

To: Oxfordshire Growth Board

Title of Report: Oxfordshire Plan: Proposed new timetable and quarter two report

Date: 24th November 2020

Report of: Rachel Williams, Oxfordshire Plan Programme Lead

Status: Open

Executive Summary and Purpose:

This report provides an update on the work to produce the Oxfordshire Plan. It outlines the proposals for a new Plan timetable and summarises the quarter two headlines for the project.

Recommendation(s):

- a) *That Growth Board endorses the proposed new timetable*
- b) *That Growth Board notes the quarter two report.*

Appendices:

None

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on the work to produce the Oxfordshire Plan. It outlines the proposals for a new Plan timetable developed following recent conversations with the government about the overall Deal programme. The report also summarises the quarter two headlines for the Oxfordshire Plan project.

New programme

2. Growth Board will be aware that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have recently agreed in principle an extension of time for the production of the Oxfordshire Plan. They have agreed that full use can now be made of the 5-year Growth Deal period for the production of the Plan. This is a significant shift in position, instead of being limited to simply the first 3 years of the Deal, there is now an opportunity to utilise the full 5-year period to produce the best Plan possible. All the partners have confirmed that are keen to make the best use of the opportunity the plan presents.
3. Having secured agreement for this principle, the team has been investigating how best to use the additional time this affords the project; how to allocate the available time to the tasks that are remaining. The timetable below sets out a proposed programme for completion of this work. This would deliver an Oxfordshire Plan as currently scoped and agreed in the Housing and Growth Deal (i.e. identifying broad locations for growth to be developed at a later stage

by future Local Plans for example through AAPs). Under this timetable the Oxfordshire Plan could be submitted for examination by September 2022, and (dependent on the Inspector's programme) could be fully adopted by all 5 district councils by Spring 2023, within the 5-year period of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

4. The interim milestones of the project would be adjusted as follows:

Oxfordshire Plan Stage	New Proposed Date	Date in published Growth Deal /Status
<i>Draft Statement of Common Ground</i>		<i>31 March 2018 Achieved</i>
<i>Joint JSSP Project Board established</i>		<i>July 2018 Achieved</i>
<i>Stakeholder Launch</i>		<i>Achieved</i>
<i>Consultation on Vision & Objectives (Reg. 18 part 1)</i>		<i>Achieved</i>
Consultation on Spatial Growth Options (including scale and Broad Locations of Growth) (Reg. 18 part2)	Summer 2021	n/a
Consultation on Submission (Draft) Plan (Reg. 19)	Spring 2022	30 October 2019
Submission	September 2022	31 March 2020
Examination	November/December 2022	Subject to Planning Inspectorate
Inspectors Report	February/March 2023	Subject to Planning Inspectorate
Adoption	May/June 2023	31 March 2021

Timing of linked projects

5. This new programme has the additional benefit of allowing the linked work of developing the Strategic Vision to conclude ahead of (and therefore to inform) the next Plan consultation. The concept of this overarching Vision is that it should help inform development of the spatial options and the eventual preferred spatial strategy in the Oxfordshire Plan, but also assist more broadly in developing other strategies and projects of the Growth Board. A separate report on the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision came to the Growth Board meeting on 30th October.
6. At the Growth Board meeting of 2nd June, a report was provided setting out the work required on the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) update. That report drew clear links between the Oxfordshire Plan and OxIS; it is important that both projects are progressed in a co-ordinated manner so that each benefits from the inputs of the other. The timetable for work on OxIS was carefully planned to fit with the stages of work on the Oxfordshire Plan with Stage 1 of OxIS feeding into the Reg18(part2) Plan consultation, and Stage 2 of OxIS supporting the Reg19 Plan consultation. Both project teams are confident that the adjusted timetable for the Oxfordshire Plan outlined above remains aligned with the phased approach to the OxIS work and that no further adjustments are required.

Quarter two headlines and progress made

7. The above timetable is made possible by the significant progress that has been made on the wide range of work streams that make up the Plan project.

8. In quarter two, the team has been focussed on the following key areas of work:
- *Oxfordshire Open Thought*
 - *Development of Oxfordshire Strategic Vision*
 - *Progressing technical studies to build the evidence base*
 - *Working with Liaison Group, Heads of Planning Group, Steering Groups for commissioned work, and working groups of technical officers to define and refine policy options for the Plan*

Oxfordshire Open Thought

9. In the last quarter Oxfordshire Open Thought was launched. This was designed to be an additional informal public engagement exercise; an opportunity to broaden the reach of the project, to gain new policy ideas, and to energise stakeholders and wider community ahead of next formal Plan consultation. A new website was launched in June; it asked individuals, organisations and businesses to consider some of the future challenges and opportunities and submit their ideas around three key topics: living and working; connectivity; and climate change. We have secured 2,366 unique users over 3,508 browsing sessions and 10,101 page views. Importantly, this has broadened the demographic reach of the Plan with 12% of users being aged under 24 and a further 22% between 25 and 34. Just under 300 submissions were received from individuals, academics, environmental groups, developers, consultants and businesses. We are currently processing those submissions and will publish a summary report when complete; we are also following up leads from the submissions where they will help with the development of Plan options. In the future we plan to launch a phase 2 exercise of Open Thought through which a series of submissions from variety of groups will be profiled and participants will be asked to comment and give their views to develop the conversation further.

Development of Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

10. In recent months capacity from the Oxfordshire Plan team has been made available to help develop the emerging Oxfordshire Strategic Vision. As part of the work on the Oxfordshire Plan it was identified that establishing a clear narrative setting out what the partners are trying to achieve through the Plan and what the strategic priorities are likely to be would be beneficial.

Progressing technical studies

11. Much of the work of the team in quarter two was focussed on the delivery of key elements of the technical evidence base. A range of technical studies have been commissioned to provide baseline information, data, mapping and projections of various types. Each commission has involved the input of all the authority partners from scoping, through interviewing, selection and co-ordination, via a steering group set up to oversee the work and provide the link with the consultancies. The emerging outputs of these studies are being used to inform the selection of options that will be presented for consultation in the next published Plan document. Each of the evidence base studies will be published alongside the Plan (Regulation 18 part 2) consultation document so that those engaging with the process can understand the work that has informed its drafting. Thereafter studies will be used to test the options and in time form the supporting evidence for the consideration of the Plan at

examination by an Inspector. It is crucial to the Plan making process to make this evidence base gathering stage comprehensive and robust.

Working to refine policy options

12. Throughout the project a series of groupings have continued to meet to provide input into the plan making process. Towards the end of quarter two (and this will continue into quarter three) the focus of these groups (including Liaison Group, the Heads of Planning Group, the Steering Groups for commissioned work, and the working groups of technical officers) has been on defining and refining policy options for the Plan. This work has been based on wealth of local and specialist knowledge available within the partners, best practise, government guidance, the Sustainability Appraisal process, and the emerging outputs of the technical studies. There is now a good deal of clarity for example on the range of options that will be presented in the next consultation document on a wide range of topics. Work will continue into quarter three to refine these and ensure there is evidence for and consensus around the options.

Risk Management

13. The following key risks to the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 have been reported previously and are still important considerations:
 - Challenges of being a front-runner, producing a new type of Plan with little bespoke guidance in national policy – this has become more relevant with the publication of the Planning White Paper.
 - Challenging timeframe for production of the Plan given the complexities of the topics it will cover and of partnership working – this is now mitigated with the new timetable outlined above although there is no further contingency.
 - The development of a clear, agreed spatial strategy to form the basis of the policies; without this the defence of the Plan and its policies would be impossible – development of the Strategic Vision seeks to fill this space.
 - Links with external projects such as the OxCam Arc.
 - Links with and relationship to district Local Plans especially with those which haven't yet been adopted.
14. Growth Board will be aware that Oxfordshire currently benefits from a flexibility in the housing land supply requirement which was separately enshrined in a ministerial statement in 2018. This provides for Oxfordshire Local Planning Authorities to maintain a 3-year land supply, rather than a 5-year land supply, and remains in place until 31 March 2021. In the conversations with MHCLG on extending the timetable for the Plan, they have indicated that an extension to this flexibility is not likely to be supported.
15. Officers have developed a detailed risk register including mitigations that are reported to the Heads of Planning Group and the Programme Board to ensure that risk is managed.

Financial Implications

16. The Housing and Growth Deal provided £2.5m to support the production of the Plan. Work will continue to ensure that the project can be delivered within the allocated budget.

Legal Implications

17. The Government has already indicated that it is comfortable in principle with the change to the timetable as set out in the Growth Deal; beyond that there are no legal implication to changes the timetable. It would require an updated LDS to be approved by each district; this can be included in a committee report covering the Oxfordshire Plan when appropriate.

Other Implications

18. None

Conclusion

19. By using the full extent of the 5-year Deal timeframe there is a much better prospect of delivering an Oxfordshire Plan that represents the vision and objectives of the Growth Deal partners, which can be found sound at examination, will add value to the local planning policy framework, which will win the support of wider stakeholders, and which will deliver change.
20. Growth Board is asked to consider the outline proposed timeline for the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and endorse this approach. Growth Board is also asked to note the quarter two report.

Background Paper(s)

21. None

Report Author:	<i>Rachel Williams, Oxfordshire Plan Programme Lead</i>
Contact information:	<i>rachel.williams@oxfordshire.gov.uk</i>