

# Minutes of a meeting of the OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD SCRUTINY PANEL on Thursday 24 January 2019

## Voting members of the Committee present:

Councillor Neil Prestidge	Cherwell District Council
Councillor Sean Woodcock (Vice-Chairman)	
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Councillor Andrew Gant (Chair)	Oxford City Council
Councillor Craig Simmons	
Councillor John Tanner	
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Councillor Nick Carter	Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor John Sanders	
Councillor Emily Smith	
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Councillor David Turner	South Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Ian White	
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Councillor Debby Hallett	Vale of White Horse District Council
Councillor Chris Palmer	
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Councillor Julian Cooper	West Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Derek Cotterill	

## Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Caroline Green	Interim Deal Director
Paul Staines	Growth Board Service Delivery Manager
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnership Manager (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils)
Andrew Down	Head of Partnership & Insight (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils)
Giles Hughes	West Oxfordshire District Council, Head of Planning and Strategic Housing
Rachel Williams	Lead Officer Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (JSSP)
Anita Bradley	Monitoring Officer, Oxford City Council
Amit Alva	Oxfordshire Growth Board - Project & Scrutiny Officer
Kevin Jacobs	Clerk for the Panel

## Also attending:

Councillor Susan Brown	Leader Oxford City Council & Affordable Housing Sub Group
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## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES; DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST; CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS, INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF TO THE SCRUTINY PANEL**

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Elaine Hornsby South Oxfordshire District Council  
Councillor Ben Mabbett Vale of White Horse District Council

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair informed the Panel that that due to a prior engagement he had to leave the meeting by 7.30 pm and the Panel agreed to vary the order of the Agenda in order to consider Item 7 on the Growth Board's response to the Panel's recommendations from the previous meeting after Item 3 minutes of the previous meeting.

The Panel welcomed Amit Alva, Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Officer and Kevin Jacob, Oxfordshire Growth Board – Democratic Services Officer to their first Panel meeting.

## **2. ELECTION OF VICE- CHAIR TO JUNE 2019**

Following the decision of Councillor Henwood to step down from the Panel it was proposed by Councillor Gant and seconded by Councillor Smith, that Councillor Woodcock be elected as Vice-Chair of the Panel.

**There being no other nominations it was put to a vote and resolved that Councillor Woodcock be elected as Vice-Chair of the Panel until the end of the Growth Board's 2018/2019 year.**

## **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2018 were agreed as a correct record subject to the addition of Councillor Ian White of South Oxfordshire District Council to the list of apologies.

## **4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Panel took this item after the item on the Growth Board's response to the Panel's recommendations from the previous meeting.

The Panel heard one question and one address from members of the public.

Sue Heywood, representing Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, asked the following question:

*'The speed and timescales being imposed on the Oxfordshire 2050 plan continue to be a concern. There is a lot of very good talk about engagement and consultation, including in the draft Reg 18 consultation document, but it is not clear that this can be*

*delivered in practice. In addition, there is much on what it is hoped growth will deliver, and how it should be delivered in order to not cause harm, but there is no evidence in the report being presented next week to the Growth Board as to when any there will be a real debate on what scale of growth might be needed to deliver the aspirations and objectives for the stakeholders in the county and it is hard to see how the Local Development Scheme as it is being proposed can deliver this. Need not Greed Oxfordshire therefore asks:*

- a. Given that the final copy of the Statement of Community Involvement was produced just one working day after the consultation ended, what opportunity was there for the JSSP sub-group or others to consider a report on the responses received and what transparency was offered to the public on the changes made/not made?*
- b. What assurances are there that the responses to the Reg 18 consultation on aspirations and objectives will be meaningfully considered and incorporated, in a transparent way, into the additional proposed Reg 18 consultation in the summer?*
- c. Why do none of the documents for consultation to date seek any opinion on the overall scale of growth and why it is needed? Will this take place and, if so, where and when? What transparency will there be on whose evidence, or what influence, will take priority in decisions that define the scale of growth and housing target numbers for the county? Only this morning, an additional piece of information came to my attention that could be relevant to these points. There is a suggestion that the additional Reg 18 Issues consultation that is now planned for the summer will include an invitation for views on housing numbers as well as on broad locations for any growth. Further, it appears there may be some topic papers planned on a number of key areas, including housing numbers, that will set out how evidence will be collected. These could be a welcome development, assuming there is opportunity for input and feedback on both, including by Scrutiny and we would be grateful for any confirmation about these that Scrutiny can provide.*
- d. In conclusion, will Scrutiny please call for further urgent action to extend the timescales for the project and also for the appropriate assurances and transparency, as outlined above?'*

At the request of the Vice-Chair, Rachel Williams, Lead Officer for Oxfordshire County Council responded to the points raised. In summary:

- The production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was an ambitious project, but it was currently in a good place and discussion was taking place in all the District Council areas. In addition, as committed to in the Growth Deal, there would be a full suite of approved or submitted Local Plans for Oxfordshire by April 2019
- The proposal for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was to have a two-part Regulation 18 consultation. The first commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> February had been designed to be an accessible discussion document concerning issues, the vision, aspiration and objectives around the scale of growth. A big launch was planned for this and broad public engagement wanted. The second consultation would focus on the broad locations for growth and this was scheduled for the summer/autumn of 2019.

- Although the final copy of the draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) had been produced in a short period of time after the close of the consultation period, Officers had already carefully considered comments as they had been received and all the responses had been further considered by the Liaison Group including how they could be addressed.
- The Cabinets/Executives of the various councils would be asked to look at the document, the responses received and to make appropriate amendments.

The Panel commented that, from events various of them had already attended, they were concerned about what appeared to be a lack of attendance and engagement amongst younger people. Given the importance of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 for their futures it was of high priority that they were represented in future launch events. The Panel was informed of the arrangements in place around engagement and Rachel Williams underlined the keenness of the Plan team to engage with young people as part of the process.

Dr Peter Collins, Chairman of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) Oxfordshire gave the following address:

*'CPRE would again like to stress the importance it gives to Panel discussions and actions, and the need to make sure that, in whatever haste, the Growth Board understands the need to spend time on and take seriously all points made by the Panel to it.*

*Councillors will be aware that CPRE is 'The Planning Charity' - unlike all other volunteer groups - both nationally and locally, with experience over 90 years in working positively alongside Government, Counties and Districts. We were glad that the Oxfordshire Growth Board saw our support of the JSSP, subject to proper public engagement, as both positive and helpful. We saw the listing of CPRE by name as a Stakeholder in a recent draft of the Statement of Community Involvement as an appropriately positive step but are now dismayed to be deleted from the list of General Consultees in the updated draft, Appendix 1. We understand that legal requirements may need a special classification. To remove CPRE by name, as a stakeholder and consultee on all matters of planning, would not in our view be in Oxfordshire's interest and be seen badly by the public. We hope that the Panel will pursue this matter.*

*CPRE also urges the Panel to pursue the Growth Board on the need for a clear priority to be given for really affordable living accommodation, with suitable density and sustainability, over provision for employment on all brownfield land. Clearly, current local plans can trump some of this, but it should be written in stone now from when the local plans come to an end, and the City and District Councils be asked to agree to seek to implement it as far as possible from now on.*

*I would note that it is well established that there are plenty of houses available for purchase, except for those really affordable ones needed for vital local people and key workers. That developers be allowed to concrete over the beautiful green fields of Oxfordshire with unneeded expensive houses or those called 'affordable' but also too expensive for the many at 80% of market value is wholly undesirable. There is no evidence that building more and more expensive houses for commuters and those who*

*still find Oxfordshire a desirable place to live will relieve the County's housing problems, provide cheaper accommodation and answer real need.*

*In order that the public, be not confused as to the meaning of words they will find used again and again in discussions in planning circles, I suggest that new definitions of 'affordable' and 'objectively assessed need' be sought. The morally enforced imperative needs to be properly understood.*

*In passing, I would like to join others in asking those who compiled the latest draft of the Statement of Community Involvement just what they understand by 'consultation', in particular with clause 15 in mind'.*

In discussion about the issues raised the Panel commented:

1. That it shared the concerns of the CPRE regarding the omission from the list of 'General Consultees' within the updated draft of the Statement of Community Involvement whilst noting the advice of Officers that there were statutory, legal and practical reasons for this and that input from CPRE remained highly valued. The Panel felt that the contribution of CPRE was sufficiently significant as to warrant listing as a key consultee or regular stakeholder in some way within the Statement of Community Involvement document. It was noted that Officers were building a database of consultees.
2. The Panel noted that definitions of 'Affordable Housing' within the plan documents had to reflect national technical definitions set out in the National Planning Policy Framework but shared the concerns raised that this did not necessarily reflect a broader consideration of 'affordable'. The Panel noted that Officers accepted there was a challenge to explain the terms in a meaningful way.

**The Panel agreed the following recommendation to the Growth Board:**

That the Growth Board reflect on the categorisation of consultees to create a separate list of key consultees in addition to the statutory list of consultees within the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (JSSP) consultation process. CPRE to be added to this list of key consultees.

## **5. GROWTH DEAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMME**

Paul Staines, Growth Deal Services Delivery Manager presented a report and presentation on the Growth Deal Affordable Housing Workstream which introduced the workstream to the Panel and sought to consider how to address some of the key issues in building a successful programme.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council and Chair of the Growth Board Housing Advisory Sub-Group attended the meeting for this item and drew the Panel's attention to the Note of the Sub-Group meeting held on 15 January 2019 which had been circulated. Councillor Brown, in summary, commented that she found the work of the sub-group to be particularly useful and that, although it was still early days in the development of the sub-group, all the partners were working well together and sharing experiences on affordable housing.

Key observations were that all the councils had different policies and priorities for affordable housing. In developing the three-year programme learning had, for example highlighted the necessity of economies of scale for modular housing if a scheme was to become viable to modular build providers. This issue could potentially be addressed by combining schemes.

In the update, and in their discussion about the issues raised, the Panel commented:

1. The median average earnings per year required to purchase an entry level house was 12 times average salary. There was some concern that even though affordable housing for rent might be 'affordable' within official definitions, at 20% below local market rents it was still unaffordable for many people. The Panel noted whilst there was flexibility with the definitions of affordable housing contained within the National Planning Policy Framework. (NPPF) to set a percentage in excess of this in response to local conditions, it was difficult to achieve this in practice because of the grant rates and rent levels set by Homes England. Shared Ownership was also felt by various members of the Panel to be unaffordable for many people.
2. Progress to date set out in the report towards the achievement of indicative totals for the Affordable Housing Programme, (AHP) on Year 1 as part of the Deal Delivery Plan were welcomed as were the ambitious indicative totals for future years. The Panel felt that it would be useful if a project plan could be included in future reports including delivery milestones.
3. Proposed changes by the Government to the borrowing limits set for councils with Housing Revenue Account, (HRA) were welcomed.
4. The conditions of the grant funding provided through the Growth Deal Affordable Housing Programme were broadly in line with those offered through the Homes England Affordable Housing Programme.
5. The Deal conditions for grant recipients included provision to claw back grant in the event of non-delivery.
6. Provision of affordable homes through the Deal were separate and in addition to any secured by local planning authorities via Section 106 contributions.
7. Delivery of the homes set out in the AHP was an ambitious challenge and it was important that the stated targets were delivered. Quality and innovation would also be important.
8. The Panel asked for data on the number of social housing units delivered by the districts and affordability target noting that the numbers provided within a council area could vary considerable year to year depending on the delivery of a big site that might not be repeated in subsequent years.
9. There was a concern that there was not enough focus on the provision of extra care housing within the overall context of affordable social housing. Officers responded, highlighting a number of extra care schemes included within the programme.
10. The Panel noted that Growth Deal affordable housing grant could only be provided to Registered Social Landlords, (RSLs) including stock retaining local authorities. All RSLs were covered by Right to Buy/Right to Acquire legislation.

**The Panel agreed:**

- 1) That a further update be presented to the July meeting.

- 2) That as part of the update, data on the 1,000 affordable homes per annum delivered by councils in Oxfordshire over the last three years be split by district and city council with any necessary context.

## **6. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD**

The Panel considered a report which set out the current arrangements for communications and engaging with the public and other stakeholders and to provide a summary of the work taking place to engage the public in the work of the Growth Deal.

In discussion about the issues raised the Panel noted that:

1. That it was not yet clear that bi-monthly communications were taking place effectively. The Panel had at its previous meeting expressed the opinion that each council Leader should be encouraged to put in place a clear structure for communications between the Growth Board and each council's members. It was felt that this view should be formalised into a recommendation to the Growth Board.
2. In respect of the Growth Board website it was noted that it was accepted by Officers that it remained work in progress, but that time and resource had been put in place with significant improvements made. The Panel was encouraged to highlight any areas for further improvement.

### **The Panel made the following recommendation to the Growth Board:**

That the Growth Board ask each Leader to establish a clear structure for communications between the Growth Board and each council's members

## **7. GROWTH BOARD RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS - NOVEMBER 2018 MEETING**

The Panel considered this report after Item 3 – minutes.

The Panel noted the Growth Board's responses to the recommendations to the Board from the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 22 November 2018 as set out in the Agenda. Councillor Gant updated the Panel on his attendance at the Growth Board on 27 November 2018.

In discussion, the following points were highlighted and discussed:

- In respect of recommendation 3 relating to the proposed [Oxford to Cambridge expressway](#), the Growth Board had clarified its stance as that set out in its letter to the Government of 1<sup>st</sup> October.
- Members of the Panel remained concerned about the timing of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (JSSP) submission deadline and individual Local Plan submission deadlines without understanding more about the impact of the expressway.

Officers updated the Panel on the status of their discussions with the Government on this issue.

## **8. OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD PAPERS 29 JANUARY 2019 FOR DISCUSSION**

The Panel discussed the reports published for the Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting on 29 January.

The Committee's discussion of the Agenda focussed on Item 9 of the Growth Board Agenda – an update on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (Joint Statutory Spatial Plan) and plans for the first stages of consultation.

Councillor Simmons expressed concern that the draft Regulation 18 Part 1 Issues consultation document attached to the report did not make enough mention of climate change and referred to the formal comments made on the [draft document by the Scrutiny Committee of Oxford City Council](#) to the City Council's Executive Board that it should work with the other five councils to strength the ambitions within the consultation document to address climate change.

He proposed that the Scrutiny Panel recommend to the Growth Board that the Regulation 18 consultation document to be more consistent with international, national and local policies and targets concerning climate change and other likely future trends. This should include:

- a) alignment with the Government's definition of 'growth' as contained with the Clean Growth Strategy 2018.
- b) a greater recognition of the importance of climate change and its relationship with the forward planning of our housing, transport, health, wellbeing and economic infrastructure.
- c) a greater recognition of the 'mega-trends' that are expected to affect the demographic, climatic and technological environment.
- d) a 'SMART' target for greenhouse gas reductions against which all the aspirations and objectives are judged.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor White.

The Panel debated the proposed recommendation extensively. A summary of points raised during the discussion included that:

- The Regulation 18 consultation also represented an ideal strategic opportunity to look at the Green Belt in the County.
- That it was important that the document recognise the important principle of climate change.
- That more time to reflect on the proposed recommendation was needed before a decision was taken.

Councillor Woodcock clarified that the Panel was a non-decision-making body and suggested that as an alternative to the proposed recommendation he write to the Chair of the Growth Board and Leaders of the Oxfordshire district councils to express the Panel's disappointment regarding the lack of recognition of climate change within the Regulation 18 consultation document and noting the response of the Oxford City Scrutiny Committee.

Caroline Green, Interim Deal Director and Assistant Chief Executive Oxford City Council commented that the draft consultation document was being presented to the Growth Board for discussion and for it to note, but that formal legal approval of the document was a matter for each of the Oxfordshire district Councils not the Growth Board. It was also noted the consultation document was a formal planning document that had to be signed off.

After further debate, as it was not possible to reach an agreed consensus, the proposed recommendation to the Growth Board was put to a formal vote and declared to be carried.

**The Panel agreed the following recommendation to the Growth Board:**

That the Growth Board redrafts the Regulation 18 consultation document to be more consistent with international, national and local policies and targets concerning climate change and other likely future trends. This should include:

- a) alignment with the Government's definition of 'growth' as contained within the Clean Growth Strategy 2018.
- b) a greater recognition of the importance of climate change and its relationship with the forward planning of our housing, transport, health, wellbeing and economic infrastructure.
- c) a greater recognition of the 'mega-trends' that are expected to affect the demographic, climatic and technological environment.

Consideration of a 'SMART' target for greenhouse gas reductions against which all the aspirations and objectives are judged.

## **9. WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE SCRUTINY PANEL - JANUARY 2018**

The Panel discussed its work programme as set out in the Agenda. In light of earlier items there was a discussion around asking for a further update on affordable housing in July and requesting further information including a project plan from the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (JSSP) team at the Panel's next meeting in March.

**The Panel agreed to:**

1. Request the project plan of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 team and a report on the impact of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (JSSP) on the Green Belt.

2. Request an update report from the Affordable Housing Sub-Group to include a clear breakdown of delivery rates and affordability targets for housing in the respective districts

## 10. DATES OF MEETINGS

The Panel noted the dates of future meeting as:

Thurs 21 March 6.30 pm
Thurs 30 May 6.30 pm
Thursday 25 July 6.30 pm

All meetings to be held in Oxford Town Hall

The Panel discussed the possibility of amending the start times and locations of future meetings as a concern was expressed that a 6.30 pm time in central Oxford was difficult for some Councillors to attend.

Susan Harbour, Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Council responded that dates and locations had been agreed with Councillor Gant as Chairman and it was logistically very challenging to find suitable alternative venues. However, the members of the Panel would be canvassed outside the meeting to seek their views.

**The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.40 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date:**