

Cabinet Report



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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Wards affected: South - All wards within the Didcot Garden Town and "Area of Influence" boundaries: Cholsey, Didcot North East, Didcot South, Didcot West, Sandford and the Wittenhams wards in South Oxfordshire district.

Vale - Blewbury and Harwell, Drayton, Hendreds, Steventon and the Hanneys, Sutton Courtenay, wards in the Vale of White Horse district.

Cabinet member responsible: South – Robin Bennett, Vale - Councillor Judy Roberts

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To: CABINET

Date: South – 23 June 2022 and Vale – 24 June 2022

New Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan

Recommendations

- (a) That Cabinet approves the revised delivery plan for Didcot Garden Town as shown in Appendix 2.
- (b) South Cabinet agrees a supplementary estimate to the 2022/23 revenue budget £660,000 from South Oxfordshire District Council, fully funded from the grant monies held in the council's reserves, thereafter, to be managed by the relevant budget holder to deliver the approved delivery plan.
- (c) Vale Cabinet agrees a supplementary estimate to the 2022/23 revenue budget £165,000 from Vale of White Horse District Council, fully funded from the grant monies held in the council's reserves, thereafter, to be managed by the relevant budget holder to deliver the approved delivery plan.

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval of a new Didcot Garden Town (DGT) Delivery Plan and associated budget, to enable a more focused delivery plan to bring forward community improvements, assist recovery of the garden town area following the pandemic and to address the climate emergency.

Corporate Objectives

2. The South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020-2024 has a key theme of “Home and infrastructure that meets local need” and the Vale of White Horse Corporate Plan 2020-24 has a key theme of “Providing the homes people need”, both of which are supported by the ‘Garden Villages and Town’ designation as a mechanism to introduce innovative housing to meet both councils’ need for high quality, low energy’ and ‘active travel networks’ that ‘supports the environment and people living healthy lives’.

Background

3. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils approved various actions relating to Didcot Garden Town on 5 and 6 October 2017. One of the actions was to approve the Delivery Plan and its vision for sustainable growth to deliver 15,000 homes and 20,000 jobs by 2031. The Delivery Plan listed over 60 projects which contributed to the implementation of the strategic plan.
4. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils (SODC and VWHDC) approved a revised governance structure, early town-wide projects and placed-based strategies for delivery in January and February 2020, following previous consideration by Cabinets in 2019. Recommendations brought forward by Cabinets and the nominated Advisory Board at the time emphasised finalising the governance structure, transportation projects, development of the Gateway and other meanwhile projects. It was also highlighted that priority should be given to community engagement and an event to launch the sounding boards once the governance was approved.
5. The Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board (DGTAB) is made up of nine representatives from organisations with an interest in implementing the Garden Town vision. The governance structure includes South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Didcot Town Council, Sutton Courtenay Parish Council (representing the five parishes in the DGT boundary as illustrated in Appendix 3), Homes England and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).
6. The DGTAB serves in an advisory role with no legal status or formal decision-making powers. Each member may make recommendations to their representative organisation to act on a matter that is under the jurisdiction of that organisation. It is the joint role of SODC and VWHDC Cabinets to make any formal decisions as the statutory bodies, who are accountable for the funding except in respect of strategic highways infrastructure projects associated to the masterplan, which Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for.
7. Since 2017, the SODC and VWHDC Didcot Garden Town team has worked with partners to complete projects as set out in the original Delivery Plan. DGT has delivered a total of 13 projects and a further 26 projects are in progress/part of BAU which are referred to in **Appendix 1**.
8. In 2021, Homes England notified officers that Didcot Garden Town will no longer be able to participate in the annual bidding rounds for capacity funding (revenue) as part of the Garden Communities Programme.

Current position

9. In December 2021 a new Community Wellbeing service was created in SODC and VWHDC, which pulled together the following teams: Health, Community Grants and

Liaison, the Community Hub, Arts Strategy, Garden Communities and Active Communities.

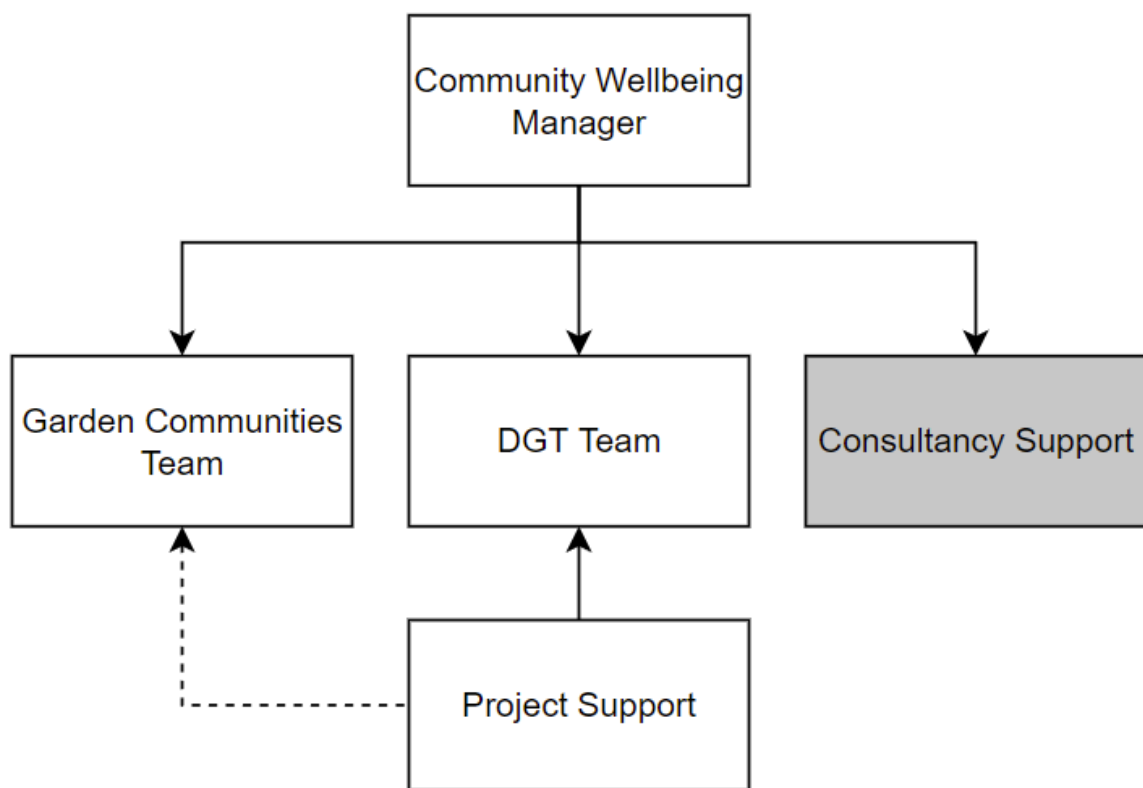
10. At the point of transition to this new team, members requested a complete review of activities within the DGT programme to provide clarity on progress and operational constraints. The table below outlines expenditure and grant income to date (both Revenue and Capital).

Revenue	Sum of Grants Received	Sum of Expenditure to 31st March 2021	Sum of Grant Remaining Balance as of 31st March 2021	Sum of Expenditure in FY 21/22	Anticipated Remaining Grant balance as of 31st March 2022
South Oxfordshire	-£3,551,419	£1,950,730	-£1,600,689	£121,078	-£1,479,611
Didcot Garden Town	-£2,375,500	£1,482,810	-£892,690	£121,078	-£771,612
Didcot Gateway 2012-2014	-£645,000	£456,019	-£188,981		-£188,981
Didcot Growth Point	-£530,919	£11,900	-£519,019		-£519,019
Vale of White Horse	-£1,710,500	£1,343,348	-£367,152	£132,271	-£234,882
Didcot Garden Town	-£1,710,500	£1,343,348	-£367,152	£132,271	-£234,882
Grand Total	-£5,261,919	£3,294,077	-£1,967,842	£253,349	-£1,714,493
Capital	Sum of Grants Received	Sum of Expenditure to 31st March 2021	Sum of Grant Remaining Balance as of 31st March 2021	Sum of Expenditure in Unit 4 as at 20/01/22	Anticipated Remaining Grant balance as of 31st March 2022
South Oxfordshire	-£7,509,399	£34,399	-£7,475,000	£7,178	-£7,467,822
NPR3 Funding	-£6,200,000	£0	-£6,200,000		-£6,200,000
Didcot Growth Point Capital Funding	-£1,309,399	£34,399	-£1,275,000	£7,178	-£1,267,822
Vale of White Horse					
None					
Grand Total	-£7,509,399	£34,399	-£7,475,000	£7,178	-£7,467,822

Revised Delivery Plan

11. In March 2022, the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board reconsidered the Delivery Plan and its objectives. This review was completed to ensure the delivery outcomes for projects, aligned with the current outlook in light of challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic situation and ongoing climate change needs.
12. As part of this work, a priority mapping exercise was completed with members to bring forward each represented organisations top three priorities for the Garden Town. Themes and feedback were also tabled by the three sounding boards: residents, businesses, and parish councils.
13. A variety of priorities came forward but there was agreement from the Advisory Board members on a number of key topics. This included strategies and projects associated with the delivery of infrastructure to ensure provisions are implemented in line with the increase in population; projects to strengthen and contribute to the climate emergency including green infrastructure and particularly active travel; and focus to support town centre regeneration and placemaking to overcome the impacts of Covid-19 including a retail strategy, meanwhile spaces and wayfinding.

14. Considering the ideas brought forward, the new team developed proposals as set out in **Appendix 2** for a revised Delivery Plan to guide service delivery. The Delivery Plan includes the emerging themes as identified by the Advisory Board, with many of them either aligning with projects identified in the 2017 Delivery Plan or resembling key strategies cited in chapters of the original strategic document.
15. The proposed revised Delivery Plan and Garden Communities team structure supports enablement of key agendas including Garden Communities principles, Health and Wellbeing, the Climate Emergency and Levelling-up.
16. It is proposed as part of this plan that the SODC and VWHDC Garden Communities team, which supports this work, will be structured with a focus on delivery and enabling the procurement of specialists and wider Council teams to support the delivery of outcomes at speed. Project delivery will also be supported by council-wide teams, where priorities align to other service delivery.



Ongoing Budget

17. In order to deliver the work outlined in the revised Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan (Appendix 2), it is paramount to ensure that the appropriate financial structures are in place to allow for monitoring in line with the budget management approach of the councils.
18. To facilitate this, it is proposed to change to working practices for this programme and create a Didcot Garden Town budget. Previously, funds were spent from the grant monies held in reserve at the end of the year in order to reconcile spent costs. The proposal presented to Cabinets in this paper, is to draw these funds down in advance and use them as an in-year budget in the same way as other departments across the councils.

19. This requires an initial sum to be drawn down from grant monies held in reserve, initially this figure is estimated to be £825,000 (South - £660,000, Vale £165,000), and Cabinet is asked to authorise the movement of these funds into the budget year 2022/2023.
20. Any monies which go unspent by the end of the year will be carried forward into following years with agreement of the Section 151 officer in consultation with the appropriate Head of Service, in accordance with finance procedure rules laid out in each council's constitution.

Financial Implications

21. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the council's overarching financial position.
22. For South, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2022 showed that the council is due to receive £2.1 million less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2022/23 (with the balance coming from reserves).
23. This funding gap is predicted to increase to over £3 million by 2026/27. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisant of the need to address this funding gap in future years.
24. For Vale, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2022 showed that the council was able to set a balanced budget for 2022/23, but that there is expected to be a budget gap in future years.
25. This future funding gap is predicted to increase to over £3.7 million by 2026/27. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisant of the need to address this funding gap in future years.
26. The expenditure proposed in the above paragraphs would be fully funded from grant funding previously received for this programme.

Legal Implications

27. Funding referenced was granted under S31 of the Local Government Act 2003 and it is to support South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council towards expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred. Homes England (under DLUHC) will monitor how the funding has been used to progress the project through regular contact with officers.

Risks

28. The revised delivery plan is comprised of the priorities from the delivery plan approved in 2017 and therefore contains no greater risk. However, should action not be taken now to identify key priorities and reflect changing circumstances posed by the Covid-19

pandemic, the economic situation and ongoing climate change needs, there is a risk that the most relevant and appropriate community improvements are not brought forward, and the desired outcomes not achieved.

Other implications

29. The Delivery Team will monitor progress on the implementation of the Delivery Plan and report back to Cabinets and Scrutiny committees, as appropriate. Reporting intervals will be agreed with the relevant Cabinet members.

Next Steps

30. Once the revised Delivery Plan has been approved, the remaining funding detailed above in paragraph 19 will be apportioned to the individual activities (once partnership working has been considered). A follow up report will be presented to Cabinets once this work is completed.

31. Officers will progress recruitment to vacant posts within the Garden Communities structure upon approval of the revised Delivery Plan.

Conclusion

32. This report seeks approval of a revised Didcot Garden Town (DGT) Delivery Plan and associated budget, to enable a more focused delivery plan to bring forward community improvements, assist recovery of the garden town area following the pandemic and to address the climate emergency.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

Acronym/Definition	Description
SAV	<i>South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils</i>
OCC	<i>Oxfordshire County Council</i>
OxLEP	<i>Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership</i>
Didcot Garden Town Boundary	<i>The Didcot Garden Town masterplan area boundary is the extent of Didcot that is covered by the garden town masterplan. This area has been considered in detail to identify both appropriate development opportunities and in order to plan investment and improvements in transport, landscape, green infrastructure, public realm, and other services. The masterplan's primary focus is the garden town masterplan area, but proposals that relate to connectivity – such as transport and green infrastructure – in some cases extend beyond the garden town boundary in order to join Didcot up with surrounding networks. List of parishes included in the DGT boundary can be viewed on the map in Appendix 3.</i>
Area of Influence Boundary	<i>As part of developing proposals for Didcot Garden Town, it has been important to look beyond Didcot's immediate boundary to consider sites and areas that are strongly linked to the garden town. This wider area around Didcot is called the 'area of influence'. Given the strong ties between Didcot and the Science Vale, the area of influence includes the three major science campuses: Harwell, Milton Park and Culham. As well-known and valued landscape features near to Didcot, Wittenham Clumps and the River Thames are important features contributing to Didcot's natural setting, these are included within the area of influence. Finally, Didcot acts as a primary service centre for a number of surrounding villages; this relationship influences Didcot's economy and transport network, and so these villages are included within the area of influence. List of parishes included in the Area of Influence can be viewed on the map in Appendix 3.</i>
Community Programming	<i>Scheduling and delivering a series of projects within the local community to support activation and community development to serve specific communities in their own environment.</i>
Meanwhile spaces	<i>Short term use of a temporary building or area generally used for the benefit of the local community for meeting spaces, training, exhibitions, pop up shops etc.</i>
Co-working spaces	<i>Co-working is a term used to describe a working arrangement in which people from different teams, companies and areas come together to work in a single shared space.</i>
Oxfordshire Plan 2050	<i>The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is one of the commitments made by the six Oxfordshire authorities and will collectively consider the needs of all the county to ensure joint up working. The Oxfordshire Plan builds on the foundations set by the current and emerging countywide Local Plans and looks beyond them, as the strategic planning issues for the period up to 2050. It will give the districts a framework for future planning policies. The Plan will not allocate sites for housing or employment. Instead, it will identify key areas for sustainable growth with associated housing/employment numbers, while considering how to help tackle climate change, improve water efficiency, and mitigate flood risk.</i>
Joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2041	<i>South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils have come together to work on a new Joint Local Plan which will guide new housing and jobs needed and where they should go, informing planning application decisions for the districts. Local Plans are used to help determine planning applications and set out how and where new housing developments should take place, along with identifying the infrastructure needed to support them. The two district councils in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse have agreed to develop a joint Local Plan for the area to reduce costs and help the councils meet their ambitious targets for making the two districts carbon neutral.</i>
Neighbourhood Developments Plan	<i>Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead</i>
Local Development Orders	<i>LDO's provide permitted development rights for specified types of development in defined locations.</i>
Green Infrastructure	<i>Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green spaces such as an area of grass, trees or other vegetation, urban and rural, which can help to deliver improved quality of life through recreational or aesthetic purposes and environmental benefits for communities.</i>
Wayfinding	<i>Wayfinding can be defined as spatial problem solving. It is knowing where you are in a building or environment, knowing where your desired destination is, and knowing how to get there from your present location.</i>