

Growth Board 2 February 2016

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## **Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme Update**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide the Growth Board (the Board) with an update on the Post-SHMA Strategic Work Programme (the Programme).

### **Background**

2. The Board, at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015, approved the Programme, designed to consider the implications of the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment and associated issues of unmet housing need in Oxford, in line with the Duty to Co-operate.
3. This report updates the Board with progress against the Programme. A Programme summary is attached as an Appendix.

### **Assessment of the unmet need of Oxford City**

4. The first key project within the Programme was to agree the figure for unmet need in Oxford City. This was done by asking the critical friend to critique the Oxford SHLAA, the Cundall report commissioned by South, Vale and Cherwell, the Oxford response to this and any other relevant information.
5. Following consideration of the report, all authorities agreed a working assumption of 15,000 homes for Oxford City's unmet need. All authorities agree to work towards this in good faith, based on the previously agreed process, which includes the review of the Oxford City's Local Plan.
6. Since this agreement, the Project Team have been considering what further work, if any will be necessary to codify this working assumption, both for the purposes of the Programme and for future Local Plan examinations.
7. The opinion of the Project Team is that the working assumption will be helpfully crystallised by the Oxford Local Plan review, which commences with an examination of their capacity for housing and economic growth, timetabled to be completed later this year.
8. Officers believe that this work, together with the testing of the spatial options for growth put forward by the City, will take both the Programme and partners to a position where they can rely upon the agreed unmet need figure until such time as the Local Plan review is complete.

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## **Green Belt Study**

9. When the Board last met in November officers were able to report that the Green Belt study had been completed and published.
10. I am pleased to report that reaction to the study has been positive with most respondents recognising that the study, the first of its kind since the establishment of green belt in the 1970s, is a valuable examination of the manner in which the green belt is performing against its objectives.
11. In my last report, I advised the Board that following the publication of the green belt study, the next stage would be to examine whether the information in the study informs any potential spatial growth options as part of the testing of those options. This work is now underway as detailed in the next section.

## **Strategic Options Development and Assessment**

12. The Board will recall that in my last report I advised that, following a check and challenge session on 30<sup>th</sup> October, a long list of potential strategic areas of search for growth had been drawn up by the partners.
13. The partners decided that it would be appropriate, rather than to rule out options at an early stage, to examine all potential areas of search no matter how remote or unlikely they may be. The partners concluded that only by doing this could we demonstrate that the apportionment of unmet need that will be presented to the Board upon the conclusion of the Programme is based upon a sustainable growth scenario.
14. I also advised at the last meeting that there had been a delay in this project due to the last minute withdrawal of the appointed consultants. This delay meant that the project could not commence until after Christmas.
15. At the time of writing this report, we have now appointed Land Use Consultants (LUC) to the project, an inception meeting held and a timetable for the project agreed that concludes on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. This is approximately 5 weeks later than originally programmed.

## **Infrastructure Assessment**

16. The Board will recognise that in order to understand the infrastructure requirements and implications of the areas of search being considered it will be necessary to reduce the long list of areas of search down to a more manageable short-list that can be tested in detail.
17. Once the Programme has agreed this short list the Programme will examine the infrastructure implications. This work will also draw upon the wider

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infrastructure work that County is undertaking on planned growth along key transport corridors.

18. Accordingly delays with the Spatial Options Assessment Project has had a direct knock-on implication for the commencement of the infrastructure assessment project, which will not now commence until the end of February. This will mean a revised completion date for the project of late July 2016.

## **Programme Completion**

19. Officers now estimate that the Programme will ask the Growth Board to approve a Memorandum of Understanding containing the agreed apportionment of the unmet need for Oxford between the rural districts in September 2016.

## **Conclusions**

20. The revised Programme attached as an appendix to this report demonstrates that since I last reported to you the Programme continues to make progress, but slippage against agreed timescales has still occurred.
21. The Programme is of course inextricably linked with the progress of district local plans. Three councils, Cherwell, Vale and West have all had Part One of their local plan examinations completed, where the inspector has considered the implications of the unmet need for Oxford in their Local Plans.
22. In the first two examinations, at Cherwell and Vale, the inspectors agreed either to allow the local plans to proceed in advance of the conclusion of the Programme, with an early review once the unmet need was apportioned or in the case of Vale has reserved his position whilst allowing the examination to proceed.
23. In the third examination however at West Oxfordshire, the inspector concluded that the Council should consider Oxford's unmet need in the current emerging Local Plan to prevent the Local Plan being out of date before it can be adopted. It is also therefore reasonable to assume that the SODC Local Plan, when examined will also need to have regard to the conclusions of the Programme.
24. The completion of the Programme to time now has implications for both Cherwell and West. Cherwell are committed to an examination of the options for growth in the late summer of 2016 and ideally would want to include consideration of how to meet their agreed proportion of Oxford's unmet need in this process to ensure that the planned partial review in Cherwell can be completed within the agreed timescale set out in Paragraph B95 of the Local Plan.

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25. Their inspector has advised West Oxfordshire that in effect they should not proceed with their Local Plan until they can include proposals to meet any agreed apportionment of the unmet need for Oxford to their District. Therefore, the timetable for West Oxfordshire's Local Plan is now dependant on the Programme making good progress.
26. Officers acknowledge that the history of the Programme is one of significant slippage and are aware that, although the original timetable was always considered highly ambitious, it is now essential that as far as possible the Programme keeps to the revised timetable shown at appendix one.
27. Officers consider that this revised timetable is realistic, albeit continuing to be challenging and have committed to ensuring that we take any opportunity to foreshorten the Programme should they arise.

### **Recommendations**

28. Officers ask the Board to note both progress of the Programme to date and the fact that it will not be achieved without the full-continued commitment of all partners to the Programme, and to reaffirm that commitment.