

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Scrutiny Committee

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2019 AT 6.30 PM

THE FOUNTAIN CONFERENCE CENTRE, HOWBERY PARK, CROWMARSH
GIFFORD

Present:

Ian White (Chairman)
Mocky Khan, Anna Badcock, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Simon Hewerdine, Alexandrine Kantor,
George Levy, Anne-Marie Simpson and Ken Arlett (as substitute for Stefan Gawrysiak)

Apologies:

Stefan Gawrysiak tendered apologies.

Officers:

Emma Baker, Andrew Down, Holly Jones, Tom Rice and Ron Schrieber

Also present:

Councillors Robin Bennett and Leigh Rawlins. Jason Sherwood, Oxfordshire County Council.

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2019 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

2 Declarations of interest

Councillor Kantor declared an interest in agenda item 6, South Oxfordshire Emerging Plan, as she was employed at Culham Science Centre and stated that she would be stepping down from the Committee during any discussion regarding the Culham strategic site.

3 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The Chairman welcomed members to the first Scrutiny Committee meeting of the new Council.



Listening Learning Leading

He reported that the scrutiny function was one of the key checks and balances to the council decision making process, acting as a “critical friend” to the Executive.

He also clarified the respective roles of scrutiny and audit and governance. Scrutiny contributed towards the development of policies and strategy. It could challenge decisions made by the executive and had a role in scrutinising delivery and performance. Whereas audit and governance committee needed to satisfy itself that an adequate control environment was in place and, therefore, contributed towards the assessment of control processes and reviewed the operation of controls and procedural compliance.

4 Public participation

Caroline Baird and Gill Bindoff had registered to speak on agenda item 6, South Oxfordshire Emerging Local Plan 2034 (see Minute 5, below).

5 South Oxfordshire Emerging Local Plan

The committee considered the head of planning’s report which provided an update on the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034 and detailed the implications of the options that officers believed were currently open to the Council. These were:

Option 1: Allow the emerging Local Plan to continue through its examination.

Option 2: Allow the emerging Local Plan to continue through its examination but proactively recommend a series of main modifications to the plan.

Option 3: Withdraw the Local Plan from examination. The Council would then make changes to the plan and then conduct a further Regulation 19 consultation.

Option 4: Withdraw the Local Plan from examination and restart the plan making process.

Under each of these options, the report addressed the following themes:

- Spatial strategy
- Housing need, requirement and supply
- Housing site allocations
- Environmental policies
- Other policies

and sought to identify the main benefits and risks associated with each option as well as the timescales for progressing them. Accordingly, officers recommended that the most appropriate way forward was to progress Option 1.

Holly Jones, planning policy manager, and Emma Baker, planning policy team leader, introduced the report and gave a brief presentation which summarised the risks and benefits of each option and their possible implications for the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bids, the Growth Deal, the 5-year housing land supply, together with their estimated costs. Also present to answer questions were Leigh Rawlins, Cabinet member for planning, Tom Rice, principal planning policy officer, and Jason Sherwood, growth manager, Oxfordshire County Council.

Gill Bindoff addressed the committee. She requested that the Local Plan give a higher priority to tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and requiring carbon neutral buildings and schemes to provide low carbon renewable energy.

Caroline Baird, on behalf of Save Culham Green Belt, addressed the committee. She stated that the current plan was unsound and was in conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and urged the committee to recommend Option 4.

Councillor Robin Bennett read out a statement from Councillor Sue Cooper, Leader of the Council, to Parish Councils which set out the council's housing land supply projections for 2019/20 against the council's housing need with a local plan in place and against the housing targets in the Local Plan.

In response to members' questions, it was reported that:

- If HIF were to be lost, it would result in a large funding shortfall for a number of major infrastructure projects.
- Were the current Local Plan to be withdrawn, developers might seek to challenge individual Neighbourhood Plans.
- The council currently benefited from a 3-year housing land supply under the Growth Deal.
- The emerging Local Plan made a commitment to accommodate 4,950 homes of unmet housing need from Oxford City Council. It was not yet known when the Planning Inspectors would complete their examination of Oxford City's housing need and capacity so it was possible that the numbers might change.
- The adopted Core Strategy was now more than five years old and the NPPF required Local Plans to be reviewed every five years to ensure strategic policies remained up to date.
- The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was published in 2014 and there was a risk that the SHMA would be considered to be out of date as time passed.
- There was a risk that the Growth Deal for all the Oxfordshire authorities could be withdrawn if the Council decided to either significantly delay or restart its Plan making process. In turn, this presented a risk to the Council's relationships with the other Oxfordshire councils and with the Government. It was essential, therefore, to maintain a dialogue with our Growth Deal partners and with the Government.
- Withdrawing the Local Plan would give the Council the opportunity to revisit its environmental and other policies. However, any new or amended policies would need to be evidence based and supported by feasibility and impact assessments which would take time to produce.
- Whilst officers believed that the emerging Local Plan was legally compliant and was the least likely of the four options to result in a successful legal challenge, there was no guarantee that the Plan's adoption would not be subjected to legal challenge.
- The report had sought to assess the risks and benefits of each option, as far as possible. However, there were many unknown factors e.g. the Planning Inspectors' assessment of Oxford City's unmet housing need and the Government's response to any significant delay in the Councils' Local Plan making process, so it was difficult to quantify these risks.

Following further discussion, a motion was moved and seconded, to recommend to Cabinet that Option 1, as set out in the report, be progressed.

On being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

A motion was moved and seconded, that, in view of the late publication of the report and the limited time available to consider it, and the changing nature of evidence, further consideration of the report be deferred to a future meeting to which the following additional information be submitted:

- a detailed assessment of the level of risks relating to each option; and
- further clarification of the 3-year/5-year housing land supply.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

A further motion was moved and seconded, that the future meeting also receive the latest traffic modelling information from Oxfordshire County Council relating to the strategic sites in the emerging Local Plan 2034.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

RESOLVED: That, in view of the late publication of the report and the limited time available to consider it, and the changing nature of the evidence, further consideration of the report be deferred to a future meeting to which the following additional information be submitted:

- a detailed assessment of the level of risks relating to each option; and
- further clarification of the 3-year/5-year housing land supply.
- the latest traffic modelling information from Oxfordshire County Council relating to the strategic sites in the emerging Local Plan 2034.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

Chairman

Date