

Growth Board 25 June 2015

Agenda item 2

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Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme

Recommendations

That the Growth Board:

- (i) Note the revised timetable for the Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme, re-affirm their approval of the Programme and their commitment to its delivery.**
- (ii) Agree to authorise the establishment of a partnership holding account and ask each partner authority to transfer £60,000 to the account for the purposes of financing the Programme**

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Growth Board with an update on the Post-SHMA Strategic Work Programme (the Programme), to seek re-approval for the revised Programme and approve a methodology for payment of associated costs.

Background

2. The Growth Board, at its meeting on 20 November 2014, endorsed the principles of the Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme, designed to consider the implications of the SHMA and associated issues of unmet housing need in line with the Duty to Co-operate. Some key principles which should underpin the post SHMA work were agreed and 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 however that the work must be collaborative and joined up to provide a county wide spatial picture and strategy;
 - 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.

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3. Subsequently officers, through the Growth Board Executive Officer Group (EOG), developed a detailed Work Programme. This is designed to test the potential strategic options to meet the unmet housing needs of Oxford City in order to determine the distribution of this unmet need between the City and District Councils.
4. The Programme is predicated on strategic options being identified by individual districts whilst the County would lead on infrastructure and green belt studies and play a partnership role in the appraisal and assessment of spatial options. The intention of the programme is to present to the Board a proposed housing distribution that will then be taken forward through the Local Plan processes of individual districts.
5. To provide an independent view of the robustness of the Programme arrangements were made through DCLG for a senior representative of the Planning Inspectorate to attend a workshop session with EOG in February of this year. He endorsed the approach being put forward as in his opinion meeting the Duty to Co-operate from a legal perspective and being appropriate under the circumstances, recognising the differing positions and starting points of the respective partner authorities.
6. This endorsement has now been reinforced by the findings of the Cherwell Local Plan Inspector as set out in his recently published report. He states that the formal arrangements in place to address the results of the 2014 SHMA (this Programme) lead him to conclude that Cherwell have met the Duty to Cooperate and that these arrangements should assist in ensuring satisfactory on-going cooperation. It follows therefore that the continued progression of the Programme should therefore help other partners demonstrate on-going cooperation in line with the Duty.

Green Belt Study

7. The partners have appointed a consultant, Land use consultants (LUC) to undertake this study.
8. Importantly it should be noted that this is not a formal review of the Green Belt but rather will form part of the evidence base for future Local Plan reviews of the Green Belt if required. The study will examine the performance of separate identified land parcels agreed by the districts against the five statutory tests of green belt suitability, a necessary precursor to any potential formal review.
9. The Programme acknowledges that it is important that the study looks at the Green Belt as a whole to provide a common basis for assessment, whilst fully taking into account work which may have been previously undertaken. It is

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envisaged that the Green Belt Study will inform the assessment of strategic options.

Critical Friend

10. Fortismere Associates have been appointed to undertake this role to act as moderator/facilitator, to shine the light of objectivity upon areas of disagreement or tension and provide technical guidance at key stages through the process. The main tasks are:
 - To act as a critical friend in the project to facilitate the partners towards agreement , as far as is possible, on the figure for unmet need in Oxford City by critiquing the Oxford SHLAA, the Cundall report commissioned by South, Vale and Cherwell and the Oxford response to this and any other relevant information.
 - To act as a critical friend for the Programme by overseeing a process of check and challenge at specific defined points in the Programme, usually towards the end of specific projects.
 - To act as an on-call technical planning advisor to the Growth Board and EOG.

Strategic Options Development and Assessment

11. A key early element of the Programme is the identification of strategic options for growth by City and District partners. The strategic options are intended to be high-level areas of search rather than defined sites and will have a minimum threshold of 500 dwellings.
12. The next stage would be to test the strategic options identified against a number of agreed criteria to assess their sustainability. These criteria will include key sustainability issues such as infrastructure, water supply, biodiversity etc. Importantly it will also test the suitability of the areas of search against the primary requirement of the programme to meet the housing needs of Oxford City, for example by proximity or transport links.
13. Having completed the sustainability tests the final element of this work will seek to examine detailed transport modelling for the short list of strategic options identified. Owing to the complexity and cost of transport modelling this would only be applied to a shortlist of the strategic options identified at the conclusion of the various sustainability tests referred to above.

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Financial implications

14. In the November 2014 report to the Growth Board officers attempted an initial estimation of the costs of the Programme. As the programme has progressed estimated costs have been confirmed and more detailed estimations have been possible. Accordingly, a revised summary of the Programme costs are detailed in the table below.

Project	Actual/ (Estimated) costs- £
Cost of Critical friend (including provision)	30,000
Cost of Green belt study	51,000
Costs of assessment of strategic options	181,000
Costs of infrastructure planning and modelling	125,000
Water supply and habitat assessments	50,000
Total	437,000

15. The Growth Board are asked to note the costs and agree to approve the payment of an initial sum of £60,000 per authority into a partnership holding account, held by the lead authority, for the purposes of paying the costs of the programme as they arise.

Conclusions

16. The revised Programme demonstrates the progress made to date but also recognises the slippage. Officers believe that the revised timetable is realistic, albeit challenging but acknowledge that it will not be achieved without the full continued commitment of all partners to the programme and ask the Growth Board to reaffirm that full commitment to help ensure satisfactory on-going cooperation..