

BICESTER VISION ANNUAL REPORT REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN BOB LANGTON.

It is now nearly 12 months since Bicester Vision was launched and much has been achieved in that time as you will clearly see in the report of our Partnership Manager. In this, my first annual report as Chairman I want to pay particular thanks to a number of people for supporting what has turned out to be a unique combination of private and public sector partners.

Firstly, thanks to Bicester Town Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council for all agreeing to the concept of what Bicester Vision was trying to achieve and then for agreeing to three year funding to enable us to appoint a full time Partnership Manager and have a sound financial base on which to build. This has turned out to be a great opportunity for all three tiers of local government to work together for the common good of Bicester – focusing on a joint vision for the town.

I would also like to thank our original private sector partners led by Adrian Shooter, Chairman of Chiltern Railways who was the first to offer substantial three year funding. They were quickly followed by Bicester and District Chamber of Commerce, Stockdale Land and Bicester Village. That really did give us the trigger to start the process of putting our vision into practice and it has now led other market towns to follow suit – with different models to suit local needs.

Those seven organisations formally came together as the Executive Board which has been meeting monthly to direct the strategy for our Vision. Since then, as you will see elsewhere in this report, we have been joined by no less than 11 more partners. We thank each one of them for their support and look forward to their continuing contribution, not just financially but ensuring that we fulfil the objectives that have been set us. All partners attend regular meetings in order that they can contribute fully to the work of Vision.

One individual did much to work with me in the early days of the Vision concept to ensure that it became a reality. Ben Jackson gave his time, energy and considerable enthusiasm to ensure that we had an excellent platform on which to build Bicester Vision. We owe Ben a huge debt of gratitude for getting us past the launching pad and giving Rachel Faulkner, when she arrived as our full time partnership manager last spring, an excellent head start. Ben even provided Rachel with office space and support facilities until we moved her into the CDC office in the Market Square early in the New Year.

We held a really successful launch in the spring by way of a symposium at Cooper School to which nearly 200 people attended and we had similar success at the second symposium held last autumn and kindly hosted by the newly opened Bicester Golf and Country Club. We welcomed a wide range of stakeholders and hope that more will link with us.

There is still much work to be done to meet our strategic objectives which are around better communication channels, encouraging a more holistic view of the town and its needs, ensuring Bicester is competitive, accessible and welcoming, supporting development of Bicester as a high quality, safe, vibrant, attractive destination as well as providing a forum to facilitate discussion and dialogue between the three tiers of local government and the business community.

Obviously some of the key developments planned for the town which include the town centre redevelopment, the new business park and hotel and the development to the South West of the town are taking longer to implement than we had anticipated, although we are hopeful that a start on the town centre scheme will be made before the spring of next year.

Much of our time over the past year has been focused on the Eco Town proposal for Weston Otmoor. We joined with the District, Town and County Councils in their opposition to the proposal and played an active part in the Government led consultation process. We now have an opportunity to look at the alternative ecology led proposal, recently approved by Cherwell District Council for North West Bicester. This will be a long haul and no doubt Vision will play an important role as the Government decides which option to approve.

Finally my thanks to Rachel who is just completing her first year with us. She has risen admirably to the challenge set her by the board and despite a number of hurdles that have been put across her path she has come through with great enthusiasm and determination to ensure that her goals are achieved. We are indeed fortunate to have such a good communicator who seems to get on with everyone, not only locally, but amongst our wider group of stakeholders across the county. Thank you CDC for hosting this post and making life a lot easier as far as administration is concerned.

I now look forward to a challenging 12 months ahead when I hope we can make a difference to Bicester in many ways. Times are challenging with the credit crunch likely to stay around well into 2010 – but there is much we can do ourselves to be positive, support local businesses, shop locally, work locally where opportunities arise and above all let us share good news and promote success. We are good at promoting bad news as our local media has shown this year, but let us go out of our way to highlight the good things that are happening in our town and surrounding villages. We have a great story to tell, so let's tell it.

Bob Langton. Chairman.