

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney,
at 6.30pm on Thursday 14 September 2017

PRESENT

Councillors: P J Handley (Chairman), M A Barrett, J C Cooper, Mrs J M Doughty,
H B Eaglestone, P D Kelland, A H K Postan and G Saul

Also in Attendance: J Haine

28. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

There were no apologies for absence.

Mr A H K Postan attended for Mrs E H N Fenton

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

31. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that he intended to deal with the Countryfile Live event at Blenheim Palace as the first substantive item of business.

32. COUNTRYFILE LIVE, BLENHEIM PALACE, 3 TO 6 AUGUST 2017 – POST EVENT FEEDBACK

Mr Cooper indicated that he had asked for this item of business to be included in the agenda in order to put on record his appreciation of the organiser's efforts in staging what had been a fantastic event. The event had been well run and, despite a few isolated objections, had been well received by the local community. The event had brought significant economic benefit to the town of Woodstock and the surrounding area and Mr Cooper expressed the hope that it would return in 2018.

In conclusion, Mr Cooper suggested that it would be useful to review how the Council's Tourism Service could take advantage of the opportunity arising from the event to encourage those attending to return to West Oxfordshire in the future.

Mr Kelland expressed some concern that those having purchased tickets for the event at a significant cost had been angered by the large number of free tickets offered by the organisers.

The Group Manager for Environmental and Regulatory Services went on to provide Members with some additional information regarding the event.

The event had taken place from 3 to 6 August at Blenheim Park, near Woodstock and had attracted 120,000 people and 32,000 vehicles over the four days. The event was licensed by BBC Enterprises to SME London which operates other large events like Top Gear Live and London Fashion Week.

Blenheim Park has a Premises Licence issued by the Council in its capacity as the Licensing Authority and large events are monitored by the Safety Advisory Group, a multi-agency group which considers the risks posed by large events and the impact on the settled community.

This was the second year of the event, in 2016 there were very significant traffic related issues on the Oxfordshire road network. A review of the event took place last year and the event organisers worked closely with Thames Valley Police and the Highway Authority on a more robust traffic management plan for this year's event, bringing on board the traffic management consultants who had successfully delivered the last two CLA Game Fairs. The event organisers also liaised closely with town and parish council's surrounding Blenheim and held a table top exercise prior to the event to test the new plans.

A review of this year's event was currently taking place and feedback indicated that the event was a success and disruption to the road network was minimal and a significant improvement on the previous year's event.

A meeting with the event organisers would take place later in the year to review this year's event and start to plan for the event in 2018 that is scheduled to take place between 2 to 5 August.

In terms of the ticketing policy, Mr Oddy advised that this was a matter for the event organisers. He advised that it had been the policy to offer free tickets to local residents and, whilst he acknowledged that a greater number of free tickets had been made available for this particular event than for most others, stressed that this was a commercial decision for the organisers, not a matter for the Licensing Authority.

Mr Kelland noted that the event had taken place at the same time as the Wilderness Festival at Cornbury Park and that the same vehicle routes had been used to access both events. Mr Oddy confirmed that the two events had taken place over the same weekend but advised that this had little impact upon the road network. The Organisers of both events had employed the same traffic management company. Given the differing nature of the events and the different travel patterns of those attending, there had been very little conflicting traffic movements. He also noted that the event took place during the school holidays whilst the Game Fair, which had been more problematic, had been held during term time when peak traffic flows were generally greater.

Mr Eaglestone confirmed that, from a personal perspective, the impact of the Countryfile Live event had been minimal.

Mr Oddy also advised that the Blenheim Estate had commissioned an academic study to quantify the economic benefits of the Palace on the surrounding Area and undertook to raise the question of tourism promotion with the relevant Officers.

In conclusion, Mr Handley advised that there had been no complaints about the event and Members joined him in congratulating both the organisers of the event and the Council's Licensing Officers on its success. Mr Handley also acknowledged the importance of encouraging those attending to visit West Oxfordshire again in the future.

33. RESPONSE TO CHERWELL LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing which sought consideration of the Council's response to Cherwell District Council's consultation on the proposed submission plan for their partial review of the Cherwell Local Plan to address Oxford's unmet housing need.

The Head of Planning and Strategic Housing introduced the report, outlining the background to the review and identifying the key aspects of the Council's proposed response.

Mrs Doughty questioned whether, as an employee of Oxford City Council, she had a conflict of interest in this matter and should therefore leave the meeting. The Principal Democratic Services Officer advised that, whilst it was for the individual Member to decide whether or not such conflict existed, from his understanding of her role at the City he did not believe that she was precluded from participating in the debate.

Mr Cooper made reference to the Duty to Co-operate imposed upon Local Planning Authorities by the Localism Act and referred to at paragraph 2.3 of the report, suggesting that this did not give rise to a requirement to agree. He noted that South Oxfordshire District Council had failed to accept the apportionment of Oxford City's unmet housing need in its emerging Local Plan and questioned how this position would be received by the Planning Inspectorate.

Mr Cooper indicated that he was not prepared to accept the apportionment of development set out at paragraph 2.9 of the report and challenged the decisions arrived at by the Growth Board in this respect. He suggested that Oxford City should do more to address its own unmet housing need and considered that the proposed response should be strengthened in this respect. Mr Cooper also questioned how additional car parking provision could be made in Woodstock to meet the increased demand arising from further development in the vicinity.

In response, Mr Hughes advised that the Council's response to Oxford City Council's Preferred Options consultation for their proposed new Local Plan had emphasised that it considered that Oxford City could do more to address its own unmet housing need within its boundaries. The response had suggested that the City had rejected what were potentially suitable sites and Mr Hughes assured Members that Officers remained conscious of these issues and would consider making further representations as the City Council's Local Plan process progressed.

Mr Hughes advised that the apportionment figures agreed by the Growth Board were based on an assumption that the City Council needed to do more by releasing additional sites within the City to address unmet need. The City Council was considering the position through its Local Plan and West Oxfordshire and other neighbouring authorities would maintain the pressure to do so through the Local Plan process.

Mr Handley questioned whether there was any scope to secure land from the Blenheim Estate to provide additional parking in Woodstock.

Whilst he acknowledged that it would not be welcomed by all Members, Mr Haine indicated that following an extensive technical work programme involving officers from the four District Councils, Oxford City Council, and Oxfordshire County Council, the Growth Board had agreed the apportionment of development to meet the City's unmet need. This apportionment had been supported by all of the Councils with the exception of South Oxfordshire and there was now a real concern that their Local Plan would fail to gain approval because of this.

West Oxfordshire did not want to be in the same position and had recognised the importance of getting its own Local Plan approved as soon as possible. Further work required following the Examination in Public would be put before the Inspector next month and it was to be hoped that the Council would be advised that the Plan was sound by Christmas. Thereafter, following further public consultation, it was anticipated that the Plan would be in place next year.

Whilst accepting the Growth Board's apportionment, the Council had already advised the City that it could do more to address its unmet housing need. The proposed response to Cherwell did not accept development on land to the south east of Woodstock was necessary or desirable and contended that the agreed apportionment could be accommodated by increasing the density of development elsewhere.

Mr Saul stressed the importance of securing transport and infrastructure improvements, particularly in relation to the A44 between Chipping Norton and Oxford. With the construction of 4,400 homes and the development of a further 2,600 either side of the A44 at Yarnton and Begbroke it was vital to ensure that the impact upon the A44 corridor did not result in the same degree of congestion experienced on the A40.

Mr Hughes advised that the Cherwell site had secured transport infrastructure improvements and emphasised the need for neighbouring authorities to work together. He indicated that if Members wanted to strengthen the response in relation to collaborative working they could do so. There was also the opportunity to raise the issue of car park provision in Woodstock on grounds of cumulative impact.

Mrs Doughty concurred with Mr Haine and noted that Cherwell had done well in securing infrastructure improvements and, in particular, the provision of Oxford Parkway station within the Greenbelt. She agreed that the Council should seek to resist development to the south east of Woodstock and advocate the redistribution of the proposed properties across the other sites.

Mr Kelland indicated that the Growth Board's decision on the apportionment of Oxford City's unmet need impacted upon West Oxfordshire's own planning position and should be challenged. The proposed Garden Village would help to address that need but Mr Kelland suggested that, rather than concentrate development in proximity to Oxford, residents would have a greater choice on where to live if it were distributed more widely throughout the County.

From a personal perspective, Mr Kelland indicated that he was supportive of the proposed Woodstock site.

Mr Hughes advised Members that the driver for development was not the Growth Board but the 2014 Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment which had identified a high level of housing need in Oxford of between 24,000 to 32,000 homes. The Local Plan Inspector had made it clear that the housing numbers initially proposed by the Council were insufficient given the level of demand throughout the County.

Whilst the City could do more to address its unmet need there was a recognition that it was restricted by its tight administrative boundaries and unable to meet that need in full. Accordingly, the Duty to Co-operate required neighbouring authorities to play their part.

Mr Haine rejected Mr Kelland's contention that development should be more widely distributed. Oxford was a centre of economic activity and there was an established housing need in the City. It was this need that had to be addressed and it was clearly preferable that if people were working in Oxford then they needed to live in close proximity to the City to give easy access to their place of work.

Mrs Doughty concurred and indicated that Oxford City was making efforts to address its own housing need. Some 900 properties were being built in Barton and the City Council was amongst the few that was building new homes for rent. She reiterated the constraints imposed by its administrative boundaries and noted that demand for housing was fuelled by the range employment opportunities offered by the large number of major employers located in the City.

Mr Postan acknowledged the need to build more homes and suggested that it was important to address local objection by ensuring that existing communities retained their own separate identities through the creation of buffer zones as barriers to further development. He cited the success of the Witney Woodland Trust in creating such constraints.

Mr Postan went on to caution against seeking to protect one site by accepting development on another, alluding to the sites at North Witney/Hailey and West Carterton/Alvescot as exemplars. He suggested that approving one site in preference to another would leave the alternate site at risk of further applications and eventual development in the future. Effective control could only be secured through the control of buffer zones.

Mr Cooper acknowledged the constraints imposed by Oxford City's boundaries; being the pre 1974 County Boundary, but expressed his disquiet that the Council had failed to offer robust representations to the City Council proposing the release of the Oxford Stadium and Southville Golf Club sites for residential development. He believed that it was unacceptable for the City to argue the protection of its own leisure assets at the expense of neighbouring authorities.

Mr Handley noted that the Growth Board was comprised of Council Leaders and suggested that those Members with responsibility for planning should also be appointed to the Board. He suggested that Member workshops should be held to enable Members to discuss and provide input on emerging proposals and their impact upon surrounding areas. If the Council was to support Cherwell's proposals for development at Begbroke then it should make it clear that it considered provision of a new railway station to be a pre requisite.

In response to concerns expressed by Mr Kelland, Mr Haine gave an assurance that local representatives would be kept abreast of progress in relation to the Garden Village proposals as they developed.

Having been proposed by Mr Postan and duly seconded it was:-

RESOLVED:- That the Cabinet be recommended to:-

- (a) Welcome the positive steps being taken by Cherwell District Council to review their Local Plan in order to address the issue of Oxford City's unmet housing need.
- (b) Approve the proposed representations appended to the report as the Council's response to Cherwell District Council's consultation, subject to the following additions:-
 - (i) Greater emphasis being placed upon the Council's opposition to the proposed development of land to the south east of Woodstock and its belief that the suggested level of development would be more appropriately accommodated if distributed amongst the remainder of the proposed locations through an increase in density giving a more effective use of land.
 - (ii) The provision of a new railway station should be a pre requisite to the proposed development at Begbroke.
 - (iii) Greater emphasis being placed upon the need to work collaboratively to secure transport improvements.
 - (iv) Reference to the need for additional car parking provision in Woodstock in response to the cumulative impact of development on the sites proposed.

Mr Haine advised that the proposed apportionment remained a working assumption but stressed the importance of the Council's continued input through the Local Plan process as any change in delivery could impact upon development in West Oxfordshire.

Members acknowledged that, as Cabinet Member with responsibility for Strategic Planning, Mr Haine was faced with a difficult task. The Committee thanked Mr Haine for his contribution to the meeting and expressed appreciation of the efforts he and the Officers made on the Council's behalf.

The meeting closed at 7:30pm

Chairman