

To: Oxfordshire Growth Board
Title of Report: Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Update
Date: 24 September 2019
Report of: Bev Hindle, Director Oxfordshire Growth Board
Status: Public

Executive Summary and Purpose:

This report provides an update for Oxfordshire Growth Board on the progress of producing the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It sets out the work done to date, the next steps and provides information on the timing and programme of the work.

Recommendations:

- 1) That the Growth Board endorses the proposed updates to the timeline and scope of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050;
- 2) That the Director Oxfordshire Growth Board seek agreement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for this

Introduction

1. Production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is one of the four key workstreams of the Housing and Growth Deal. The Plan is being prepared by a joint team on behalf of the five local planning authorities (Oxford, Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire) with support from the County Council. All of Oxfordshire’s authorities are committed to working together to produce a sound Oxfordshire Plan 2050 which sets out a spatial strategy and policies for the long-term future of the county. It will allow us to set out a joined-up approach to planning for the next 30 years, ensuring sustainable plan-led growth on our locally-defined terms.
2. The Housing and Growth Deal committed to a very challenging timescale; however, this is a complex project with many inputs and interested parties and complex approval processes within and between the partners involved. Whilst work has been progressing well with preparatory work, evidence base gathering, testing and co-ordination with other projects, the timetable needs to expand to reflect the time required to ensure our evidence is robust and responds to the ever changing context around us, but also to allow even more engagement to test this evidence to ensure the public are properly engaged in the process at every key stage. The Plan programme has been kept under review and regular conversations have been held with the Government about the right approach to take to ensure the Plan is the best it can be and meets Oxfordshire’s needs.

3. This report provides an update on work carried out so far and on proposed amendments to the timetable for producing the Plan to allow for more collaboration with stakeholders and to best align with linked projects.

Work to date

4. A dedicated Oxfordshire Plan team is in place to lead this work, with the support of a Liaison Group of authority planners, the Heads of Planning Group and the Member Sub-group. LEP representatives and County Council officers and members also attend these meetings
5. Work on the Plan so far has focussed on generating the options for the Plan, engaging with communities and stakeholders, and developing the evidence base to inform the choices that the Plan-making bodies will need to make. 1200 individuals and organisations have signed up to be part of the plan making process, many of which provided us with feedback on our first consultation document earlier in the year or attended one of our roadshow or stakeholder events.

Collaboration with linked projects

6. As we continue with the plan-making process, there will need to be close collaboration with other projects and partners going forwards. To make the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 the best plan we can and to ensure that it can withstand scrutiny, it will need to take into account and respond to a range of other projects, strategies, plans and external influences relevant to Oxfordshire. Similarly, the Plan will also work directly alongside and feed into other key Oxfordshire strategies and shape them so that there is an ongoing iterative relationship. There is also opportunity in some cases to collaborate in using a common or shared evidence base, which will also help to ensure a joined-up approach across key projects.
7. It is important that the technical work to develop the Oxfordshire Plan is undertaken from a 'neutral' position because if the Plan were to be developed with a fixed pre-emptive position about external factors beyond its control, then there is a significant risk that it would not be sound. For example, whilst it is acknowledged that there may not be endorsement from all of the authorities for significant projects like the Expressway, the Plan must take account of it in the evidence base. The local authorities reserve their rights individually or collectively to support or oppose such projects but for the Plan to be robust they must be fully considered.
8. The ongoing work related to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and rail corridor through Oxfordshire, will all influence the strategic links and wider geography within which Oxfordshire sits. The work on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc seeks to improve connectivity for communities and businesses and support economic growth across the key common sectors and strengths of the region. The Expressway project seeks to improve road connectivity between Oxford and Cambridge, whilst East-West Rail seeks to improve rail connectivity across the area. Whilst the plans for East-West Rail are agreed, indeed the first phase of East-West Rail is complete and operational already, the Arc and Expressway projects are at much earlier stages and there remains uncertainty about how they might shape Oxfordshire.

9. Another shaping growth in Oxfordshire is the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategyⁱ. It is an ambitious long-term vision and strategy for economic growth in the county to 2040. It positions Oxfordshire as one of the top-three global innovation ecosystems, highlighting its world-leading science and technology cluster, and to be a pioneer for the UK and emerging transformative technologies and sectors. This position helped to inform the Housing & Growth Deal, and the work undertaken by the LEP to understand Oxfordshire's economy and its growth potential provides economic analysis and forecasting information and evidence base including delivering key infrastructure and social and environmental benefits.
10. We also recognise that the Plan needs to consider major influences beyond Oxfordshire, particularly strategic growth in areas such as Swindon, Reading and the Midlands, as projects in those areas will impact on residents and businesses in places such as Faringdon, Henley and Banbury. Duty to co-operate conversations are on-going with the relevant bodies to ensure that strategic matters and cross-boundary issues are picked up.

Requirements of a statutory plan

11. We have set the bar for the Plan very high in committing to produce a statutory plan for Oxfordshire and in setting a planning framework with such a long-term vision to 2050. The Plan needs to be approved by all five district councils' democratic processes at key stages. This helps to ensure the same transparency and public scrutiny as for existing local plans. The decision to publish or submit documents at each stage of the process of Plan production lies with the five district councils as the Oxfordshire Plan will become part of each authority's local plan.
12. Furthermore, being a statutory plan, it will need to be found sound by a Planning Inspector before it can be adopted by each of the councils, which means it also needs a robust evidence base and environmental assessment. While this was known at the time of agreeing the original timetable, it is only once work begins that you get a better, more accurate appreciation of the time and resource required to deliver this robust work iteratively and effectively with the Plan.
13. Because the requirements of national planning policy and guidance are generally aimed at local plans rather than strategic plans (particularly those covering such a long time horizon), we're also learning from the progress (and problems) encountered by other front-runner regions working on joint plans, such as in the West of England, so we can refine our own processes and evidence base for the Plan.

Programme for the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050

14. As set out above, production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is a complex project with many partners and many more interested parties and stakeholders. We want to make sure it is the best Plan possible, making sure we get it right for Oxfordshire so future generations can reap the rewards of sound long-term thinking framework for growth.
15. Given all this, we're keeping the timetable for the project under constant review and are holding regular conversations with the Government about the right

approach to take to ensure the Plan is the best it can be and meets Oxfordshire’s needs.

16. The consultation that was held earlier in the year was focussed on the high-level vision, objectives and aspirations that will shape the rest of the Plan. The next consultation will be focussed on testing the Spatial Growth options for the Plan. (Together these two consultations will form the Regulation 18 “options” consultation.) We want to develop some of the ideas and challenges put forward through the consultation to date with further engagement and testing over the autumn and winter. This along with other background work required to get to the second consultation means our current intention is to hold the next formal stage of public consultation in Spring/Summer 2020.
17. The revised programme outlined below represents a change to the both the timetable agreed in the Housing and Growth Deal and the approved Local Development Scheme but would ensure that there is enough time to engage appropriately and produce the required supporting evidence to facilitate a meaningful and productive consultation period to inform the future stages of producing the Plan. Introducing this new additional stage of Regulation 18 consultation gives the public further opportunity to comment and be involved in the Plan and its evidence base, before it reaches the statutory Regulation 19 stage when scope to comment is more limited. The authorities are keen to promote this additional engagement and transparency in the process.

Oxfordshire Plan Stage	New Proposed Date	Date in published Growth Deal	Status
<i>Draft Statement of Common Ground</i>		<i>31 March 2018</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
<i>Joint JSSP Project Board established</i>		<i>July 2018</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
<i>Stakeholder Launch</i>		n/a	<i>December 2018 - Achieved</i>
<i>Consultation on Vision & Objectives (Reg. 18 part 1)</i>		n/a	<i>February/March 2019 - Achieved</i>
Further Engagement on key technical challenges arising from Reg. 18 Pt 1	November/Dec 2019	n/a	new additional engagement
Consultation on Spatial Growth Options (including scale and Broad Locations of Growth) (Reg. 18 part 2)	June/July 2020	n/a	New additional stage of public consultation
Consultation on Submission (Draft) Plan (Reg. 19)	November/December 2020	30 October 2019	
Submission	March 2021	31 March 2020	
Examination	June–September 2021	Subject to Planning Inspectorate	
Inspectors Report	December 2021	Subject to Planning Inspectorate	
Adoption	March 2022	31 March 2021	

Financial Implications

18. A decision to extend the time period for the project would require additional funding, primarily to cover staff costs for the additional time preparing the Plan, and to undertake any additional work for example additional engagement/consultation or technical studies / evidence base. The financial implications of the extension will be addressed through Housing & Growth Deal funding.

Legal Implications

19. Moving away from the timetable in the Growth Deal requires the agreement of the Government; beyond that there are no legal implications to changing the timetable. It would require an updated LDS to be approved by each district but this can happen with a committee report to each council in due course if appropriate.

Other Implications

20. Extending the programme of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 could have an impact on when the Local Planning Authorities next review their Local Plans. However, this risk is considered smaller than the risk of having an unsound Oxfordshire Plan 2050 which could set back further policy development more substantially.

Conclusion

21. Oxfordshire Growth Board is asked to consider the outline proposed timeline to produce the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and endorse this approach.

Report Author:	Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director
Contact information:	bev.hindle@oxfordshire.gov.uk

ⁱ Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy: A Partner in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, July 2019) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/lis>