

## 9 Overall Conclusions (of the Arup Report on Weston Otmoor)

Economic and Social Impacts of a Potential Eco Town at Weston Otmoor  
Final Report  
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### 9.1 General Conclusions

9.1.1 The housing and employment proposals at Weston Otmoor, in combination with existing plans, provide capacity for growth far in excess of existing anticipated demand in the local area. The strategy set out in the emerging South East Plan is to promote Bicester as a new location for higher value and knowledge based industries associated with the Oxford Cambridge Arc, and to reduce its dormitory function. Additional new employment development in Oxfordshire (including development in eco towns or north of Oxford) will need to ensure that it does not risk undermining these improved fortunes. Specifically, there is a significant risk that the Western Otmoor proposal will undermine the emerging South East Plan and the Secretary of State's proposed changes which suggest that additional employment land and housing on the northern edge of Oxford could be detrimental to Bicester's aspirations.

9.1.2 Although there is some scope for the Eco Town to help 'grow' the local economy and offer more housing, the consultants judge that the following outcomes are also likely if the Eco Town goes ahead:

- Although eco-credentials may generate some additional demand, existing activity and planned growth will need to be displaced to the Eco Town, displacing existing and planned future growth in Bicester and Kidlington.
- Bicester will fail to realise its vision and may be less sustainable as economic activities decline.
- The Eco Town will not necessarily develop in the timescales suggested by Parkridge.
- Employment growth is likely to lag behind housing growth and it will take many years before these balance.
- To achieve success the Eco Town will need to increase demand in the local housing market, for example by offering additional affordable housing.
- To be successful in employment terms the Eco Town will have to act as a regional scale facility, capable of attracting new growth from across the wider region.

### 9.2 Specific Conclusions

9.2.1 Other more specific conclusions supported by a range of evidence can be summarised as follows.

- Cherwell is one of the more affordable housing locations in the South East and has received substantial proportions of housing growth in recent years, notably at Bicester. There is no obvious evidence of under provision of housing in the area and, indeed, the existing pipeline of housing is large with a wide range of potential housing capacity evident in the LDF Issues and Options paper. The district is thus not an obvious location for further growth.
- Many of the economic drivers for the Eco Town, such as the commuting potential via Chiltern Railways, are shared with Bicester or with other locations in the Central Oxfordshire sub region: there are no obvious existing independent economic drivers for the Eco Town.
- Bicester has experienced rapid growth of population as a result of new housing and now needs to balance this growth with improved employment opportunities as well as better infrastructure and services. These prospects have been delayed by the effects of global credit crunch on property markets, and would be threatened by the Eco Town.
- The implied trajectory of housing growth of the Eco Town together with existing planned growth in the district represent a more ambitious housing trajectory than has been achieved in stronger growth areas.

- Within a polycentric urban structure and without the mechanisms available to new towns in the past, it is difficult to see how the requisite level of self containment will be achieved. It is likely that employment will lag behind housing and it is unlikely that new residents will make the 'double move' of home and job within a short period. Even as jobs come available it is unlikely and would be entirely coincidental if resident skills and experience matched employment opportunities. This means that it is important that there is sufficient transport capacity to meet all these flows.
- The Eco Town would face considerable competition for large scale employment uses from the rest of the County, especially south of Oxford. It is not clear why the Eco Town would have a competitive advantage.

### 9.3 Wider Conclusions

9.3.1 Other conclusions that arise as a consequence of undertaking the study are as follows.

- It is not clear that Weston Otmoor is the only or best option for meeting additional growth objectives in this part of Oxfordshire.
- There is potentially substantial capacity for further growth of housing and employment in Bicester.
- Given the large upfront infrastructure costs it is important that the sensitivities of costs and build-out rates are tested upfront to mitigate the need for future compromises on infrastructure, employment and service provision.

## Overall Conclusions

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#### General Conclusions

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The housing and employment proposals at Weston Otmoor, in combination with existing plans, provide capacity for growth far in excess of existing anticipated demand in the local area. The strategy set out in the emerging South East Plan is to promote Bicester as a new location for higher value and knowledge based industries associated with the Oxford Cambridge Arc, and to reduce its dormitory function. Additional new employment development in Oxfordshire (including development in eco towns or north of Oxford) will need to ensure that it does not risk undermining these improved fortunes. Specifically, there is a significant risk that the Western Otmoor proposal will undermine the emerging South East Plan and the Secretary of State's proposed changes which suggest that additional employment land and housing on the northern edge of Oxford could be detrimental to Bicester's aspirations.

### 9.1.2

Although there is some scope for the Eco Town to help 'grow' the local economy and offer more housing, the consultants judge that the following outcomes are also likely if the Eco Town goes ahead:

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Employment growth is likely to lag behind housing growth and it will take many years before these balance.

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To achieve success the Eco Town will need to increase demand in the

local housing market, for example by offering additional affordable housing.

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To be successful in employment terms the Eco Town will have to act as a regional scale facility, capable of attracting new growth from across the wider region.

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prospects have been delayed by the effects of global credit crunch on property markets, and would be threatened by the Eco Town.

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Within a polycentric urban structure and without the mechanisms available to new towns in the past, it is difficult to see how the requisite level of self containment will be achieved. It is likely that employment will lag behind housing and it is unlikely that new residents will make the 'double move' of home and job within a short period. Even as jobs come available it is unlikely and would be entirely coincidental if resident skills and experience matched employment opportunities. This means that it is important that there is sufficient transport capacity to meet all these flows.

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The Eco Town would face considerable competition for large scale employment uses from the rest of the County, especially south of Oxford. It is not clear why the Eco Town would have a competitive advantage.

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additional growth objectives in this part of Oxfordshire.

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Given the large upfront infrastructure costs it is important that the sensitivities of costs and build-out rates are tested upfront to mitigate the need for future compromises on infrastructure, employment and service provision.