



**REPORT TITLE:**

<b>Scrutiny meeting</b>	Economic Growth Joint Committee
<b>Chair</b>	
<b>Presenting Officer</b>	
<b>Item Type</b>	For Information
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	Update the Committee on progress since the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) was awarded £100,000 through the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) to progress the Innovation Village concept.
<b>Recommendations/ Action sought</b>	N/A
<b>Forthcoming Decisions</b>	N/A
<b>Background Documents</b>	N/A
<b>Appendices</b>	N/A
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## **Background**

An application was made in 2022 for funding to provide project management services to start the delivery process of the Innovation Village at the RAU in Cirencester. The application was successful and a grant of £100,000 was provided to the RAU towards the cost.

In August a tender process was concluded with a number of established and reputable firms bidding to provide project management services, the tender was awarded to Ridge and Partners working from their Cheltenham and Oxford offices. Ridge were appointed in September and started by working with the senior leadership and academics at the university to develop the project brief and programme. The programme established the route through design team selection, the RIBA stages, consultation and the planning process. The Ridge appointment covers the period from September 2023 to January 2024.

Ridge then prepared project specific scope of services for the various design disciplines, which emphasised the sustainable nature of the proposed scheme and commenced the tender process in accordance with the RAU's Governance procedures. Following a robust selection procedure, the following selections were made.

- Architype / BD Landscape Lead Designer - Hereford
- OPS Structure, Civil and Structural Engineering - Cirencester
- QODA Consulting, Mechanical, Electrical Engineering - Farringdon
- Momentum Transport, Transport Engineering - London
- Coreus, Cost Management - Bristol

An existing supplier relationship with Ridge and Partners is being used for planning services to the project.

Architype are the leading UK Passivhaus specialist with an impressive portfolio of work which includes academic/research buildings, master-planning educational institutions and had one of their buildings showcased at COP26 which included a thatch cladding system. The tender panel were blown away by their sustainable and landscape led approach to the project.

## **Stage 1**

Early activities for the design team in the included stakeholder identification and engagement, identification of project risks and confirming the site boundary and ownership. In addition, surveys for ecology and arboriculture were instructed to provide an up-to-date information set from which to commence design.

RIBA Stage 1 started with participation in the RAU's Estates Strategy workshop closely followed by the first phase of stakeholder engagement. Stage 1 has focused on the internal RAU team along with members of the Growth Hub and Farm 491. As part of this engagement process academic teaching staff have been invited to design team meetings, students are using the project as case studies for their module

reports and a number of paid and unpaid ecology survey opportunities have been provided to the student population.



The design team has worked with the university working group to establish a set of Guiding Principles for the Innovation Village. These eight principles are all important but discussion identified a series of priorities, of course they're all important, but the highest priorities were thought, at the time, to be:

- **LANDSCAPE** i.e. landscape this scheme sits within, and the landscape it creates
- **DESIGN QUALITY** - creating a showcase, reputationally and to benefit PR
- **COMMERCIAL** – To enhance the RAU’s core business and ensure its long term financial viability.
- **GLOBAL CENTRE** – to celebrate the uniqueness of the UK’s agriculture while creating a scheme of international significance

The theme of sustainability continually appeared in the discussion and threaded through all of the principles. With this importance recognised and being a core part of the overall design brief the design team & RAU working group discussed and established a set of sustainable outcomes for the development.



They include:

- Minimize the energy used to operate all buildings on site (new, and existing) and will use renewables, on site, to provide as much of the energy required as possible.
- Maximise the use of materials grown on campus, with other materials sourced within 100mi radius where possible
- Utilise reed bed water systems where viable
- Meet World health organization indoor air quality targets
- To prioritise walking, cycling, scooters and 20% of parking spaces will be suitable for EV charging, and we will give these spaces, and those used by people car sharing, priority on site.
- The inclusion of an employment and skills plan
- A biodiversity net gain of more than 10%.

To make sure these are robustly met, the project intends to achieve recognised certification for not only the buildings, but also the landscape through 'Building with Nature'.

The project was publicly launched on 20<sup>th</sup> January with attendees from local and national government, industry and alumni amongst the guests.

The stage 1 design process concluded with the production of a report which was presented and discussed at a number of governance gateways within the university and on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023 formally endorsed by the RAU's Governing Council.

### **Stage 2 to Planning Submission Activities**

Stage 2 has commenced with the immediate focus being on a detailed examination on the markets targeted within the mixed-use scheme, further development of the business case and the local and regional economic benefit that the development will likely deliver. This work is running in parallel with engagement with the local planning authority and the arrangement of a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with both Cotswold District Council and Gloucestershire Highways. This PPA is fundamental for the delivery of an outline planning submission at the end of November 2023 and will allow all parties to build on the positive momentum created by the public launch.

In addition, the RAU hope to open discussions with GCC regarding the ownership of 30m<sup>2</sup> of land located in the middle of the site which houses some sewage plant for Thames Water. This land was transferred to the council in 1989 along with the

corner of the field to facilitate the development of the roundabout and the dwellings over the road. The return of this very small landlocked parcel of land to the RAU, its former owner and owner of all adjoining land can only be of benefit to the project.

June 2023 will see the start of the community engagement process with Local Authorities, Parish and Town Councils, neighbour and community groups to discuss the scheme and allow them to input into the overall concept ahead of the design and formal consultation process.