

To: Council
Date: Monday 18 April
Report of: Councillor Bob Price, Leader of the Council
Title of Report: The Oxfordshire Growth Board

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	The report is to provide an update on the work of the Oxfordshire Growth Board
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Bob Price Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	Vibrant and Sustainable Economy and Meeting Housing Needs
Policy Framework:	The Corporate Plan
Recommendation(s):	
1. Council is asked to comment on and note the contents of the report	

Introduction and background

1. The Oxfordshire Growth Board is a Joint Statutory Committee of the six councils in Oxfordshire delivering projects from the City and Growth Deals.
2. The Oxfordshire Growth Board is a Joint Statutory Committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire charged with the delivery of projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver collaboratively. It also oversees all the projects agreed in the City Deal and Local Growth Deals that fall to the councils, working collaboratively, to deliver.
3. It also exists to advise on matters of collective interest, to seek agreement on local priorities and influence relevant local, regional and national bodies.
4. The Growth Board is supported by an Executive Officers Group comprising senior officers from the six member local authorities, the HCA, LEP and other partners.
5. Details of the terms of reference and membership is available in the link below:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshire-growth-board>

Oxfordshire Growth Board update – Post-SHMA work

6. An important project currently being undertaken by the Oxfordshire Growth Board is the 'Post-SHMA' (Strategic Housing Market Assessment) work stream. The ultimate output from this will be the **apportionment of the Oxford unmet housing need**, i.e. distribution amongst the four District councils of the quantum of housing that will need to be delivered in Oxfordshire by 2031 which relates to the City's Objectively Assessed Housing Need, but which cannot be met in Oxford due to its limited land supply.
7. The timetable originally agreed by Growth Board for completing this work was completion by July 2015. The completion date is now expected to be September 2016, hence there has been slippage of some 14 months overall, despite the City Council strongly arguing the importance of sticking to the agreed timetable.
8. Nevertheless, looking back over the last year, there has been some significant progress in terms of the process reaching its conclusion. The Growth Board Project Team, which consists of officers from the four district councils, the City Council and the County Council, has been overseeing and inputting into this work. So far the following outputs have been completed:
 - Publication of the Oxford Green Belt Study. This study independently assessed parcels of land which together covered the whole of the Oxford Green Belt against four Green Belt purposes, on a consistent basis. The study was undertaken by Land Use Consultants. The findings will feed into the Growth Board's decision on how to apportion the housing in light of the performance of the Green Belt in particular areas considered alongside the Assessment of Spatial Options (see below).
 - Agreement by the Partners to a working assumption that the Oxford unmet need, for the purposes of the post-SHMA work, is 15,000 homes. This flowed from input from a Critical Friend employed by the Growth Board, which concluded that Oxford's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was compliant with national policy, albeit some adjustments to assumptions on housing densities might lead to a higher capacity to deliver housing in the City.
9. The following sub-projects are ongoing:
 - Assessment of Spatial Options. This work is being independently led by Land Use Consultants with input from the Project Team. It will assess the performance of a long-list of spatial (site) options for meeting the Oxford unmet need against a set of sustainability criteria devised by LUC and agreed with the Project Team. The criteria have recently been agreed, and a draft assessment of options will be considered by the Partners at a 'Check and Challenge' workshop on 15th April. A final study report, which should identify stronger- and weaker-performing options, is anticipated to be completed in May 2016.
 - Infrastructure Delivery Framework. This is to be prepared by Oxfordshire County Council in partnership with sustainable transport consultancy ITP. The timetable is uncertain due to a lack of consultancy tenders at the commissioning stage, but is hoped to conclude in July 2016.
10. Follow-on workstreams (which will be after the apportionment of numbers) are agreed as:

- Strategic Habitat Regulations Assessment. This exercise is yet to be scoped and may be a straightforward screening process to identify which preferred sites will need an HRA when being considered in Local Plan reviews. No timetable yet agreed.
 - Water Cycle Study. This exercise is yet to be scoped, but is likely to consider constraints to the water supply and sewerage infrastructures, and impacts on delivery of the preferred prospective strategic sites identified by the Growth Board earlier in the process. No timetable yet agreed.
11. The current date for completing the housing apportionment process, by way of an agreed Memorandum of Understanding between all the Growth Board partners, is anticipated as by the end of September 2016. Partners are aware of the urgency of having this agreed, given West Oxfordshire's examination is currently suspended pending the apportionment being agreed, and other Plan reviews and partial reviews at South Oxfordshire and Cherwell respectively will also need this evidence to progress. Therefore the September date is expected to hold, or at least minimal slippage anticipated.

Implications for the City Council

12. The City Council is committed to progressing with partners sustainable urban extensions to the North and South of Oxford. It is important therefore that the joint post-SHMA project works through, as it will demonstrate that reasonable alternatives for meeting the Oxford unmet need have been consistently assessed and openly considered, discussed and where felt necessary challenged by Growth Board partners.
13. It is important to note that the Growth Board partners have agreed to the principle that local plans are 'sovereign' i.e. the joint work cannot in itself allocate or predetermine sites ahead of them being considered in the context of formal Local Plan preparation. This means that just because a site performs well against the jointly-agreed sustainability criteria, the relevant local authority is not in any way obliged to allocate or even prefer that site in preparing their Local Plan. However there would be a clear risk for the relevant local authority that they were disregarding jointly and independently-prepared evidence, and potentially failing the Duty to Cooperate and the 'Effectiveness' Test of Soundness, if they were to seek to take forward less sustainable alternatives (for example sites more distant from Oxford and/or poorly accessible to Oxford by public transport, walking or cycling).
14. The City Council has worked with consultants to separately prepare a comprehensive evidence pack to demonstrate that urban extensions to the north and south of Oxford are highly sustainable and deliverable options for meeting a significant proportion of Oxford's unmet housing need. It is expected that this evidence will also be considered by the Growth Board and in the preparation of relevant local plans and plan reviews, albeit within the context of the joint working process. This evidence will be made available on the City Council's website within the next few weeks.

Financial implications

15. There are no financial implications relating to this report.

Legal issues

16. There are no legal implications relating to this report.

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Background Papers: None