

## **Cherwell District Council**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, Oxon OX15 4AA, on 1 February 2022 at 6.30 pm

#### Present:

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)  
Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor Mike Bishop  
Councillor Sandy Dallimore  
Councillor Simon Holland  
Councillor David Hughes  
Councillor Ian Middleton  
Councillor Perran Moon  
Councillor Adam Nell  
Councillor Les Sibley  
Councillor Bryn Williams

#### Substitute Members:

Councillor Shaida Hussain (In place of Councillor Matt Hodgson)

#### Also Present:

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council  
Councillor John Broad  
Craig Bower, Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire

#### Apologies for absence:

Councillor Matt Hodgson

#### Officers:

David Peckford, Assistant Director: Planning and Development  
Andrew Maxted, Planning Policy, Conservation and Design Manager  
Natasha Clark, Governance and Elections Manager  
Emma Faulkner, Democratic and Elections Officer  
Lesley Farrell, Democratic and Elections Officer

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

37 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

39 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

40 **Digital Infrastructure Update**

The Committee received a presentation from the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire, which gave an update on the progress of full fibre internet and 5G mobile signal rollout across the county.

Following the partnership with BT Openreach that had been in place since 2014, 14,000 premises in the district had been connected to superfast broadband services. 98.5% of the district now had access to superfast services, an increase from 63% when the programme started.

The percentage of premises with no access to a connection of at least 10 megabits per second (mbs), which was considered a minimum requirement for getting online, was currently 0.9%.

The Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire explained that the focus of the current programme was to deliver full fibre connections to premises, rather than cabinets as had previously been the case. Openreach had published their rollout plans for delivery, and work to upgrade connections had been carried out in Banbury before Christmas 2021. A number of smaller providers would also be providing fibre services to property connections, but they had not publicly announced their plans due to commercial sensitivities. This made associated communications with affected areas difficult, as the upgrading of wires and poles involved roadworks and disruption to infrastructure. However, once the appropriate upgrades had been made and fibre connections were in place, it would be easier to make changes in the future.

Regarding connection of business premises, the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire explained that since 2019, 230 businesses had been connected via funding from DEFRA. The businesses had been in some of the hardest to reach areas of the district, and therefore not viable for commercial providers to install connections. As the base infrastructure was

now in place, it was hoped commercial providers would use the connections to further develop services in those areas.

In October 2021 a new project had started called 'Gigahubs'. 24 public service buildings across the district had been identified as hub sites, which would have fibre connections installed that could then be used to extend fibre connectivity to local residents and businesses.

In relation to mobile digital signal, the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire explained that the team had a focus on 'small cell' improvements. This involved the installation of small units on street furniture such as lampposts, to increase the available mobile signal. Initially the project would be rolled out to a small number of lampposts in Oxford, but it was hoped that by the end of 2023 up to 70 lampposts across the county would have the technology, including some in Banbury and Bicester.

With regard to planning applications for new or upgraded mobile phone masts, the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire explained that discussions were ongoing with mobile phone providers to encourage them to go through the pre-application process before submitting an application. Doing so would allow discussions to take place regarding the suitability of proposed locations and possible alternative locations, increasing the possibility of an application being approved.

In response to questions from the Committee the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire said that the Shared Rural Network had been set up by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in 2020, which encouraged the four mobile network operators in the UK to share masts and improve digital connectivity.

At the discretion of the Chairman, Councillor Broad addressed the Committee regarding the danger to the radar altimeters on military and commercial aircraft of the frequency being used.

The Committee thanked the Programme Director of Digital Infrastructure Oxfordshire for the presentation.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the presentation be noted.

## **41 Oxfordshire Plan 2050: Summary of responses from Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation and next steps**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Planning and Development that gave an update from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and included a summary of comments received during the recent consultation.

The Assistant Director – Planning and Development gave a short presentation that highlighted the key aspects of the report.

All Oxfordshire district and city Scrutiny Committees were due to consider the same report during February, before a further report was submitted to all Executive and Cabinet meetings in March. The Statement of Community Involvement for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 had been updated following the consultation stage, and was recommended to all Oxfordshire district and City Executive/Cabinets for approval.

The next stage of the plan process would be the Regulation 19 submission plan, that was currently scheduled for Summer 2022. Once this stage had been completed the plan would move to Regulation 22, submission of the plan to the Secretary of State to start the examination. This was currently scheduled for Autumn 2022, but the Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that detailed analysis of the consultation responses was still being undertaken, and timeframes for the subsequent stages of the plan could be amended.

422 parties had submitted responses to the consultation. Feedback had been generally positive, with widespread support for the approach to climate change adaptation, and general agreement regarding the need for more affordable homes across the county.

As well as the positive feedback, some responses had called for more say on the next iteration of the plan, as there was concern that proceeding straight to Regulation 19 stage wouldn't give time for further consultation. The Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that it would be possible for the Future Oxfordshire team to proceed to Regulation 19, but they were considering all responses in detail before confirming the next stage.

Comments had also been submitted regarding a need for the plan to have long term flexibility due to the time scale it was proposed to cover.

The central plan team were now considering the scope of the proposed plan, and undertaking further work in relation to the latest legislation and national policy, as well as considering the relationship between the Oxfordshire Plan and the local plans of each authority across the county.

The detailed work programme would be reviewed, and discussions would take place with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities due to the plans link with the Growth Deal.

With regard to the Statement of Community Involvement update, the document detailed how consultation would be undertaken, when, and who would be consulted. It had been necessary to update the document following the lifting of Coronavirus regulations.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that there was time for changes to be made to the plan if the central team felt they were necessary. Once a local

plan reached Regulation 19 stage it was unlikely that any significant changes would be made, so it was important that appropriate time was taken between Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 stages to address consultation feedback and ensure the plan was ready to proceed to examination.

The Committee thanked the officers involved in producing the comprehensive feedback document, but some Members commented that there had been insufficient time to fully read and review all documents submitted for the meeting due to the level of detail.

The Committee repeated the concerns that had been raised in July 2021 when considering the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation document regarding the accuracy of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, due to the implications of the figures on the plan.

At the discretion of the Chairman, Councillor Broad addressed the meeting in relation to the method to be used to determine the housing numbers as this was not included in the report.

With regard to references to affordable housing, the Committee again emphasised the need for more social rented housing rather than Government defined affordable housing. The Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that the detail regarding implementation of the plan would be the responsibility of local Housing teams, and affordability would be an important aspect of the discussions at that stage.

In response to a query regarding if it would be possible for affordable rented housing to be linked to local wages rather than the national market formula, the Assistant Director – Planning and Development explained that there wasn't a detailed policy in place yet but discussions could be held regarding the possibility of such a link. The Committee requested an update on discussions at the relevant time.

Referring to the recommendation in the report for the Committee to note the consultation feedback, some Committee members felt that agreeing to note the report could not be interpreted as agreeing with the details.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the summary results from the recent regulation 18 (part 2) consultation be noted.
- (2) That the revised scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, with clarification over its relationship to city and district Local Plans and supporting evidence base be noted.
- (3) That the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan process be noted.
- (4) That Executive be recommended to adopt the revised Statement of Community Involvement for the Oxfordshire Plan (Annex to the minutes

as set out in the Minute Book) when it considers a report on this matter at its March 2022 meeting.

(Councillors Perran Moon and Shaida Hussain requested that it be recorded they had voted against the recommendations.

Councillors Ian Middleton and Simon Holland requested that it be recorded they had abstained from voting on the recommendations).

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### **Work Programme 2021-2022**

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021, received an update on subjects for review and on items previously submitted to the Committee.

With regard to the Member Training and District and Parish relationship working groups, Councillor Sandy Dallimore reported that both working groups had formulated recommendations and detailed reports would be submitted to the March 2022 meeting of the Committee.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the work programme update be noted.
- (2) That the update on topics previously suggested for review be noted.
- (3) That the update on items previously submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.37 pm

Chairman:

Date: