

Cabinet Report

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

Reporting Officer: Jayne Bolton, Community Wellbeing Manager

Author: Charlotte Cottingham, Didcot Garden Town Programme Manager

Telephone: 07717 271932

E-mail: Charlotte.Cottingham@southandvale.gov.uk

Wards affected: Didcot North East, Didcot South, Didcot West, Cholsey, Sandford and the Wittenhams, Blewbury and Harwell, Steventon and the Hanneys and Sutton Courtenay

South Cabinet member responsible: Cllr Robin Bennett

Tel: 01865 858680 / 07979 646815 E-mail: Robin.Bennett@southoxon.gov.uk

Vale Cabinet member responsible: Cllr Sue Caul E-mail: Sue.Caul@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

To: South Cabinet on 18 April 2024 and Vale Cabinet on 19 April 2024

Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan update and next steps

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes progress against the approved Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.
2. That Cabinet approve the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy.
3. That Cabinet approve the Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy.
4. Subject to approval of recommendations 2 and 3, that Cabinet approve:
 - a) A budget allocation of £100,925 from the unallocated Didcot Garden Town capital pot to enable implementation of the agreed wayfinding improvements.
 - b) A budget allocation of £400,000 from the unallocated Didcot Garden Town capital pot to enable the implementation of the short-term green infrastructure enhancements.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Signing off officer	Simon Hewings	Pat Connell	Jessie Fieth	Mark Minion

Purpose of report

1. To update Cabinet members on progress against the approved Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan attached as **appendix 1**.
2. To seek approval of the proposed Didcot Wayfinding Strategy, attached at **appendix 2**, and to agree the budget allocation for delivery of the signage scheme proposed in the strategy.
3. To seek approval of the proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy, attached at **appendix 3**, and to agree the budget allocation for the delivery of the short- term green infrastructure enhancements as proposed in the strategy.
4. To seek approval to utilise unallocated Didcot Garden Town capital budgets to implement proposed community improvements identified within the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Corporate objectives

5. The proposals would meet these Vale of White Horse District Council objectives:
 - Providing the homes people need - supporting people living healthy lives.
 - Tackling the Climate Emergency – improving sustainability and biodiversity.
 - Building healthy communities – strong community identity, healthy place shaping and active communities for everyone.
 - Working in partnership - residents, businesses, and organisations.
6. The proposals would meet these South Oxfordshire District Council objectives:
 - Protect and restore our natural world – with partners
 - Openness and accountability – best outcomes for residents”.
 - Action on climate emergency - encouraging behavioural change, active travel, enhanced biodiversity, and circular economy.
 - Improved economic and community well-being – connected active travel
 - Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs - reduce car dependency
 - Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability – optimise use of government funding and stewardship of council assets for the residents’ benefit.

Didcot Garden Town projects

7. On 23 and 24 June 2022 South and Vale Cabinets respectively, approved a revised Didcot Garden Town (DGT) Delivery Plan and allocation of Didcot Garden Town budgets to enable focused delivery of community improvements.

8. Three of the projects have been completed, sixteen projects are on track or are now deemed to be business as usual. Five projects have been subject to delay but the Didcot Garden Town team continue to push forward with implementation. Appendix 1 provides an update on the 27 projects in the delivery plan, and Cabinet are asked to note the update.

Proposed Didcot Garden Town Wayfinding Strategy

9. Identified as project 9 in the Didcot Garden Town delivery plan, the project set out to identify areas to implement wayfinding to enhance user experience in accessing spaces around the Garden Town, and helping individuals find their way to desired destinations and encourage active travel. David Lock Associates Ltd were appointed as the consultants to lead on developing the strategy.
10. Design principles set out in the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Design Guide require the inclusion, wherever possible, of accessible wayfinding or signposting to active travel or movement on foot or bike. Wayfinding is generally defined as the use of signage, colour, and other design elements to help people navigate a place.
11. David Lock Associates Ltd prepared the proposed Didcot Wayfinding Strategy (Appendix 2), which identifies wayfinding routes, sets design standards to enhance access to Didcot destinations and encourages active travel. The proposed visual identity is designed to resonate with the town's history, natural setting, and relationship with Science Vale. The strategy includes specifications and costings for implementation of a scheme to extend across the garden town and it provides a template to allow wayfinding expansion as Didcot grows. Implementing the proposals could help to make Didcot more welcoming, enhance the sense of place, create a more connected and inclusive place to live in or visit and encourage active travel.
12. The design principles set out in the proposed strategy (page 7) are summarised here:
- signage must be **accessible and legible** - typeface, size, and colour
 - signage information should be **relevant, current, and necessary**
 - signage **longevity** should reduce the need for maintenance or map updates
 - wayfinding scheme should aim to **reduce street clutter** where possible
 - distances and journey times on signs can **promote walking and cycling**,
 - wayfinding should improve **connectivity between neighbourhoods** in Didcot and destinations in surrounding countryside and Science Vale
 - wayfinding should benefit residents and visitors through **strengthening sense of community**
 - signage should be **visible and eye-catching** in design terms and in location
 - signage should prioritise use of **zero / neutral carbon materials** and recycling
 - Didcot sits at the heart of **Science Vale** and signage design should reflect the world-leading science work and research being undertaken here.

13. The proposed strategy identifies destinations across Didcot, including specific buildings, facilities, and open space, which are shown on the map on page 89 of the strategy. Active travel is to be encouraged through signage information on walking and cycling times. Time and distance schedules on pages 16-17, provide a breakdown of data for a hierarchy of signage from double sided 'totem' boards to finger posts.
14. The proposed signage hierarchy, totems, finger posts and way markers, is unified by colour and style that includes patterning unique to each Didcot neighbourhood. The potential palette of neighbourhood patterns, on page 19 of the proposed strategy, is based on characteristics of the town and surrounding area, themes varying from Science Vale electrical circuits and biological mitosis to marshes, wheat, and orchards.
15. The Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board has considered and shown support for the proposed Didcot Wayfinding Strategy.
16. Subject to both Cabinets approving the proposed Didcot Wayfinding Strategy and implementation of the proposed wayfinding scheme, detailed design and works on the ground will be carried out in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and Didcot Town Council and through further targeted engagement with key stakeholders.
17. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan 2022 allocated £60,000 to support the delivery of a wayfinding strategy and to implement wayfinding improvements. To date just under £20,000 revenue has been spent on consultants to prepare the proposed Wayfinding Strategy, with a remaining balance of £40,000 capital to support wayfinding improvements. The strategy outlines an indicative budget allocation of £140,925, to implement the wayfinding proposals in full. Officers recommend that Cabinet approve the additional allocation of £100,925 from the Didcot Garden Town unallocated capital pot to implement the wayfinding proposals in full.
18. Once the detailed design, survey, specification, relevant planning permissions and procurement phase is complete, a further report will be presented to Cabinet to seek approval to proceed with implementation and include consideration of budget requirements for ongoing maintenance, repairs and responsibilities.

Proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy

19. Identified as Project 16 in the Didcot Garden Town delivery plan, the Green Infrastructure project set out to conduct a review of neighbourhoods to identify areas where green infrastructure can improve the public realm, assess the access to green / open space on the outskirts of Didcot and also provide a phasing plan for biodiversity enhancements including potential for other green infrastructure. Arkwood Ltd were appointed as the consultants to lead on developing the strategy.

20. Natural England defines green infrastructure as ‘a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.’ Blue infrastructure includes ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, and Sustainable Drainage Systems or SuDS.
21. Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 Core Policy 45 states that ‘a net gain in Green Infrastructure, including biodiversity, will be sought either through on-site provision or off-site contributions and the targeted use of other funding sources. A net loss of Green Infrastructure, including biodiversity, through development proposals, will be resisted.’
22. South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan Policy STRAT3 paragraph 1.iii states that within the Didcot Garden Town masterplan area the Local Plan will, ‘support the delivery of ambitious green infrastructure provision and plan safe, healthy and active spaces, supported by Policy ENV5’ on ‘green infrastructure in new developments’, make particular reference to design with regard to the quality standards set out in the district wide Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan. Consideration should also be given to inclusive access, biodiversity gain, climate change, management, and maintenance.
23. Arkwood Ltd prepared the proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy, (appendix 3) reviewing green infrastructure and biodiversity opportunities by neighbourhood and setting out a robust options plan for enhancement opportunities relating to existing and potential public realm.
24. The proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy responds to policies in the councils’ adopted Local Plans and guidance in the Joint Design Guide and the National Planning Policy Framework. It proposes projects to enhance the function of existing green and blue infrastructure assets, to provide new assets and to create or reinforce connections between them, increase biodiversity net gain and improve habitat connectivity. Approving the strategy and delivery against some of the options proposed will:
- improve the appearance of the town and its approaches.
 - make it a more connected and greener, healthier place to live.
 - make green spaces more accessible, inclusive, and neurodiverse.
 - improve connections between the town and the open countryside.
 - provide a network of interlinked multipurpose open spaces.
 - benefit wildlife and make the town more resilient to climate change.
25. The proposed strategy concludes that the Didcot Garden Town programme offers a unique opportunity to enhance green infrastructure provision and ecosystem services across Didcot. The proposed strategy looks at five areas of Didcot, north-east, south-east, north-west, south-west and central, identifying green infrastructure requirements, and providing short, medium, and long term improvement options for each area. Please see table on pages 97-98 of the proposed strategy.
26. Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board will have reviewed the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy at its meeting on 15 April 2024.

27. Subject to both Cabinets approving the proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy and identifying the options for delivery and the associated budgets, the Didcot Garden Town team will initiate the procurement process for detailed design and works on the ground in partnership with the Oxfordshire County Council, Didcot Town Council, and local organisations.
28. The Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan 2022 allocated £20,000 revenue budget to deliver a Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy, and this budget has been spent in full. £100,000 capital funding was allocated to implement short-term green infrastructure schemes and enable community improvement. The strategy outlines a number of short, medium and long term options, some of which have been identified as being headline enhancement, and some have an estimated cost documented within the proposed strategy. Officers recommend that the short-term headline projects from each of the designated areas, is progressed in the first instance, these projects are outlined below:

Didcot Areas	Summary project descriptions (p97)	Estimated Cost
North East	Project 3 - Increase multi-functionality of green spine and greenspaces to include biodiversity connectivity, play, food growing, public art and making space for girls	£100,000
South-East	Project 1 - (Phase 1 of Sustrans NCR 544) Introduce clear sight lines, lighting and improved signage and clear exits to Sustrans NCR 544 to make it safer for users, especially women and girls	£100,000
South-West	Project 1 - (Phase 1) Enhance/develop southern perimeter route between Mowbray Nature Reserve and proposed Alma Park/Neighbourhood Park/ Boundary Park/Robin Way Park. Incorporate play and exercise features	£200,000
North-West	The three short-term options have not been identified as headline enhancement and estimated costs are to be determined. Officers would recommend that we continue to explore the feasibility of the short-term options proposed and bring forward a delivery option at a later date.	N/A at this time
Central	Project 1 – Biodiversity corridor creation	£100,000
TOTAL		£500,000

29. Officers recommend that Cabinet approve the additional allocation of £400,000 from the unallocated Didcot Garden Town capital pot to implement the above short-term green infrastructure enhancement projects. Officers will progress relevant design and specifications works related to each project, and where applicable further reports will be presented to Cabinet to seek approval to proceed with implementation and include consideration of any ongoing budget requirements.

Options

30. Cabinet may choose not to approve the proposed strategies. This would mean that agreed programmes in the DGT delivery plan will not be delivered and intended community improvements will not be achieved.

Financial Implications

31. In June 2022, Cabinets approved an amended Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan that allocated £579,000 Didcot Garden Town revenue and capital funding to eleven of its 27 projects.
32. The table below outlines the current financial position in relation to Didcot Garden Town funding.

Revenue	Sum of Grant Remaining Balance as of 1 April 2023	Committed Within Delivery Plan	Remaining Unallocated Balance
South Oxfordshire	£1,312,590	£619,872	£692,718
Vale of White Horse	£229,494	£154,968	£74,526
Grand Total	£1,542,084	£774,840	£767,244

Capital	Sum of Grant Remaining Balance as of 1 April 2023	Committed Within Delivery Plan	Remaining Unallocated Balance
South Oxfordshire	£1,200,000	£140,000	£1,060,000
Grand Total	£1,200,000	£140,000	£1,060,000

33. Referring to the table above, it is recommended that the additional £100,925 wayfinding strategy funding and the £400,000 green infrastructure funding is allocated from the Didcot Garden Town unallocated capital balance.
34. This would leave a remaining **unallocated revenue budget of £767,244** and an **unallocated capital budget of £559,075** to progress further Didcot Garden Town programmes, including, for example, consideration of North-West green infrastructure community improvements and a contribution to the delivery of a community Broadway scheme.
35. Officers will also continue to seek external funding to support delivery of programmes.

Legal Implications

36. Legal Services will provide advice on procurement of proposed services and works and related property law matters such as processing of licences as required for example, to allow contractors to work on land proposed for the location of signage and green infrastructure.

Climate and ecological impact implications

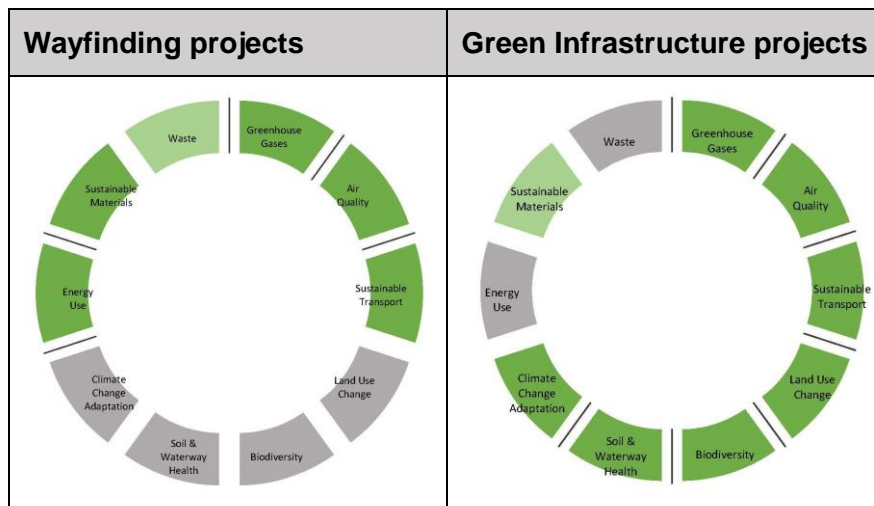
37. The Didcot Garden Town Wayfinding Strategy identifies wayfinding routes to encourage active travel within and between neighbourhoods in the town and further afield. The proposed signage will provide consistent information on routes and journey times to make it easier for people to choose to walk and cycle. This will reduce the number of journeys taken by car, therefore reducing carbon emissions and contributing to our district-wide carbon emission reduction targets.

38. The Wayfinding Strategy includes routes identified in Didcot's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the Didcot Central Corridor Placemaking Strategy. Together, these will deliver new walking and cycling routes in Didcot which will provide further opportunities to encourage active travel.

39. The proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy identifies potential green infrastructure options that will contribute to:

- make Didcot a more connected and greener, healthier place to live
- make green spaces more accessible, inclusive, and neurodiverse
- improve connections between the town and the open countryside
- provide a network of interlinked multipurpose open spaces
- benefit wildlife and make the town more resilient to climate change.

40. The proposals in this report have been assessed utilising the councils' climate action tool as shown below:



Equalities implications

41. In making decisions the council is required to have regard to its equalities duties and in particular to those set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and eliminate any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic namely age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, and persons who do not share it and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
42. An Equalities Screening Form has been completed, which shows no negative equalities implications in relation to the proposals in this report. It is anticipated that positive outcomes and benefits will be realised from the proposed strategies in this report, including making public areas more accessible, inclusive and neurodiverse.

Risks

43. Any identified risks associated with delivering the strategies will be monitored in accordance with the council's risk management process, and the project risk registers will be reported as appropriate to the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board Advisory Board and Cabinet. Some initial risks are indicated below.
44. Economic – there is a risk that global economic change, increased prices, and taxation changes result in budgets not being sufficient to carry out required services or works. This may be mitigated by expediting procurement, seeking additional or alternative funding sources and to some extent managing public expectations for works on the ground.
45. Social – the high level of development around Didcot may give rise to demographic profile changes resulting in changes to project priorities. This may be mitigated by ensuring that projects impacting current health and wellbeing issues are prioritised in the short term, that new social issues arising are considered in any future stewardship planning and the team continues to seek Didcot Garden Town principles be embedded in new development.
46. Technological – there is a risk that new technology and changes to digital access in the community may result in a need to change signage developed from the Wayfinding Strategy. This may be mitigated by keeping a low level of technology interface in the detailed design.
47. Legislative / regulatory – potential changes to national and local legislation, regulations and guidance may impact on the detailed design of projects, particularly those derived from the Green Infrastructure Strategy. This may be mitigated by expediting the carrying out of short-term green infrastructure projects and by the team staying alert for legislative changes.
48. Environmental – there are a number of environmental issues, for example flooding or contaminated soil effecting the safety of local food growing. These may be mitigated by careful project management, including briefing, and specifying for procurement of services and works.

Conclusion

49. Progress against the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan 2022 continues and is reported to the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board on a quarterly basis.
50. Approval of these two strategies and support to implement identified works within them, supports delivery of two programmes within the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan and would deliver vital community improvements.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Progress update of the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan 2022

Appendix 2 - Proposed Didcot Wayfinding Strategy, David Lock Associates Ltd

Appendix 3 - Proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy, Arkwood Ltd