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## 16. Bicester Area Strategy

### The Local Context

- 16.1 Bicester is one of the fastest growing economic centres in the county, with a population of approximately 31,000. Its economy is focused on storage, defence and distribution activities, food processing and engineering. Bicester Village shopping outlet is a significant UK tourist attraction, drawing in nearly six million visitors a year, including many from overseas. It benefits from good rail connections with London, which will be improved by a direct connection to London from Bicester Town Station as part of East-West Rail Phase 1. Further improvements will come forward as part of East-West Rail Phase 2 which will connect Bicester with Milton Keynes, Bletchley and Bedford.
- 16.2 The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership identifies Bicester as a growth town. It will play a key role in the economic growth of the county, which will be focussed on the central area encompassing Bicester, Oxford and Science Vale. Given its advantageous location on the transport network which connects the town with Oxford, Science Vale and the wider south-east region, it has significant potential for growth through the expansion of Bicester Village, proposed business park and employment sites allocated in the emerging Local Plan, investment in the town centre as shown by the recently completed £70m town centre redevelopment, and the shift to a low carbon community exemplified by North West Bicester eco development.
- 16.3 The Cherwell Local Plan seeks to use this potential to deliver jobs-led growth, supported by housing, with 122 ha of employment land, and approximately 4,200 further new homes in Bicester by 2031. The Local Plan also sets out an ambition for Bicester to become a greener more pleasant place to live, work and visit.
- 16.4 This strategy supports the *Local Plan*. The implementation of the *Local Plan* will be helped by proposals and initiatives in the *Bicester and Northwest Bicester Ecotown Masterplans*. These documents promote an enlarged and vibrant town with a comprehensive range of employment opportunities and local amenities to complement its substantial role in the wider region's economy. The *Local Plan* stresses the importance of securing jobs-led growth in the town to address the critical employment shortfall, and the high levels of out-commuting.
- 16.5 The *Local Plan* will enable employment development on allocated sites, with the aim of creating a diverse economy that attracts growth and investment from the business, manufacturing, science and hi-tech sectors. Employment sites include the Bicester Business Park and South East Bicester, which between them will create up to 48 ha of

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employment land. This will be supported by housing development of a further approximately 4,200 new homes by 2031, and the Local Plan anticipates 3,200 new homes coming forward beyond 2031 as part of later phases of North West Bicester. The *Local Plan* also seeks to strengthen the town centre and create additional green and recreational space.

- 16.6 Enhancing access to the strategic transport network and making it easier for people to travel between homes and jobs is critical in accelerating and accommodating future growth in Bicester. Investment in core transport infrastructure will boost the attractiveness and desirability of Bicester as a place where businesses want to locate and grow, and where people want to live and work.

### **Transport Strategy Aims**

- 16.7 The priority for Bicester is to provide the transport infrastructure which supports the aspirations set out in the *Local Plan* and the initiatives for their implementation in the forthcoming *Bicester and North West Bicester Eco-Town Masterplans*. This includes tackling the challenges identified in the *Bicester Movement Study* and those specific to Central Government standards for transport in Eco Towns. This will enable the town to thrive and realise its full growth potential, and its essential role in Oxfordshire's economy.
- 16.1 This strategy identifies a series of improvements to increase the overall capacity of transport networks and systems within the locality, enabling them to accommodate the additional trips generated by development; to adapt to their cumulative impact and to mitigate the local environmental impact of increased travel. Where schemes are needed to mitigate one particular development, the developer will be expected to either construct or provide funding for the scheme; where a scheme is required due to the impact of more than one development, each developer will be expected to make a contribution proportional to the scale of their impact. Additional funding may also be sought via the Local Transport Board to the Local Growth Fund and other sources.
- 16.2 Oxfordshire County Council are working towards a strategic transport contribution rate for developer funding, which will be adopted in a future update of this strategy.
- 16.3 It is essential to provide high quality access to the strategic highway and railway network to secure business investment and encourage people to make Bicester their home.
- 16.4 We will:
- Provide highway infrastructure which effectively reduces current and predicted transport congestion in Bicester;

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- Increase highway capacity on perimeter routes to make these attractive to employment and longer distance traffic and thereby reducing the strain on the town centre and central corridor;
  - Accommodate proposed strategic rail initiatives, including East West Rail and plans for electrification, and a possible future Rail Freight Interchange, in order to strengthen Bicester's position on the national rail network and maximise access to regional economic centres, such as Milton Keynes;
  - Strengthen the town's walking, cycle and bus networks to reduce congestion, improve air quality and ensure good links to local employment opportunities and amenities within the town, as well as transport hubs.

**BIC1 – We will seek opportunities to improve access and connections between key employment and residential sites and the strategic transport system by:**

- **Increasing capacity at Junction 9 of the M40 and supporting plans to improve Junction 10**, to relieve congestion on these busy interchanges, particularly in the peak periods, and to accommodate the future increase in traffic to Oxford, Science Vale and other nearby centres (along the A41, A34, M40, A43), alongside significant improvements to rail and bus services between Bicester, Oxford and Science Vale.
- **Delivering a strategic perimeter route around the town is the key component of this strategy.** Work undertaken through the Bicester Movement Study identified the need for a fit-for-purpose peripheral route to facilitate all proposed growth in Bicester, i.e. with North West Bicester fully developed out. Further assessment work has been undertaken which identifies online improvements which will be required during this LTP period and a new peripheral route that will provide necessary additional capacity beyond 2021. An initial sifting report (Bicester Peripheral Route Quantitative Assessment Report) identifies preferred routes to the south-east of the town. Both routes entail the use of land within the Graven Hill and East Bicester (East of Wretchwick Way) development sites and will therefore require safeguarding/dedication as part of development proposals. The scheme will provide full access to the strategic road network which is fundamental in helping to attract and secure business investment in Bicester.
- **Working closely with partners to facilitate the delivery of proposed strategic rail initiatives, especially East West Rail.** The travel opportunities created from this Network Rail and Chiltern Railways-led investment will enhance connections between homes and jobs, making Bicester a more attractive place to work, live and establish enterprises. This investment will attract investors to set up

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businesses and bring new jobs to Bicester.

- **Working with the rail industry and developers to deliver solutions at the Charbridge Lane and London Road railway level crossing points** to enable more rail services operating to and from Bicester as a result of East West Rail and anticipated growth in rail freight without causing excessive traffic delay. These improvements are critical in order to manage traffic flows and impacts on the wider road network.
- **Supporting the proposals to secure a potential freight interchange at Graven Hill and working with the district and developers to achieve this.** This would reinforce Bicester as a distribution hub within the region's economy and make a significant contribution to the future employment provision in Bicester, especially in the Graven Hill site, which in itself could provide 26 ha of employment land. The facility would also assist in removing freight traffic on the M40, A34 and A43, further reducing strain on the strategic road network and benefiting the environment.
- **Working with developers to improve the A41 Oxford Road, including enhancements to the Pingle Drive junction, new site accesses, new bus stops and footpath and cycleway improvements.** This work will support the creation of over 3,800 new jobs through the Bicester Village expansion and the Bicester Business Park proposal by improving connections along this congested corridor.
- **Creating a Park & Ride facility adjacent to the A41, close to the Vendee Drive junction,** to serve Bicester town centre, employment centres and rail stations, Bicester Village and Oxford, alleviating congestion along the A41 by intercepting car trips and promoting increased use of the high quality bus services.
- **Providing measures to reduce congestion through the central corridor (from Kings End (B4030) to the 3-arm Field Street, Buckingham Road and Banbury Road roundabout).** The longer term aim will be to reduce the level of traffic through this route and increase the opportunities for east-west traffic movements through traffic management options, including bus priority and potential speed control measures.
- **Implementing focused enhancements to the A4421 (between the junctions with Bicester Road and Launton Road)** to complement the transport solution at the railway level crossing at Charbridge Lane and facilitate development in the area. This scheme will improve the operation of this section of the eastern perimeter road, and enhance the integration of the North East Bicester Business Park site with the rest of the town.

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- **Improvements to the Buckingham Road / A4221 junction** to provide the necessary capacity for the additional trips generated from nearby employment and residential development, as well as support the heritage tourism development of the neighbouring Former RAF Bicester site.
- **Increasing capacity at the Howes Lane / Bucknell Road junction and approaches** to accommodate the increase in traffic using this route, further enabling development in the area, including the North West Bicester development.
- **South East Link Road** to enable residential and employment growth on the eastern side of the town, especially at the Graven Hill and East Bicester development sites, without compromising the strategic perimeter route around the town.

16.5 All this will be critical to attracting employment growth in Bicester, especially for the peripheral development sites. Effective transport links between the residential areas, employment sites and other facilities will facilitate economic growth, and provide more opportunities for people to live and work in Bicester, thus reducing the current level of out-commuting. The reduction in the length of people's journeys provides opportunities for them to use non-car modes of travel. Complementary investment in the town's bus, walking and cycling network will have an essential role in accommodating growth, encouraging sustainable travel choices, and raising the quality of the environment.

16.6 Bus priority measures may be required at anticipated pinch points on the main approaches to the town centre as future developments come forward. This is likely to include the Bucknell Road/Field Street junction, and the Buckingham Road approach to the three arm roundabout.

**BIC2 – We will work with strategic partners to develop the town's walking, cycling and bus networks and links between key development sites and the town centre and railway stations by:**

- **Enhancing pedestrian, cycle and public transport links to the two railway stations, in particular Bicester Town Station.** We will use the opportunities offered by the redevelopment of Bicester Town Station to create a 'state-of-the-art' multi-modal interchange offering high quality facilities for pedestrians, bus users and cyclists, including a cycle hub incorporating hire and repairs. We will also improve walking and cycling routes leading to the station, in particular, the walking route between the station and the town centre, as well as creating a new walking route linking the station with Langford Village and the

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expanded Bicester Village outlet and the Kingsmere estate.

- **Improving Bicester's bus services along key routes** to connect residential areas with existing and future employment centres, particularly Graven Hill, North West Bicester, the Launton Road Industrial estate and North-East Bicester Business Park. This will be achieved by using funding from development to enhance the quality and frequency of existing services, with the aim of services reaching full commercial viability.
- **Significantly improving public transport connectivity with other key areas of economic growth within Oxfordshire**, through access to high-quality, high frequency services on the core network between Bicester, Oxford and Science Vale, operating on a 'turn up and go' basis throughout the day; integrated connections between local bus services and services on the core network, and flexible, cashless payment, with the ability to switch between modes of travel without penalty or the need to make separate payments. Proposed network improvements are shown in Figure 2.
- **Providing improved public transport infrastructure**, where there are identified needs arising from strategic development sites and working with Bicester Town Council to enhance passenger information at strategic locations, and potential bus priority measures.
- **Providing new sections of urban pedestrian and cycle routes to better connect residential developments with the town centre and key employment destinations.** This includes:
  - A direct link from the centre of North West Bicester (Eco Town) to Bicester North Station and onwards to the Launton Road industrial estate.
  - Improved pedestrian connections to Graven Hill including A41 crossing options to reduce severance and increase the accessibility of this site;
  - A new link through the town park to Kings End to reinforce the east-west pedestrian and cycle links across Bicester;
  - Promoting George Street as a pedestrian route linking to the Sports Centre, Community College and town centre;
  - Providing a pedestrian footbridge over the railway as part of East West Rail to maintain access to the national cycle route
  - Southern connectivity project to provide sustainable connections between housing and employment developments to the south of the town.
- **Public realm improvements in Bicester Market Square and The Causeway** to enhance the quality of the pedestrian environment by creating a sense of 'place'. This will complement the major investment

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in the town centre redevelopment.

- **Securing green links between proposed development sites on the outskirts of the town and existing Public Rights of Way, providing a series of leisure / health walks.** We will also pursue opportunities to join a number of missing links in the Public Rights Of Way network through working with developers

16.7 We are currently promoting a range of travel options within Bicester, through the Travel Choices demonstration project, with the aim of reducing the proportion of single occupancy car journeys, in order for the transport network to cope with trips generated from planned development .

**BIC3 – we will work to get the most out of Bicester’s transport network by investigating ways to increase people’s awareness of the travel choices available in Bicester by:**

- **Undertaking travel promotions and marketing measures** to complement the wider Bicester Vision place-making initiatives to strengthen the town as a place to live, work and invest in commercial enterprises. This will increase the use of walking, cycling and public transport measures by increasing people’s awareness of the travel choices available, and will be achieved primarily through developer travel plans.
- **Developing a coordinated parking strategy in partnership with Cherwell District Council** to identify an appropriate balance of parking provision in the town, including the quantity and location of short stay and long stay parking, as well as appropriate parking management and pricing mechanisms.
- **Discourage undesirable routeing of traffic by developing a signage strategy**, improving the directional signage on the town’s road network by directing strategic traffic away from the town centre. This will alleviate congestion on the central corridor and enhance the quality of the environment in the town centre. It will also support Cherwell District Council’s emerging Air Quality Strategy, which aims to tackle air pollution in the Kings End / Queens Avenue Air Quality Management Area.

16.8 This Area Strategy replaces the Bicester Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy – 2000 (BicTLUS). Planning obligation contributions, secured in order to mitigate the impacts of development, towards BicTLUS will be able to be used to deliver the proposals in this strategy and be in accordance with the planning obligations.

16.9 A comprehensive list of transport schemes proposed for Bicester can

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be found on the Oxfordshire County Council website (Link to web page from which Cabinet Paper can be downloaded).

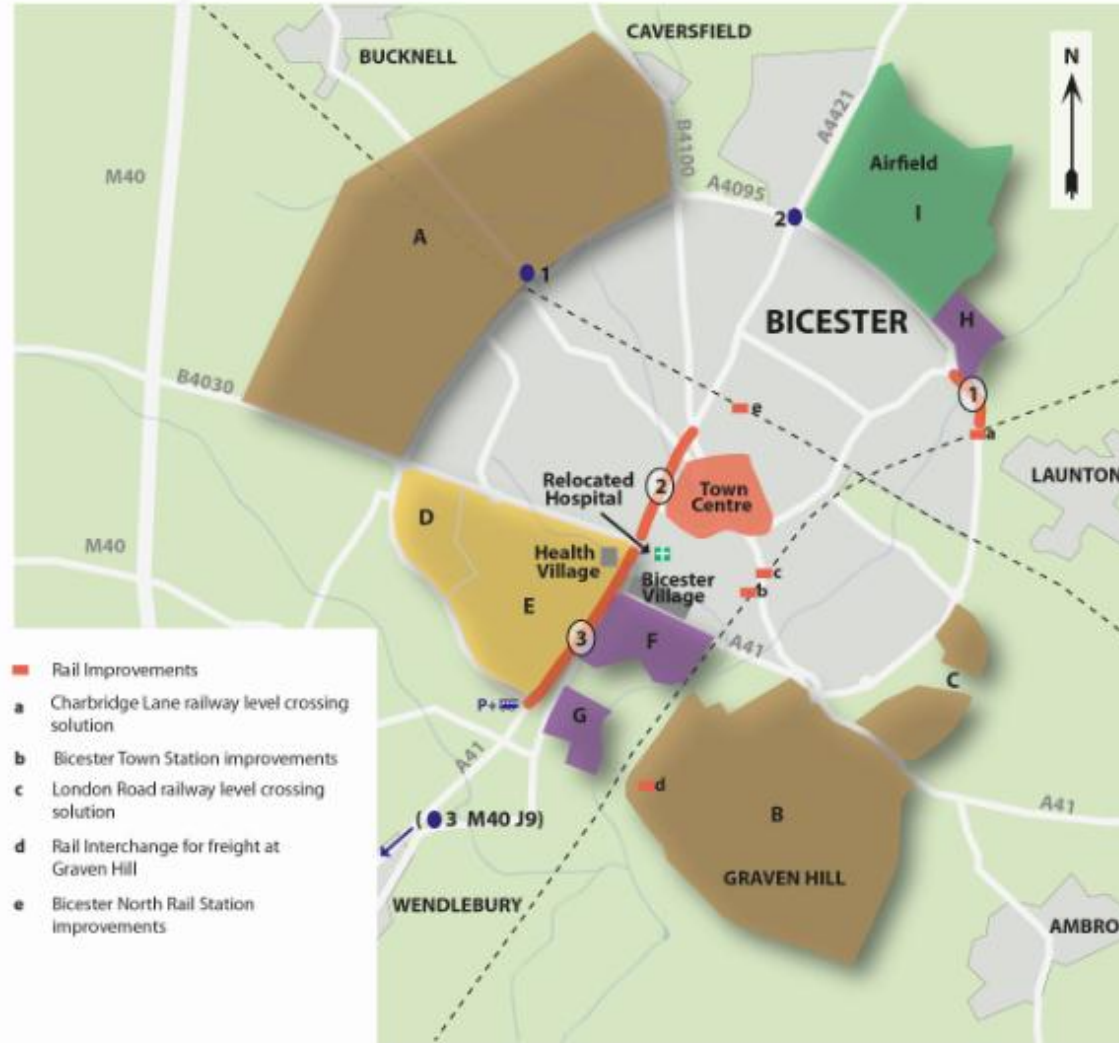
### **Maps and Plans**

16.10 Figures 1 below shows the key pieces of transport infrastructure required to deliver the proposed growth and investment in the area.



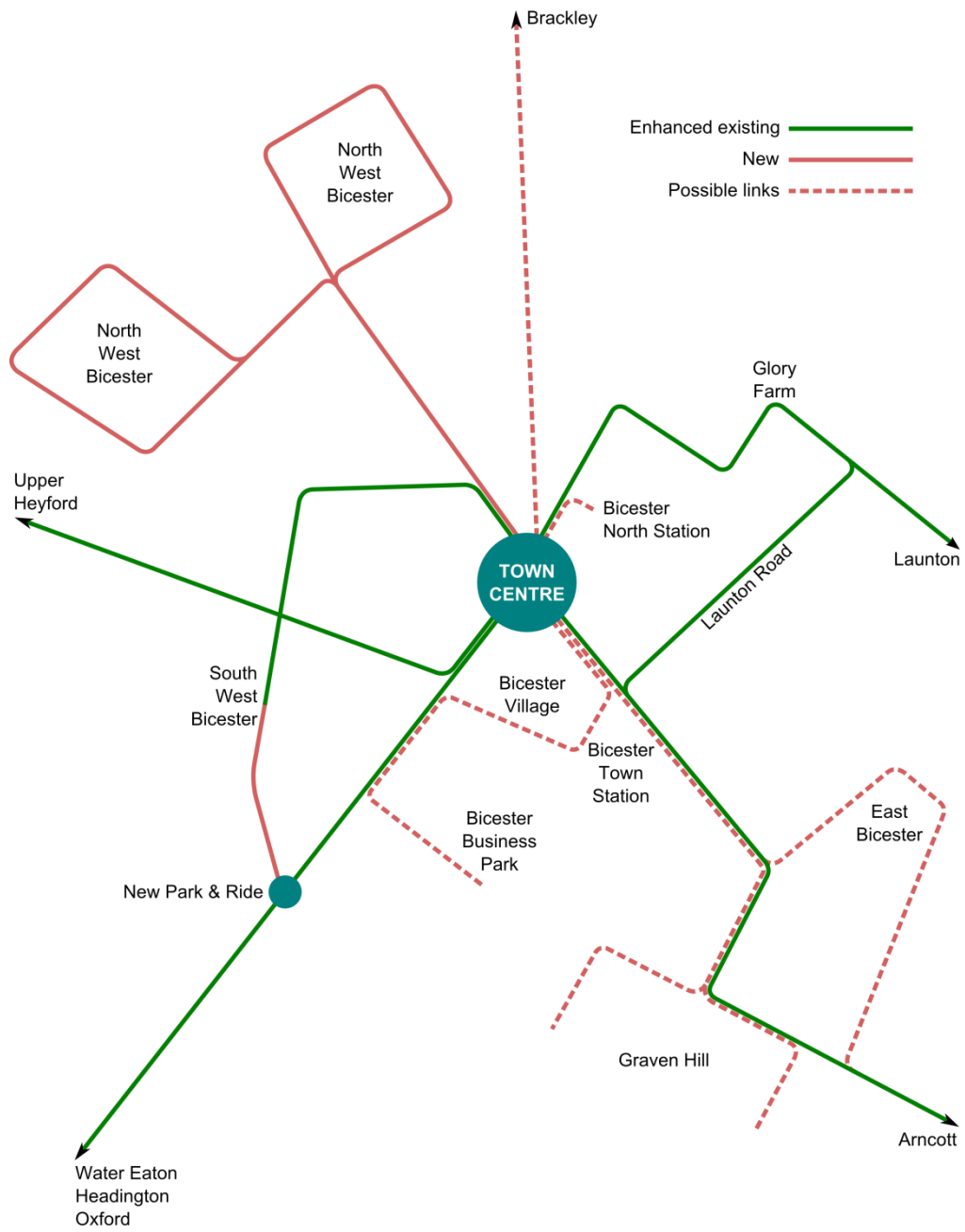
**BICESTER AREA STRATEGY**

- Mixed Use Developments
- A** North West Bicester (Eco Town)
- B** Graven Hill
- C** South East Bicester
- New Housing
- D** South West Bicester Phase 2
- E** South West Bicester Phase 1 - (Approved)
- New Business Parks
- F** Bicester Business Park
- G** Bicester Gateway
- H** North East Bicester Business Park
- Tourism Development
- I** Former RAF Bicester
- Town Centre Improvements including Market Square
- Road Improvements
- 1** A4421 enhancements between Bicester Road and Launton Road
- 2** Central Corridor enhancements (King's End to Queens Avenue junction)
- 3** A41 / Oxford Road corridor enhancements
- Bicester Park and Ride site next to the Vendee Drive / A41 Oxford Road junction
- Junction Improvements
- 1** Howes Lane / Bucknell Road junction
- 2** Buckingham Road A4221 junction
- 3** M40 Junction 9 improvements



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16.11 Figure 2 shows the proposed public transport network.



Note – this plan does not show certain lower frequency bus services

Not to scale

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## References

Bicester Masterplan –

[http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/q/i/Bicester\\_Masterplan\\_-\\_Consultation\\_Draft\\_\(August\\_2012\).pdf](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/q/i/Bicester_Masterplan_-_Consultation_Draft_(August_2012).pdf)

Bicester Movement Study –

[http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/9/5/Bicester\\_Movement\\_Study\\_February\\_2013\\_Part\\_1\\_of\\_4.pdf](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/media/pdf/9/5/Bicester_Movement_Study_February_2013_Part_1_of_4.pdf)

'Bicester Transport Modelling: Bicester Peripheral Route Quantitative Assessment Report', report commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, January 2014

Bicester Vision – <http://www.bicestervision.co.uk>

Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership -

<http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/cms/>

Cherwell Local Plan (submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for formal Examination on 31st January 2014). –

<http://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=10782#mgDocuments>