

# Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## **Oxfordshire Growth Board Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group**

**HELD ON THURSDAY 3 JUNE 2021 AT 10.00 AM  
VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS**

### **Present:**

Councillors: Tim Bearder, Debby Hallett, Alex Hollingsworth, Michele Mead, (Chair)  
Anne-Marie Simpson and Barry Wood

**Officers:** Adrian Colwell (Oxfordshire Plan 2050), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Paul Staines, (Interim Head of Programme) and Peter Truman, (Oxfordshire Plan 2050).

### **1 Introductions & welcome to new members; Apologies for absence and notifications of substitutions**

Apologies were received from Councillor Colin Clarke, Cherwell District Council, (substituted by Councillor Barry Wood), Councillor Duncan Enright, Oxfordshire County Council, (substituted by Councillor Tim Bearder) and Councillor Jeff Haine, West Oxfordshire District Council due to IT issues.

Councillor Mead welcomed all those present as Chair. In light of there being a number of new members present, members of the advisory group and officers introduced themselves.

### **2 Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3 Role of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group; Terms of Reference**

The advisory group considered the Terms of Reference of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group.

That the Terms of Reference of Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group be noted.

### **4 Notes of the previous meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on 27 April 2021 were agreed as a correct summary.

## 5 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Draft V14

The advisory group considered a draft, pre-Regulation 18 version, of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This followed the broad structure of the earlier 'skeleton documents' discussed at previous meetings and set out in detail:

- how the Plan was to progress from Regulation 18 to Regulation 19 stage, taking account of the level of committed growth from adopted Local Plans
- the overall strategic context affecting the development and drafting of the Plan as part of a detailed introduction to the Plan, including relationships to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.
- The draft Plan sought to set out possible preferred options for policies and spatial distribution, but also set out alternatives where appropriate.

Members were taken through a presentation which provided an overview of the Plans' progress, its evidence base and scope before turning to each of the draft Plan's key themes. Officers informed the advisory group that:

- Continued discussions were taking place with officers within each partner council and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership on the detailed content of the draft Plan so that any local issues could be identified and mitigated.
- It was important to be mindful that the current version of the Plan was a working document. As its drafting was progressed and refined, it was expected to reduce in length. The draft did seek to show a common golden thread of approach linking through the priorities of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
- Appropriate legal advice on the Plan would continue to be sought prior to the Regulation 18 and Regulation processes as the Plan was bound by Local Plan regulations.
- The Plan would cover a 30 year period and would set the framework for future growth, policies, and content of new Local Plans within Oxfordshire. Possible national level Local Plan reforms could have an impact.
- Significant discretion was allowed as Part of the Regulation 18 stage of the Plan's development subject to supporting evidence as part of the testing and consultation of the Plan, but Regulation 19 would require precision.

In discussion, whilst noting the Plan was work in progress, a number of members of the advisory group gave general feedback that as the draft Plan moved towards consultation as part of the Regulation 18 stage, it was important for the language to be as accessible as possible, whilst acknowledging that some technical language and structure had to be used given the role and audience of the formal document. It was suggested that given the need to engage with the public a shorter summary version should be produced. It was also felt that there was a need to ensure the document set out clear explanations around preferred and non-preferred options. Officers concurred with this suggestion.

Members referred to the importance, and acknowledged the difficulty of, seeking the right balance between policies most appropriately set out on a strategic Oxfordshire wide basis in detail, (for instance where no local policy currently existed such as nature recovery) and those areas most appropriately reserved to the remit of individual Local Plans to preserve the sovereignty of Local Plans. It was noted that in some respects the Plan would due to the extended period it covered, inevitably influence future Local Plans beyond those already adopted

Members welcomed what was felt overall to be a continuation and reflection in the Plan of the strong ambition and priorities for Oxfordshire as set out in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

The advisory group received an overview of each of the themes of the draft Plan which included the policies supporting each theme as follows:

- Theme One: Addressing climate change
- Theme Two: Improving environmental quality
- Theme Three: Creating strong and healthy communities
- Theme Four: Planning for sustainable travel and connectivity
- Theme Five: Creating jobs and providing homes

Members were informed that ordering of the themes had been a deliberate reflection of the priorities within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision towards addressing climate change and improving environmental quality. As Planning guidance for policies in these areas was relatively less prevalent than in other areas of policy, (such as affordable housing) greater detail was set out in policies linked to those themes than other themes within the Plan.

#### Theme One: Addressing climate change

In discussion, members of the advisory group asked about how issues around economic viability had been considered in the development of the draft policies within this theme. Officers responded that potential risks of challenge to the policies around the economic viability test were recognised, but these could only be fully scoped and tested once the draft policies had been developed in final form. However, it was felt that the direction and trend of policy travel nationally was supportive of the Oxfordshire ambition to address climate change set out in the draft policies.

#### Theme Two: Improving environmental quality

The advisory group was informed that the broad thrust of policies under this theme was to go further than the current Environment Bill with the objective of securing net environmental betterment from future development, whereas historically, Planning policy had sought to mitigate negative impacts only. This had the potential to significantly change how development sites would look in the future. In discussion, it was acknowledged that the approach and policies set out in the draft Plan primarily sought to shape future developments for instance in relation to air quality, not those developments which had already been approved. However, taken as whole, the Plan would contain a range of options and policies that would have a positive impact on existing as well as future residents. For example, policies to promote and support electric vehicle use would help support improvements in air quality overall.

#### Theme Three: Creating strong and healthy communities

The advisory group was informed that one of the aims of the policies within Theme Three was to set out the standards which should apply in relation to health and provide transparency to the NHS of the issues which local Planning authority authorities would judge to be of importance in considering NHS proposals about health infrastructure.

In discussion, the importance of addressing inclusivity and tackling inequalities including but not limited to health, opportunity and income as part of the Plan was highlighted and it was felt that the draft needed to be developed further and more explicitly in this area. Officers indicated they would investigate this.

#### Theme Four: Planning for sustainable travel and connectivity

The advisory group noted the linkages between draft policies under this theme and the drafting of the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy. The suggested draft policies sought to set out land use elements of both strategic Plans and reflected the ambition of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision towards achieving the shift to zero carbon.

In discussion, it was felt that there was tension which needed to be recognised in that strategic level infrastructure was not determined locally and whilst the Plan needed to recognise and take account of such infrastructure, care needed to be taken not to stray into areas beyond the Plan's remit.

The advisory group was informed and recognised that ultimately local Planning authorities would have to take into account and balance all relevant factors including the full remit of policies set out in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in considering individual Planning applications.

#### Theme Five: Creating jobs and providing homes

The advisory group was updated that the draft policies supporting Theme 5 covered a number of strategic issues and sought to balance the complex issues around the provision of jobs, homes, and sustainability. Lessons from the development of other strategic Plans had been considered and as a result a number of the policies under the umbrella of Theme 5 explicitly related to significant employment and transport hubs.

Policy directed towards town centre renewal aimed to work differently from previous retail assessments, taking account of changes in living and working patterns, including the longer term changes linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In discussion, a number of the members of the advisory group referred to the desirability of locating housing close to employment locations. The view was also expressed that in setting out policies within the Plan relating to potential numbers of homes and where homes and jobs should go, care was needed in terms of the presentation and order of the policies with the Plan document so as not to appear to prejudge the spatial options for the distribution of growth set out later in the document.

#### Spatial Options: The distribution of growth

The five spatial options for the distribution of growth within the draft Plan were set out to the advisory group. It was stressed that the final version of the Plan would include not just the options themselves, but also guidance on how the options would be applied in practice.

The advisory group discussed and acknowledged the importance of arriving at an eventual Plan and distribution of growth outcome that was as fair an outcome as possible for Oxfordshire as a whole being mindful of the priorities of sustainability and deliverability.

Officers thanked members for their comments and contributions which built on and supported those made by officers within the partner councils. The feedback provided would be carefully considered and inform the next iteration of the Plan.

## **6 Identification of key community influencers**

Members of the advisory group were asked to assist the Oxfordshire Plan Team in identifying appropriate points of contact within their constituent authorities and local communities that the Team could approach as part the communications drive associated with Plan public consultations. It was noted that this would be in addition to existing formal consultation partners such as Town and Parish Councils.

Members of the advisory commented on the importance of social media publicity being short and snappy in nature, whilst linking through to more detailed and technical information for those that wished to access it.

## **7 Future meeting and work programme**

The advisory group noted the dates of its future meetings as set out in the Agenda. Members paid tribute to Councillor Mead for her role as Chair, noting that the Growth Board would consider Chair appointments to the advisory groups at its meeting on 8 June.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm