

Note for the Oxfordshire Growth Board



From the Housing Advisory Sub-Group meeting Tuesday 15 January 2019 at 6.00pm

Six members of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group were present. Cllr Brighouse (Oxfordshire County Council sent apologies)

Attending officers: Andrew Down, Aaron Rosser, Paul Staines, Jennifer Thompson

The meeting considered the items below.

1. Affordable housing programme update

The Group considered a paper and presentation setting out the progress with this programme to date and the position that will be reported to Homes England at the annual review meeting on 21 January 2019. The Group also noted the paper on the Affordable Housing Programme sent to the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel for their meeting on 24 January.

Members discussed the challenges involved in bringing sites forward to the stage of delivery in time to meet the year-end targets. It was noted that officers were confident that the target of 148 homes in Year 1 would be delivered but more work was required in the last quarter to ensure that the agreed target for delivery, contractual start on site was achieved.

Members noted that for some councils the Growth Deal Affordable Housing programme (AHP) would be delivered through wholly owned council delivery vehicles. Challenges for council's own housing developments include securing planning permission, loan funding, and/or firm contracts for the work. However, councils' housing companies could bring forward smaller and more difficult sites and could exert a greater degree of control over both the process and outcomes.

There were also considerable challenges in encouraging Registered Providers (RP) and developers to provide additionality on their sites. Lead officers and lead councillors at each district council had new and crucial roles as enablers and facilitators in bringing forward both market and affordable housing units efficiently and effectively both pre- and post- planning permission and especially in overcoming challenges on complex sites.

In a buoyant market such as the one that has existed in Oxfordshire for some years private developers were often reluctant to complete affordable housing early in the development as this added to the up-front costs and affected their cash-flow: on large phased developments affordable housing could be required to be delivered in each phase and this was a mechanism that had been used in Oxford City as part of the

planning process as well as part of development agreements where the city was a landowner.

Members noted that Oxford City Council had proposed using modular housing for eight units on two small sites. This had not proved feasible so these would be retendered for standard on-site construction. This would delay these schemes to Year 2.

Other initiatives were noted. Cherwell were taking a strategic approach and providing certainty in their processes to assist developers in bringing sites forward. South and Vale were approaching owners and RPs to bring forward sites where planning permissions were less likely to be implemented. West Oxfordshire District Council was looking at borrow-to-let arrangements and a scheme to buy part-exchanged houses suitable for low costs discounted market housing.

The Housing Advisory Sub-Group recommends:

- **that all district councils make best possible efforts to ensure their agreed affordable housing units in the Growth Deal programme are ready to deliver to the agreed timetable;**
- **that district council officers and lead members formally and informally share good practice which assists the timely delivery of proposed affordable housing schemes.**

2. Housing from Infrastructure Delivery

The Group considered a paper and presentation giving an overview of agreed infrastructure projects for Year 1; the progress to date; and partnership working and reporting arrangements.

The Group noted that the trajectory of the houses delivered will be skewed towards the latter years of the Deal due to the lag time between the infrastructure being planned for and delivered and the resulting delivery of housing. The challenge was not just to ensure that the infrastructure was delivered but that it then resulted in market confidence and the accelerated housing provision identified in the Housing and Growth Deal. Consequently, good communications with developers both in the planning stage and as the infrastructure projects progressed were crucial.

The Group noted officer's view that the rate of development on larger sites was slowing at the moment, particularly those areas which had experienced a lot of development, but building on small sites remained healthy. The challenge was to facilitate house building rates at a suitable level to deliver the Deal's targets.

3. Work plan and future meetings

The Housing Advisory Sub Group will meet on 12 March and 21 May.

The Group agreed to consider at the next meeting:

- Key lessons and good practice from work to deliver additional affordable housing on large strategic sites
- Innovative finance models for affordable housing and to help deliver market housing on small sites.

Councillor Susan Brown, Chair of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group, (Leader of Oxford City Council)