

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Future Oxfordshire Partnership Housing Advisory Group

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

Present:

Councillors: Susan Brown (Chair), Robin Bennett, Diko Blackings, Jeff Haine, Judy Roberts and Lucinda Wing

Officers: Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Yi Li, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Megan McFarlane (Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Team) and Paul Staines (Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal)

8 Apologies for absence and notifications of substitutions; declarations of interests; Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pete Sudbury, (Oxfordshire County Council).

There were no declarations of interest or Chair's announcements.

9 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

10 First Homes Update

It was noted that this update would be deferred to the next meeting due to officer unavailability. The Chair suggested that in the meantime, if officers or members of the group had any new information available regarding the First Home initiative, it should be shared directly outside of the meeting.

11 Quarter 1 Year 4 Housing and Growth Deal Progress Presentation

The advisory group received a presentation setting out key points on progress as of Quarter 1, Year 4 of the Affordable Housing and Homes from Infrastructure Programmes.

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, emphasised the significant emerging risk of national shortages in labour and materials, which was impacting on the delivery of sites and projects across the Homes from Infrastructure programme. Discussions with Homes England regarding this were underway as appropriate.

The advisory group was informed that a number of schemes within the Affordable Housing Programme, (AHP) had been recategorised as having an amber risk rating which was in large part linked to the planning permission status of the individual scheme and the need for this to be in place by March 2022. It was also highlighted that within the context of the Housing and Growth Deal and the AHP, delivery of units was considered to have taken place once contractual start on site was achieved which typically comprised the granting of planning permission and in some instances contracts in place with developers to build the units, not the physical delivery or completion of those units on site.

It was noted that if the revised programme was delivered in full then projected spend for the AHP would be approximately £57m against the budget target of £60m. Progress would continue to be carefully monitored as it was recognised that it was a key priority to achieve full spend against the budget and deliver as many AHP units as possible given the shortage of affordable housing in Oxfordshire. Members of the group explored potential ideas for ways to ensure full spend, noting that Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government permission would need to be granted for the addition of any new schemes to the programme and that it was unlikely that any further extension to the AHP would be granted. It was agreed that a list of schemes, broken down by area and type would be supplied to members of the advisory group so that they could be followed up locally once this final list was agreed with Homes England and HM Government.

The Advisory group noted that, within the OAHP, the largest category of tenure of units was shared ownership with delivery expected of 500 units against a target of 228. It was expected that 488 social rent units would be delivered against a target of 704. In discussion, it was noted that the Halo Shared Ownership model had been popular in the Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire with the possibility of extending such schemes into Cherwell District being explored. However, it was felt that there was scope for improvement in the marketing of shared ownership schemes. If this could be achieved, shared ownership schemes could offer a good way for key workers to enter the housing market.

The Advisory group noted the update.

12 Presentation on reflections from the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme to date

The advisory group received a presentation from Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme setting out key observations around lessons learned from the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme, (AHP) to date including key successes and challenges.

Members of the advisory group discussed the observations made in detail and particularly focussing on whether any lessons could be learned, or adjustments made, if the programme were to be repeated which would increase the likelihood of involvement by Registered Providers of social housing in areas of Oxfordshire where there had been low or no delivery of units under the current programme. It was noted that a number of Registered Providers in different areas of the county already had long-term Strategic Partnership relationships with Homes England which made it more challenging to secure

their participation with the OAHF. More generally it had been challenging to match the levels of Homes England national grant rates through the OAHF, although the commitment of S106 contributions by partner councils to top up the level of grant funding available had assisted with this challenge.

Members commented that there was an ongoing, high level of need for affordable housing within Oxfordshire and the Chair suggested that it was important to continue to work to develop innovative future new proposals to HM Government that would work for all the districts of the county and to seek ways to work differently in order to increase the numbers of affordable housing. Given the county's track record of good delivery through the AHP it was felt that Oxfordshire was in a relatively strong position to negotiate with HM Government.

Members of the group also discussed the potential for self-build through Community Led Housing scheme to deliver more affordable housing, (with appropriate safeguards to ensure ongoing public social good) but acknowledged that self-build units currently fell outside the technical definition of affordable housing within the National Planning Policy Framework for which grant funding could be used.

13 Update on Community Led Housing following local Community Led Housing seminar

It was noted that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board) had in July 2020 considered a report written by the Collaborative Housing Hub on current barriers and opportunities for growing the delivery of Community Led Housing (CLH) in Oxfordshire and had agreed to the establishment of action plans to deliver the report's recommendations. Megan McFarlane, Growth Deal Programme and Projects Officer provided an update on progress in the implementation of the regulations. Since the previous meeting, work had been undertaken to promote the implementation of the report's recommendations in relation to planning policy amongst professional groups across the councils.

In discussion, members discussed the advantages of Community Led Housing and how to better secure funding for these schemes given that HM Government's funding matrix did not include CLH. It was felt that Community Led Housing Associations, who were not Registered Providers, were keener to build CLH in the urban areas but not so much in more rural communities. The concept of cooperative schemes was also considered.

The Chair concluded that ways to provide different and interesting CLH schemes should be explored and that potentially there might be opportunity to involve smaller Registered Providers in CLH schemes as such schemes would not be in direct competition with Homes England based funding.

The Advisory group noted the update.

14 Dates of future meetings

Tuesday 2 November 2021.

Members of the Advisory group confirmed that they were happy to continue to meet virtually.

The meeting closed at 7.40 pm