

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT. NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2010.

The past 12 months seem to have shot by and here we are within two weeks of Christmas. A time to reflect and a time to plan for the next 12 months.

I would ask all our partners to think hard about what they feel our priorities should be for 2010 because during 2009 we seem to have been thrown a range of challenges which hadn't been on our radar at the beginning of 2009.

In 2010 I would like us to be more focused on our key missions for the year and at the same time to ensure that they are adequately resourced. Amongst the priorities that I see are to ensure that we communicate even better with the people of Bicester and to ensure that people are kept well informed as progress is made on the Town Centre development, potentially the Market Square (although timing here will be critical), the Eco Bicester project with possibly a show house in the town centre as well as a start on the pilot village and with any luck a start by Countryside Properties on the South West project. Vision has a vital role to play in the communications of all these projects.

The Eco Bicester project will remain challenging throughout 2010 as has been instanced at the Bicester Summit held at the newly named Bicester Hotel, Golf and Spa and later that same day at the Community College. The summit, jointly promoted with Cherwell District Council was extremely successful with 300+ people attending the various briefings. I would like to thank Rachel for all the hard work she put in to making this event such a success. She was involved from an early stage with Mary Harpley and her team in planning and organising this event.

The promise by the Government Minister of around £11 million in two tranches for Junction 9 improvements and "a cheque in post" for up to £20 million for infrastructure improvement connected with Eco Bicester was most welcome. The briefings on transport, Environment, Health and Defence from the various government agencies were most enlightening and the update briefings on the town centre and Eco Bicester most welcome. What was disappointing was the negativity of many Bicester people to the fact that so many good things were about to happen to their town. One resident at the evening meeting didn't want a penny of the Government money and thought Bicester would be better served by remaining in the aspic that has surrounded it for the last 40 years – no change.

One of the questions that keeps arising, time and time again concerns traffic. Not only the issues around Tesco and Bicester Village (now recognised as a no go area at weekends) but also facing the challenges of traffic management during the development of our new town centre, market square and Eco Bicester. I believe that the Bicester Traffic Advisory Group must get to grips with a holistic approach to traffic management issues in the town for the short and medium term.

We need to think out of the box for a solution to the Tesco situation. They have basically come to terms with the fact that they can't expand on their current site and will at some point have to come to the conclusion that a new site may be required. If that happened it would give Bicester Village the opportunity to purchase some of that site to provide a new in only and out only route for their growing band of customers, now estimated at 4 million a year – a huge success story which we must applaud. It also might be possible to use the remainder of the site for a flagship hotel at a prominent location on the entrance to Bicester.

The town centre businesses will also need all the help they can get during the continued recession and therefore improved linkages between Bicester Village and the town centre must be explored including better signage, better map in Pingle Drive promoting the restaurants, shops and other facilities in the town and also to look at ways of providing some sort of shuttle service along that route (environmentally friendly vehicle) to the market square and back.

Education too is exercising our minds as a new head prepares to take up his post at the Community College and there is talk of providing in time educational needs as the new developments commence. We need to continue to work hard at forging closer links between our schools and the business community. If we are to aspire away from low skills, low wage economy in Bicester to a higher level of skills then the need for a strong partnership will become critical.

I am delighted to report that we have all ten sponsors in place for the Bicester Business Awards and intend to launch the awards early in the New Year. We are organising a photo shoot for sponsors at 10am on Tues 5th January on the first level on the car park at Bicester North station. An article will appear in the Bicester Advertiser on 7th January with a mail out entry form to all local businesses. Waddesdon Manor is sponsoring the Champagne Reception and we are pleased to announce that Kelvin Thomas, Chairman of Oxford United will be our guest speaker. Please do all you can to encourage entries. Gala Dinner tickets cost £35 and there is a limit of 120 tickets. Our MC will be Shaun Jardine, founder of the Banbury Breakfast Club.

Finally can I thank all partners for their continued support in so many ways – provision of meeting places, support for events and support for dealing with the many issues as they arise? This will be the last meeting for Lt Col Nick Wand from the MOD before his retirement. A special thanks to Nick for breaking through the various MOD obstacles to achieve a unique scenario of the MOD becoming a full partner of Vision. We wish Nick and his wife well but as they continue to live locally we hope to keep in touch.

**Bob Langton,
Chairman.**

10.12.09