



To: Oxfordshire Growth Board
Date: 11 March 2020
Report of: Growth Board Scrutiny Panel
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 4 March 2020

Purpose of report: To present recommendations from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 4 March 2020 to the Growth Board.

Scrutiny Lead Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Growth Board
Members: Scrutiny Panel.

Recommendation: That the Oxfordshire Growth Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Panel would like to thank Councillor Barry Wood (Leader – Cherwell District Council and Chair of the Arc Leaders Group), Bev Hindle (Growth Board Director), Stefan Robinson (Growth Board Manager), Caroline Green (Assistant Chief Executive – Oxford City Council), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive - West Oxfordshire District Council), Susan Harbour (Strategic Partnerships Manager - South and Vale district councils) and Anita Bradley (Monitoring Officer - Oxford City Council) for attending the meeting to answer questions.
2. The Panel welcomed Councillor Barry Wood as the Oxfordshire representative Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Group to update the Panel on the wider composition of over 30 different local authorities within the Arc and their ambitions. Councillor Wood clarified that the Oxford to Cambridge Arc is a concept and that it differs from the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, also that the matters of economic growth are at its forefront in the economic review. The

Panel discussed the Joint Declaration of Ambition between the Government and the Arc with regards to the potential for the Arc to be a funding source for Oxfordshire Plan 2050 incorporating environmental concerns and Zero Carbon strategies.

Recommendation 1: That the Growth Board, in its future involvement in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, continues to champion and seek deliverability specifically against the following section of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc joint declaration between HM Government and local partners, which the Scrutiny Panel supports:

“We value the natural environment highly and aim to meet our economic and housing ambitions while overall improving, rather than degrading, the environment in the Arc. We want better places to live, which are beautiful and inspiring, to benefit the Arc’s residents today as well as tomorrow. The Government has already set out its intention for the Arc to embody England’s 25 Year Environment Plan, which we will work together to deliver, including through planning for local natural capital. We want new developments to use intelligent and sensitive design to create or enhance habitats and improve habitat 8 connectivity, in situ and in the surrounding area. We also want to improve access to the environment for existing and new communities in order to improve health and wellbeing.”

3. The Panel discussed concerns over the future of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and speculation around decisions on the Oxfordshire section of the expressway. The Panel also discussed at length the funding for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal and the need to have elected councillors from the Growth Board as representatives within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc governance structures.

Recommendation 2: That any representation from the Growth Board within the formal governance structures of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc should remain reserved for elected councillors within the Growth Board.

4. The Panel discussed how the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 could help influence the local standards of housing developments. The Panel also debated the need for smaller milestones to reduce carbon emissions from developments by 2050. In addition, the need for funding from Government to retrofit existing houses and make future developments inexpensive to retrofit with regards to Zero Carbon emissions.

Recommendation 3: That the Growth Board encourage Government to put in place a series of phased incremental 5-year targets to reduce carbon emissions from new and existing homes to achieve Net Zero Carbon emissions by 2050. This could be an effective measure to increase the focus on realistic delivery towards this target.

Recommendation 4. In view of the Government’s target to reduce carbon emissions by 2050, the Growth Board recognise the significant need for a national household retrofitting programme in addition to ensuring current developments are inexpensive to retrofit. Furthermore, make the case to Government for investment support.

5. The Panel considered a report from Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive Oxford City Council, on Zero Carbon Housing. The Panel also discussed the higher than average costs for modular builds and Zero Carbon Housing as per industry standards in contrast to Greencore housing development site at Southmoor where developers were able to achieve Zero Carbon housing standards within the same financial envelope as traditional methods.
6. In addition to using Greencore housing development site as a model as recommended by the Panel at its previous 23rd January 2020 meeting and also noting that this approach might not be consistent across other developers the Panel also recognised a need for more accessible mortgage products in the form of local schemes, variable stamp duty, incentives for landlords and support from lenders.

Recommendation 5: That the Growth Board recognise the higher than average purchase price for modular build and Zero Carbon housing built by modern methods, setting out to Government the need for more accessible mortgage products.

7. The Panel considered the challenges that have arisen in the Quarter 3 Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report with regards to the complexity of delivering different housing projects and the issues faced to progress it through local planning authority committees. The Panel recognised that the Housing and Growth Deal in conjunction with Oxfordshire Plan 2050 needs realistic and flexible timelines. The Panel also considered the need to get a response from the Government on the extension requested by the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 team on its timeline.

Recommendation 6: That the Growth Board, in considering the Housing and Growth Deal Progress report, seek to develop a reflective paper on experiences to date concerning the deliverability of the Housing and Growth Deal including mitigation activities and future risks. Furthermore, that the Growth Board ask the Government to respond to the request for extension made by officers on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timelines and that this should reflect on the need to set flexible and realistic timescales for any future investment agreements with Government following an audit of existing arrangements.

8. The Panel also received feedback from Health and Wellbeing Board workshop with regards to loneliness and networking in local communities.

Future Work

9. As well as reviewing the Growth Board's response to these recommendations at its next meeting on 28 May 2020, the Panel will also be considering in detail:
 - The Growth Board Revised Terms of Reference, for subsequent approval by each constituent council.
 - Q4 Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report and Financial summary
 - Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Update

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