

# Minutes

of a meeting of the

## Joint Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 31 October 2016 at 6.30 pm

at the Meeting Room 1, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton OX14 4SB

**Open to the public, including the press**

### Present:

Members:

South Oxfordshire District Councillors: Richard Pullen, David Dodds, Toby Newman, Ian White and Jeanette Matelot (in place of John Walsh)

Vale of White Horse District Councillors: Debby Hallett (chairman), Mohinder Kainth, Ben Mabbett and Chris Palmer

Officers: Gerry Brough and Ron Schrieber

Also present: Councillor David Turner (SODC), Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive and Dawn Pettis, Strategy Manager, OxLEP

### **Sc.25 Notifications of substitutes and apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from:

- South Councillor John Walsh; substitute Jeannette Matelot
- Vale Councillor Alice Badcock

### **Sc.26 Minutes and actions arising**

The committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 22 September 2016 were an accurate record and the Chairman signed them as such.

### **Sc.27 Declarations of interest**

None.

### **Sc.28 Urgent business and chair's announcements**

None.

## **Sc.29 Statements, petitions, questions from the public relating to matters affecting the scrutiny committee**

Colin Thomas, Annie Thomas and Tony Wood had registered to address the committee (see Minute 30 below).

## **Sc.30 OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)**

OxLEP representatives Nigel Tipple, chief executive and Dawn Pettis, strategy manager, attended to give a presentation on and answer questions on the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and to answer questions on both this and on the partnership.

The presentation covered the following:

The SEP refresh timetable  
A snap-shot of the priorities and actions  
The purpose of the SEP

Colin Thomas, a representative of Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE), asked the following question:

“Across the country LEPs are driving up housing targets on the back of unrealisable growth projections. Oxfordshire is no different, with the LEP, promoting rates of growth that have never consistently been achieved. It is a flimsy basis on which District authorities are being forced to release more and more land for housing. The LEP promotes the idea that this area will economically out-perform other areas – but every other LEP seems to think the same and that its areas will be at the leading edge of something or other and out-perform the others. Each is competing for the same workers to fulfil its aspirations for growth, and each is planning to build houses for those same workers.

Mr Tipple - your own analysis of consultation responses to the SEP refresh shows an overwhelming criticism of the growth targets. **If you will not take note of the overwhelming responses to the consultation, will you in the light of Brexit, which will limit the total workforce available, with your partner local authorities now re-examine those growth targets so that district authorities like the Vale and South are not in the position of being forced to feed land grabbing developers which will do absolutely nothing to deliver truly affordable housing so badly needed by the people of the Vale?”**

The OxLEP representatives replied that the growth targets in the SEP had been drawn up in consultation with Oxfordshire’s local authorities. In the last four years 29,000 jobs had been created and housing completion rates had increased significantly.

Annie Thomas, a representative of SPADE asked the following question:

“The LEP claims in the executive summary of the redrafted SEP that the SEP “responds to substantial engagement from the county’s businesses, universities, research institutions, local authorities, voluntary and community sectors, and many of its residents”.

We remind you that only 262 responses to the SEP refresh public consultation were received. 73% of the responses raised extreme concerns over the aggressive growth strategy being proposed. It appears the LEP failed to adequately engage the business

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community (and even after having a hastily convened second go, possibly at the bequest of the criticism from Local Authorities) the LEP still has written responses from only 15 businesses.

We believe that this is not the “wide endorsement” the LEP claims. Our question to you as members is **“are you, as the only democratically people with a democratic mandate in the South and Vale responsible for local planning, willing to endorse a plan which shapes the future of our communities to 2031 and beyond, with so little public and business support?”**

The OxLEP representatives replied that, although the number of formal written responses from the business community had been low, there had been considerable engagement with businesses and other stakeholders including workshops. Information about these workshops had been published on OxLEP’s website.

Tony Wood asked the following questions:

- “a) How does the various strategy development documents (OxLEP SEP, Oxford City Deal, Oxford growth deal) that have been written over the past few years actually affect the development of individual plots in the region? I have noticed that recent planning applications to sites in and around North Hinksey make no reference to any of these apparently important documents and arguably the developments that have been signed off pay little regard to them. Taking the Oxford city deal as an example, the knowledge spine that is referenced in the document extends from Bicester in the north to Didcot in the south including Oxford and follows the A34. One would imagine that North Hinksey sitting right in the middle of the development zone should be heavily influenced by it.”

The OxLEP representatives replied that the planning process was based on core policy documents such as the National Planning Policy Framework and the Local Plan. It would not be appropriate to use the SEP and other strategy documents to fetter the planning process.

- b) “If the developer, planning officers and planning authority are not obliged to consider applications with these documents in mind, why do we spend the sums of money we do on them - Is it worth having OxLEP at all?”

The OxLEP responded by outlining the work carried out by the LEP with local communities including initiatives such as the community grants scheme and funding for tourism in rural areas.

- c) “How does OxLEP plan to deliver the ambitions laid out in the refreshed SEP? Whilst I am sure they can raise the money to deliver the goals, I wonder whether we have the capacity to deliver across the county. For example, the SEP seems to suggest that our housing deliveries over the next few years need to be 5000 units a year yet the SEP also seems to suggest that we have not delivered more than about 2500 homes at any point of the past 5 years. A 10% increase I could believe but doubling the delivery rate would seem an insurmountable challenge.”

The OxLEP representatives referred to their answer to Annie Thomas’ question.

- d) “How does OxLEP engage with local communities? There are a huge range of talents in communities waiting to be tapped and should be very influential in these strategic documents. I see little evidence of change resulting from community involvement. How does OxLEP engage with communities? I am the Chairman of the working group looking

at employment and the economy as part of the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan but I have no contact with OxLEP. We in North Hinksey are keen to engage with OxLEP if there is some value in doing so - can we arrange a meeting?"

The OxLEP representatives replied that the draft SEP had been sent to all town and parish councils and that the LEP was working with many different local groups. They would be happy to meet with Mr Wood and his group.

The committee considered the role of OxLEP with particular reference to the SEP. In response to questions and issues raised by members, the OxLEP representatives reported that:

- OxLEP took account of developments outside of the county which impacted on Oxfordshire housing and employment and worked with other LEPs on joint initiatives.
- The LEP reported to a number of government departments on programmes, funding and resources.
- A number of improvements to the rail network were under consideration including the reopening of Grove station.
- OxLEP recognised that the shortage of affordable housing, both to buy or rent, and the congested road network were the main constraints on economic growth in the region. There was a need to look at integrated infrastructure improvements including road, rail and broadband. With regard to housing, initiatives such as self-build programmes and local authorities setting up their own housing companies were required to provide affordable housing for key workers.
- OxLEP had created jobs by securing investment and infrastructure. As well as delivering projects it provided leadership, brokering and facilitation.
- OxLEP had produced a risk register and would include it as an appendix to the SEP.
- OxLEP monitored and published its performance against its goals. There was information on its website including a SEP monitoring and impact plan.
- It accepted that it needed to do more to increase public awareness of its role and activities. One way of doing this would be to publish summaries of strategy documents in plain English. Councillors Debby Hallett, Mohinder Kainth, Toby Newman and Chris Palmer volunteered to help with this.

The committee thanked Nigel Tipple and Dawn Petts for their presentation and for the open and informative way that they had engaged with the committee and the registered speakers. All agreed that it had been a very useful and productive meeting.

### **Sc.31 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings**

The committee noted its current work schedule.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm