

Public speakers

22 September 2020

Questions

1. Julia Benning on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire

Ref Agenda Item 11 - OxCam Arc Update:

As far as Need not Greed Oxfordshire is aware, the promised publication of the Terms of Reference of the Arc Leaders / Arc Leaders Executive groups (as indicated at the July Growth Board meeting) has yet to take place. Meanwhile, we note that Hatch Regeneris has been commissioned to help develop an economic prospectus for the Arc.

Please can the Growth Board confirm:

- how much public money is being allocated to this?
- who is accountable for the work?
- whether similar work/investment is taking place in relation to developing environmental/social prospectuses?
- when the long awaited Terms of Reference will finally be published?

Response: The Terms of Reference of the Arc Chief Executives Group, Arc Leadership Group Executive and Arc Chief Executive Group are now available on the Agenda webpage page for the meeting. A total of £25,000 had been allocated by the Arc Leadership Group in commissioning the work on the economic prospectus. Reporting into the Arc Leadership Group, the Arc Director is accountable for this work on the client side alongside lead representatives from the local enterprise partnerships and leads from the universities across the Arc. Environmental and social inclusion objectives are at the forefront of thinking and these had been included within the economic prospectus, notwithstanding its title.

Addresses:

2. Michael Tyce on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire on the Government's proposed Planning White Paper and housing numbers.

Since the system of Town and Country Planning began it has been the practice for the Government to provide general guidance on policy and official forecasts of population growth, and latterly household formation, to inform decision making whilst Local Authorities decided their own Local Plan numbers and locations.

The old PPG system was torn up in 2012 and replaced with the National Planning Policy Framework intended to be the final word, but subsequently extended, clarified, and rewritten in 2019. There have been several attempts at a "standard method" by which Local Authorities should assess need, but in principle Local Authorities still

decided. Now that is all to be turned on its head.

Instead of housing numbers being decided by our local representatives, on the evidence, they are to be imposed nationally to fulfil a manifesto commitment. The new housing numbers calculation starts with the answer of 337,000 houses a year, and the arcane formula is created to arrive at it.

The allocations to the Local Authorities are based not on need, or even the less tangible “requirement”, but on relative house prices. The higher the house prices, the more houses you have to build. This will not reduce house prices as Kate Barker proved in her seminal report to Gordon Brown in 2008, because builders will only build what they can sell at current prices and are not about to devalue their own markets. Its only effect will be to bring more people to the area. As it happens Lichfields calculate that Oxfordshire would be required to build more or less the same number of houses as the Growth Deal, which the Government itself acknowledged was far greater than the number needed, all the time, every year, for ever, each time from a larger base.

How this would interact with the Zoning to be imposed in the White Paper is not clear. Would the Zoning have to take more account of the number of houses to be built than it would of the need to protect the environment? How could broad brush zoning work in a crowded island where environmental assets are mingled with development? How will it impact on broader plans such as Oxfordshire 2050? What is clear though is that both of these proposals – the numbers and the zoning – will drain decision making even further away from the people most affected and the Local Authorities they rely on to reflect their interests.

The South Oxfordshire experience where a new administration elected to scrap the submitted Local Plan it inherited from its predecessors has been forced by Government to take it to Examination, whatever the detailed rights and wrongs of the case, is as clear an indication as you need that this is a Government determined to enforce its will and how little flexibility will be tolerated.

It is against that clear statement of intent that you need to consider the proposed imposition of housing numbers and broad-brush zoning.

CPRE says that this is not so much an argument about the minutiae of the way these new diktats would work, important though that is, but that the diktats are themselves undemocratic and unacceptable because they disempower the Local Authorities we rely on (for better or worse) to represent us all.

We urge the Growth Board, and its constituent authorities, to respond strongly to both the housing methodology and Planning White Paper consultations and the wholesale erosion of local democracy they represent.

Response: It is recognised that the Planning White Paper raises some important issues and local authorities in Oxfordshire may be responding individually to the consultation. There are not currently any proposals to have a joint response through the Growth Board, but we will ask officers to consider whether there should be – accepting that the timeframe is challenging. The Growth Board’s Housing Advisory Sub-group has been considering whether a letter can be sent to the Secretary of State specifically in relation to the impacts the White Paper could have on the future provision of affordable housing.