

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ECONOMIC & SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2015
OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD
REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR
(Contact: Andrew Tucker, Tel: (01993) 861721)

(The decisions on this matter will be a resolution)

1. PURPOSE

To summarise the work going on through the Oxfordshire Growth Board in general conformity with the statutory duty to co-operate looking in particular at how to address the issue of any unmet housing need arising from Oxford which cannot be accommodated within the city boundaries.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the content of the report be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Public bodies have a Duty to Co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries. This duty is primarily being met in this area through the work of the Oxfordshire Growth Board the membership of which includes all the local authorities in the county.

3.2. A collectively commissioned Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Oxfordshire was published last year which identified significantly increased housing needs across the county well above the figures projected in the former South East Plan. A key issue arising from this work is the potential unmet housing need arising from Oxford City. The Growth Board has approved a Work Programme to examine this further and to help the Oxfordshire councils fulfil the duty on this issue.

3.3. As part of this work the Growth Board approved a number of key principles which should underpin the Programme and these are set out below:

- The district Local Plans are sovereign and all work should feed into Local Plans for them to determine the spatial future of the districts;
- A recognition therefore that joint work on future spatial options, transport infrastructure and green belt will be required to feed into Local Plans;
- Recognition that the City cannot fully meet its housing needs and there is a need to agree on the level of unmet need. However, work on determining spatial options in Local Plans can commence alongside this;
- A wish that the timescale for completing the Review is 12 – 18 months and that this should not hold up Local Plan timescales.

4. SUMMARY OF WORK PROGRAMME

4.1 The Work Programme itself consists of a number of related component elements as set out below:

Defining Oxford's Unmet need and clarifying its extent is a critical element of the Programme and consultants have been engaged to provide an independent review of the evidence on this issue.

Development of Strategic Options including looking at potential areas of search to help inform the future distribution of any unmet need arising between the various local authority areas.

Green Belt Study assessing the contribution that different parts make to the purposes of the Green Belt according to the five statutory criteria.

Strategic Options Assessment including the development of a common set of criteria against which to test the relative sustainability of each of the strategic options.

Infrastructure Delivery Planning in respect of which the County Council will set out the strategic infrastructure investments required to support growth.

Housing Need Distribution linked to the outcomes of the Strategic Options Assessment (referred to above) which will inform the distribution of Oxford's unmet need between the various district council areas.

Local Plan Reviews which local planning authorities will complete, if required, to address the issue of Oxford's unmet housing need. This will involve detailed technical work at a sites level and will provide extensive opportunities for public engagement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 This Work Programme illustrates what is happening across Oxfordshire to meet the duty to co-operate. Latest indications are that the Growth Board will not be in a position to reach any conclusions until spring 2016 which local planning authorities can then further consider in the context of future reviews of individual local plans.
- 5.2 If the duty to co-operate is not found to have been met by a Planning Inspector then a Local Plan cannot be progressed as it fails the statutory test and this cannot be fixed at the Examination. It is therefore a fundamental requirement. However, a duty to co-operate does not mean a duty to agree. There is therefore no legal obligation on the authority to accept a proportion of Oxford's unmet need and, provided the duty to co-operate has been engaged, a local plan may proceed to be tested for soundness at Examination based upon the evidence put forward to support it at the time.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

7. RISKS

If the duty to co-operate has not been met a Local Plan cannot be progressed. The Work Programme agreed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board is designed so as to mitigate that risk.

8. REASONS

To clarify the position in respect of the duty to co-operate in relation to any unmet housing need arising from Oxford.

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Background Papers: None