

To: Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Title of Report: Update on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Programme
Date: 27 September 2022
Report of Giles Hughes: Senior Responsible Officer Oxfordshire Plan
Status: Open

Executive Summary and Purpose:

To provide an update to the Partnership following the announcement of the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans.

How this report contributes to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision Outcomes:

Planning has a key role to play in delivering well-designed infrastructure and homes, sufficient in numbers, location, type, size, tenure, and affordability to meet the needs of our county, as set out in the Strategic Vision [here](#).

Recommendations:

1. Note that Local Plans for the City and Districts will provide the framework for the long-term planning of development in Oxfordshire.
2. Support the principles set out in paragraph 16 of this report outlining how the partners will take forward the Local Plan based approach.
3. Note that the end of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme requires a review of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group's name and terms of reference.
4. Request that Officers develop draft terms of reference for a refreshed Planning Advisory Group of all six principal authorities for consideration at a future meeting.

Appendices: None

Introduction

- 1) The following statement was issued from the leaders of Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council in August:

“The five Local Planning Authorities in Oxfordshire have been working together on a joint plan for Oxfordshire to 2050. It is with regret that we were unable to reach agreement on the approach to planning for future housing needs within the framework of the Oxfordshire Plan.

“Local Plans for the City and Districts will now provide the framework for the long term planning of Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will end and we will now transition to a process focused on Local Plans. The issues of housing needs will now be taken addressed through individual Local Plans for each of the City and Districts. The Councils will cooperate with each other and with other key bodies as they prepare their Local Plans.”

Background

- 2) The Oxfordshire Plan was a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan that was being jointly prepared by the City and District Councils in their roles as local planning authorities. It was intended to focus on strategic issues leaving local matters for individual Local Plans.
- 3) Formal decision making on the Oxfordshire Plan lay with the City and Districts Councils as the relevant local planning authorities, and the final plan would have needed to be adopted by each of them.
- 4) Aspects that the plan needed to cover, in order to be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, included identifying Oxfordshire’s future housing need, and the setting of the future housing requirements for the City and the Districts. These housing provisions would have needed to be agreed by all of the local planning authorities. Individual Local Plans would then set out how these housing requirements would be met and would allocate development sites.
- 5) During 2022 there have been a sequence of discussions and workshops to try and identify a commonly accepted approach between the local planning authorities to the evidence base needed to inform discussion on strategic housing issues. Unfortunately the local planning authorities were unable to reach agreement on the best approach to this. In the absence of an agreed approach to these central questions it was accepted that the Oxfordshire Plan programme will need to come to an end. Instead these issues will now be considered during the development of new Local Plans for the City and Districts.
- 6) Work on the Oxfordshire Plan was guided by input from the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group. This group included the relevant Cabinet Members from each of the Councils and provided a valuable forum to

discuss all aspects of the plan. While the group identified a wide range of issues on which there was common agreement it was not possible to reach an agreed approach on the evidence to inform strategic housing issues.

- 7) The City Council and all of the District Councils have adopted Local Plans currently in place, and the growth committed to in these plans is set. Oxfordshire's local planning authorities are all in the process of developing new Local Plans. These new plans will need to cover the housing questions and other matters that would have been addressed through the Oxfordshire Plan. There is a requirement on the local planning authorities in preparing these Local Plans to satisfy the Duty to Cooperate. The Duty to Cooperate is a legal test that requires cooperation between local planning authorities and other public bodies to maximise the effectiveness of policies for strategic matters in Local Plans. Discussions on strategic housing issues between relevant partners will be an important aspect of the Duty to Cooperate in Oxfordshire. Local Plan examinations will test whether the Duty has been satisfied and consider the soundness of submitted plans.

Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

- 8) A commitment by the Oxfordshire Councils to prepare a joint statutory spatial plan covering the City and all of the Districts was an element in the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal that was agreed with the Government in 2017/18 and runs until March 2023. The Housing and Growth Deal identified £215 million of government funding for Oxfordshire.
- 9) Discussions have taken place with officials from DLUHC to inform them that this element in the Housing and Growth Deal is now no longer being pursued. Further discussions with officials are due to take place in September on the implications of this decision. The decision to bring the Oxfordshire Plan work programme to an end does not affect the councils' commitment to delivery of the other aspects of the Housing and Growth Deal. There was a separate commitment to plan for and support the delivery of 100,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031. All of the City and District Councils have adopted plans in place which plan up to at least 2031 and these collectively plan for the necessary sites for Oxfordshire for the Housing and Growth Deal period.

Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

- 10) The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, which was endorsed by the Partnership in March 2021 and approved by all of the Oxfordshire Councils, contains a vision which sets out a highly ambitious pathway for long-term change towards a more sustainable future.
- 11) The Strategic Vision includes a range of outcomes for Oxfordshire by 2050, defines what good growth means for the county, and includes guiding principles which form an overarching approach to long-term sustainable development.
- 12) The Strategic Vision will continue to help guide the development of Local Plans and other strategic documents in Oxfordshire. Local Plans continue to

provide an important vehicle for developing the spatial ambitions for the County linked to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy

- 13) The Housing and Growth Deal also contained a commitment by the Oxfordshire authorities to implement and roll forward the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy.
- 14) A review of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy is taking place in two parts. The first of these was considered and endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership at its January 2022 meeting. The second phase of the project was related to the Oxfordshire Plan. Officers are considering how this work will now sit alongside and support Local Plan processes. Discussions between officers from the County Council and the City and Districts can explore how to closely integrate the next phase of work with Local Plans. The delivery of the appropriate infrastructure to support development is a key issue for Oxfordshire.

Next Steps

- 15) The bringing to an end of the Oxfordshire Plan work programme means that Oxfordshire's local planning authorities will revert to established mechanisms to bring forward plans for the long-term sustainable development of the County. The City, Cherwell, West, and Joint South and Vale Local Plans will address the key strategic matters set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 16) Discussions between officers from the Councils have identified a number of principles for the Local Plan focussed approach:
 - That we collectively seek to deliver the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision
 - That we ensure a smooth transition from the Oxfordshire Plan back to Local Plans
 - That we continue to satisfy the requirements of the Duty to Cooperate
 - That we continue to work cooperatively and constructively in developing our respective Local Plans and other strategies, assisted by Statement(s) of Common Ground or memoranda of understanding where appropriate.
 - That we continue to work together on the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy.
 - That the understanding achieved of countywide and district issues and priorities, are utilised, where appropriate, to support the preparation of these plans and strategies.
 - That the benefits and learning gained by the Oxfordshire authorities, through their long history of joint working and collaboration on planning and infrastructure matters, continue to be valued in seeking to achieve both common and individual goals.

- 17) To help retain good communication between the Councils on strategic planning matters it is proposed that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group is renamed as the Planning Advisory Group and that its terms of reference are reviewed to set out a broader strategic remit around spatial planning. It would continue to report through to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and be chaired by a member of the partnership. It would involve relevant Cabinet Members from the City and District Councils as local planning authorities, and from the County Council as the mineral planning authority, waste planning authority and key infrastructure provider. The group would be supported by respective Heads of Planning/ Planning Policy Managers who would also attend meetings. This refreshed advisory group could be a useful forum for the Councils to update each other on their respective plans as they are prepared, and for discussion on strategic planning issues.
- 18) Officers from the Councils will continue to engage closely with each other as plans are prepared in order to satisfy the Duty to Cooperate. The terms of reference of the officer Heads of Planning meeting and the Oxfordshire Planning Policy Officers meeting will be reviewed and these meetings will continue to provide a forum for discussion and cooperation.
- 19) Although the Oxfordshire Plan project may have ceased, there has been a lot of background work that will continue to be of value to the planning authorities as they develop their local plans. A wrap up exercise is underway to address consultant contract and human resources matters and help from partners is appreciated on this.
- 20) It is important that Oxfordshire learns from the experiences of the Oxfordshire Plan project and that these lessons inform future strategic or collaborative planning as appropriate.

Legal Implications

- 21) None arising from this report.

Other Implications

- 22) The adoption of a constructive approach from the Oxfordshire Councils to engaging with each other, and with other partners, on strategic planning matters can help deliver the spatial ambitions of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and reduce any impacts from the ending of the Oxfordshire Plan work programme.

Conclusion

- 23) This report outlines the shift in approach for the long-term strategic planning of development in Oxfordshire from the Oxfordshire Plan back to one focussed on district level Local Plans.
- 24) The report outlines principles for how the partners should take forward this new approach in order to help achieve the ambitions of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and to satisfy the Duty to Cooperate.

25) It is recognised that the name and terms of reference for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group are no longer valid, so it is recommended that the group remit be updated to cover a wider range of strategic planning matters involving the County, City and District Councils.

Background Papers

None

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