

## **GROWTH BOARD QUESTIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES** **1 FEBRUARY 2018**

### **1. Question from Colin Thomas for CPRE**

#### Introduction

We understand that the Joint Spatial Plan is now considered an integral aspect of the Housing & Growth Deal to be discussed under agenda item 6 today.

Unfortunately the papers for this item were not available in the very limited timescale available for submitting questions. Therefore we have submitted this question in expectation that it is pertinent to this agenda item. We note that under the forward plan for the Growth Board, the Terms of Reference are due to be re-considered in March and once again ask that these are reviewed to encourage and support meaningful public engagement by the provision of timely information.

#### Question

As members of the Growth Board will be aware, CPRE Oxfordshire has long championed the case for a Joint Spatial Plan to allow effective strategic level planning, including consideration of the overall environmental and social impacts of growth. We therefore welcomed the Growth Board's decision at the November meeting to take this forward. We have also proposed that this should be a Statutory Plan, to ensure a robust and transparent process subject to independent examination, and we are delighted to learn that this is now the intention and is indeed a requirement of the Housing and Growth Deal as set out in the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government 20th November letter.

We are sure Growth Board members will agree that moving forward, the overall acceptance and success of the Plan will be inescapably linked to the extent to which local communities are allowed genuine engagement in the process, right from the inception, not just belated consultation on decisions effectively already taken. We note that some of the original milestones set out in the Business Plan and the Growth Board Forward Plan, such as the February Approval of Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Delivery Programme and Assurance Framework and updates on the Communications Strategy and development of the Statement of Community Involvement, are already under pressure.

Given the overall tight timeframe for the JSSP, it is vital that the public engagement element of the process is not squeezed out at the expense of other more 'bureaucratic' elements of the Plan. CPRE propose that time spent engaging with local residents and stakeholder organisations at the start of the plan process will help ensure that the overall process is more efficient and effective with better and more productive outcomes for all concerned.

Therefore, can the Growth Board advise how it plans to engage with the public and stakeholder organisations, particularly in the formative stages of the JSSP, and most importantly how organisations such as CPRE can effectively and constructively engage in this process?

#### **Response**

**The development of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan forms part of the Housing and Growth Deal and will be a high level framework plan, with District Plans**

**continuing to deal with planning in their areas. The JSSP will be prepared on a statutory footing so will follow the appropriate regulations and procedures for plan making and preparation including community engagement and consultation and public examination.**

### **Supplementary question**

CPRE want to work with the Growth Board to make sure the public are involved and were hoping to come in a constructive frame of mind, especially considering the support in the response to questions on consultation with Highways England. CPRE wish to work in partnership on the JSSP and the Deal, but bearing in mind there is no consultation taking place today how can we do this?

### **Response**

**It is not possible to discuss the terms of reference for the JSSP until the draft revised NPPF is published next month. Following that the Board will have a clear basis for consultation over an 18-24 month period, and will certainly take up CPRE's offer to work with it on this.**

## **2. Question from Charles Mathew, Oxfordshire County Councillor for the division of Eynsham**

I represent the division of Eynsham, which covers the A40 from Barnard Gate to Cassington. This section of the main road to the west from Oxford is subject to constant daily traffic jams on a rush hour basis and often more – and a source of constant and exasperated complaints from local residents. Eynsham Parish Council is strongly in support of this potential solution.

Plans to install a Park and Ride at Evenlode for 500 vehicles (and maybe extended to 1,000, I understand) and a bus lane on the north side to Duke's Cut have been proposed, although not finally funded, and have received your approval; there is also a declared wish to extend the dual carriageway from the Witney by pass to the Park and Ride and further to mirror the aforesaid bus lane on the south side. None of this has been consulted with local residents, nor has the HiF bid, currently awaiting a decision from Government, been consulted on.

The total bill for these plans amounts to some £250 million plus to be spent on the A40. In addition the housing planned in the Carterton/Witney/Eynsham corridor will ensure that any improvement to the access to Oxford via the A40 will be negated by the volume of traffic increase from that housing. In short, these taxpayer funds are in danger of being spend with no effect to the flow of traffic on the A40 and therefore will be money down the drain.

The argument is given that all this has already been consulted; however the documentation, some three years ago, accompanying this general discussion of options, contained a serious flaw in that it claimed that traffic going straight through on the A40 was less than 20 per cent, when the actual figure is estimated at double that; there is an argument to say that plans based on wrong data will inevitably produce the wrong solution.

The first 'improvement' to this road should be a new road joining Duke's Cut to the Loop roundabout to carry all traffic heading north before meeting the Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts and that is now needed urgently.

As the total funds reflect the almost identical estimated cost of a light railway/Wuppertal option/tram predominantly along the old railway line from Carterton through Witney and Eynsham to Oxford (perhaps via Long Hanborough), surely that should be pursued in preference as it would draw passengers off the A40 and negate the necessity of spending any money on that road.

Was this seriously considered before you in the Growth Board approved the A40 plans and the HiF bid and if not, will you now do so urgently as this is the only way the current and future problems of the A40 will be met?

### **Response**

**The A40 Project to which the question refers was approved by the County Council prior to the existence of the Growth Board, and is now a confirmed and funded project, subject to the submission and approval of the final Business Case.**

**The Dukes Cut proposal (A40 – A44) scheme is a separate proposal under consideration as part of the wider growth and infrastructure planning for Oxfordshire.**

**The reinstatement of the old rail line as a transport corridor has also been previously considered. However, the County Council's assessment is that this would be an extremely challenging and very costly scheme, primarily because the previous rail alignment (which was only a single track) has been built over at several locations. Consequently, it is not a priority for rail development or investment for either the rail industry or local authorities within the current planning framework. Instead, other investment that would support the A40 transport corridor – for example to further enhance and upgrade the Cotswold Line – is being taken forward. There will be a joint analysis of rail development opportunities in the Central Oxfordshire area as part of the next phase of the infrastructure studies that we are undertaking.**

### **Supplementary question (read out at the meeting)**

It would be courteous of me to thank the Growth Board for their response, but I find myself severely disappointed by the negative approach adopted.

The problems of traffic on the A40 and access to Oxford, as well as its role as a national 'trunk' road, requires an innovative blue sky thinking approach today; tomorrow with the 16,000 plus new houses to be built by 2031 in the Carterton/Witney/Eynsham corridor, no loop roundabout road from the A40 to the A44, a Park and Ride at the wrong end of where the congestion is and able to accommodate only some five per cent of daily passing traffic, the prospects of the current plans achieving an improvement to the flow on the A40 are nil.

Clearly the West Oxfordshire economy is throttled by the current situation. Your response indicates to the residents of Oxfordshire that you are not really interested in solving the current A40 problems for now or the next decade.

Would the Growth Board therefore at least support a comprehensive and constructive review of the most effective possible options to this major bottleneck, which is such a nightmare in the lives of local residents, and through traffic equally, since the present plans merely spend public money through government funding without any prospect of it achieving any improvement to the flow of the A40?

**Response from Cllr Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council Leader**

**There was £35m of public funds definitely available for improvements. The HIF bidding round was 15x oversubscribed so the likelihood of funding for this realistically was low. So between the HIF, the Deal, and other available but limited funds we would need to see what was feasible. However the County Council would continue to work on productive and suitable improvements.**