

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Housing Advisory Group

HELD ON TUESDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2023 AT 6.30 PM

Present:

Councillors: Susan Brown (Chair), Robin Bennett, Nick Mawer, Judy Roberts, Geoff Saul, Linda Smith and Pete Sudbury.

Officers: Murry Burnett (West Oxfordshire District Council), Andrew Chequers (Oxfordshire County Council), Becky Chesshyre (Oxfordshire Partnerships), Paul Fielding (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Kevin Jacob (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Alex Jeffery (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Nicola Riley (Cherwell District Council), Dave Scholes (Oxford City Council), Paul Staines (Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal) and Beth Wilks (Future Oxfordshire Partnership).

Guests: Fiona Brown and Charlie Fisher (Collaborative Housing Hub).

40 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutes; declaration of interests; Chair's announcements

There were no apologies or declarations of interest for this meeting.

41 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate record of matters discussed.

All actions from the meeting on 01 November 2023 have been completed.

42 Forward work programme

Members noted the forward work programme.

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, reminded members and officers that as an agreement with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on the final £30 million of funding for the Homes from Infrastructure programme appeared close, there will be enhanced monitoring arising from the revised conditions for the final

two years of the programme. Paul advised members and officers that by April he would expect to be able to advise on what that monitoring may look like, and by July the first set of data produced.

The Chair noted a light agenda for April and therefore the opportunity to discuss how those figures might be presented. Councillor Bennett queried whether this was related to the affordable housing programme? Paul Staines confirmed this was not related to the affordable housing programme, this was instead housing that was agreed to be accelerated as a consequence of the infrastructure programme.

43 Community-led housing in Oxfordshire

Members received a presentation from Charlie Fisher, Director of Transition by Design and Collaborative Housing Hub steering group member, on community-led housing (CLH), CLH projects in Oxfordshire and opportunities and challenges facing the future of CLH.

Regarding the Stonefield Community Trust, the Chair questioned how that finance model works? Charlie explained that the key to success is time; it began in the 1980s with a gift from the local pub landlord and a continued revenue stream comes from multiple projects including projects funded by West Oxfordshire District Council and working with local banks. Charlie would share a Stonefield Community Trust factsheet with members after the meeting.

Councillor Bennett noted a previously discussed idea of a revolving fund and regarding strategic sites, questioned how we might increase allocation for CLH through engagement with major developers? On finance, Charlie advised members that the creation of a revolving fund was supported by the Growth Board (now the FOP) in 2020 and now required is early-stage funding to help initiate this.

On strategic sites, Charlie explained that starting small and experimenting with thirty homes in one go along with something like the revolving fund and support from developers would enable financial support from developers in the early stage and the transfers of these sites to groups where we could facilitate and manage these very carefully as a small piece. Paul Staines reminded members there was support for 'seed-corn funding' for CLH however Councils need to be assured that money put-aside would be taken up through a pipeline of schemes. In order to do that there needs to be demand and expressions of interest that can be converted into something definite enough to be financed. Paul Staines recommended that using facilities of CoHo hub we can facilitate the demand that could support a business case.

Councillor Mawer queried a site owner by Bicester Town Council and the idea to provide affordable housing for people with a local connection and whether this is compatible with CLH? Charlie responded positively recommending that there are real mechanisms that have been built over decades to support these kinds of schemes. Charlie offered to continue a conversation offline referencing a number of case studies that could demonstrate how this might operate.

The Chair thanked Charlie and Fiona for their presentation.

44 Additional opportunities for collaborative working

Beth Wilks, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager, gave the presentation updating members on detailed work underway to support in identifying additional opportunities for collaborative working which deliver the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision. Beth sought feedback from members on whether they considered anything was missing, focussing on those areas where there is added value through partnership working.

The Chair raised the issue of a skills shortage particularly in retrofit and supply issues in terms of modern methods of construction (MMC). The skills issue is being taken up by the LEP but is such a significant issue that the Chair recommended the Housing Advisory Group should not lose sight of it. The Chair recommended that the root of the problem could be there being no formal qualification and that the Housing Advisory Group, and by extension, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, could be part of national lobbying to address this.

Councillor Sudbury queried whether there is enough focus on ensuring new housing was retrofit proof and being built with low embedded carbon. Officers present at the meeting advised that there is work to do in this sphere by looking across the various local plans to understand how Councils are pushing their low carbon ambition and how that affects the viability of affordable housing sites. Staying on the topic of housing, Councillor Sudbury also recommended focussing on tighter restrictions around second homes and Air B&Bs and the consequential utility impact of new housing and a need to ensure the building industry does not get more subsidy.

Members noted issues arising from housing lists and only being able to apply to the one that you live in. Councillor Roberts recommended there should be geographical exceptions so tenants could access assistance from another district. Officers responded that historically there have been joint allocations policies or reciprocal arrangements and therefore a position statement could be provided at a future meeting.

Councillor Smith commended progress that has been made in the last 12 months on homelessness and suggested there may be scope to push this work further, particularly in housing-first type projects. Paul Staines recommended that officers could provide a position statement on this along with some proposals. Temporary and emergency accommodation was also recommended as an area on which Councils could collaborate. Officers present at the meeting recommended that focus should also be on the causes of homelessness and preventing it in the first instance. Moving on facilities are also required as a 'next step' for individuals recovering from mental health or addiction issues in order to stop people back sliding.

On First Homes, Councillor Bennet suggested harnessing county-wide influence to advise HM Government that Oxfordshire are dealing with this an alternative way. Officers acknowledged that this scheme has been around for some time now and there have been soft commitments that could be resurrected again, as well as understanding on the impact on affordable housing.

Following the presentation from the Collaborative Housing Hub, members questioned whether the proposal of a revolving fund should be added to the list of collaborative working opportunities? Officers present at the meeting reminded members that if this was to be funded through prudential borrowing then this sits within the remit of Oxfordshire

County Council. Paul Staines recommended this could be revisited should the proposal wish to be investigated further.

Beth Wilks advised members that a refined portfolio of ideas would be presented to FOP following a filtering process, examples of which were provided in the slide pack within the agenda. Beth explained that whilst some ideas are business as usual, some might require more extensive resource which are the ones that would be put through the filtering process.

The Chair summarised the discussion by noting that clear shared themes were emerging from this work, and it is helpful to lobbying powers, for procurement and other reasons why we might work together and learn from one another.

Action: Officers supporting the Housing Advisory Group to pick-up above mentioned position and progress statements at officer group meeting.

45 Housing Revenue Accounts

Dave Scholes, Senior Responsible Officer, briefly introduced the paper noting that Oxford City Council is the only authority in Oxfordshire to have a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Chair noted a clear demand for social housing but also a difficulty in transitioning from where a lot of councils are to actually being a council that has a HRA. Councils must have independent HRAs and as such there is no opportunity for collaboration on this matter.

Members queried the impact of right to buy (RTB) on the HRA stock. Dave responded that in the case of Oxford City Council, around twenty units per-year were lost to RTB, but the overall HRA stock is growing due to a more active development programme. On tenure types, any of the affordable tenure types can be included within a HRA however the focus for Oxford City Council is social rent. Dave explained that activities not allowed within a HRA is market sale and the tenancies Oxford City Council offer are secure tenancies.

Members noted that the smallest HRA in the country is around 1000 homes (Blaby), which is indicative of the minimum sustainable size of a HRA and the challenge an authority would face in restarting direct council housing provision, as it would take some years to reach this number and an active development organisation would be required to get from 200 to 1000 units. Dave Scholes noted that the Local Government Association through their finance group is considering lobbying around the 200-unit threshold.

The Chair thanked Dave Scholes for the paper.

46 Chairs update from FOP

The Chair advised members there was nothing specific to note from the recent meeting of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

47 Dates of future meetings

- 18 April 2023 18:30 – 20:00

Due to the Local Government Association annual conference taking place 04 – 06 July 2023, the July meeting of the Housing Advisory Group will be re-arranged. An updated invite will be sent to members and officers as soon as possible. It is anticipated that this meeting will be on-site at Graven Hill.

The meeting closed at 19:53