

Scrutiny response to JSSP report for City Executive Board Tuesday 22 January 2019

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To: City Executive Board
Date: 22 January 2019
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Scrutiny Committee report concerning the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and the Westgate Centre

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present a Scrutiny Committee recommendation concerning the Regulation 18 Part 1 Consultation Document
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning & Transport
Corporate Priority:	A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy; Meeting Housing Needs; Strong and Active Communities; A Clean and Green Oxford
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendation: That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 21 January 2019, the Scrutiny Committee considered the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Statement of Community Involvement; Amendment to the Local Development Plan and the Regulation 18 Part 1 Consultation Document. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Hollingsworth, Board member for Planning and Transport, and Carolyn Ploszynski, Planning Policy and Place Manager, for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Summary and recommendations

2. The Committee were aware that this was one of the most important stages in the development of the JSSP; where comments could be passed on the draft high level planning ambitions and objectives for the County. The Committee noted assurances from the Planning Policy and Place Manager that the public consultation would be wide ranging, open to everyone, and reach out to specific groups as set out in the Town and Country Regulations 2012. The Committee reviewed the list of consultees following changes to the list, and noted that equal weight had been given to each of the 38 responses to this phase of consultation.
3. Councillors highlighted the importance of everyone having an opportunity to respond to the consultation, and that there may be merit in recording, separately, a list of all those bodies that the Council proposed to consult which could be made available via the Council's website.
4. The Committee welcomed to decision to separate the Regulation 18 document into two separate consultations, where the first concerns the vision for the area, aspirations and objectives, and the second looks at broad locations for growth.
5. One of the biggest challenges identified as part of the Growth Deal process, as already highlighted by the JSSP Advisory Sub-Group and the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, is the misalignment of Highways England's timescale for the Expressway and the development of the JSSP. The Committee noted that dialogue was still underway with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on this issue, and recognised that it was difficult to develop such a strategic planning document without knowing the route of the expressway first.
6. The Committee's main discussion focussed on the extent to which the ambitions and objectives set out in the Regulation 18 Document were broad and unspecific. It was explained that the rationale for this approach was to allow space for subsequent consultation responses to shape the detail of the document. However, the Committee believe that the document is too unspecific, and does not highlight the importance of key themes that are fundamental to planning for the future.
7. Principally, the ambitions and objectives of the Plan could be more consistent with international, national and local policies and targets concerning climate change, as well as making clear a commitment throughout the document to social and truly affordable housing.
8. The Climate Change Act, the Government's Clean Growth Strategy and the revised National Planning Policy Framework (among others) all set out targets or actions that should be taken to address climate change. The Committee felt there was a disconnect between the urgent need to address climate change, and the lack of detail on the issue within the consultation document.
9. The Government's Clean Growth Strategy explains that "*Local areas are best placed to drive emission reductions through their unique position of managing policy on land, buildings, water, waste and transport. They can embed low carbon measures in strategic plans across areas such as health and social care, transport, and*

*housing (p.118).*¹ This is an opportunity to embed such measures from the outset in the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan.

10. There are other pertinent County strategies too, such as the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, with an objective to *“to halve emissions of carbon dioxide by 2030 compared against 2008 levels (p.4).”*² More broadly, the Plan would benefit from situating the aspirations and objectives within the wider context of climatic, technological and demographic changes between now and 2050, when the Plan ends. A further example of how this theme could be better embedded through the aspirations and objectives is by setting a greenhouse gas reduction target.
11. The Committee noted an underlying complexity surrounding the City Executive Board’s approval of the Regulation 18 Consultation Document, in that any major changes to the draft would halt the consultation for the other Oxfordshire districts, given its status as a joint document.

Recommendation 1: That the Council works with the five Oxfordshire districts to incorporate minor amendments to the Regulation 18 Consultation Document, to strengthen the Plan’s ambitions to address climate change and provide truly affordable housing (consistent with other long term national and local policies and targets). These themes should be considered the basis for the Council’s response to the consultation.

The Westgate Centre

12. The Committee discussed the City Executive Board’s response to its recommendations concerning the Westgate Centre, which were presented to the Board on 18 December 2018. The Committee asked the Chair to provide the Board with further clarity about the intention of their recommendations.
13. The Committee wanted to clarify that their recommendation to carry out a survey of retailers in the Westgate Centre about the Oxford Living Wage (OLW) was a means of establishing a baseline set of data, which could be used as an indicator of how successful future OLW campaigns have been. The survey will also help establish dialogue with local retailers concerning the OLW.
14. It was noted that a survey had been done on shop frontages in secondary retail areas, but a recommendation previously put to the City Executive Board concerned surveying the occupants of those shops, to understand how they perceive the impact of the Westgate. The Committee previously heard that during the planning stages of the redevelopment, consultants were commissioned to consider what impact the Centre might have on other retail areas in the City. It was concluded that some areas would be negatively affected, and using the same methodology as that study, the Committee believe it would be useful to know whether retailers had perceived a positive or negative affect.

¹ HM Government. 2017. Clean Growth Strategy. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700496/clean-growth-strategy-correction-april-2018.pdf

² Oxfordshire County Council. 2015. Energy Strategy 2015 to 2020. Available at: https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s35019/CMDE_OCT1316R10.doc.pdf

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