

GROWTH BOARD 27 MARCH 2018

Questions and written responses

Summary of supplementary questions and responses

Summary of addresses

1. Question on behalf of Need not Greed Oxfordshire, read by Sue Haywood

We note that the Growth Board's Terms of Reference are under review and scheduled to be discussed at the next meeting. This will be a valuable opportunity to address on-going issues of transparency and accessibility of information, including timeliness. For example, with the increasing amount of decision-making apparently to be made at the Growth Board level, removing it further from the local electorate, steps must be taken to ensure that all local councillors have adequate opportunity to input to the process, including sufficient time to review documentation. Increasing transparency, including appropriate time to consider and respond to often very detailed and complex issues, will enable all stakeholders to be more constructive in their involvement. Some of this comes down to setting the right philosophy and ethos for the Board, which should be embodied in the Terms of Reference. However, there are also simple practical steps, such as the creation of a single web location for all Growth Board information. This has been previously requested and we trust that a few pounds from the recent £5m capacity funding might be spared to take this forward.

How will the Growth Board factor these issues into the review of the Terms of Reference?

Written Response

The Board will be reviewing its terms of reference to align them to the changed role of the Board and in particular the governance requirements of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. It is certainly our intention that the work of the Board should observe all the standard local government principles of transparency and public engagement, as is shown by the facility for asking questions and making statements to the Board and presentations such as the one that is on today's agenda from Highways England on the Growth Corridor. The Board will also be considering how it can broaden its engagement with local councillors. These matters will be discussed at the April meeting.

The Board has always had a profile on the web sites of its constituent partners but a stand-alone website would clearly be helpful in the next phase of work to implement the Growth Deal and this should be completed by the end of April.

Supplementary Question summary

We note the intention to ensure all councillors are kept up to date and informed but it is on record that some councillors have not had enough time to consider Growth Board papers before decisions are made. Please can the new terms of reference include explicit commitments to transparency and giving time for constructive engagement by all councillors and stakeholders?

Response summary

We note the concerns and will consider how to realistically address these when finalising the terms of reference and how the Board operates.

2. Question on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire, read by Michael Tyce

England's rural landscape is precious and Oxfordshire is currently the South East's most rural County. The countryside and environment must weigh at least equally in the balance with economic growth. These issues are complementary not incompatible. Economic growth is important but the supply of land is finite and it must therefore be used with caution. In considering development, we must think first whether it can be accommodated within existing settlements and by using higher densities. If new sites must be contemplated for housing this must only be for the reasonable requirements of the existing population, taking into account both affordability and tenure. If despite addressing only real local demand, whilst maximising densities and previously developed land, there is still be a need for new land to be used this should be to a strict order of precedence with designated land such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Green Belt being the absolute last resort.

How will these considerations be taken into account when drafting the Oxfordshire-wide Statement of Common Ground and appointing to and setting terms of reference for the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan Project Board?

Written Response

The Growth Board has already made clear, when approving the business case for the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP), that the Plan is intended to be a strategic and long term framework for the development of the county up to 2050. The Board accepts that this must involve the maintenance of natural character of the county, as local plans are also required to do. We will be seeking to apply the principles of sustainable development and environmental sensitivity throughout.

In common with all statutory local plans the JSSP will be scoped and governed by key documents that will be placed in the public domain and the considerations and findings of the JSSP will be tested at key stages through public consultation, including an independent examination held in public.

Supplementary Question summary

While you have stated you would take account of the impact of housing on undeveloped rural land, you have collectively agreed housing numbers 40% above what the government now deems reasonable: additionally you are no doubt ready to sign up to the further 300,000 houses in the NIC Corridor Growth scheme, more than doubling the present housing stock. This is a self-inflicted challenge. How are you going to preserve Oxfordshire's rural nature when you have signed up to deliver numbers of houses way beyond any conceivable need?

Response summary

Councillor Price said:

We will work as stated in the response above. The housing numbers proposed are entirely consistent with the numbers required by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the SHMA and so development will be consistent with these defined measures of current and future unmet need.

3. Address to the Board by Oxford City Councillor Andrew Gant

Councillor Gant said in summary:

- Having called for the establishment of oversight and scrutiny of the Growth Board's work he was pleased to hear that this was under consideration in the draft new terms of reference.
- On the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP):
- It would be a mistake to allow Kidlington and Oxford to expand and coalesce into large centreless spread.
- Statements in the House of Commons reiterated the principles of maintaining and not developing designated Green Belt land and resisting urban sprawl.
- The Growth Board should safeguard these principles and commit to the Green Belt as a whole not removing stretches piecemeal.
- There was a need to make a natural capital assessment and then safeguard these assets.
- There were some interesting statements about different types and tenure of housing but these must deliver a mix of homes for key workers – of all types, and not just social housing, at all stages in the plan.

Housing must be built in the right places, not just the easiest places.

Response summary

While the JSSP will form the overall strategy, these decisions will be for each local authority and ultimately for the Planning Inspectorate to take as they determine the soundness of individual Local Plans. So any proposals will be consulted on locally as well as county- wide and be tested for each authority's Local Plan by inspectors at public inquiry.

4. Address to the Board by Oxfordshire County Councillor Charles Mathew

Councillor Mathew said in summary:

Referring to his question at the 1 February meeting and following on from the announcement of successful Housing Infrastructure Fund bid, he was still waiting for a satisfactory response to his question.

His concerns and queries over the efficacy of measures to mitigate current and future pressures on the A40 had not been addressed.

He asked the Growth Board to confirm support for the review of options open to them for A40 improvement in light of the successful HIF bid before committing to a potentially pointless park and ride at Eynsham and bus lane to Dukes Cut and asked for the A40 improvements to be brought forward to October.

Response summary

Councillor Hudspeth said:

The park and ride and bus lane were funded by the existing City Deal for the science corridor and cancelling this would lose a £3m investment as the funds were not transferable. The Garden Village HIF bid had reached the second stage, not a final decision. Once a business case was submitted for this a final evaluation and then a funding announcement was expected in the autumn: unfortunately too late to allow work on the A40 contingent on this bid to start in October.

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