

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Housing

Advisory Group

HELD ON TUESDAY 6 JULY 2021 AT 6.30 PM

VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

Present:

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

Officers: Kevin Jacob, (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Megan McFarlane (Housing and Growth Deal Team), Dave Scholes (Oxford City Council) and Paul Staines, (Housing and Growth Deal Team)

1 Introductions & welcome to new members; Apologies for absence and notifications of substitutions, declarations of interests; Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made by all present.

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

2 Notes of the previous meeting

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

The Chair referred to the significant and positive contribution John Donaldson had made to the work of the advisory group on behalf of Cherwell District Council prior to ceasing to be a councillor in May. It was agreed that the advisory group's thanks and gratitude should be conveyed to Mr Donaldson which Councillor Wing indicated she would action.

3 Terms of Reference of the Housing Advisory Group

The role of the Housing Advisory Group and its terms of reference were noted by the Group.

In discussion, members of the advisory group referred to its scope and remit as expressed within the Terms of Reference, noting that its original principle but not sole role was to provide strategic oversight in the development and delivery of the Housing from Infrastructure, (HFI) and Affordable Housing Programme, (AHP) work streams of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (the Deal). It was suggested that as progress was

made towards the end of the Deal that there was the possibility to seek to expand upon the wider housing related role allowed in the ToR.

The Chair commented that the Advisory sub-group did have broad discretion with paras 1.3-1.35 of its existing Terms of Reference to operate within the housing remit set by the Growth Board and it was noted that by so doing, ideas around housing best practice in areas such as Low carbon and Community led Housing had been learned and shared for mutual benefit. It was felt that the ToR allowed for sufficient discretion and opportunity to explore issues of interest and importance to the group, notwithstanding that that it would be possible for the Advisory sub-group to recommend changes to its Terms of Reference to the Growth Board if it choose to do so at a later date.

Officers commented that they were working on the development of a more formalised work programme. This would be comprised of reports related to the monitoring of the AHP and HFI elements of the Deal and areas of work already committed to by the Advisory sub-group, but subject to consideration of resource issues, ideas for additional potential items were very much welcome and could be made to officers outside of the meeting.

4 Quarter 4 Housing and Growth Deal Progress Presentation

The advisory group was provided with a presentation setting out performance management information in respect of the Affordable Housing Programme, (AHP) and Homes from Infrastructure, (HFI) elements of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, based on the quarterly monitoring report to the Growth Board.

Key conclusions included:

- Homes from Infrastructure -the trajectory for delivery of homes accelerated by the programme had reduced to be close to target, but the extension to the programme timeline provided an opportunity to meet count additional accelerated homes.
- Reported national shortages of construction labour/materials was emerging as a significant risk to both the delivery of both the HFI and AHP programmes.
- The gross size of the AHP had increased in terms of total potential units, but it was recognised that the challenge to deliver these remained high given the backloaded nature of the programme and risk of slippage.
- The Growth Deal had been successful in securing a high level of grant to support delivery of local priorities relating to a number of social rent low carbon units.
- Further discussions with HM Government and Homes England were taking place around finalising scheme delivery and criteria for 5th year extension

In discussion, members of the advisory group noted the current Year 4 position and the proportion of units attributed with an amber or red RAG rating. Officers acknowledged this and that these ratings demonstrated the challenges to delivery. Officers advised that risks to delivery of all schemes was reviewed regularly in partnership with colleagues at district level. Flexibility from HM Government on the levels of grant available in the AHP, together with the ability to use Section 106 funds to contribute towards AHP scheme grant rates had helped to mitigate some of the financial risks. This left the delivery and timing of risks together with the risk of schemes dropping out of the programme. On this basis, it was considered unlikely that the prioritisation methodology for schemes would be required

The Chair commented that whilst appropriate mitigations were being put in place, the scale of the challenge was clear as the county emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic. On this basis, the deliverability of projects would be a key consideration.

The advisory group noted the presentation.

5 First Homes Update

It was noted that consideration of this update would be deferred to the next meeting.

6 Update on Community Led Housing

The advisory group considered a status report detailing the Community Led Housing (CLH) schemes currently within the Growth Deal Y4 and contingency programmes. In addition, an action plan setting out progress in achieving recommendations relating to CLH was circulated.

The point was made aware that CLH schemes were by definition community led schemes with an independent, autonomous, local focus. The requirement of CLH groups to secure Registered Provider status or to partner with a Registered Provider in order to secure HM Government funding had been felt to be a barrier to the delivery of more CLH schemes and ways of how this might be mitigated were discussed. It was felt that officers within the localities may be able to provide additional support for CLH groups in navigating the registered provider accreditation process. Officers agreed to investigate the feasibility of this taking into account available resources.

The meeting noted that a working group of planning officers was being set up to look at the planning related recommendations in the Community Led Housing report commissioned by the Growth Board and that future meetings of the sub-group would be updated on this work.

Reference was also made in discussion to the importance of self-build projects in contributing to greater affordable housing provision and of sharing best practice in this area. Reference was made to self-build projects within Cherwell District, and it was suggested that officers from Cherwell District Council might wish to share their experiences of self-build projects with the advisory group at a future date. It was also noted that HM Government had in April commissioned an independent review into scaling up provision of self-build and custom housebuilding led by Richard Bacon MP and that a briefing on the review's outcomes could form a future agenda item.

The advisory group noted the update report.

7 Dates of future meetings

Wednesday 1 September 2021

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm