

GROWTH BOARD QUESTIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES

11 June 2018

1. Question from Cllr Debby Hallett, Chairman of Scrutiny Vale of White Horse District Council

The district and city councils have signed up to a deal with Government to provide a number of new houses that is significantly more than is needed (according to the housing minister). Growth Board says it needs effective scrutiny, yet as of this question's deadline, there is no scrutiny committee appointed to scrutinise whether signing this agreement was a good idea, nor the work progressing now.

- i. Who is the member of the Growth Board responsible for ensuring good governance practices (including Scrutiny) are set up and operating as expected and providing the value we all think they should?
- ii. What steps are being taken, by whom, reporting how, to ensure good governance of this Growth Deal?
- iii. How will Growth Board balance the need to get things done and progress the work, with your responsibility to be accountable to the people of Oxfordshire, and to ensure your decisions benefit residents?

Written Response

- i. Since its establishment in 2014, the responsibility for the scrutiny of any decisions made by the Growth Board has rested with the scrutiny arrangements in each of the six Oxfordshire councils that make up the Growth Board. Since this date several councils have taken up this option periodically. These arrangements reflected the fact that the Board has no Executive decision making powers of its own, save for those that are delegated to the council leaders in their capacity as that council's Board representative.
- ii. The decision by Government to rest the task of oversight of the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal with the Growth Board highlighted a need to adopt appropriate new scrutiny arrangements and the partners committed to this as part of the Deal. We are now in the process of establishing this scrutiny regime and council partners have been asked and provided nominations to a Growth Board Scrutiny Panel. Once these are approved at today's meeting, officers will be working with the nominees to set up the meetings, drawing up terms of reference etc. with a view to establishing a timetable of meetings as soon as possible.
- iii. The Governance arrangements for the Housing and Growth Deal are designed to balance the need for delivery, as required by the Deal with the transparency and accountability required for all local authority work. Cross partnership officer arrangements, up to and including Chief Executives will ensure a high quality output and this will be overseen at a detailed level by three Housing and Growth Deal Advisory Sub- groups , populated by councillors drawn from across the partnership, the Growth Board itself in its role as the strategic

governing body and both the scrutiny arrangements for the Board set out earlier in the response and the complimentary scrutiny arrangements that each council has in place to examine the work of the Board. The Board will review the effectiveness of these arrangements periodically to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Supplementary question

How does the Growth Board see its responsibility to create good governance and ensure the scrutiny committee is functioning effectively? Who has responsibility for this? It is disappointing that four months after the Deal was signed this committee has not yet met.

Response

At this meeting the Growth Board are appointing and noting the membership of the Sub-Groups and Scrutiny Committee. After this the first meetings of these will be set up to agree terms of reference and functions. There is no requirement for a dedicated scrutiny committee for the Growth Board but we considered this necessary for good governance. We hope it will allow you to have a strong oversight of the Board's work.

2. Question from Cllr Judy Roberts, Vale of White Horse District Councillor

Given that the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study is to identify the short/ medium and long term rail strategy, can I have the assurance of the Growth Board that the viability and costs of the electrification of Didcot to Oxford and separately the whole of the East West rail link will be undertaken as part of this study?

Written Response

The study will be taking account of and considering the electrification of Didcot to Oxford, although whether this project goes ahead will not be determined by the study alone

Electrification of East-West Rail (EWR) will not be considered, as this has been taken out of the Project Scope by Government, so there are no current plans for this part of the railway to be electrified. However where new structures are being built as part of EWR, they are being constructed to make provision for possible future electrification.

Supplementary question

Integration of the different delivery boards and including all relevant information is critical to the project. Are there any other identifiable sources of finance that can be used to support and enhance the study and programme of improvements before 2020?

Response from Cllr Hudspeth

The delivery board for East-West Rail project is established and work is in progress. There are separate project boards for each of the growth corridor and the expressway.

3. Question from Ian Green, Oxford Civic Society – referring to the JSSP

1. We would like to thank the OGB for following up our request that the Oxford Civic Society and other stakeholders participate in the finalisation of the Statement of Community Involvement for the JSSP: I was pleased to meet an officer from the JSSP Project Team for a preliminary discussion and look forward to further follow-up.

We note that the Statement of Community Involvement is planned to be presented to the next OGB meeting at the end of July and ask for confirmation that further follow-up with the Oxford Civic Society and other stakeholders can proceed quickly.

2. The Oxford Civic Society and URBED have prepared a report ‘Oxford Futures and smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire’ which we would like to submit to the OGB for consideration as shaping the JSSP proceeds.

The report reflects the Oxford Civic Society and URBED earlier report with the same title which four years ago, in 2014, proposed setting up an Oxford Futures Commission as a first step in drawing up ‘a spatial growth plan and charter for sustainable development’. With this history it is perhaps not surprising that OCS and URBED very much welcome the Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) and look forward to contributing to its preparation and implementation.

The report includes a discussion of the relevance of garden city principles, JSSP priorities and objectives, where developments could be located, what forms of transport should be promoted and how investment can be funded. The benefits of engaging communities and interest groups in the preparation of the JSSP are also discussed. The new report has been prepared in the spirit of constructive collaboration and is intended, at this early stage of JSSP preparation, to support those considering the scope of the JSSP.

Can you please confirm that the OGB will receive the report (copies will be e-mailed) and consider the suggestions made in it? The OCS and URBED will be pleased to discuss the report or any aspects of it with members of the OGB and the JSSP project team.

Written Response

The Board welcome the report and the spirit of collaborative co-operation with which it is offered. We are happy to receive the report and to consider how its recommendations can be taken forward in the Joint Strategic Spatial Plan.

Supplementary statement

The Civic Society’s *Oxford Futures and smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire* 2014 report, revised in 2018, discusses a sustainable development and growth charter; the relevance of garden city principle; integrated transport; and objectives for growth – relevant in a wider context than simply Oxford or the JSSP. We are pleased you will consider the report and are happy to meet to discuss this and other aspects of the Board’s work. We would ask for the Draft Statement of Community Involvement to be sent out to consultation.

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