

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Housing

Advisory Sub-Group

**HELD ON TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2020 AT 6.30 PM
ST ALDATES ROOM, OXFORD TOWN HALL OX1 1BX**

Present:

Councillors Susan Brown (Chair), Liz Brighthouse, John Donaldson, Neil Fawcett, Jeff Haine and Mike Rowley

Officers: Caroline Green, Kevin Jacob and Paul Staines

21 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutions; declarations of interest; Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Robin Bennett, (South Oxfordshire District Council) and Councillor Bethia Thomas, (Vale of White Horse District) who was substituted by Councillor Neil Fawcett.

There were no declarations of interest.

22 Notes of the meeting held on 5 November 2019

The notes of the meeting held on 5 November 2019 were received.

23 Zero Carbon Housing Presentation

The sub-group received a presentation from Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive, Oxford City Council on low/zero carbon housing from a national and Oxfordshire context including relevant case studies.

The presentation set out the opportunities low/zero carbon housing offered to reduce carbon emissions from housing and the challenges to achieving this in respect of both new build and existing housing. It was intended to present a paper on low/zero carbon housing present to the Growth Board which the sub-group's discussion would inform.

Key points of the presentation and discussion included:

- Individual climate change emergency declarations had been made by all the Oxfordshire local authorities.
- Residential use represented a significant proportion of overall Oxfordshire emissions.

- UK Policy and Legislation 2007-2009. It was noted that in 2015 HM Government had dropped a commitment to only building zero carbon homes by 2020, but in 2019 had announced a commitment to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- A concern around the 2019 Future Homes Standard on energy efficiency and low carbon heating currently subject to consultation was that although it proposed a minimum standard it also included provision to remove flexibility for local authorities to go above the standard.
- Meeting UK targets required near complete elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from UK building and emission reductions had currently stalled with insufficient efforts to adapt the UK's housing stock.
- Achievement of net zero energy housing would require meeting the challenges of:
 - Performance and compliance
 - Addressing the skills gap
 - Retrofitting of existing homes
 - Building new homes
 - Finance and funding
- National policy was not yet clear, but it was expected that there would be significant shifts soon.
- 80% of Oxfordshire homes for 2031 had already been built meaning a key challenge was to improve the energy of existing stock, but retrofitting existing stock was significantly more expensive than building new stock to low/zero carbon efficiency standards.
- Challenges for local authorities' existing stock included a lack of user demand, a lack of clear and consistent HM Government policy, comparatively high costs and inefficient supply chains, a lack of finance and incentive schemes and a mismatch between costs and benefits to landlords and tenants of retrofitting.
- Success factors for changing existing stock included clear policy and a long-term strategy, public sector subsidy or access to low cost finance, a whole house approach to retrofit, a trusted point of contact and good consumer protection. Good practice already existed in Oxfordshire.
- Key local policies and good practice to encourage new zero carbon housing provision included Local Plans, Area Action Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents, but these did have limits, the encouragement of developers and direct involvement in the development of strategic sites and working with developers.
- Local case studies included Hope Close Banbury, a development of 11 certified passive homes commissioned and developed by Cherwell District Council, 25 carbon neutral homes at Springfield meadows, Southmoor and the Bicester Eco-Centre. Nationally noteworthy projects included the Turner Prize winning Goldsmith Street in Norwich.

In terms of Oxfordshire emissions by economic sector, Members referred to the private rented residential sector noting that included significant institutional landlords within the county including the universities. It was felt that the universities might be encouraged to further improve the efficiency of their housing stock, whilst appreciating the significant difficulties associated with retrofitting existing housing stock. The University of Oxford's move to the Passivhaus standard was welcomed and it was acknowledged that Oxford Brookes University was a world leading centre of innovation regarding low and zero carbon housing.

Members acknowledged that the cost of new low/carbon housing was currently around 10-15% greater than a conventional build and discussed the challenges and possible solutions to this, but also noted that whilst difficult to accurately forecast, retrofitting costs

were significantly higher which, it was felt, strengthened the case to move forward with low/zero carbon housing in new stock.

Lack of knowledge amongst the public, (particularly of homeowners and private landlords) of the substantial long-term cost savings of maintaining low/zero carbon housing in respect of energy bills was felt to be a significant barrier to increasing demand for low/carbon housing. Currently, it was felt that long term economic savings and environmental benefits were not readily apparent to consumers and more widely, when compared against the current extra initial cost of energy efficient new housing. Stimulation of demand, leading to greater provision and lower unit cost was a key challenge as well as providing a strong economic cast to homeowners and landlords to invest their properties.

It was noted that lack of low/zero carbon housing construction skills was also a significant challenge in seeking to encourage greater provision and the work being undertaken by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership in this area was welcomed.

Members also strongly felt that the societal benefits of fuel efficiency from low/zero carbon homes went far wider than simply environmental and had the capacity to also reduce fuel poverty amongst the most disadvantage groups with a resulting positive impact on the public sector overall including the NHS and benefit expenditure. This was felt to be an important lobbying point with HM Government.

A detailed discussion took place regarding how the Growth Board might potentially add value and engage in the most effective way with existing groups and networks to facilitate the provision of low/zero carbon housing across Oxfordshire, particularly in encouraging the next steps from demonstrator projects to a pipeline of low/zero carbon housing provision at scale from specialist providers which also fitted into the encouragement of modern methods of construction, (MMC). It was suggested that such an emphasis could be part of a future approach in engaging with HM Government, including Homes England. The social housing sector had to date played a key role.

Members felt given the role of the sub-group and the link between the Growth Board to new housing provision through the Growth Deal it was important to strongly encourage new builds to meet the best possible standards and that this might be an area where local authorities and potentially the Growth Board could have a role, notwithstanding the role of HM Government to play its part in setting national policy and market interventions.

24 Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Update

The sub-group noted a report to the January Growth Board setting out historical Q2 progress for 2019/2020 including the Homes from Infrastructure and Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programmes. Paul Staines, Growth Deal Service Delivery Manager also gave a presentation on latest developments in respect of the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme, (OAHP).

Key points of the presentation and discussion included:

- Considerable effort was continuing to be taken across the county to maximise the delivery and spend of the programme, but there remained unallocated budget in Year 2.

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, (MHCLG) had indicated that it intended to audit all aspects of the Housing and Growth Deal including the OAHP.
- It remained necessary to demonstrate to MCHLG that any gap in Year 2 of the OAHP could be made up in Year 3 and discussions with MHCLG and Homes England were ongoing.
- New initiatives included use of Section 106 top up funding for the OAHP, use of right to buy receipts within Oxford City to support the OAHP, counting of some nil grant S106 housing units towards the OAJP and use of some nil grant units to calculate average grant rates, allowing more grant to be used where needed.
- It was an important time for the OAHP with partners focused on using new flexibilities to negotiate with Homes England to maximum effect.

25 Dates of future meetings

Dates for future meetings were noted.

Kevin Jacob was asked to look at an alternative venue for the proposed December 2020 meeting.