

NW Bicester Masterplan

Summary of December 2013 Public Exhibition Feedback
and Responses

December 2013 Public Exhibition Feedback

Initially, residents and stakeholders were asked whether they support the principle to develop the UK's first eco town at NW Bicester. Of the 67 responses received, 36 (54%) stated that they support the proposals, 15 (22%) had reservations and 11 (16%) respondents stated outright objection to the proposals. Only 5 (8%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question.

Respondents and exhibition attendees acknowledged the principles of the eco-development, new affordable energy efficient homes and provision for the amount and variety of green space.

The two topics most discussed in the feedback as a whole were: a concern that the proposals would create an increase in traffic and congestion, and the impact that the changes to Howes Lane would have on the area. Residents and stakeholders were then asked to comment on the proposals. The feedback form was broken down into several different themes, New Zero Carbon Homes, Green Spaces & Landscaping, Highways & Access Arrangements, Community Facilities, Employment Provision and Further Comments.

1. Do you support the Masterplan proposals in principle to develop the UK's first eco town at NW Bicester?

Of the 67 responses received, 36 (54%) stated that they support the proposals, 15 (22%) had reservations and 11 (16%) respondents stated outright objection to the proposals. Only 5 respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The topics most frequently commented on with regard to this question were: concerns regarding an increase in traffic, and the belief that the concept is the right idea but in the wrong location.

2. The proposed Masterplan will provide lower density homes on the more rural edges of the site, whilst properties that are more urban in character will be located closer to the centre. Do you agree with this approach?

Of the 67 responses received, 52 (78%) stated that they support lower density homes on the more rural edges of the site, 5 (7%) had reservations and 4 (6%) respondents stated outright objection to the proposal. 6 (9%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The majority of respondents did not comment on this question, however, some mentioned that the element of social housing should be spread out. Another respondent was concerned that locals will not be able to afford the houses.

3. How important is the energy efficiency of a house to you when moving home?

Of the 67 responses received, 30 (46%) stated energy efficiency is very important, 20 (30%) stated that it is important, 3 (4%) said that they were indifferent and 9 (13%) stated that it would not affect their decision. Only 5 (7%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The two most prevalent comments stated that the energy efficiency of a house is very important if it means saving money, however, a few mentioned that they would make it energy efficient themselves anyway.

4. Do you feel the proposed new sports fields are well located and provide good access to the existing and new proposed housing areas?

Of the 67 responses received, 32 (48%) stated that they agree with the location of the sports fields, 27 (40%) were unsure and 2 (3%) respondents stated outright objection to the location. 6 (9%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. Respondents suggested that it is common sense to put them by a school and that they will create additional traffic.

5. Do you feel the introduction of a nature reserve on part of the site represents a good use of the green space areas?

Of the 67 responses received, 58 (88%) stated that they support the introduction of a nature reserve, 1 (1%) respondent had reservations and 3 (4%) respondents stated outright objection to the nature reserve. 5 (7%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comments that appeared most frequently suggested that lakes or ponds should be incorporated into the nature reserve; additionally, many respondents were keen to see the creation of woodland.

6. Do you think using part of the site for a new country park is a good idea and, if so, would you use it?

Of the 67 responses received, 51 (77%) stated that they believe a country park to be a good idea, 8 (12%) had reservations and 3 (4%) respondents stated outright objection to the proposals. 5 (7%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. Most of the respondents commented that they felt the park would be a good idea, many said they would use it for walking and others mentioned family activities or bird watching.

7. In light of the potential for a nature reserve and country park, which of the following other uses would you most like to see incorporated within the green space? Please rank your top 3 choices, with number 1 as your highest priority.

The respondents were asked to rank their top 3 choices out of a number of options. If a respondent simply ticked 3 boxes then these choices were all added to the 'third preference' column.

The community allotments were the most popular choice with a total of 34 choices overall, followed by the play area with a total of 30 choices overall, and a community farm came in third place with a total of 28 choices overall.

8. NW Bicester will provide a frequent bus service between key destinations. How frequently do you use the current bus service in Bicester?

Of the 67 responses received, 4 (6%) stated that they used the bus daily, 10 (15%) said they used it on a weekly basis, 19 (28%) stated that they used it occasionally, while a further 28 (42%) claimed that they did not use it at all. 6 (9%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comments that appeared most frequently suggested that, while the majority of respondents currently used their cars, they would consider using a better bus service. Some respondents highlighted that there are no stops near their residences.

9. What would encourage you to travel by bus more frequently?

This question gave respondents a number of options to choose from and many respondents ticked multiple boxes. In order to collate the data effectively it was applied to a bar chart. The most prevalent choice was a demand for a more frequent service, which was selected 38 times. Additionally, direct routes received 19 selections and desirable destinations received 18 selections.

10. Do you feel the proposed pedestrian and cycle routes provide good links for existing residents to access the proposed new community facilities, and for new residents to access Bicester Town Centre?

Of the 67 responses received, 26 (39%) agreed with the proposed pedestrian and cycle routes, 27 (41%) respondents had reservations and 7 (10%) respondents stated outright objection to the proposed routes. 7 (10%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comment that appeared most frequently suggested that the routes on Buckingham Road and

towards the town centre need to be improved, however, respondents highlighted that the eco town is too far from the town centre to cycle.

11. Do you support the proposals for the realignment of Howes Lane to enable the new development to connect into the existing town?

Of the 67 responses received, 29 (44%) agreed with the realignment of Howes Lane to connect the new development, 18 (27%) respondents had reservations and 13 (19%) respondents stated outright objection to the realignment. 7 (10%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comment that appeared most frequently suggested that respondents believed the road will become a 'rat run'. Respondents were also concerned by potential congestion from the new road.

12. Are the primary schools in the correct locations to serve the new community?

Of the 67 responses received, 23 (34%) agreed that the primary schools are in the correct locations in relation to the new development, 34 (52%) respondents had reservations and 3 (4%) respondents stated outright objection to the locations. 7 (10%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comments that appeared most frequently suggested that the respondents did not know the locations of the primary schools and that schools will increase the traffic and parking problems of an area.

13. Will the secondary school location serve the needs of the new and existing community and encourage use of facilities/amenities by the wider town?

Of the 67 responses received, 15 (22%) agreed with the proposed location of the secondary school, 40 (61%) respondents had reservations and 3 (4%) respondents stated outright objection to the location. 9 (13%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comment that appeared most frequently suggested that the school should be located in Kingsmere instead. It was also requested that the Council ensures that the wider town can use the facilities.

14. Community hubs will provide retail, services and employment opportunities for surrounding neighbourhoods. What facilities and services would you most like to see included within these? Please rank your top 3 choices, with number 1 as your highest priority.

The respondents were asked to rank their top 3 choices out of a number of options. If a respondent simply ticked 3 boxes then these choices were all added to the 'third preference' column. The majority of the respondents asked for healthcare included as part of the hubs, which gathered a total of 42 choices overall. This choice was closely followed by requests for shops to be included with a total of 41 choices overall, and a restaurant or a pub in third place with a total of 26 choices overall.

15. Is the proposed community hub, located south of the railway line, in the right place to serve existing and new residents?

Of the 67 responses received, 15 (22%) agreed with the proposed location of the community hub, 39 (59%) respondents had reservations and 5 (7%) respondents stated outright objection to the location. 8 (12%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. Some of the respondents felt that better use should be made of the existing town centre and highlighted that existing residents have their own hubs.

16. How often do you currently work from home?

Of the 67 responses received, 6 (9%) stated that they worked from home permanently, 7 (10%) respondents said that they worked from home regularly, 10 (15%) respondents claimed to work from home occasionally and 34 (51%) respondents stated that they did not work from home at all. 10 (15%) respondents did not indicate a stance on this question. The comments that appeared most frequently were respondents admitting that they were retired. Others commented that it would not be possible with their job or that there is no guarantee that business will move to the area

17. In your view, what would make it easier for you to work from home or attract more people to do so?

This question gave respondents free reign to air their views as to how they believed effective working from home could be achieved. The responses were analysed and collected into distinct themes to make the feedback easier to understand. The most common theme was a desire to see better broadband internet in the area, which had a total of 15 comments that related to it. The two most regular issues which featured next were respondents commenting that they were retired; highlighting that effective working from home also depends on there being the right jobs in the area.

18. Which of the following facilities would you most like to see included as part of a business centre within a community hub? Please rank your top 3 with number 1 as your highest priority.

The respondents were asked to rank their top 3 choices out of a number of options. If a respondent simply ticked 3 boxes without specifying their order then these choices were all added to the 'third preference' column. The majority of the respondents asked for opportunities for small businesses included as part of a business centre within a community hub, which gathered a total of 38 selections overall. This choice was followed by requests for free broadband to be available, with a total of 30 selections overall, and a provision for meeting rooms in third place, with a total of 24 selections overall.

19. Are there other key areas of employment that you feel should be explored?

This question again gave respondents the opportunity to air their views about what areas of employment should be considered. Most respondents felt that the opportunities listed in the feedback form were sufficient to provide relevant employment to the area. However, some respondents highlighted the need for care professionals to work in nurseries or look after the elderly population. Also, respondents recommended that help be given to fund start-ups and science-based research.

20. Do you agree with the principle of creating one job per home? If so, do you agree with the proposed locations for employment sites across NW Bicester?

Of the 67 responses received, 28 (42%) agreed with the principle of creating one job per home, 22 (33%) respondents had reservations, and 10 (15%) did not agree with the principle. 7 (10%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comments that appeared most frequently were respondents' concerns as to how this principle would be implemented. Additionally, respondents wanted to highlight that it should be one job per adult, and others asked if the jobs would be relevant to the people living in the area.

21. Do you think that this kind of community involvement is a good idea?

Of the 67 responses received, 44 (66%) stated that they believed community involvement in the proposals is a good idea, 13 (19%) respondents were unsure, and 2 (3%) respondents stated that they did not think community involvement is a good idea. 8 (12%) respondents did not provide a stance to this question. The comments that appeared most frequently were respondents questioning that community involvement depended on the people who were

involved. Other respondents were concerned as they felt that the Council should be undertaking this role.

22. What are your views on this approach?

When asked how respondents viewed a community-led management structure, the majority of respondents replied positively. Respondents were keen to point out that resident involvement develops communal responsibility. The next two most prevalent comments were that respondents believed this approach to be good in principle; however, some of the respondents felt that this approach could isolate people who are unable to get involved. Interestingly, residents again highlighted that they felt this should be the Council's job.

General comments about the proposals

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide general comments about the proposals for NW Bicester. A number of topics and concerns were raised by respondents; the most recurrent comment was the fact that respondents were concerned about the amount of extra traffic they believe the proposals will generate. Respondents were also worried about the changes that will be made to Howes Lane, as many state that it acts as the unofficial 'Bicester Bypass.' Additionally, while many respondents believe the proposals are a good idea in principle, they believe Bicester's infrastructure needs to be improved first.

Responses to December 2013 Public Exhibition Feedback

The responses below follow the consideration of all feedback received as a result of the public consultation completed, including the public exhibition, by A2Dominion and its project team. These responses relate to the main questions and themes (questions 2-22 on the exhibition feedback form) whereby people were invited to provide comments and feedback to the team to help inform the emerging Masterplan proposals.

Lower housing density on the edges of the development with higher density homes closer to the centre: A2Dominion is pleased to see that over three quarters of respondents were in support of the approach adopted in respect of the proposed housing elements of the Masterplan. In response to the small number of respondents that held concerns, A2Dominion is keen to highlight that the approach adopted is considered the most appropriate in respect of the site's location and context.

- It should also be noted that the housing and density layouts are a matter for the subsequent application stages.

Energy efficient houses: A2Dominion notes the positive response from the community in respect of the creation of true zero-carbon, highly energy efficient homes, which support its research that people are becoming more sustainability conscious and increasingly aware of the cost of energy, both of which will attract people to NW Bicester.

- It should be noted, however, that whilst the housing designs are a matter for the application stages, the Masterplan is taking into account provision of energy centres to meet the zero carbon requirements.

School playing field location: The Masterplan is proposing the sports pitches are located near the school playing fields to benefit from some shared use of facilities. The Masterplan has taken into account the existing landscape constraints which are more sloping, with more trees and large hedgerows to the north, which favours the suggested location of the sports pitches near the school playing fields south of the railway.

Nature reserve: A2Dominion's plans to include a proposed area for a nature reserve within the Masterplan received wide spread support (88 per cent of respondents supported the introduction of this facility).

- In response to particular suggestions over the incorporation of lakes and woodlands, A2Dominion is of the view that the proposed nature reserve could

provide a mix of habitats including natural wet areas and woodland. Exact details of the specific habitats that could be created will be determined as part of the on-going programme of work undertaken by A2Dominion and its consultant team.

Country Park: A2Dominion notes that over three quarters of respondents considered the inclusion of a country park to be a good idea. In response to specific comments raised over what this space could be used for (family activities, walking), it should be noted that the country park will be located close to existing and proposed footpaths, providing a mix of amenity spaces.

Other uses to incorporate within the green space: A2Dominion sought responses on people's preferences over a number of other uses within the green space of the Masterplan. In light of the ranking of the proposed uses by respondents, the Masterplan now includes proposed areas for community allotments and play areas distributed across the residential areas as well as a proposed area for a community farm in a central location.

Bus service: A2Dominion recognises comments made by respondents in connection with the use of public transport, with the majority stating that whilst they use their cars, they would consider using an improved bus service. The Masterplan includes proposed routes for bus services and its associated travel strategy promotes frequent services to key destinations within the town (between 10 to 15 minutes frequency) in order to encourage sustainable travel.

Cycle and pedestrian routes: Whilst 39 per cent of respondents agreed with the proposed pedestrian and cycle links, A2Dominion notes that 41 per cent held reservations while 10 per cent were in objection. Having spent much time in developing the Masterplan and, in particular, on ensuring it is easily and well connected to the existing local communities, A2Dominion considers that the access proposals as presented offer the best and most direct connections to key local destinations.

Realignment of Howes Lane: A2Dominion was encouraged by the fact that nearly half of the respondents agreed with the proposed realignment of Howes Lane to connect the new development. Whilst the concerns raised over this specific aspect of the Masterplan were noted and considered, A2Dominion firmly considers on the basis of advice from its professional team that the realignment of Howes Lane will help improve traffic flow locally whilst also delivering a new crossing of the railway and assisting in the integration of NW Bicester with the existing town.

- Transport modelling work is on-going to determine the scope and scale of potential implications.

Location of primary schools: In response to the feedback received on the topic of the location of the primary school, A2Dominion noted that over a third of respondents considered that the proposed primary schools were in the correct locations. Furthermore, A2Dominion recognises that over 50 per cent of respondents held reservations about the proposed locations. It should be noted that the comments most frequently raised suggested that respondents were, at this stage in proceedings, unclear about the exact locations of the primary schools. Whilst acknowledging concerns expressed over the potential for traffic and parking to increase in particular areas, it should be noted that the primary schools has been distributed across the residential areas within 400m travel distance of all homes. It is, therefore, hoped that given the emphasis placed on public transport and sustainable choices of travel, that a number of parents will use non-car methods of transport when collecting their children from school.

Location of secondary school: Whilst just over 20 per cent of respondents agreed with the proposed location of the secondary school within the Masterplan, A2Dominion noted that over half of respondents held reservations and/or were in objection. The proposed location of the secondary school is the result of work carried out by A2Dominion in conjunction with CDC and OCC, and is considered by A2Dominion to be ideally located for most of the site. With regards to concerns expressed regarding the that the secondary school should be located in Kingsmere, A2Dominion understands the proposal secondary school for Kingsmere is still going ahead, but the overall schools strategy for Bicester is currently being finalised by Oxfordshire County Council.

Local centre uses: A2Dominion notes that the leading uses ranked in preference order by respondents was as follows – healthcare, shops and a restaurant or pub. It should be recognised that a new health centre is proposed as part of the local centre, and planned to be located south of the railway line nearest to the existing community that presently has to travel furthest to reach existing provision.

- Furthermore, A2Dominion is keen to highlight that both shops and a pub or restaurant will be amongst a number of uses that will form the proposed community hubs.

Location of proposed local centre south of the railway line: A2Dominion recognises that 22 per cent of respondents considered the hub location south of the railway line is correct. Further to this, A2Dominion notes that 59 per cent of respondents held reservations on this matter whilst a further 7 per cent were in objection. In response to this, it should be noted that A2Dominion has proposed the scheme's supporting community hubs in locations that are within reasonable travel distance of all homes and existing communities. Furthermore and as referenced above, the hub proposed south of the railway line, which will include the new health centre, has been duly located to help address issues affecting the existing community.

Working from home: The Masterplan would encourage working from home by providing a superfast broadband network in homes and good public transport. In addition, there will be provision of local centres with small business space and support services which will be distributed across the residential areas in a high quality of environment within reasonable travel distance of all homes.

- The feedback from the consultation event is consistent with the assumptions we have made in the economic strategy about home working. The Masterplan aims to enable people to work from home through the design of housing and the availability of local facilities including the eco business centre, coffee shops and various informal meeting places in the other retail/business areas within the scheme.
- Working from home is often associated with jobs in professional and personal services, and art and craft work. These types of jobs will be encouraged locally. However, working from home is also often linked to jobs which are not based locally – for example, some people whose jobs are based in London or Oxford work from home in Bicester all or part of the week, because it is more time and cost efficient.

Business centre facilities: Feedback received in respect of facilities to be provided within the planned business centre focused on seeing opportunities provided for small start-up businesses, requests for free broadband as well as provision for meetings rooms to be available.

- In response to this feedback, A2Dominion's Masterplan includes space designed for small business within the local centres whilst there will also be flexible accommodation for firms within the eco business centre. Furthermore, there will also be provision made to assist people working from home in the form of the use of meeting rooms. Superfast broadband network will be available to all businesses, but the terms on which it is made available will be dependent on the providers or the eco business centre management.

Employment mix and provision: A2Dominion notes that the consultation feedback indicated a preference for help to be given to fund start-ups and science-based research. This may be desirable, but A2Dominion is not in a position to provide grants to start ups and science based research. However, support will be provided to businesses in Bicester and science based research through initiatives like the Oxfordshire City Deal and the national Growth Accelerator programme, and organisations like the Oxfordshire and South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Community Involvement: A2Dominion were pleased to see that over 60 per cent of respondents recognised the benefit of community involvement whilst noting that comments were also made that the nature of such activity depended on those involved. In response to concerns raised over the fact that such activity should be completed by CDC, it should be noted that the council has limited resources across the district. However, A2Dominion is working with both CDC and BTC on the creation of a unique community led governance structure, so community development work in the area is cohesive and inclusive and does not duplicate any existing functions by the Council.

Community led management: A2Dominion were pleased to receive such a positive response to its approach to building a community and the importance of resident involvement to develop ownership and a sense of responsibility. A2Dominion is committed to creating a vibrant, resilient and inclusive community that is truly integrated with the wider town.

- Furthermore, A2Dominion is already working in partnership with a range of local Bicester stakeholders spanning the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to allow the existing community to become involved, helping to shape what a community governance structure could look like.
- As new residents start to occupy NW Bicester we will work with them through 'welcome to your home events', community engagement support and via regular communication on the Live In-home information system to encourage their participation in the governance structure, giving them a wide range of opportunities and methods to participate based on their availability, interests and the skills they have to offer.

