

# Notes

## OF A MEETING OF THE



# The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Housing Advisory Group

**HELD ON TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 6.30 PM  
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM**

## **Present:**

Councillors Susan Brown (Chair), Robin Bennett, Jeff Haine, Andrew McHugh, Judy Roberts and Mike Rowley

**Officers:** Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Archie Martin, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Megan McFarlane (Housing and Growth Deal Team), Dave Scholes (Oxford City Council) and Paul Staines, (Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Team)

**Other councillors:** Councillor Merilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council)

## **15 Apologies for absence and notifications of substitutions; declarations of interests; Chair's announcements**

Apologies of absence was received by Councillor Diko Blackings, Oxford City Council, (substituted by Councillor Mike Rowley), Councillor Pete Sudbury, Oxfordshire County Council (no substitute) and Councillor Lucinda Wing, Cherwell District Council, (substituted by Councillor Andrew McHugh). Councillor Merilyn Davies (West Oxfordshire District Council) also attended with the agreement of the Group.

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

## **16 Notes of the previous meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting on the 9 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

## **17 Quarter 2, Year 4 Housing and Growth Deal Progress**

The advisory group received a presentation on the progress of the Housing and Growth Deal Quarter 2, Year 4 of the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing and Homes from Infrastructure Programmes.

The presentation was delivered by Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, who summarised the key aspect of the Housing and Growth Deal (H&GD). He emphasised that the recently finished Oxford Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) consultation had brought forward around 25 additional potential infrastructure and transport schemes that need to be reviewed, in tandem with the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and other bus-related schemes. He explained this would cause a slight delay as these schemes needed to be carefully considered and then taken to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership meeting on 25 January 2022.

The advisory group were informed of proposed changes to the H&GD, Infrastructure Programme where it was proposed that further funding would not be provided to the A4095 Howes Lane realignment and that this funding be reallocated to the Lodge Hill Interchange scheme, which presently sat outside of the H&GD. The Lodge Hill Interchange proposal would accelerate the number of expected housing numbers by up to 350. Officers have stressed the priority of maximising housing numbers attributable to the delivery of infrastructure programme element of the H&GD.

Councillor Andrew McHugh expressed his disappointment as a representative of Cherwell District Council over the proposed removal of the A4095 scheme from the infrastructure programme, whilst acknowledging the strict requirements of the H&GD in terms of accelerated housing. Officers commented that they would work with infrastructure programme colleagues and colleagues at Cherwell District Council to help as much as possible.

It was reiterated by members of the advisory group that they agreed with the position of Cherwell DC that there was a need for regulations to require new housing development to be built to passive standards to assist planning authorities seeking to impose such standards, such as was being required at the sites linked to the A4095 infrastructure scheme, in a bid to help tackle the oncoming climate crisis.

The second quarter of the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme, (OAHP) had delivered 50 units, meaning a total of 86 units had been delivered so far this year and a grant drawdown of £4.8 million. In total, the OAHP had secured an additional 744 units of affordable housing across Oxfordshire to date and drawn down over £30m of grant.

Paul Staines advised that addressing the challenge of delivery is a constant one for the OAHP as it is with all housing provision. Securing delivery was a complex process, timelines are naturally fluid as developments moved through the planning process and other key milestones at different rates.

A firm view had been taken by government on scheme deliverability as Oxfordshire authorities worked on delivering the programme and accordingly, the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, (DLUHC) have changed the way the OAHP is funded, reducing the remaining OAHP budget for the final year to £10m, but with other deliverable schemes in the programme being funded through Homes England's (HE) Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) and other government funding streams.

This new funding arrangement does have some advantages in that HE funding does not have the same time constraints as the OAHP so will help with some of our challenges, for example reducing the risk around the timing of planning permissions, contracts and consequently achieving the relevant completion milestones for the schemes.

There are also some schemes in the current programme that were not eligible for HE funding, according to their criteria, and therefore alternative funding routes were being identified.

DLUHC had agreed in principle that all these schemes are recognised as contributing to the OAHP targets and officers were working to ensure that this was the case.

Following the detailed analysis with Homes England there were a small number of schemes, such as the Community Housing Scheme in West Oxfordshire with a significant delivery risk which could not remain in the current programme. However, officers continued to explore the funding and delivery options to bring these schemes forward.

Officers would continue to manage the delivery of the identified OAHP programme and secure/enable their delivery, albeit by accessing these different funding streams, and report on progress as we head towards the conclusion of the OAHP.

The advisory group noted the update.

## **18 Affordable Housing Future Options**

The advisory group was presented with a briefing paper by Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, that reported on key issues in the provision of affordable housing in Oxfordshire, following consideration by Oxfordshire council Leaders. It set out the context of the continuing need for affordable housing in Oxfordshire, the challenges to provision, observations from the operation of the private rental sector and further observations on learning from the current Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme, (OAHP). It was noted that a key issue from the current deal was the relative lack of competitiveness of available grant funding through the OAHP to registered social landlords in comparison to national offers. The briefing paper set out a number of possible options to work outside of, and add value to, national offers.

In discussion, the Chair and members of the advisory group continued to support the ambition of working collectively to create a potential new common affordable ask to HM Government. High environmental standards for affordable homes were one such potential area, whilst being mindful of the need to also maximise the number of genuinely affordable homes built and challenges around viability. However, the point was also made that affordable homes built to high environmental standards had the dual benefit of reduced energy costs, a key factor in reducing fuel poverty and therefore shouldn't be regarded as a luxury option.

The advisory group discussed the affordable housing scheme in west Oxfordshire, where West Oxfordshire District Council had worked with Blenheim Estate Homes (who are not registered social landlords) to provide affordable homes in perpetuity. It was noted that this partnership also had significant climate action plans. However, the transferability of the advantages of this scheme to other providers is limited.

It was felt that many of the issues regarding future affordable housing provision linked to, and would be influenced by, the policy direction set out within Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and it was suggested that a joint meeting or workshop with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was justified to consider elements relevant to affordable housing within the Plan.

It was agreed to recommend to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it:

1. Endorse continued work by officers supporting the Housing Advisory Group and partners to develop proposals for a future affordable housing joint ask from Oxfordshire to HM Government to include consideration of local powers and funding issues.
2. Note the request for officers to arrange a joint workshop between the Housing Advisory and Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group to discuss issues relating to affordable housing.

## **19 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Affordable Housing and Planning Workshop**

Members were informed that due to unforeseen circumstances the workshop had been delayed and therefore an update could not be given. It was decided that the update would be provided in the next advisory group.

## **20 First Homes Update**

The members of the advisory group considered a briefing note on the introduction of HM Government's First Home policy, presented by Dave Scholes, Affordable Housing Supply Corporate Lead, Oxford City Council and Megan McFarlane, Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The briefing note set out the background to the policy, updates on subsequent developments and some of the key challenges for local authorities in Oxfordshire arising from the policy's introduction.

It was explained that the First Homes programme was a new model of low-cost home ownership that resulted from a HM Government consultation in 2020. Houses under the scheme were sold at a discount sale price of 30% against the market value. This was subject to eligibility criteria and a valued cap of £250,000. From June 2022 (and following a transition period), it was expected that a minimum of 25% of all affordable homes secured using developers should be First Homes and that these are to be provided before any other form of affordable housing which, in the Oxfordshire context, would impact on the share of other forms of affordable housing provision that could be secured through developer contributions while not contributing to genuine affordability.

Members debated the impacts of the First Homes policy which were felt to be negative but also acknowledged that it was too early to be conclusive and further information was needed. This was particularly pertinent with regard to the potential impacts of First Home on affordable housing policies within Local Plans and also the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

It was agreed that:

1. Officers should be requested to further investigate and monitor the potential impacts of HM Government's First Homes programme within Oxfordshire.
2. A further agenda item on the issue should be added to the advisory group's forward programme.

## **21 Community Led Housing Update**

The advisory group received an update by Megan McFarlane, Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Team on Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire, prior to the consideration of a

formal draft update paper to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership at the advisory group's meeting in January 2022. This followed on from the consideration by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in July 2020 of a report, supporting research and recommendations aimed at the promotion of Community Led Housing in the county. The Partnership had agreed that officers should be asked to establish action plans for the recommendations attached to the report with the intention of maximising the utility of Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire.

It was noted that a joint planning and housing officer workshop had been held in August 2021 concerning the planning policy-related recommendations from the report. Various actions were developed which are under consideration. Potential actions include the possibility of an Oxfordshire wide common definition of community led housing and consideration of community-led housing within Oxfordshire Plan 2050's work on affordable housing

The advisory group was informed that consideration of the establishment of a revolving loan fund to support land purchase and initial development feasibility costs associated with Community Led Housing, (as had been put in place by Cornwall Council), was one of the recommendations arising from the report which had not yet been progressed.

After further discussion, it was agreed that in light of the timetable for agreement of local authority annual budgets the issue was time limited, and that appropriate officers and lead councillors would be identified and approached for their assistance in progressing work on this recommendation as soon as possible.

## **22 Dates of future meetings**

Members of the advisory group noted that the next meeting had been rescheduled from 6 January 2022 to 13 January 2022. The members further requested that the Housing Advisory Group meeting on 26 April 2022 to be rescheduled to the previous week, if possible, 19 April 2022.

The meeting closed at 8.06 pm