

Chairman's Report. January 2010.

The soundings I took at our partnership board meeting just before Christmas left us in no doubt as to the priorities for 2010:

- Top priority by some distance is around young people, education, upskilling, NEETS and the Courtyard.
- Second priority concerned working together to promote our town and its offer; better communications and ensuring that we manage the process well as our town centre is redeveloped.
- Thirdly issues around transport, traffic (this litmus test was taken before the hiatus surrounding the Christmas and New Year gridlock around Bicester Village and Tesco) and general issues to do with rural and other forms of transport.

It will be vital that we do not forget some of the other key elements which will be of significant importance through 2010 / 12 including the new Eco Bicester to the North West of the town, the South West Bicester development by the Countryside Properties Consortium which will see the last piece in the ring road jigsaw put into place – the main question will be the timing.

Rachel and I had a very useful meeting at OCC with Huw Jones and his team concerning some of the traffic issues facing Bicester and this played well into the Bicester Traffic Advisory Group agenda at their meeting on January 14th. The Committee, which is now to meet bi-monthly, has asked the Country and District officers to report back on potential improvements to traffic flow that can be implemented quickly and at relatively low cost while a medium to longer term solution can be found for the pinch points around Bicester Village and Tesco. Rachel has been monitoring a growing Face book campaign concerning the town's growing traffic problems.

Following the Bicester Summit, which was jointly hosted by Bicester Vision I have written to Barry Wood, leader of Cherwell District Council and to Mary concerning capturing the main issues raised at the summit and the points made at the various briefing sessions. I have asked CDC to give me a clear picture of the future process of consultation, not only on Eco Bicester, but also on how we are to manage the communication process on a number of important areas which will arise this year such as + Eco Town + Town Centre redevelopment + Market Square timetable + Major traffic issues. I have stressed the need for Vision to be involved in thought process rather than just managing the outcomes. At this important time for Bicester Vision needs to be reassured on the route to be taken and to ensure that we all work together with one voice.

We need to work extremely hard to listen to concerns of our businesses of all types. It never ceases to amaze me as to the diversity of businesses within just one industrial estate. We have an organ maker for instance almost next door to Wirth Research – one of the leading edge firms in Formula One racing, currently employing 120 people in Bicester with another 30 jobs being created by mid year. However having listened to expansion concerns of their MD Tim Cunningham we could be in danger of losing this fast hi tech growing company to Banbury because we can find the right space at the right place for them to grow.

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I am also concerned that we need to focus on help for young people and Rachel will mention more about some of the initiatives in which Vision is becoming involved. However The Courtyard sticks out like a sore thumb and I am particularly disappointed at the lack of top level leadership from County and District to sort this matter out. Until we have clarity and full agreement on a blueprint and management structure for Youth facilities in Bicester there is no point in recruiting a youth leader where the overall remit for the Courtyard is unclear. The nettle must be grasped and soon. So far my representations and those of our Mayor seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

Finally I cannot complete these notes without congratulating Adrian Shooter on his well deserved CBE in the New Year's Honours List. Richly deserved and I am sure we all applaud his award. Couple with this the recent application for the new improved rail links from Oxford, through Bicester to Marylebone and the improvements that will bring and we can really see just how Chiltern Railways is putting Bicester on the map.

I am hopeful that we will have one or two new partners joining us over the coming months including Countryside Properties, P3Eco and we hope Wirth Research amongst others. In conclusion I would also like to thank Rachel for her boundless enthusiasm for the job. The way she connects with people and organisations is a real skill and she is certainly putting Bicester Vision on the map.

Bob Langton. January 16th, 2010.