

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 14 October 2020

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown (Chair)	Councillor Turner (Deputy Leader)
Councillor Hayes (Deputy Leader)	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Clarkson	Councillor Hollingsworth
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Linda Smith
Councillor Tidball	Councillor Upton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive
Tom Bridgman, Executive Director (Development)
Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive
Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing
Nadeem Murtuja, Interim Executive Director for Communities
Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Carolyn Ploszynski, Planning Policy and Place Manager
Dave Scholes, Housing Strategy & Needs Manager (Affordable Housing Supply Lead)
Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnership and Communications Manager
Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)
John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Apologies:

No apologies were received

69. Declarations of Interest

None.

70. Addresses and Questions by Members of the Public

None.

71. Councillor Addresses on any item for decision on the Board's agenda

None.

72. Councillor Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None.

73. Items raised by Board Members

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks, reminded the meeting that Council had, the previous week, asked Cabinet to adopt plans to make an application to DEFRA for designated bathing water status for a stretch of the Thames in Oxford. She asked Cabinet to acknowledge this request and to ask officers to undertake the necessary work, in consultation with her, before bringing back to Cabinet for agreement.

74. Scrutiny Committee Reports

There were no recommendations to Cabinet from the latest meetings of Scrutiny Committee or its Panels.

75. Project Approval and Allocation of Housing and Growth Deal Funding for Affordable Housing Delivery

The Head of Housing Services had submitted a report to seek project approval and delegations to enable capital grant allocations to be paid to Registered Providers and Community-Led Housing providers for schemes within the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal programme, using grant received from Oxfordshire County Council for this purpose. To delegate officers to enter into funding and other necessary agreements for the purpose of delivery of affordable housing through this programme.

Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, introduced the report. The project approval and allocation of funding was very good news for the City as together they would increase the proportion of social and other affordable housing available to residents. Some of the funding would be directed towards projects which already had planning approval. The report sought agreement, among other things, to the allocation of significant funding from the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal to the William Morris Close site which would enable 100% of that site to be affordable, with an increase in the amount of social housing and an increase in shared ownership properties. Further budget reports to Cabinet for other sites would follow in due course.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Give project approval** to the proposals, to accept and distribute grant; enter into funding agreements; and any other necessary agreements or contracts, as set out in this report for sites at William Morris Close; Gibbs Crescent; and Champion Way, for the purpose of delivering more affordable housing in Oxford, through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal programme;
2. **Note** that the Head of Financial Services proposes to use financial delegations for grant funded capital schemes, to make the initial payment for William Morris Close, by the required deadline;

3. **Note** that the budget for further Growth Deal grant payments will be requested in future budget reports;
4. **Delegate authority** to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing; the Head of Financial Services/Section 151 Officer; and the Council's Monitoring Officer, to enter into funding and other necessary agreements for the purpose of delivery affordable housing through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal programme, within identified budgets, for the schemes listed in this report;
5. **Delegate authority** to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance and Asset Management, and Affordable Housing, to approve any agreements over £500,000 for affordable housing, within this project approval and budget envelope; and
6. **Recommend to Council** that it approves a revision to the general fund capital budget in 2020/21 of £3,123,000, for the initial grant payment in relation to the William Morris Close site, and a further capital budget for 2021/22 of £347,000 to fund the remaining grant balance payable for that scheme all of which will be funded by capital grant income from Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (OGD).

76. Oxford City Council's response to the Planning for the Future White Paper August 2020

The Head of Planning Services had submitted a report requesting Cabinet to note the response on the White Paper Planning for the Future to be submitted to MHCLG.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Delivery, introduced the report. It was unusual for a Council response to a Government consultation to be put before Cabinet but the implications of the White Paper on Planning for the Future were such that they warranted Cabinet's attention.

The proposals contained in the White Paper as presently conceived would have a profound effect on the City's control of many important matters: its general development; its ability to respond appropriately to its heritage, to provide social and affordable housing, and to set its own standards in relation to the climate emergency.

The White Paper was explicit about the Government's intention to repeal the substance of the Town & Country Planning Act 1947. Despite the White Paper's references to "democracy" and "efficiency" these were not features which emerged from the substance of the proposals. There had been a great deal of criticism of elements of the White Paper at a national level, notably in relation to the proposed use of an algorithm to produce housing numbers. However there were many other elements of the White Paper which gave a cause for concern.

It was worthy of note that the Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Council were united in their opposition to the White Paper, to its centralising tendencies, its lack of democracy and its impracticality as well as to the damage it would do to the provision of affordable housing, place making and local policy. These views were shared widely throughout the country and by councils of all political persuasions.

At a fundamental level the proposals would remove the crucial opportunity for local people to contribute to planning decisions, replacing it with the new version of the local plan. The zoning approach to plans suggested in the White Paper would be both complex and impractical. The proposals didn't, for example, address the many and

varied differences that exist in different parts of the City which would, in turn, require a multiplicity of zones to do them individual justice.

The White Paper set great store by the criterion of “beauty” as a key element in the decision making process but failed to define it.

The White Paper placed great emphasis on greater public engagement via digital means to provide certainty for the development industry whereas, since the 1947 Act, planning processes had sought to balance the needs of different interests in a more equitable way than the proposals would allow. The White Paper was explicit in its intention to remove what was regarded as the disputatious element of public consultation but this was something which, in practice, provided one of the cornerstones of the present system. The White Paper represented a profoundly damaging set of proposals which put the whole planning system, the communities which are protected by it and local democracy at risk and all efforts should be made to highlight and, ultimately, resist them.

The Cabinet was unequivocal in its view about the damaging nature of these proposals and the threat they proposed to local democracy as outlined in the response and described by Cllr Hollingsworth.

In discussion it was suggested that a few elements of the response might be expanded (eg that the “beauty” criterion is necessarily locality and subjectively based; the undesirability of a nationally introduced “identikit” house design; the need for clarity about the application of the proposals in the case of change of use; the need to tackle land banking by developers; a challenge to the focus on a digital approach; the potential consequences of the proposals on healthy place shaping; and the potentially negative effect of the proposals on environment and biodiversity (all members of the Cabinet having been contacted by constituents about the latter)).

Officers agreed to see that the points raised were sufficiently addressed in the proposed response or expanded before agreeing the text of the final submission with the Councillor Hollingsworth.

Summing up, Councillor Hollingsworth repeated the point that the proposals sought to bring to an end the benefits of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. While data are of course important, it was unwise for planning decisions to be driven principally by algorithms, there was no substitute for local community consultation. The government had identified a need for more homes, particularly affordable homes and the White Paper was proposed as a means of addressing that need. The shortage was not, though, a function of the present planning regime it could, however, be addressed by the simple expedient of the Government choosing to invest in social housing.

The Chair thanked officers for their work in shaping this important response to a matter of such significance to the City.

Cabinet resolved to:

1.Delegate to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Delivery agreement of the final response on the White Paper to be submitted to MHCLG .

77. Minutes

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 09 September 2020 as a true and accurate record.

78. Decisions taken under Parts 9.3(b) of the Constitution

The Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) had submitted a report asking Cabinet to note the decisions taken by him using the urgency powers delegated in Part 9.3(b) of the Constitution.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note** the decisions taken as set out in the report.

79. Decisions taken under Parts 9.3(b) of the Constitution - Exempt Appendix

There was no discussion in confidential session.

80. Dates of Future Meetings

Meetings are scheduled for the following dates:

- 11 November
- 09 December

All meetings start at 6pm unless otherwise stated

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.50 pm

ChairDate: Wednesday 11 November 2020

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