

Case Study: Didcot Garden Town

February 2023

Proposal

As a transformational garden town, Greater Didcot will deliver over 15,000 new homes and 20,000 jobs by 2031 in new neighbourhoods to the north, east & west of the town; with a focus on sustainable connectivity & enhanced green infrastructure & public realm improvements throughout the town.

Local Authorities

South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC)
Vale of White Horse DC (VWHDC)
Oxfordshire County Council

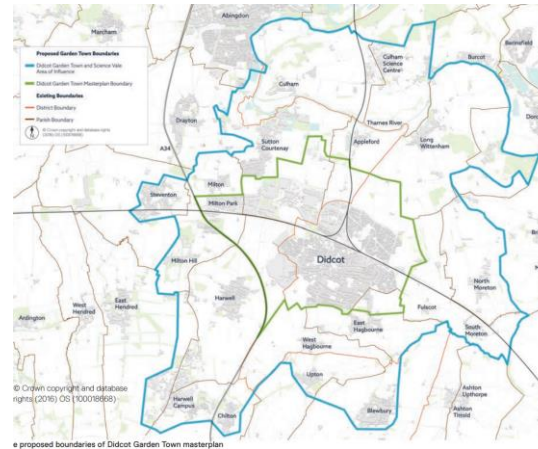
Main Sites

Valley Park
Great Western Park
NE Didcot
Lady Grove East
Milton Heights

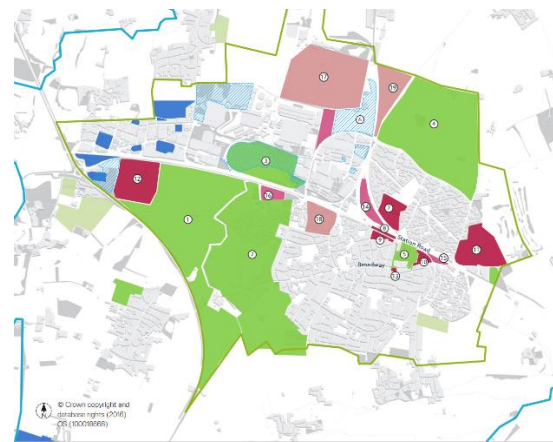
Key Statistics

- 15,050 new homes inc. up to 40% affordable homes
- 20,000 new jobs
- New local centres, schools, health & recreational facilities to support growth
- Joined GC Programme 2017 - at that point development was already underway on some of the main sites

Garden Town area



Major development sites



Vision

Didcot Garden Town will be the county's home of sustainable living and inspiring future ideas, leading the way in solution-driven creativity through proactive resident, worker and visitor participation. The Garden Town will exemplify the 'contemporary green', lifestyle that places green technologies and energies, localism, health and wellbeing and active lifestyles at the foreground of its culture, infrastructure, planning and governance. Delivery of the vision is supported by the 3 pillars of (i) Visionary science & advance technology; (ii) Fantastic green space; (iii) Connected cultural communities.

Planning Status & Housing Projections

- The main sites were allocated via 3 historic Local Plans & the Core Strategy 1997
- The majority of main sites have planning permission, including Valley Park which received permission for 4,254 homes in 2022.
- The average annual build out rate of homes to date has been 367 homes pa.
- It is anticipated that all planned new homes will be delivered by 2031

Case Study: Didcot Garden Town

February 2023

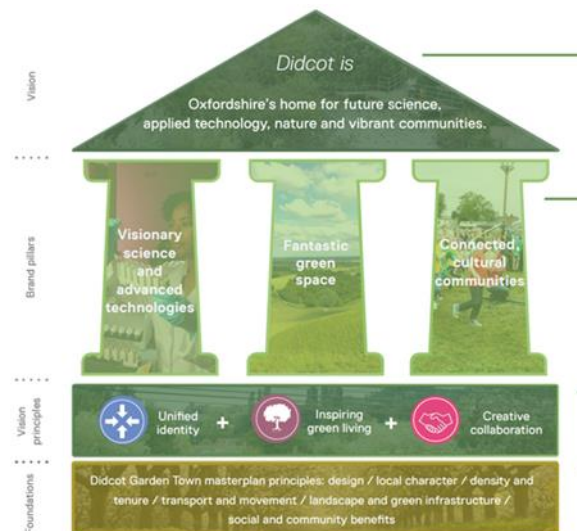
Rationale for garden town approach

The planned knowledge economy growth in Science Vale relies on the success of Didcot as a place to live & relax & for families to thrive requiring a fresh impetus to help achieve the step change needed for good growth that would attract the investors, employers & residents needed. Key to the transformation of the town via growth was addressing deficiencies in landscaping, environment & open space within the town & creating links to the surrounding countryside & environmental assets.

The Milton Park employment area has been a focus for economic growth, currently with over 9000 employees on the campus, 38% of whom live within Didcot. Housing affordability & quality of the housing offer in Didcot are significant factors in attracting employers to move to Didcot.

The garden town badge has been useful in signalling & driving the step change in good growth across the town for both economic and housing growth.

Vision diagram



Didcot GT Sounding Boards Residents Sounding Board

Helps gather feedback from people living and working in and around the Didcot GT area.

Parish Sounding Board

Facilitates listening to & talking with 18 neighbouring parish councils

Business Sounding Board

Supports businesses based in and around the garden town & local business parks.

Project governance

Governance arrangements have evolved to focus on delivery of core workstreams. The vision for the garden town is now held by Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board comprising representatives from South and Vale district councils, county & town councils, OxLEP, Homes England & the 5 parish councils within the garden town area. The board meets quarterly; all meetings are open to the public.

Developer liaison takes place on an individual basis in respect of different sites..

Engagement

As part of the project governance, there are three 'sounding boards', which represent community, business and neighbouring parishes who provide feedback to the advisory board.

Events such as garden parties are used imaginatively to engage with the wider community on garden town matters - [Didcot Garden Party - Free shows, performances and sports sessions in Didcot Garden Town this summer](#) - [South Oxfordshire District Council](#) (southoxon.gov.uk)

Case Study: Didcot Garden Town

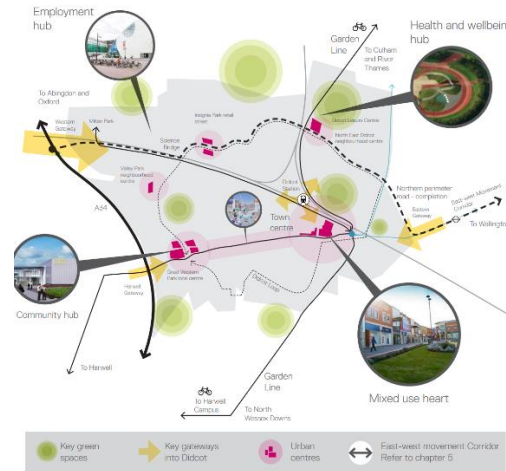
February 2023

Place-making

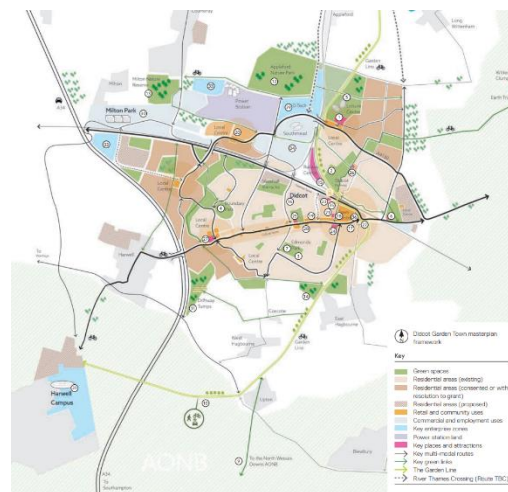
A town-wide masterplan formed part of the Garden Town Delivery Plan developed in 2017 setting out a framework for development across the area underpinned by 7 priority objectives. Key areas of intervention highlighted were the town centre, Cultural Spine, Gateway Spine, & The Garden Line. The strategic town masterplan was supplemented by more detailed masterplans for the town centre, key sites within the town and major growth areas around the edge of the town.

Framework plans, detailed design guidance and design codes guide development within the major growth areas with a focus on creating distinct character areas. Planning applications for strategic sites are subject to a Design Review process.

Delivery of supporting infrastructure is a key element of enabling community development within the growth areas. The first district centre is now in place along with schools, multi-use community centres and sports facilities. Currently, the council is taking an innovative approach to securing health provision through taking on a site and working with the Integrated Care Board & local GPs to facilitate delivery of a GP-surgery on GWP.



Masterplan Framework



Innovation

The 2040 vision for the Milton Park employment area establishes the move towards zero carbon. Sustainable travel has been a key focus - excellent data collection on employees travel patterns underpins initiatives to encourage a move to use of sustainable means of travel including subsidised bus travel, improvement of cycle facilities.

Milton Park has also partnered with Oxfordshire County Council and First Group on the MultiCav project which will see the first demand-responsive autonomous passenger vehicle to run on public roads being trialled late 2022 to spring 2023 linking Milton Park to the rail station. OCC is currently piloting drone delivery services at Milton Park.

Development at Milton Park has been managed through a Local Development Order adopted in 2012. This is described by the Milton Park company as a 'game-changer' in facilitating fast & efficient responses to new employees seeking to establish in the Park. Milton Park has collaborated with the local authorities on a revised LDO to support delivery of its 2040 vision; with an increased focus on net zero gain measures. This was adopted in February 2023.

Case Study: Didcot Garden Town

February 2023

Challenges

As development was underway on some of the main sites, retrofitting aspects of the GT vision has been challenging, in particular creating sustainable links between the new growth areas, the town centre & employment areas.

Creating a truly distinctive character across multiple strategic sites is challenging, as is community building in the new growth areas & connecting with the existing town community.

Rapid & sustained high levels of growth in a place can result in 'growth fatigue' among residents.

Stewardship of community assets & open space has been dealt with on an individual site basis, resulting in a mix of approaches across the new development areas.

The term 'garden town' creates expectations among existing & new residents around the quality of new development.

Learning points

- The USP and success factors of the vision for a garden community needs to be communicated consistently with developers and the community..
- Early provision of infrastructure & job opportunities is critical to community building, particularly infrastructure that will connect individual developments.
- Early coordination with developers would have helped implementation of the GT vision more effectively.
- Developing a framework for stewardship at the outset would have avoided a patchwork of different models being established.
- Ensure new growth supports existing businesses & life in the town centre by ensuring good access links & travel initiatives such as subsidised buses are in place early on.
- LDOs are an effective tool for facilitating new businesses wishing to establish in an area
- Be prepared to communicate, champion & deliver on the vision if community expectations are to be realised.

GC Programme Impacts

The garden community 'branding' afforded by the programme was an important aspect of the councils' commitment to achieving the quality step change desired. The programme enabled the local authorities to develop the tools & resources needed to harness the scale of growth planned to help deliver on the vision & transformation ambitions and retrofit aspects where appropriate.

Looking ahead

- The Didcot GT project will evolve to align more closely with the district-wide agenda on climate change and health & well-being, necessitating a refinement of the GT vision.
- Implementation of projects identified in the Delivery Plan 2017 will continue, prioritised by the GT Advisory Board.

Useful links

[New look Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#)