

# Cabinet Report



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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To: 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 attached at appendix 1.
2. That Cabinet approve the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy attached at appendix 2.
3. That Cabinet approve the Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy attached at appendix 3.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Signing off officer	Anna Winship	Pat Connell	Jessie Fieth	Abi Witting

### 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**.
3. To seek approval of the proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy, attached at **appendix 3**.

## Corporate objectives

4. 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.

## Didcot Garden Town projects

5. On 24 June 2022 Cabinet approved a revised Didcot Garden Town (DGT) Delivery Plan and allocation of Didcot Garden Town budgets to enable focused delivery of community improvements.
6. Three of the projects have been completed, seventeen projects are on track or are now deemed to be business as usual. Seven 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

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
  12. 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.
  13. The Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board has considered and shown support for the proposed Didcot Wayfinding Strategy.
  14. Subject to Cabinet 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.
  15. Once the detailed design, survey, specification, relevant planning permissions and procurement phase is complete, officers will provide a further update.

## **Proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy**

16. 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.
17. 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.

18. 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.’
19. 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.
20. The proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy responds to policies in the council’s adopted Local Plan, 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.
21. 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.
22. Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board will consider its support for the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy on 15 April 2024.
23. Subject to Cabinet approving the proposed Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy and availability of approved budgets from South Oxfordshire District Council’s capital fund, 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. The proposed headline short term projects recommended to be brought forward for implementation are shown in the table below.

<b>Didcot Areas</b>	<b>Summary project descriptions (p97)</b>
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
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)
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
North-West	Officers recommend that we continue to explore the feasibility of three short-term project options here for delivery at a later date.
Central	Project 1 – Biodiversity corridor creation

## Options

24. 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

25. In July 2022, Cabinet approved an amended Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan that, from both districts, allocated £579,000 Didcot Garden Town revenue and capital funding derived from Government grants, to eleven of its 27 projects including the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy and Didcot Green Infrastructure Strategy.

### Table to outline current financial position in relation to Didcot Garden Town funding

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

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

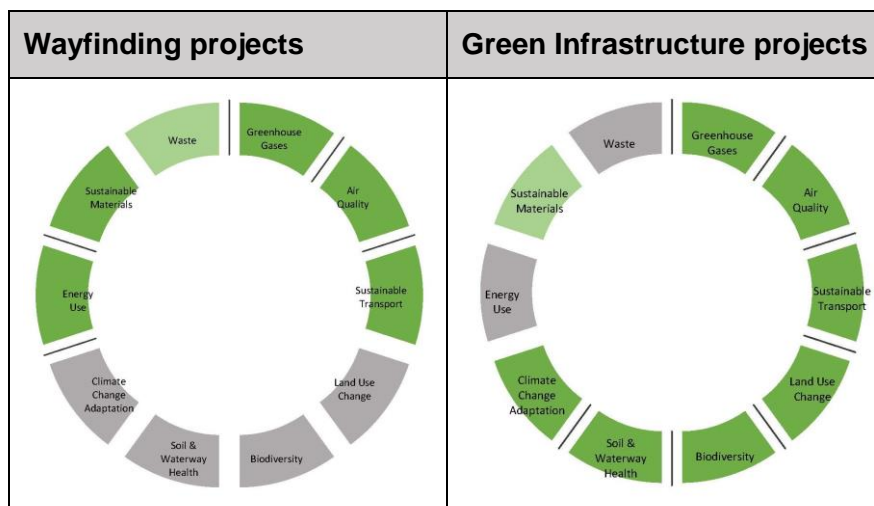
26. There are no financial implications from approving the Didcot Wayfinding and Green Infrastructure Strategies as budgets for implementation works are being sought from South Oxfordshire District Council's capital budget.
27. In Vale of White Horse the remaining revenue balance, as of 1 April 2023 was £229,494. £154,968 is already committed within the Delivery Plan programme leaving an unallocated balance of £74,526 to further progress Didcot Garden Town projects. Officers will also continue to seek external funding to support the Delivery Plan programme.

## Legal Implications

28. 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 for those in the Vale of White Horse area.

## Climate and ecological impact implications

29. In line with the scope of the project, the proposed Didcot Garden Town Wayfinding Strategy identifies wayfinding routes and sets design standards to enhance user experience in accessing Didcot's spaces and desirable destinations, which will encourage active travel, including routes identified in Didcot's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and the Didcot Central Corridor Placemaking Strategy.
30. The strategy also considered the climate emergency by proposing sustainable signage options, recycling of existing, superfluous signage and demonstrating a positive contribution to climate action through sourcing and use of materials.
31. 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.
32. The proposals in this report have been assessed utilising the councils' climate action tool as shown below:



## Equalities implications

33. 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.

34. 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**

35. 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.

## **Conclusion**

36. Progress against the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan 2022 continues and is reported to the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board on a quarterly basis and to cabinet when formal decisions are required.
37. Approval of these two strategies supports delivery of two programmes within the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan and would deliver vital community improvements.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Progress update against 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