

Oxfordshire Growth Board

Thursday 25 June 2015, 14:00

Committee Room One, West Oxfordshire District Council Offices

Present:

Councillor Matthew Barber, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council
Councillor John Cotton, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Bob Price, Leader of Oxford City Council
Councillor Barry Norton - Chairman, and Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of Cherwell District Council

Non-voting Members:

Adrian Shooter, Chairman Oxfordshire LEP
Linda King for Alistair Fitt, Universities Representative, Oxford Brookes
Sally Coble for John Mansbridge, Environment Agency
David Warburton, Homes and Communities Agency

In attendance:

David Neudegg, West Oxfordshire District Council (representing Oxfordshire Chief Executives)
Andrew Tucker, West Oxfordshire District Council
Paul Staines, Growth Board Programme Manager
Sue Scane, Oxfordshire County Council
Bev Hindle, Oxfordshire County Council
David Buckle, South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Councils
Sue Smith, Cherwell District Council
Calvin Bell, Cherwell District Council
Anna Robinson, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
David Edwards, Oxford City Council
Nigel Tipple, Local Enterprise Partnership

Apologies:

Alistair Fitt, Universities Representative, Oxford Brookes
Andrew Harrison, Business Representative
Adrian Lockwood, Business Representative, Oxfordshire Skills Board
Jon Mansbridge, Environment Agency

1. Introductions and Welcome

Barry Norton welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the meeting. He advised that this would be his last meeting as Chairman, the Chairmanship rotating between the constituent authorities and passing to Cherwell District Council at the next meeting. Those present then introduced themselves.

Mr Norton advised that the Growth Board had been approached by the CPRE with a request to ask a question at the meeting. The current terms of reference did not allow for any form of public participation, such as asking questions at a meeting, but these Terms of Reference needed to be reviewed. In response to the CPRE's request, an undertaking had been given to provide a response on behalf of the Chairman of the Board.

Subsequently, a number of further questions had been received from individuals and groups and these had been circulated to Members. Draft responses would be circulated to Growth Board Members for comments in advance of formal written replies being given.

As previously indicated, the Joint Committee's Terms of Reference were due for review shortly and Mr Norton suggested that the matter of public participation at the meetings be considered by the Executive Officer Group as part of that work.

Finally, Mr Norton advised that he intended to take agenda item No. 3 (Summary of the Cherwell Local Plan Inspector's Report) prior to consideration of the Post SHMA Work Programme Update Report.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Andrew Harrison and Phil Shadbolt, Business Representatives; Sally Coble attended in place of John Mansbridge representing the Environment Agency and Linda King for Alistair Fitt, the Universities Representative.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be considered at the meeting.

4. Minutes of the Shadow Growth Board held on 14 November 2014

The minutes of the meeting of the Shadow Health Board held on 14 November were received and agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

5. Summary of the Cherwell Local Plan Inspector's Report

Barry Wood introduced the report and advised that Cherwell would seek to adopt the Plan at its Full Council meeting on 20 July. A series of adjustments would be made to the submitted plan and tabled at the meeting. Mr Wood reminded the meeting that making Local Plans was critical to economic prosperity and Districts welcomed the obligation to do so. Whilst the development of a Local Plan was intensive in terms of time and resources, these challenges had to be met so that planning could regulate growth. The absence of a Local Plan would result in developer led planning. Cherwell would be happy to assist other districts in developing their plans and to share the lessons learned.

6. Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme

David Neudegg introduced the report outlining the post SHMA Strategic Work Programme. He indicated that the Programme had been the subject of previous debate and the Board was now invited to confirm approval of the Programme and establish a partnership holding account to finance the Programme. He noted that the timetable had been produced some time ago and that, whilst some dates may have slipped, it summarised the work streams as set out in the appendix to the report.

With regard to the appointment of land use consultants to undertake a Green Belt Study, John Cotton indicated that the Vale was just about to publish its own Green Belt study and, whilst the authority would be willing to co-operate with the consultants, he raised concern over the manner in which various open spaces and developed land had been parcelled together, suggesting that if this had not already been resolved it could represent a weakness in the eventual report.

In response, Andrew Tucker confirmed that the concerns raised were in the process of being addressed by the consultants in liaison with the relevant authorities

Matthew Barber suggested that it was fundamental to the Programme that the availability of land for residential development in Oxford City and the level of unmet demand be identified. With this objective in mind he proposed the following motion:-

Districts councils note the clear direction of the Cherwell Local Plan Inspector that Oxford City's unmet housing needs be 'fully and accurately defined'

The districts believe that fulfilment of the duty to cooperate would be further strengthened by Oxford City also committing to an early review of their Local Plan in common with all the other districts. The districts remain firmly committed to delivering the post SHMA Work Programme, including the critical friend process, as part of the duty to cooperate.

In seconding the proposition, John Cotton indicated that a review of Oxford City's Local Plan would enable both the policy desires of the Council and the issue of capacity to be tested in a public forum through the Local Plan Inquiry process.

Ian Hudspeth emphasised the importance of continuing with the existing Programme and the need to reach a conclusion without delay. He expressed concern that other district's Local Plans ought not to be delayed recognising that, if Plans were not robust, there was a continued danger of speculative development on unallocated sites.

Barry Wood indicated that he had no objection to the Board making such a request as long as it did not deflect from the work identified in the post SHMA Work Programme

Bob Price, responding to the proposal acknowledged that this was a matter of on-going debate and reiterated the City's position was that their 2011 Local Plan was robust and that the city has sought to address as much of their unmet housing need as possible. He confirmed that the Oxford SHLAA was based in their view upon an exhaustive examination of sites and indicated that consultants employed by the City to review Oxford's SHLAA had concluded that a review of the Local Plan was unnecessary.

On being put to the vote the Motion **WAS CARRIED**

Turning to the revised timetable for the Post SHMA Work Programme, Barry Wood indicated that he did not consider that the Board was in a position to endorse the Programme as submitted given that it was not fully up to date. He proposed that consideration of the Programme be deferred to a special meeting of the Growth Board to be held as soon as possible in July to enable the Executive Group to produce a revised timetable, together with a synopsis of the work involved.

In expressing his support the proposal, Matthew Barber advised that, in moving towards Examination in Public in September, the Vale of White Horse had advice suggesting that the spatial options work should be more robust. Whilst the Vale would not wish to delay the post SHMA timetable, it was crucial to the joint process (and for districts to begin accommodating Oxford's unmet need) that Local Plans were found to be sound in order to avoid delay and potential future challenges.

With regard to the creation of a partnership holding account, John Cotton indicated that, having undertaken its own independent Green Belt Study, South Oxfordshire would not wish to see any funding it allocated to the account applied towards this

particular study. He also sought reassurance that the necessary procedures would be put in place to ensure that funds were properly spent and accounted for.

Matthew Barber emphasised the necessity to allocate funds to progress the work programme and Ian Hudspeth noted that the suggested contribution of £60,000 from each authority was to be viewed as a maximum.

Bob Price advised that expenditure would be subject to all the usual accountability arrangements employed by the lead authority. David Neudegg confirmed that a regular monitoring reports and budget updates would be submitted as part of this process.

The Board :-

RESOLVED:

- (a) That further consideration of the detailed Programme be deferred to a special meeting of the Growth Board to be held as soon as possible in July to enable the Executive Group to produce a revised timetable, together with a synopsis of the work involved.
- (b) That the establishment of a partnership holding account be authorised and each partner authority requested to transfer £60,000 to the account for the purposes of financing the Programme.

7. Local Growth Fund Projects Update

Nigel Tipple introduced the report which outlined progress on Local Growth Fund Projects. He explained that inclusion in the project list ought not to be taken to presuppose the allocation of Government funding as detailed discussions would not take place until after the budget, comprehensive spending review and autumn statement. Identifying and developing potential projects at an early stage in conjunction with the private sector allowed the LEP to take advantage of any future funding opportunities as and when they arose.

He explained that the 'Gold' and 'Silver' designations shown on the report related solely to the original expressions of interest for individual projects and not to any ranking within the project list. He also confirmed that the financial sums were indicative project totals only and inclusion within the list did not imply that all projects could be progressed at the same pace as a number were still the subject of on-going dialogue and not yet in a position to be brought forward.

By bringing an outline programme together, the LEP would be in a position to commence discussions with Ministers and Civil Servants after the summer recess. There were business plans underpinning each project and, by working with the private and voluntary sectors and aligning projects with strategic objectives, the LEP was able to access a wider range of funding streams.

Bob Price noted that total potential expenditure was huge and questioned how the projects could be prioritised in relation to the SEP. He also queried the extent of match funding committed by the proposers of individual projects, indicating that this was a significant factor in establishing priority.

Nigel Tipple acknowledged that potential costs were substantial and advised that private sector funding created significant leverage in accessing other funding streams. A 25% contribution towards a potential total expenditure of some £350M

to £400M was envisaged which raised issues with regard to state aid and support from the private sector.

The programme built upon the success of the City Deal and Growth Fund where projects were ranked according to their business plans and consistency with the SEP.

Further assessment of project activity was currently taking place and it would be necessary to prioritise areas and rank schemes within those priorities. Projects were grouped using a thematic approach but were not prioritised. It was necessary to identify those that were deliverable and in accord with Government priorities. Some projects would be developed further whilst others would be held in reserve as being desirable.

Bob Price suggested that the economic significance of the Harwell project was such that it should be considered as an exceptional project outside the Growth Fund. Nigel Tipple concurred but noted that projects would need to be tailored in order to resonate with the Government's current approach; a methodology that had proved successful in the past.

John Cotton acknowledged that, whilst projects could be packaged differently to meet Government priorities and maximise funding opportunities, this ought not to be to the detriment of established local priorities or the relative benefit to the local economy. Nigel Tipple concurred that there was little merit in pursuing funding as an objective in itself but noted that funding had been secured for projects of recognised strategic importance in the past by re-packaging schemes.

Barry Wood commended the work carried out and recognised the need to maintain a flexible approach, particularly in times of financial constraints. He noted that the governance of the Growth Fund fell to the LEP and that the report was submitted to the Growth Board for information.

Whilst acknowledging the need to maintain flexibility, Ian Hudspeth stressed the importance of taking a wider strategic view in preference to seeking to secure funding for local projects of limited merit. Whilst applications could be made in response to changing Government priorities, it was important to ensure that projects fell within agreed strategic objectives.

Adrian Shooter indicated that the medium and long term direction of the SEP was kept in mind by the LEP Board. The project plan enabled the LEP to be opportunistic when Government funding opportunities arose; for example when other areas were unable to progress funded schemes. Accordingly, whilst schemes might not always be progressed in the expected order, the general direction of travel would always be maintained.

RESOLVED: That the report and the current position be noted.

8. European Structural Investment Fund

Nigel Tipple introduced a report seeking an in principle approval for funding for technical support for projects allocated funding from the European Structural investment Fund.

RESOLVED: That partner councils be requested to give in principle approval to make provision in their budgets for the three years to 2018/19 to fund technical support for the projects allocated funding from the European Structural investment

Fund, subject to a detailed assessment of the funding required and how the resources could be delivered by the Executive Officer Group.

9. City Deal Finance Summary

The Board received a report summarising the financial position of various City Deal Projects.

RESOLVED: That the report and the current position be noted.

10. Response to Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee

The Board received and considered a report advising Members of the recommendations made by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee and suggesting a response.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the proposed response approved for submission to Oxford City.

11. Date of Future Meetings

It was noted that, in addition to the special meeting to be held in July, future meetings of the Growth Board would be held at Cherwell District Council's offices on 24 September and 19 November 2015 and 19 January, 31 March and 26 May 2016.

12. Any Other Business

Bev Hindle introduced John Henderson, regional Asset Manager for Oxfordshire County Council.

The meeting finished at 3:00 pm