

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Housing Advisory Sub-Group

HELD ON TUESDAY 16 JUNE 2020 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Members: Councillors Susan Brown (Chair), Robin Bennett, Liz Brighthouse, Jeff Haine, Mike Rowley and Bethia Thomas

Officers: Caroline Green, Stephen Man, Stefan Robinson and Paul Staines

26 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutions; declarations of interest; Chair's announcements

Apologies were submitted from Councillor John Donaldson. There were no substitutions or declarations of interest.

27 Notes of the meeting held on 7 January 2020

In response to a question concerning the notes of the previous meeting, officers clarified that of the expected number of homes to exist in Oxfordshire by 2031, 80% of those homes had already been built. The notes of the previous meeting were agreed.

28 Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire

The meeting heard that £36,113 of Homes England grant had been received to undertake a study into how a commissioning and development framework could be established to promote Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire. The report, which would be presented to the Growth Board on 28 July, presented the findings of that work. It was recommended that a project team drawn from across the six councils be established to drive forward actions arising from the report's findings, returning to the partner councils or the Growth Board for any necessary authorisations as they are developed. It was noted that there would be cost and resource implications to this work, but officers would be working to minimise those costs.

Local Authorities were in different places with respect to their approach to Community Led Housing. Officers explained that whilst there were several benefits associated with Community Led Housing, these could only be realised in certain circumstances, and it was not the only development model that could be used.

The Sub-group discussed the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had, and will have, on the Oxfordshire Housing Market and residents' lives. Registered providers and other development partners were building in up to 12 months of delays into their development plans due to the pandemic. The Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme will need to reflect this reality.

The sub-group offered support for the report and its conclusions, recognising that this was a positive step in a wider discussion about Community Led Housing.

29 Covid-19 and the Oxfordshire housing market update

The Sub-group were provided with a report summarising the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the Housing Market. This reflected elements of a report presented to the Growth Board on 2 June 2020. It explained that the mortgage market had tightened nationally, requiring higher than usual deposits, which had limited access to loans for some. This may influence some people to pursue a shared ownership arrangement, instead of outright ownership. The impact on developers had been varied, from minor to significant, depending on the demand profile of the developments they were taking forward.

The Sub-group discussed the changing market, its complexities, and the various factors that could influence the level of demand for different tenures. Members commented that the full impact of Covid-19 on the housing market would not be fully understood for some time. There would be various knock on effects from the disruption which will carry over into future years. Specific concern was raised about the need for the market to adapt to a growing aging population, which may be less inclined to make use of care homes given that they have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The Sub-group supported the view that it would be important for Government to be flexible in their approach to housing targets and spend within the Affordable Housing Programme given the impact of the pandemic.

30 Growth Deal year end housing delivery position

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had meant that on-site working restrictions would have led to productivity imitations, as people and businesses adapt to the new working arrangements. For this reason, delivery in the third year had been significantly impacted. Accordingly, it was proposed that the Affordable Housing Programme should be extended for an additional year (year four) to meet the programmes spend, given the impact that the pandemic has had. This was a discussion that needed further development with Homes England. Despite the delays caused by the pandemic, officers continued to strive to deliver against existing targets where possible.

31 Update on discussions with Homes England on the role of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal in the housing recovery

Officers presented the Sub-group with a draft proposal to Homes England requesting additional freedoms and flexibilities considering the Covid-19 pandemic. This set that the Housing and Growth Deal could play an important role in the recovery of the local Housing Market. It proposed that the utility of an extended

four-year Affordable Housing Programme would help to deliver the overall aims of the programme. This was presented as an opening position, and it was suggested that a more detailed assessment would be needed to assess the advantages of a year four programme in budget and delivery terms, if support for the way forward was secured.

In recognising the significant impact that the pandemic has had on the Affordable Housing Programme, the Sub-group offered its support for progressing discussions with Government in favour of a four-year programme.

32 Low/Zero Carbon housing update

The Sub-group agreed to defer this item until its next meeting and requested that a written update be provided.

33 Any other business

Caroline Green updated the group on work underway on a county-wide strategy for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and the response during COVID-19. It was flagged that the work had identified a need for a joined-up approach to matching available housing with people in priority need and greater engagement from housing associations.

34 Dates of future meetings

The Sub-group noted that owing to a clash with the new Growth Board meeting on 28 July 2020, that their meeting on the same date would be rescheduled to either 7 September or 10 September 2020. Officers were asked to canvas member availability before confirming the date.

The meeting closed at 19:38

Chairman

Date