

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Economic and Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee**  
held in Committee Room I, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney,  
at 6.30pm on **Thursday 7 March 2019**

### PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Hilary Fenton (Vice-Chairman); Rosa Bolger, Julian Cooper, Jane Doughty, Harry Eaglestone, Duncan Enright, Ted Fenton, Peter Kelland, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Michele Mead, Neil Owen and Harry St John.

Also Present: Councillor Nigel Colston

#### 66. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 January 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs P D Kelland and B J and the following resignations and temporary appointments were received and noted:-

Councillors Julian Cooper for Andy Graham, Duncan Enright for Laetisia Carter, Liz Leffman for Jake Acock and Harry St John for Ben Woodruff.

#### 68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

#### 69. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman advised that three members of the public had expressed a desire to address the meeting in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure. As each intended to speak on a different item of business, Councillor Beaney advised that it was his intention to allow each to address the meeting immediately prior to consideration of the relevant report.

#### 70. CONSULTATION ON THE OXFORDSHIRE PLAN 2050

Ms Sue Haywood addressed the meeting regarding the Committee's response to the consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. A copy of her submission is attached as Appendix A to the original copy of these minutes.

The Planning Policy Manager then introduced the report and explained that preparation of the Plan was required as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. This was an ambitious piece of work on which the Oxfordshire authorities were collaborating. The document currently before Members was the first stage of a process which set out a high level draft vision, aspirations and objectives and sought views on potential spatial options.

Councillor Fenton indicated that it was difficult for Members to look to 2050 and beyond. He noted that the Plan was predicated on current thinking and failed to place sufficient emphasis on the impact of future technologies given the long term nature of the plan.

Given that Oxfordshire was a centre for innovation and technology, Councillor Fenton suggested that the University should be consulted with regard to emerging technologies.

Councillor Fenton also noted that the Plan sought to mitigate environmental harms and suggested that it should take a more positive approach and go far further by encouraging the production of good, innovative and exciting environmental improvements.

Councillor Leffmann agreed that it was difficult to look so far ahead and noted that the Plan was based upon the assumption that there was a need for growth. She questioned whether this was necessarily the case and, whilst recognising the need for a long term strategic plan, suggested that it should incorporate 'milestones' at 10 year intervals to give the opportunity to revise proposals.

Councillor Leverton considered that long term planning tended not to be imaginative and stressed the importance of ensuring that the Plan was fit for purpose in the long term being as bold and ambitious as possible. He emphasised that there was a need for more central funding to ensure that infrastructure was provided prior to development taking place.

Councillor Enright questioned the level of expertise within the Growth Board in areas such as sustainability. In response, the Planning Policy Manager advised that the team responsible for developing the Plan have already brought in expert resources on some matters including sustainability and would need to continue to do so as required as, similarly to the Council's own Local Plan, the Oxfordshire Plan would be subject to Examination in Public and would have to be shown to be evidence based.

Councillor Beaney drew attention to reference in the Plan to Oxfordshire's historic character within the proposed vision on Page 3 of the consultation document and suggested that this should be revised to refer to the County's rural and urban historic character.

Councillor Fenton noted that the Plan did not indicate the mix of housing to be provided and suggested that there was a greater need for one and two bedroomed properties than larger family housing. The Planning Policy Manager advised that the Oxfordshire Plan would in due course need to be informed by an updated assessment of future housing need and that whilst the current Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment, provides some indication of dwelling sizes needed, is intended to be used as a guide and was not prescriptive.

Councillor Kelland suggested that site allocations within the Council's own Local Plan had been developer led and considered that the Oxfordshire Plan offered the opportunity for others to make suggestions as to where growth should take place. The Planning Policy Manager advised that, as part of the consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan, a 'call for ideas' is taking place seeking views on potential locations for growth. He acknowledged that the majority of suggestions would be likely to come from landowners and developers but advised that this was an open exercise in which anyone could put forward suggestions for areas of potential development.

Councillor Beaney welcomed consideration of the overall Oxford Green Belt as suggested at paragraph 16 of the consultation document. He also suggested that the disparity between healthcare and public transport facilities between urban and rural areas should be stressed. Councillor Enright suggested that the development of autonomous vehicles would result in the demise of private car ownership.

Councillor Beaney suggested that the Plan appeared to be Oxford City centric and Councillor St John indicated that there was a need to recognise that links to the City were limited and the direction of travel for employment needed to be reversed.

Councillor St John questioned the number of jobs and houses that were anticipated to be required post 2031 as it was difficult to forecast this need over such a long period with any degree of accuracy.

Whilst recognising the importance of new businesses, he questioned whether growth would be organic within the County or forced upon it from outside. There was a clear intention to expand outer London in an arc between Oxford and Cambridge along the proposed 'expressway'. Councillor St John noted that a route had yet to be chosen and questioned whether such a link would be required. He also stressed the importance of improving rail links.

In terms of the Plan's aspirations, Councillor Beaney suggested that greater emphasis should be placed upon protecting the environment. This should be recognised as a principal objective.

Councillor Fenton noted that, whilst the Plan called for high quality design, there was no specific indication as to what this entailed. He suggested that future design should be innovative, imaginative and sustainable.

Councillor Owen considered the overall objectives and aspirations of the Plan were to be welcomed but cautioned that the devil would be in the detail. He agreed that it was difficult to envisage the timescale of the Plan.

Councillor Bolger suggested that the Plan should make provision for responsible procurement and Councillor Fenton wished to see the retention of free car parking.

Councillor Doughty questioned whether it was appropriate to make housing provision for those who wished to live in the County simply because it was seen as a 'special place'. The Planning Policy Manager agreed that emphasis should be placed upon the provision of affordable housing, including provision for key workers. Councillor Kelland noted that affordable housing was to be provided within the Garden Village and suggested that, as transport links were good, people would be encouraged to move out of London. He went on to stress the importance of providing a broad range of properties, including some larger homes.

Councillor Leffman indicated that it was important to recognise the changing needs of individuals as they moved through different stages of life and to provide an appropriate mix of facilities in both urban and rural areas. It was important to make provision for those in rural areas to remain in their communities as they grew older.

Councillor Cooper suggested that the Plan should make reference to the importance of dualling the Cotswold Line as a specific objective. The Planning Policy Manager advised that, whilst the current consultation was directed towards identifying more general objectives, not specific projects, this could be included in the Council's response. He also advised that as part of the Oxfordshire Plan process, the current Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OXIS) would probably need to be updated and that this was perhaps the most appropriate mechanism for such specific projects to be identified.

Councillor St John advised that there was a range of topic papers linked to the consultation document and he believed that the need for improvements to the Cotswold Line had been identified in the transport paper.

He suggested that it was essential to identify infrastructure provision as a key aspiration or objective within the Plan. The Planning Policy Manager agreed that this should be given greater prominence.

In terms of spatial options, Councillor Beaney questioned whether it would be necessary to develop large sites to secure infrastructure provision or whether the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy would change this.

In response, the Planning Policy Manager advised that, whilst the introduction of CIL would be of some assistance in ensuring smaller schemes contributed towards infrastructure, site specific infrastructure would continue to be sought on larger development sites through the current system of S106 planning obligations. He stressed that, at this stage, the consultation was only seeking views on the broad options for development; including, for example, whether it should be concentrated on new sites or existing settlements.

Councillor Leffman suggested that the problem was in the assumption that funding for infrastructure could only be secured through further residential development whereas current infrastructure was inadequate to support existing development. Whilst it was the Government's policy to fund infrastructure provision through development, additional housing would exacerbate existing problems. Councillor Leverton noted that Milton Keynes had been able to provide infrastructure prior to development.

Councillor Doughty expressed concern at the potential funding gap for strategic projects. The Planning Policy Manager advised that there was a possibility of imposing an additional strategic levy on top of S106 and CIL funding to go towards strategic projects but this would be dependent upon viability.

Councillor St John suggested that the need to improve mobile telephone coverage should be included in the Committee's response.

Councillor Beaney expressed some concern at the intended provision of primary care services 'at scale' and Councillor Mead agreed that this would be detrimental to those living in rural areas. The Planning Policy Manager acknowledged these concerns but indicated that this proposal reflected the broad 'direction of travel' within the health service. Councillor Bolger agreed that that it was important that primary care provision should be focused on small local practices.

It having been duly proposed and seconded it was:-

**RESOLVED:** That the comments above be conveyed to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Team as the Committee's response to the consultation document.

71. OXFORDSHIRE AND THE INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

Mr Dean Temple addressed the meeting regarding the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. A copy of his submission is attached as Appendix B to the original copy of these minutes.

The Committee then received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services.

It was proposed by Councillor Doughty and seconded by Councillor Owen that the Council be recommended to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

Councillor Enright thanked Mr Parnes for raising this issue at Council and Mr Temple for his contribution to the meeting. He indicated that the rise of anti-Semitism was a global problem evident throughout Europe and the United States of America. Attacks on schools and synagogues had become more prevalent and, whilst the Council took a broad approach to equality and diversity, he believed that it was important for it to respond to this particular problem.

On being put to the vote the proposition was carried unanimously

**RESOLVED:** That the Council be recommended to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

72. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION – COTSWOLDS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2018-2023

Mr Jim Clemence addressed the meeting regarding the call-in request relating to Cabinet minute no. 96 of 16 January 2019 in respect of the Council's response to the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2018-2023. A copy of his submission is attached as Appendix C to the original copy of these minutes.

In response to a question from Councillor Leffman, Mr Clemence advised that he was uncertain whether Cotswold District Council had fully endorsed the AONB Board's draft Management Plan.

*Subsequently, Mr Clemence stated that consideration of this matter had been deferred until after the forthcoming elections.*

Councillor Enright indicated that the Cabinet had expressed some concern that a National Park Authority would lack a democratic mandate in relation to development control and enquired how such boards were organised. In response, Mr Clemence advised that there were different models and this was an issue that could be discussed in the future. He indicated that National Park Authorities consisted of 60% elected members with 40% being nominated by the Secretary of State. He went on to suggest that planning was primarily an administrative function with larger developments which the local planning authority sought to resist being determined on appeal. The Planning Inspectorate had no democratic mandate and Mr Clemence suggested that the Local Plan was the formative democratic exercise.

Councillor Fenton enquired whether it was anticipated that the area of the proposed National Park was to mirror that of the AONB. Mr Clemence advised that there were no firm proposals but, although it was possible to do so, the AONB Board's instinct was to avoid boundary changes. This could be reviewed if the AONB became an administrative area.

Councillor St John enquired how the Cotswolds AONB Board was constituted and Mr Clemence advised that there were 15 Local Authority representatives, 15 members appointed by the Secretary of State and 7 Parish Council representatives.

Councillor Colston advised that the AONB Board received some £450,000; £150,000 from local authorities with the remainder being met by Defra.

Councillor Leverton questioned how a National Park Authority would be funded and how any funding shortfall would be met. Mr Clemence advised that there were differing models and that he believed that Defra funding was available.

The Committee then received and considered the report of the Head of Democratic Services.

Councillor Leffman proposed that the Committee support the call-in request and refer the matter back to the Cabinet for further consideration. She suggested that officers liaise with Cotswold District Council to ascertain that Authority's views and explore the possibility of retaining an input to the planning process.

The proposition was seconded by Councillor Enright who considered that there were too many unknown factors. Representatives of the AONB Board should be invited to meet to identify the scope for local authority involvement. The creation of a National Park Authority could be financially advantageous in terms of tourism.

Councillor Enright considered that concerns over development control were exaggerated as there was no real prospect of any significant development within the AONB.

Councillor St John advised that he had some knowledge of the operation of a National Park Authority in Sussex and cautioned that the composition of the Authority was such that it was dominated by representatives from semi-urban locations. In consequence, those in rural areas found it difficult to secure planning permissions for agricultural or tourism related projects. Whilst Councillor Enright was correct in his assertion that there was no real prospect of any significant development within the AONB, there was a danger that all forms of development would be precluded. Councillor St John indicated that he was aware of similar concerns being expressed in other National Parks.

Councillor Colston suggested that the Cotswolds differed from the majority of other National Park areas as those were primarily in upland areas. He expressed concern that the nature of the Cotswolds was changing in that it was losing its rurality.

Councillor Leverton suggested that there was a need for further information before the call-in request could be properly assessed and suggested that this could be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

Councillors Leffman and Enright withdrew their proposition and it was subsequently proposed by Councillor Enright and seconded by Councillor Leffman that consideration of the call-in request be deferred pending the receipt of further information. In this way the Committee would be able to track the AONB Board's proposal as it came forward.

Councillor Kelland expressed his support for the proposition but suggested that the Committee should consider the questions it wished to see answered. A representative of the AONB Board could be invited to attend a future meeting to explain the proposal in more detail.

Mr Clemence indicated that the Government Review was to report at the end of the year and it was doubtful that there would be any detailed information available until then.

The proposition was then put to the vote and was carried.

**RESOLVED:** That consideration of the call-in request be deferred pending the receipt of further information.

### 73. LOCAL PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing, together with the Council's Local Plan monitoring report for 2017- 2018.

Councillor Eaglestone requested an update on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Planning Policy Manager advised that, following the adoption of the Local Plan, this was top of the list of priorities within the Planning Service. Officers were aware of the desire to progress this work and had hoped to be able to do so in conjunction with the Local Plan. Unfortunately, the Planning Inspector had declined to do so. However the intention was to progress the introduction of CIL during the current year and professional advice had been sought to assess the best way to proceed. It would be necessary to review and refresh the viability evidence and charging schedule prior to the proposed scheme going forward to examination in Public. It was anticipated that this would take place later in the year.

The Community Infrastructure Levy would enable the Council to secure funding to address the cumulative impact of small scale development.

Councillor Leverton suggested that it would be helpful if reports to the development Control Sub-Committees gave details of the density of proposed developments and the Planning Policy Manager advised that he would raise this with the Development Manager.

Councillor Fenton sought advice on the merits of local communities producing a neighbourhood plan. The Planning Policy Manager advised that, for some reason, there had been a far greater take up in other areas than in West Oxfordshire. One advantage was that those authorities with a neighbourhood plan would benefit from a higher level of CIL receipts once this came into force. Whilst the development of a neighbourhood plan was a significant commitment, it need not be costly depending on the nature of the document with site allocations often requiring a more extensive evidence base. There were however other options for bringing forward specific development sites outside of Neighbourhood Plans such as rural exception sites or a community right to build order but neighbourhood plans need not necessarily be complex, and instead could focus on stipulating more general local policies for example to protect green space or preclude coalescence of settlements. Once adopted, these policies became part of the Local Plan and must be taken into account for development management purposes and as such are worth having in place.

Councillor Cooper enquired what was done to advise parish councils of potential development to assist them in setting their future budgets. The Planning Policy Manager advised that, whilst supplementary planning documents were devised to identify infrastructure requirements and guide the development of larger strategic sites, it is difficult to predict with any certainty the increase in parish precepts in specific areas from speculative development. Whilst allocated sites were known, windfall sites could not by their nature be identified until they were brought forward.

Councillor Leffman queried the number of completions against extant permissions and questioned whether delay on the part of developers in bringing sites forward would impact upon the Council's five year housing land supply. The Planning Policy Manager advised that whilst there had been a slow-down in residential development in recent months probably as a result of uncertainty surrounding Brexit, the Council remained confident that it was able to demonstrate a robust five year housing land supply.

Councillor St John was interested to learn that South Leigh had adopted a simple neighbourhood plan at minimal cost and suggested that North Leigh could apply a similar model.

With regard to the number of persons on the housing waiting list identified in the executive summary, Councillor St John suggested that this should be further expanded to make it clear that it was those in the gold and silver bands who were in actual housing need as there was a danger that the real position would be misinterpreted if too much emphasis was placed on those in the lower priority bronze band. The Planning Policy Manager acknowledged that there is a need to make a clear distinction and advised that there was a breakdown by gold, silver and bronze categories in the main body of the document and it was intended to include this in the executive summary for clarity.

Councillor Beaney suggested that the executive summary should be sent to all town and parish councils as well as appearing on the Council's website.

In response to a question from Mr Kelland, the Planning Policy Manager advised that the amended Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan was now with the Examiner and was hoped to be concluded in the next few months.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8:05pm

Chairman