public and people signing the petition were asked to protest against proposals to build over large parts of Ladygrove (although most of the parts of Ladygrove referred to in the initial petition were unaffected by the Technology Institute proposal).
17. As a result of the concerns expressed by local Ladygrove residents, the plans for a Technology Institute were removed from the proposed Delivery Plan in December 2017.
18. The on-line petition nevertheless continued to gather signatures, although the wording of the petition changed to reflect a more general concern to stop development on any existing open spaces in Ladygrove (and possibly throughout Didcot). This petition was presented to SODC and discussed at their July Council meeting i.e. during the formal consultation period. Council members referred it to Cabinet for further consideration and they, in turn referred it to the Didcot Garden Town Project Advisory Board for their consideration.
19. The effective mobilisation of a relatively large number of Ladygrove residents, determined to object to key elements of the Garden Town delivery Plan, had an undoubted impact upon the Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan consultation process.

20. Similarly, during the course the formal consultation process, a significant number of Culham residents started a petition to oppose the construction of any new homes in the Green Belt. The proposal to allocate this land for new housing was included in SODC’s local plan, which was out to public consultation at the same time as the Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan. Unfortunately, however, many of these residents missed the deadline for submitting comments via the SODC Local Plan consultation process and so decided to submit these through the Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan Consultation process. Many of the concerned residents also participated in the Garden Town Consultation online questionnaire, by disagreeing with key elements of the Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan.
21. The above two campaigns therefore undoubtedly had a negative impact on the Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan consultation process.
22. Nevertheless, the summary document in Appendix 1, confirms that most consultation respondents agreed with, or had a neutral view of, most Chapters of the Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan. The support for various sections of the document is summarised in the following table.

Chapter	Topic	Responses	% of total respondents that agree with, or have a neutral view of, the proposals
3	Vision	93 to 94	49% (bringing vision to life) to 59% (vision)
4	Better Place for Business	64	54%
5	Infrastructure	135 to 157	54% (transport) to 76% (grey)
6	Wider Choice of Homes	80	61 %
7	Connected Smart Community	64 to 67	65% to 67%
8	Super Green Town	100 to 102	60% to 62%
9	Proposed Masterplan	78 to 87	51% (the masterplan) to 64% (design review panel)
10	Managing Delivery	135 to 157	42% (planning) to 50% (planning & governance overview)
11	Funding and Implementation	67	45%

23. Many of the comments received are critical of issues that the Garden Town cannot and has not sought to influence. For example, disagreeing with the Garden Town Delivery Plan because it does not aim to change the number of houses allocated for development within either South or Vale’s Local Plan is not a very constructive position to take. The Garden Town aims to play its part in delivering the District-wide Local Plans by facilitating higher quality more sustainable development at a faster pace than might otherwise be the case without Garden Town status and it has therefore never set out to oppose or amend the Local Plans, in any way.

24. However, by analysing individual respondents' comments, as well as their overall assessment of various elements of the Proposed Delivery Plan, we have been able to identify a number of issues that the Final Didcot Garden Town delivery Plan needs to address.

25. The required issues and actions are as follows;

- i. The Final Delivery Plan needs to bring some of the information included in the Planning Section into the Foreword to make it clear how the Delivery Plan relates to the Local Plan. In particular the reader needs to know at the start of the document that it has been written to comply with the current planning regime and does not seek to change this. The foreword also need to make it clear that individual projects and proposals within the Delivery Plan will need to be subjected to further analysis and public scrutiny, and secure necessary funding, before they are capable of being implemented.
- ii. The Final Delivery Plan needs to be clearer about what it is not designed to do. For example, the Delivery Plan is not about delivering improved services that are the responsibility of other public sector agencies such as the National Health Service. It focusses on trying to influence the location of physical assets within Didcot Garden Town that are required to deliver these services.
- iii. A summary document needs to be produced and written in plain English.
- iv. Additional reference needs to be made to the potential role that Churches of all faiths can play in improving the health and wellbeing of Didcot residents.
- v. The document, in summarised form, needs to be more accessible and needs to emphasise projects that are going to result in positive benefits for the average Didcot resident.
- vi. The document is ambitious. However, it needs to be clear about the fact this ambition may need to be reduced in scale, by prioritising projects, once it is clear what resources are available to support the plan's implementation.
- vii. Reference needs to be made to the fact that Garden Towns originally involved the development of green fields. However, because Didcot is an existing community and has not been developed according to Garden Town principles, applying Garden Town principles and transforming Didcot into a Garden Town is a much more challenging task.
- viii. Chapter 2 needs to be amended to introduce a new sub-section that includes the text in of Appendix 1. This will mean that the final Community Engagement Chapter also includes a summary of the recent formal public consultation process.
- ix. Chapter 2 should make reference to the fact that Community Engagement will be an on-going process for the Didcot Garden Town Board and Executive – since there is an acute understanding of the need to involve all parts of the local community in the work of the Garden Town.
- x. The section on blue infrastructure needs to mention the importance of the Hakka's Brook in relation to any future development South of Didcot and

confirm whether or not the brook will need to be upgraded, if further development takes place South of Didcot Town Centre.

- xi. The Final Deliver Plan needs to include a map that shows the relationship between development sites included within the local plans and required infrastructure.
- xii. The housing section of the Final Delivery Plan needs to make greater reference to Affordable Housing and to the proposed new joint Housing Strategy that SODC and VoWH are aiming to introduce by the end of 2017.
- xiii. The Final Delivery Plan should try to identify clear “sustainability” goals and should indicate the type of specific targets that may be agreed as a means of achieving these goals.
- xiv. The map on Page 285 (Section 9.1.5) needs to make it clear that all land in and around Culham is within the Green belt.
- xv. The Final Delivery Plan should include more details concerning the governance arrangement, such as;
 - Operating guidelines for the various sub-groups operating below the Didcot Garden Town Board.
 - A summary of the proposed Scheme of Delegation between South and Vale Councils and the Didcot Garden Town Board
- xvi. Some indication should be given as to the prioritisation of the various projects referred to in Chapter 11 and the likely consequences of failing to secure the required funding from Government.
- xvii. However, the Final delivery Plan will be amended to make reference to the specific needs of young people and to ways in which this need may be met.
- xviii. The importance of connecting to the countryside should be included within the Vision (pages 12 and 13 of the Proposed Delivery Plan).
- xix. When reference is made to the proposed Culture, Leisure and Sport Study, we will also mention the fact that this should consider the need for a running track within Didcot Garden Town.
- xx. The Social Infrastructure Section of the Report (Section 5.4) will be reviewed to provide more prominent mention of the need for better local health facilities.
- xxi. We will ensure that reference to Cow Lane and any future feasibility study makes it clear that one of the options would be “two-way cycling and walking traffic”, rather than simply referring to “pedestrianisation”.
- xxii. We will consider how the Delivery Plan could be amended to acknowledge the need to improve the quality of the Abingdon to Didcot cycle route.

- xxiii. Consideration will be given to the insertion of a section in the delivery plan that specifically refers to ways in which young people can become involved in shaping Didcot's future by implementing the Delivery Plan.
- xxiv. Reference will be made within the Governance section of the need to encourage volunteering.
- xxv. Greater reference will be made to the important role that Social Enterprise can play in Didcot's future growth.
- xxvi. A paragraph will be inserted into the Delivery Plan to emphasise the need for a commitment to future maintenance and upkeep of cycle routes.
- xxvii. When referring to new residential development in Culham the delivery plan will be amended to indicate that any new housing will be dependent upon its inclusion within SODC's final, approved local plan.
- xxviii. The delivery plan will be amended to make reference to the need for appropriate public toilet facilities within the final Delivery Plan.
- xxix. The wording in the final delivery plan will be amended to refer to 'community and religious groups', instead of 'community groups'.
- xxx. Figures 8.6 and 8.8 will be corrected to show that the Sutton Courtney Environmental Education Centre (SCEEC) as a non-publicly accessible green space.
- xxxi. We will make sure that, within the masterplan, Greenlight Developments' land is shown as an agricultural field that is not available for woodland.
- xxxii. A section will be inserted within the Delivery Plan referring to scheduled monuments and the wider historic environment, within the wider area of influence.
- xxxiii. The text will be amended to reflect the fact that Milton Park is not seen as secondary to the Harwell Campus and Culham Science Centre. We will also correct other factual errors relating to Milton Park (e.g. P337). Milton Park (MEPC Milton GP Ltd)
- xxxiv. The wording on the label on p341 will be amended to read "Potential new railway station site", instead of "Network Rail Opportunity Site"
- xxxv. To avoid any perception that Didcot Garden Town is being positioned to compete with existing Science Centres at Culham, Harwell and Milton Park, We will change the vision wording to say "Didcot Garden Town is Oxfordshire's gateway to future science, applied technology, nature and vibrant communities".
- xxxvi. Reference to 1) Local Plans and 2) Recent Planning Decisions will be made within the Masterplan Process diagram in Section 9.1.2, by including two additional bullet points in the right hand box.

26. All of the above issues will be considered, together with any relevant points raised by Scrutiny Committee, and the text of the Proposed Delivery Plan will be

amended accordingly before being submitted to both Cabinets on the 5th and 6th of October.

Options open to both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

27. In reality, too much effort has gone into producing the Delivery Plan for it not to be approved by Cabinet. If Cabinet does not approve the contents of the Delivery Plan, this would be a major set-back for the Didcot Garden Town Project.

28. However, if either Cabinet is concerned about any element of the Delivery Plan contents, they could ask for these concerns to be addressed, before re-submitting the Delivery Plan to the next Cabinet meeting. This would not derail the entire Garden Town Project, but it would likely make it much more difficult to secure a 2017 government commitment to provide funding.

Financial Implications

29. The governance structure of the Garden Town will need to be resourced using some form of revenue funding, either from Government or from the other key stakeholders (or a combination of both).

30. A business case will need to be prepared to justify these revenue costs.

31. Individual projects within the Garden Town will normally be funded on a project by project basis (e.g. the Northern Perimeter Road, Phase 3). Project funding would be secured on an understanding that some of this will be used to fund revenue costs that can legitimately be “capitalised” to specific projects.

32. All further financial implications will need to be identified and assessed in conjunction with the Council’s Section 151 Officer, and will be included in any subsequent Cabinet Paper.

Legal Implications

33. The Council’s Legal team are currently working with the Garden Town Team to produce a Draft Scheme of Delegation and a brief set of Operating Guidelines for the various sub-groups that will be operate under the Didcot Garden Town Board, and for the Board itself.

34. All further legal Implications will need to be identified and assessed in conjunction with the Councils Head of Legal and Democratic Services and will be included in any subsequent Cabinet Paper.

Risks

35. The main risks associated with the Garden Town project are as follows:

- Sufficient near-term funding cannot be secured to progress priority projects
- Sufficient long-term funding cannot be secured to ensure that the whole delivery plan can be implemented

- Problems arise in connection with one or more of the Garden Town's priority projects and, in turn, this damages the reputation of the Didcot Garden Town Board and its' Executive.
- It proves difficult to encourage sufficient local participation in the various Garden Town Board sub-groups
- It proves difficult to improve the quality and diversity of new housing developments that have already received planning consent, but have yet to be built.
- That key staff decide to leave (for whatever reason) and are hard to replace.

Other Implications

36. Some other implications will inevitably be identified before the required Cabinet Paper needs to be submitted to both south and vale Cabinets. These will therefore be added, as they arise.

Conclusion

37. Didcot Garden Town is a challenging and ambitious project. Some areas of the Delivery Plan will need to be amended to address some of the comments received during the public consultation process. However, on balance, the feedback we have received from Stakeholders is extremely positive and the feedback received from people that participated in the formal public consultation is also broadly positive.

38. Without a Garden Town Delivery Plan, Didcot will have to accommodate 15,000 new homes, but will most likely be unable to secure sufficient investment to build new community facilities and much needed physical infrastructure. They will also struggle to provide additional high quality open space and better connectivity without the Garden Town delivery Plan.

39. The Proposed Garden Town Delivery Plan represents a solid piece of work aimed at making Didcot an even better place to live by 2031. Consequently, having a Garden Town Delivery Plan means that Didcot residents are more likely to be able to benefit from;

- more, and better, publicly accessible open spaces;
- improved local public transport services;
- reduced congestion of Didcot's main roads;
- improved public realm;
- new career opportunities created by businesses starting, expanding and investing in Didcot Garden Town;
- improved quality, diversity and sustainability of new housing;
- accelerated provision of new housing;

- improved connectivity as a result of creating more and better pathways, and cycle ways, across Didcot;
- new technology that will be introduced into the urban environment whenever possible; and, finally,
- investment in new physical infrastructure, to support planned new housing developments.

40. The challenge facing the Didcot Garden Town Board and Executive Team is to turn the Delivery Plan into an action plan that fully involves the local community and is capable of realising the above benefits on behalf of all Didcot residents.

Background Papers

- Appendix 1: The Didcot Garden Town Public Consultation Process – Summary Report
- Appendix 2: The Didcot Garden Town Public Consultation Feedback Report (produced by M.E.L. Research)
- Appendix 3: Didcot Garden Town Proposed Delivery Plan (hard copies to be hand delivered to confirmed meeting attendees. electronic copy, plus appendices available at www.didcotgardentown.co.uk)