

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel Public speakers

23 July 2024



1. Cllr Richard Parker has submitted the following question and statement on behalf of Shirburn Parish Council

Shirburn Parish Council (SPC) is a key stakeholder in the Watlington Relief Road (WRR) scheme and the parish is severely impacted by the proposed project.

The proposed WRR does not have planning consent and the application lodged by Oxfordshire County Council under Ref R3.0010/24 is the subject of a significant Reg 25 Request and in itself will require further public consultation.

SPC are therefore particularly concerned to note within the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the End of Quarter 4 2023/24 at Para 3.2 “Scheme Delivery update and Risk Management” and Para 3.2.4 that there is reference to the WRR and that a planning decision is anticipated later this year.

There does not appear to be any minuted previous discussion on the proposed WRR for which there is no planning approval and the scheme even if approved cannot be constructed before 31st March 2025 at which point funding via DLUHC will expire.

The FOP is being asked to note a number of schemes which do have planning permission, or which are not dependant on planning permission and some that have identified a step change in housing delivery, and which are competing for funding and it therefore appears to SPC that the FOP Scrutiny Panel are being asked to accept a significant risk for an unconsented scheme.

There is no transparency as to why this scheme has appeared before the Panel nor any updated and current construction cost to compare with the budgeted cost. The current Annexe 1 HGD presented to the Committee Meeting on the 23rd July 2024 shows no “Procurement Contract” has been signed and that the “Appoint Contractor” is to “tbc” whereas the same Annexe presented to the last Committee Meeting showed a “Procurement Contract” signed in March 2022 and the “Appoint Contractor” in October 2023.

We request that the Panel investigates the WRR proposal carefully as this is an unconsented and uncosted scheme taking funding from other consented schemes in the County.

Response

The Quarter 4 2023/2024 report provides an update on all of the schemes that are wholly or part funded by the Housing & Growth Deal. Watlington Relief Road has been in the programme since 2020 so the report provides an update on this as at the end of March

2024. It is part funded through the Housing & Growth Deal so only the H&GD element would need to be spent by 31 March 2025.

The report notes that the scheme is subject to a planning decision later in 2024 and that:

3.2.4 The planning decision for Watlington Relief Road is anticipated later this year. Work is ongoing to assess the impact of this and the ongoing deliverability of the scheme.

3.2.5 A final update on the schemes will be shared with FOP as part of the report for Quarter 1 of 2024/25 in September 2024.

Oxfordshire County Council is currently assessing the impact of the timing of the planning decision for the scheme on its deliverability as part of the Housing & Growth Deal and will agree updates on this and other schemes where there is on-going activity through its governance process.

A final update to the programme of schemes that will be funded through the Housing & Growth Deal by the 31 March 2025 deadline will be shared with FOP in September 2024. The council's on-going capital programme for 2025/26 onwards will be considered as part of the next Budget & Business Planning process.

As you may be aware, the Panel did not decide in the meeting to undertake any further investigation, noting that responsibility for the delivery of the Homes from Infrastructure Programme rests with Oxfordshire County Council.