

Oxfordshire Growth Board
Tuesday 2 February 2016

Agenda Item 5: Public Participation

In accordance with the public participation scheme, requests to address the meeting and questions submitted have been listed in the order submitted.

The time limit for public participation is 30 minutes.

Restrictions on requests to address the Board:

- Must be on a substantive agenda item
- May speak for up to 3 minutes.
- With the leave of the Chairman, any questions of clarification asked of the speaker by Growth Board members should be duly answered.
- There will be no debate on any representations made except to the extent that they are considered when the relevant agenda item is considered later in the meeting.

Restrictions on questions submitted to the Board:

- Questions shall be directly relevant to some matter in which the Growth Board has powers and duties and which directly affects the area of Oxfordshire.
- Submitted questions shall be dealt with in the order of receipt by the host authority.
- The questioner may read his/her question, but the Chairman will do so if the questioner wishes for that, or is not present at the meeting. No supplementary question may be asked.
- The Chairman will answer submitted questions. This may take the form of an oral statement, or may be given subsequently in writing to the questioner. A written copy of the response will be circulated to all Growth Board Members. It is intended the written response will be given within ten working days of the meeting.
- No discussion shall take place on the question or the answer.

Public Participation Requests

- **Ian Green, Executive Committee, Oxford Civic Society**
Request to address the Board on agenda item 6, Post SHMA Work Programme Update Report

- **Helen Marshall, Director, CPRE Oxfordshire**
'We note that 'the reaction to the [Green Belt] study has been positive with most respondents recognising that the study... is a valuable examination of the manner in which the green belt is performing against its objectives' (Post SHMA Work Programme Report). We also note the appointment of Land Use Consultants to conduct the Strategic Options Development and Assessment, in a project that will conclude on 2 May.

Can the Growth Board therefore explain:

- a) How the Growth Board has shared information on the Green Belt Study with the general public?
- b) How, when and where members of the public have been/are able to register their views on whether or not this was a 'valuable examination'?
- c) How much the Green Belt Study cost taxpayers in total i.e.; was it actually 'valuable' or just 'costly'?
- d) When the terms of reference for the strategic options work will be made publicly available?
- d) What plans there are for public consultation within this process that ends on 2 May (bearing in mind that leaving this to the Local Plan process is not sufficient as it would not allow adequate consideration of the overall cumulative impacts on the environment / infrastructure etc.)?

- **Helena Whall, on behalf of the coalition Planning for Real Need not Spectacular Green in Oxfordshire**

Given that OxLEP is embarking on a process of updating the County's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), can the Growth Board please tell us:

- What input it expects to have to this process?
- Will it be working with OxLEP to help ensure full public engagement and consultation, including debate at full council meetings?
- Will the proposed Plan be debated openly and in public at a Growth Board meeting?
- Will the Growth Board be required to approve the final document?

- **Mr Robert Warne, Chairman of Sunningwell Parishioners against Damage to the Environment (SPADE)**

All our questions are follow up questions to the written responses given after the Growth Board meeting on 19 November 2015.

Post SHMAA work programme update

SPADE Original question – 1. This report identifies that a MOU (including a common approach to FOI requests) has been signed between all parties. Please can a copy of this MOU be provided to the public? 2. If not, please provide a detailed rationale as to how this is justified?

Growth Board response – “The Board will discuss its release with partners and advise”

SPADE Subsequent question – We assume that nearly three months is sufficient for the Board to discuss this, so please can the Board now answer this question and publish the MOU?

SPADE Original Question – 4. Para 13 identifies that the long list will be “subject to a number of tests to examine their potential suitability for consideration as growth options.” Please detail the tests to be used and the rationale for their use and any objective measurement criteria being used?

Growth Board response - The tests will be designed to assess, at a strategic level, the relative suitability and sustainability of the spatial options being considered. The tests will be designed by the consultant once the project commences later in November.

SPADE Subsequent question - We assume that the project has now commenced so please can the information on the tests be provided as originally requested?

Public Participation

We note your response to our previous question regarding the inadequate amount of time available for the public to formulate and submit questions following publication of the Growth Board meeting agendas. We found both the conduct of this agenda item in the meeting and the written response to our questions “disappointing.”

Your written response indicated that “The Board will be considering an item on public participation at the meeting, although it is not envisaged that the current proposed process will be will changed as it follows a process adopted successfully elsewhere. It should be noted that the Growth Board’s proposed approach to participation goes beyond that required by statute”.

SPADE Subsequent question – We are intrigued by the concept that this, in our opinion flawed process, has been copied from elsewhere and ask can you provide examples of other Growth Boards (or equivalents) adopting a mere 48 hour window of opportunity for questions to be submitted?

SPADE Subsequent question – Please explain how as a Statutory Joint Committee that your approach to participation “goes beyond that required by statute”?

Your response also indicated – “We are legally required to publish agendas for a meeting 5 clear days before the meeting date, the date of the meeting and the date of publication are not counted as “clear” days”.

SPADE subsequent question – Your response was slightly misleading in that you are required to publish agendas a minimum of 5 clear days before the meeting date. As dates of future meetings are well documented, as originally requested, could the Growth Board commit in their Terms of Reference to publish agendas a minimum of 7 clear days before the meeting date allowing a sufficient time for the public to consider the agenda and supporting papers and hence formulate meaningful questions?

SPADE Subsequent question – Are the voting members of the Growth Board, as democratically elected councillors, content that the public participation process as currently enacted by the Board is transparent and one that encourages local people to engage meaningfully in matters of strategic importance for their communities?

- **Sharone Parnes, Woodstock resident and Town Councillor**

Part A)

Regarding Conclusions in the Post SHMA Work Programme Update Report (Agenda Item 6), and in particular

Paragraph 24 stating: *“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”;*

Paragraph 25 stating: *“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”;*

And Paragraph 26 stating: *“Officers acknowledge that the history of the Programme is one of significant slippage...”*

Doesn’t “slippage” really mean delays or missed targets, and if yes then why doesn’t the Growth Board use the more plain English terminology; and, will the Growth Board acknowledge that further “slippage” and/or delays and/or missed targets will not only produce knock-on consequences for timescales of Local Plan evolution processes, but also foreseeably will bolster the likelihood and volume of speculative planning proposals in the face of resultant delays in Local Plan evolution processes? What, if any, mechanisms or assurances can the Growth Board offer towards allaying public concerns that some controversial developers – some of which stand to benefit directly or indirectly from Growth Board projects – may discern commercial incentives in contributing to further “slippage” in order to exploit or cause gaps and delays in Local Plan processes?

In considering its response, please would the Growth Board take account of, and preferably relate to, the following public comments from highly esteemed sources:

Nearly a year ago, in February 2015, when West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) announced its approval of its final Draft Local Plan, Cllr Warwick Robinson, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Housing, said: “It is of vital importance to our District that we get our Local Plan into place to guide the way it develops and protect it from speculative development, and we are pleased to be taking a significant step towards this today by approving this robust, evidence-based Plan.”

Last week, on January 26th, WODC announced planning inspector Simon Emerson “has formally suspended the examination of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 until December 2016 to allow the Council to undertake consultation on ‘main modifications’ in order to make the plan sound.”

Guidance from the Planning Inspectorate's *Examining Local Plans Procedural Practice* publication (December 2013 v2) explains: "Up to six months' suspension might be acceptable but a period greater than this is unlikely to be generally appropriate...A delay of more than six months would be likely to create a great deal of uncertainty within the examination process for those who have submitted representations at the publication stage. Furthermore a delay of this period would normally only be necessary if the LPA were proposing major changes to the Plan which had not been adequately frontloaded. In that event the Plan should be withdrawn to allow the proper procedures to be followed for a revised version of the Plan."

Part B)

Why did it take so long (i.e., until 19th November 2015) for the Growth Board to agree and publish its Public Participation Scheme, and why didn't the Growth Board members foresee the public interest justifying such a Scheme at the very outset of the Growth Board's establishment, especially bearing in mind it has so many voting members who are leaders of local authorities where public participation is an integral component of routine meetings?

- **Mr Philip Redpath, Woodstock resident**

As the SHMA figures significantly informed and influenced the Growth Board, do not the Growth Board feel morally obliged to question the practice of the same company setting the figures for the SHMA and also working for development companies who will seriously benefit from those figures?

Considering that we import 40% of our food, which makes all development of farmland non-sustainable, as the Country is not sustainable in its food productivity, why is it that the Growth Board has no component in it that represents the preservation of open spaces and farmland?