

Growth Board 11th June 2018

Agenda item – South Oxfordshire Local Plan Update

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REPORT TO OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

REPORT PURPOSE

1. To update the Growth Board on the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. South Oxfordshire District Council has recently resolved to reassess the strategic allocations proposed in their emerging Local Plan as long as the extra time that this will take does not have a significant impact on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The Growth Board has an interest in supporting Local Planning Authorities in their efforts to deliver a full set of up to date Local Plans for Oxfordshire within the timeframes set by the Housing and Growth Deal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. That the Growth Board note the report.

BACKGROUND

2. South Oxfordshire District Council is preparing a new Local Plan, which will replace the existing saved policies of the Adopted Local Plan to 2011 and the Adopted Core Strategy (2012). This new plan responds to the housing need in South Oxfordshire identified by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2014), and to the issue of Oxford's unmet housing need. Following an extensive process of preparation the new Local Plan was published under Regulation 19 for a public consultation which closed on the 30th November 2017.
3. The published Local Plan proposes to build upon the existing settlement hierarchy of the District and create a pattern of development central to the area. It identifies strategic levels of growth at four new locations connecting through the central area of the District on sites at Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Culham and Wheatley. The Science Vale area, which is shared with the Vale of White Horse District, is intended to remain a focus for major new development.
4. At a Council meeting on the 15th May 2018 South Oxfordshire District Council considered the content of the plan and the process for bringing it forward. In assessing this issue the Council took into account the wide range of representations received on the published plan, and these included representations from other Councils in Oxfordshire which raised some significant objections.
5. At their May meeting South Oxfordshire District Council decided to reassess the strategic housing allocations proposed by their emerging Local Plan as long as the extra time that this will take does not have a significant impact on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. In carrying out this re-evaluation South Oxfordshire will assess all reasonable alternatives promoted through the Local Plan process up to the end of the consultation process that closed in November. The strategic housing sites under consideration are as follows:

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- Current proposed sites: Culham, Wheatley, Berinsfield and Chalgrove Airfield;
- Previously considered (but not progressed, ‘reasonable alternatives’) sites: Thornhill, Wick Farm, Lower Elsfield (Bayswater), Grenoble Road, Northfields, Harrington;
- Additional sites submitted by developers: Palmers Riding Stables – Emmer Green Reading, Reading Golf Club, Playhatch - Reading, Land off Thame Road - North Weston and Land South of Great Western Park

6. The reassessment process is likely to be completed by the end of July 2018.
7. This process of re-evaluating the strategic options in the later stages of Local Plan preparation has happened before in Oxfordshire. In both West Oxfordshire and Cherwell new strategic sites were added to their Local Plans after the Examination processes had started.
8. The preparation of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan pre-dated the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. This deal identifies significant funding towards infrastructure and affordable housing, and also a package of planning freedoms and flexibilities. As part of the deal the Oxfordshire authorities are responsible for the delivery of a number of commitments, including a requirement for all of the Local Plans in Oxfordshire to be submitted for examination by the 1st April 2019, and the preparation of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan.
9. Discussions have taken place with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and these discussions have reaffirmed the importance of the outstanding Local Plans for Oxford City and for South Oxfordshire meeting the 1st April 2019 milestone.
10. The resolution passed by South Oxfordshire District Council states that if there is an indication that there will be a significant impact on the Housing and Growth Deal, then Chalgrove Airfield will remain in the Local Plan as a strategic housing site, with a reserve site or sites added following assessment work. South Oxfordshire District Council’s position on whether this fall-back position will be necessary will become clearer following the re-evaluation process to be completed by the end of July 2018.
11. Although Local Plans are the responsibility of individual Local Planning Authorities the Growth Board has an interest in supporting them in their efforts to deliver sound plans within the timeframes set by the Housing and Growth Deal. At present it appears that South Oxfordshire District Council’s proposed reassessment of strategic allocations may well be carried out, and the Local Plan submitted, within the timeframes set by the Housing and Growth Deal. However, a fall-back position is available should it be required.
12. The Housing and Growth Deal can play a significant role in helping fund the infrastructure needed to support the delivery of sites identified by Local Plans. South Oxfordshire District Council’s re-evaluation of the strategic options in their District provides an opportunity for the Council to consider the alignment between the emerging infrastructure programme and the package of strategic allocations for their District. The re-evaluation can also consider the implications of the possible infrastructure funding that may be delivered through the Government’s Housing Infrastructure Fund.

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13. South Oxfordshire District Council has written to site promoters, developers and land owners for each of the strategic housing requesting additional information to support the reassessment. It has also written to stakeholders as well requesting their assistance. The information received will provide an up to date view of deliverability. The reassessment process provides an opportunity for the Council to consider an alternative package of deliverable strategic sites which might overcome some of the significant objections that were received to the published plan.

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