

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen,
Witney, on Wednesday 14 February 2018 at 3:48 pm.

PRESENT

Councillors: N A MacRae MBE (Chairman), Mrs M J Crossland (Vice Chairman), A J Adams, Mrs J C Baker, M A Barrett, R J M Bishop, J C Cooper, D A Cotterill, C G Dingwall, P J G Dorward, Mrs E H N Fenton, E J Fenton, S J Good, A M Graham, J Haine, P J Handley, A D Harvey, Miss G R Hill, H J Howard, E H James, P D Kelland, Ms E P R Leffman, R D J McFarlane, J F Mills, T J Morris, Dr E M E Poskitt, A H K Postan, Mrs C E Reynolds, G Saul, H E T St John, T B Simcox, C J A Virgin and B J Woodruff.

47. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17 January 2018, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N G Colston, C Cottrell-Dormer, Mrs J M Doughty, H B Eaglestone, P Emery, D S T Enright, Mrs L E C Little and T N Owen.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers relating to items to be considered at the meeting.

50. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Chairman or from members of the Executive. Mr Cotterill thanked members for the cards, letters and other best wishes he had received following the passing of Mrs Cotterill.

51. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no submissions from members of the public.

52. OXFORDSHIRE HOUSING AND GROWTH DEAL: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Council considered the recommendations made by the Cabinet at its meeting immediately prior to this meeting, in the context of the report and appendices previously circulated to all members of the Council. In proposing those recommendations, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the recommendations were as included in that report.

Mr Mills went on to emphasise the significance of the Growth Deal for Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire, given that it secured £150m for infrastructure and £60m for affordable housing provision. In doing so, it added to the existing work on the emerging local plans in the county, and the joint work being undertaken by the six local authorities. He also highlighted the importance of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and other relevant documents. It was clear that many residents with concerns over housing development proposals cited the lack of infrastructure as one of the primary considerations, and this would help address that issue. He further emphasised (i) the reference in the autumn statement to this being a “downpayment”, which he hoped was indicative of additional future funding; (ii) the fact that the Deal related to/arose from

housing which was already proposed and thus to development which would take place whether or not additional funding was provided; and (iii) the huge economic worth of the area, and the associated intention to build on the economic success with continuing future growth. He considered that it would be a disservice to local people if the Deal was not approved.

In seconding the proposition, Mr Haine indicated that he agreed with Mr Mills that this was a good deal for the County. West Oxfordshire's emerging Local Plan committed the Council to providing 15,950 new homes in the period to 2031 and the increase through the Growth Deal only increased this number by a few hundred that were likely to be delivered on windfall sites in any event.

Mr Howard expressed his support for the Deal, and drew attention to the likely situation where the Council would need only to be able to demonstrate a three year housing land supply, which would help it in resisting speculative development. He hoped and expected that Carterton would benefit from the Deal, in terms of the provision of housing, the development of a science park and highway improvements. He believed that many RAF personnel left the area for housing and employment reasons, and this would help correct that situation.

Mr Cooper felt that the democratic accountability of the Growth Board was an issue, and that the benefits of the Growth Deal for Oxfordshire were clearer than the benefits to West Oxfordshire. He made reference to the Marginal Viability Fund and stated that this Council needed to reflect on the reasons that it was unsuccessful in its bid, with a view to increasing the chances of success in the future. He confirmed that the Liberal Democrat Group would be supporting the proposition.

Mr Handley and Mrs Crossland both spoke on their hopes for a positive impact on Carterton, and the opportunities in relation to former RAF personnel which would arise with improvements to highways and employment land provision and access. This was also relevant to the increase in the amount of RAF related work being undertaken by civilians.

Mr McFarlane expressed concerns that it was not clear how much funding would come to West Oxfordshire, nor which specific projects would be addressed. Mr Postan supported the proposals, and hoped that the initiative would help the direction of funding to encourage businesses to locate in Carterton.

Mr Morris considered the Deal to be highly beneficial for Oxfordshire, stating that even if no funding came to West Oxfordshire the Council and the District would have lost nothing and there would still be a route to unlocking other future funding opportunities. Improvements across the county would, of course, be beneficial to West Oxfordshire residents who worked in other areas, as well as to people who travelled into West Oxfordshire for their employment.

Mr Good urged that the rurality of the District was not overlooked, hoping that some of the funding could provide direct benefits to some of the District's smaller communities. Messrs Harvey and Saul both spoke in support of the proposition, with the former reminding members that the housing provision through the Local Plan was a certainty, meaning that any opportunity for infrastructure improvement had to be pursued, and the latter commenting that there appeared to be a need better to explain the benefits to residents in the north of the District.

Mr Dingwall reiterated the view that the £60m for affordable housing provision was essential and, in its own right, justified support for the proposals.

In response to questions from Mr St John, Mr Mills advised that the commitment to explore the possibility of the Strategic Infrastructure Tariff was no more than that at this

stage, and stated that the practical effect of the recommendations was that some decisions would be made by the Council rather than by the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

In closing the debate, Mr Mills referred to the questions of democratic accountability and consultation, stressing the view that the Deal built on the existing and emerging Local Plans in the county, all of which had been subject to statutory consultation processes, including Public Examination, and drawing attention to the fact that there were over 200 members of the principal councils in Oxfordshire, who would be making the decision to proceed. He again referred to the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, which listed the requirements relevant to projects. Whilst sharing the disappointment that the bid for Marginal Viability Funding had not been successful, he noted that that did not mean there would not be successes in the future. The potential planning flexibilities would help to protect the District, and the Deal would help the delivery of managed growth. He agreed with the earlier comments about the desirability of retaining the skills of former RAF personnel, and again stressed the need to be part of the conversations with government to be able to accrue the possible benefits. Finally, he gave examples of specific possible projects relevant to West Oxfordshire, namely access to Carterton, the A40 and A44, and a west facing bus lane on the A40.

The recommendations were then put to the vote, and it was unanimously -

RESOLVED: That the Council:

- (a) Agrees to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal;
- (b) Agrees the Delivery Plan attached as Appendix 3 to the report as the basis for the Deal; noting that elements would be updated as detailed work programmes developed;
- (c) Delegates authority to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Leader and the Growth Board, to make minor changes to the Delivery Plan that may be required to secure agreement with Government;
- (d) Delegates authority to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Leader and the Growth Board, to agree the Year 1 affordable housing programme and phasing and processes specified in the Delivery Plan;
- (e) Appoints Oxfordshire County Council as the accountable body in respect of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal;
- (f) Delegates authority to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Leader and the Growth Board, to review the terms of reference of the Growth Board and agree any amendments and any appropriate inter-authority agreements required to support the Delivery of the Housing and Growth Deal;
- (g) Delegates authority to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Leader to take any other decisions arising from agreement to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, until the revised terms of reference of the Growth Board were in place; and
- (h) Agrees to participate in the preparation of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) for Oxfordshire in accordance with the timescales set out in the Delivery Plan and in accordance with Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, with the milestones for progressing the JSSP being contingent on Government delivering the Planning Freedoms and Flexibilities as described in the Delivery Plan.

The meeting closed at 4.27 pm

CHAIRMAN