

Project: Cherwell Local Plan Partial Review

Subject: Alternative Sites Strategy

Date: 4 February 2019

1. This technical note is submitted made by Cherwell Development Watch Alliance and its associated member groups (“the Alliance”). In a submission to the Planning Inspector made on 24 January 2019 substantial new evidence was submitted by the Alliance showing that the objectively assessed need (“OAN”) for Oxford City is significantly overstated.¹ The Alliance contends that the unmet need that does exist can be delivered on existing brownfield sites within Oxford City, and through the prioritisation of land for housing led developments with economic led developments delivered across the Oxfordshire region.
2. Should these compelling arguments not be accepted by the Planning Inspector, this technical note outlines an alternative strategy for the delivery of any unmet housing need for Oxford City that does not require use of Green Belt sites located to the north of Oxford. This strategy aims to further develop a strategy in the adopted Cherwell Local Plan that complements the economic growth strategy for Oxfordshire to support the development of a Knowledge Spine that runs the length of the county.
3. The Cherwell Adopted Local Plan highlights the well-connected town of Bicester:

(“B.69 The District has excellent road and rail links. New investment has substantially reduced the travel time from Banbury and Bicester to central London and Birmingham, with regular high quality train services via the Chiltern line. New investment is due in the Plan period to open up frequent rail links between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Bedford reinforcing the role of Bicester” (page 52)).

Since 2016 Chiltern Railways have run services on the route Bicester Village -- Islip -- Oxford Parkway – Oxford.² Bicester also is served by a premium bus route with the S5 running service four time an hour until 7.00 p.m. when the service is twice an hour until the end of the day. The S5 premium bus calls at Bicester Park and Ride from where it has a journey time of 32 minutes to Magdalen Street in central Oxford.³

¹ See the CDWA Submission for Matter 3 that contains a report by Opinion Research Services, a consultancy who specialise in conducting strategy housing market assessments for local authorities.

² <https://www.chilternrailways.co.uk/routes-and-destinations/bicester-village>

³ Stagecoach Timetable for S5 Premium Bus Service https://tiscon-maps-stagecoachbus.s3.amazonaws.com/Timetables/Oxford_Timetables/S5_current.pdf

4. The Sustainability Appraisal ("SA") notes that the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan ("SEP") describes Bicester as home to a large number of highly qualified residents who commute out to work (mainly to Oxford and London). The SEP recognises that alongside the town's already major growth plans, there are opportunities to locate science and technology based businesses, strengthen innovations and spin-outs from academic research locally. The SEP states there are currently 13,000 jobs in Bicester with the potential of over 10,000 more in the plan period. (SA Part 1, 2.38, page 13). Bicester and Kidlington lie within Oxford's hinterland (SA Part 2, 3.78, page 30). The development of Bicester's science and technology based economy is consistent with promoting the Knowledge Spine that runs through Oxfordshire for approximately 26 miles from Bicester to Didcot/Harwell in the south.
5. The 2014 Oxfordshire SHMA shows that house prices are cheaper in Bicester and Banbury in the north of the County, and that this is having the effect of helping first-time buyers to the market. (SA Part 2, 3.50, page 27) ("There are though price variations evident in Cherwell. Kidlington and rural areas (based on selected postcodes) are capable of achieving considerably higher values in comparison to Banbury and Bicester. Kidlington's close proximity to Oxford is a likely key driver of higher prices in the south of the District" (PR79 Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment (Final, Feb 2018), Appendix 3 – Market Assessment, 1.10.) (The difference in relative house prices in Cherwell is confirmed in the 2017 Viability Assessment prepared by Montague Evans which states that Kidlington is the most expensive area of the Cherwell housing market, with average prices comparable to Oxford City, with prices lower in Bicester and Banbury (see PR49 Viability Assessment, page 10.)
6. Area of search E incorporates Bicester and area of search C includes Wendlebury and "the town of Bicester sits close to the north eastern edge of the area and is accessible via the A41". (SA, Part 3, 7.4, 7.6, page 49).
7. Area E, containing Bicester and the surrounding area scored positives on the SA objective to improve accessibility to all services and facilities because it has strong public transport connections with Oxford City, including a railway line and bus routes (SA Part 3, 7.26, page 53). Area Search C has a minor positive effect due to proximity to Oxford and the presence of the railway line (SA Part 3, 7.27, page 53). Overall search areas C & E score positively against the SA objectives.
8. Cherwell appraised site options only in search areas A & B. We have previously contended that spatial proximity to Oxford is overly restrictive given the strong relationship of the Bicester housing market and commuting patterns to Oxford City.

9. By way of example: Bonner Allen submitted a large-scale site, Land East of Wendlebury, in response to the Issues Consultation. The site was initially described as a "Proposed Extension of Wendlebury, Oxfordshire" (March 2016), accommodating 3,000 houses.⁴ This site falls within the SA Search Area C.
10. The Bonner Allen Wendlebury proposal was further developed in response to the Options Consultation, including a detailed Transport Feasibility Report and a vision document, renaming the development, "New Alchester - Southern Gateway to Bicester" (Jan 2017). In three parts:
 - a. Response to consultation and Transport Feasibility Report
<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2114/pr-b-1016-wyg-bonnar-allen-ltd---new-alchester---part-1-of-3.pdf> ;
 - b. Vision Document, part 1
<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4019/pr-b-1016-wyg---bonnar-allan-ltd---new-alchester-redacted---part-2-of-3.pdf> ;
 - c. Vision document, part 2
<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4020/pr-b-1016-wyg---bonnar-allan-ltd---new-alchester-redacted---part-3-of-3.pdf>.
11. Bonner Allen contends that their submission has been erroneously identified as within search area C whereas their view is that it belongs within search area E,

"Our proposal at New Alchester has been grouped together with a separate proposal at Weston-on-the-Green on the western side of the M40 (Area C). However, there is little or no commonality between the two locations. New Alchester is close to the built-up area of Bicester and falls within the Garden Town Masterplan area. It lies well within the line of the M40 and lies across the railway line between Bicester and Oxford with a proposed station to maximise use of the railway. The site at Weston-on-the-Green is remote and separated from Bicester by the motorway, on which it would depend for highway access, together with the A34. There is no opportunity to utilise the railway and it is therefore not of comparable character or location to New Alchester. For these reasons we consider that New Alchester should be considered as part of the area around Bicester (Area of Search E)."

(Bonner Allen response to the Options Consultation, Part 1, Question 9 – Identifying Areas of Search, page 6).
12. The New Alchester Vision document was re-submitted by Bonner Allen in response to the Proposed Submission Plan. The summary comments include,

⁴ <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3413/pr-a-083-bonnar-allen.pdf>

"The land is identified in the Vision document attached to these representations and will include up to 7,200 new market and affordable homes, primary and secondary schools, creation of a 240 acre country park and watersports centre and the potential to incorporate a new Park & Ride site with connection to the railway line south of Bicester by a new railway station."

Not surprisingly, Bonner Allen believes Cherwell's policy of allocating sites around Kidlington and Begbroke to be flawed (PR-C-1398, page 8 (PDF), <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/6259/pr-c-1398-wyg-on-behalf-of-bonnar-allan.pdf>).

13. The Cherwell HELAA records the site as 'Land East of Wendlebury' and comments (amongst other things),

"...Development of this site would undermine the settlement hierarchy in the adopted Local Plan Part 1 and contribute significantly to coalescence between Wendlebury and Bicester (including planned development at Graven Hill and Bicester Gateway) to the north east of Wendlebury. With regard to assisting Oxford with its unmet housing need, Wendlebury lies outside Areas of Search A and B"

(PR79 - Final 2018 HELAA: HELAA227, page 82).

14. Other example sites identified via the Issues Consultation and recorded in the HELAA, for which detailed proposals are not available, include:

- a. **North West Bicester Eco-Town, Bicester (Search Area E; HELAA275* & HELAA090; 322.6 hectares; 6,000 dwelling)⁵**

Note that this site is a strategic allocation in the adopted Local Plan. However, it is also noted that the site can accommodate 6,000 dwellings with 3,293 by 2031. In their detailed response to the Proposed Submission Plan the developer (A2 Dominion) notes, "Strategic Allocation (Policy Bicester 1) has identified NW Bicester as being able to deliver 6,000 homes, 3,293 of which are anticipated to come forward within the plan period (up to 2031). The trajectory for NW Bicester, as set out in CDC's Annual Monitoring Report (March 2017) which covers the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016, anticipates the delivery of 2,998 total homes at NW Bicester including 393 homes at the Exemplar site and 2,605 homes at NW Bicester (Phase 2) up to 2031. A2D considers further housing can be delivered at NW Bicester within the plan period and the Site can make a significant contribution to Oxford's unmet housing need and Cherwell's housing need." (<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/5974/pr-c-1408->

⁵ <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3421/pr-a-097-barton-willmore---a2-dominion.pdf>

[barton-willmore-on-behalf-of-a2-dominion.pdf](#)>, 2.25, page 13; see also their Conclusions, 2.66, page 23). The HELAA notes, "This is a deliverable site in the 2016 Annual Monitoring Report. No further potential. With regard to assisting Oxford with its unmet housing need, Bicester lies outside Areas of Search A and B" (PR79 - Final 2018 HELAA: HELAA275*, page 27).

b. **St David's Barracks, Graven Hill (Search Area E; HELAA248; 33.84 hectares; ~725 dwellings)⁶**

The representation to the Options Consultation by Defence Infrastructure Organisation notes, "The estimated date of disposal of the site is 2028. Initial thoughts suggest that the site could accommodate circa 725 residential dwellings. It is noted that the site is currently covered by the currently adopted Bicester 2 Graven Hill policy. However, the housing allocation stated within that policy does not take into account the additional circa 725 dwellings that can be accommodated at the St David's Barracks site, as the barracks site was not available for redevelopment at the time of the drafting of the Bicester 2 policy."

(<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2016/pr-b-0908-defence-infrastructure-organisation---st-dauids-barracks-bicester.pdf>>, page 1). The notes for HELAA248 include, "Brownfield site within the built-up limits. The site is considered to be suitable in principle as it falls within the Bicester 2 Graven Hill strategic allocation from the adopted Local Plan Part 1. ... No further potential at the current time but will need to be reconsidered in the future. With regard to assisting Oxford with its unmet housing need, Bicester lies outside Areas of Search A and B" (PR79 - Final 2018 HELAA: HELAA248, page 26).

c. **Land South of Upper Heyford Airfield (Search Area F; HELAA220; ~100 hectares, 1,000+ dwellings)⁷**

The notes for HELAA220 include, "Further development to the south [of Upper Heyford Airfield would open up a new area of countryside, expanding the new settlement under construction. Its future consideration would depend on need and further examination of the landscape and heritage issues arising. There would be a need to avoid harm to both conservation areas, to protect the identity of nearby settlements and to consider the impact on the countryside" (PR79 - Final 2018 HELAA: HELAA220, page 79).

⁶ <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2016/pr-b-0908-defence-infrastructure-organisation---st-dauids-barracks-bicester.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3339/pr-a-022-savills---new-college-oxford.pdf>