

Public speakers

2 June 2020

Questions

1. Julian Benning on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire.

When considering the impacts of Covid 19, NNGO challenges the implicit assumption that the Arc will go ahead unchanged, along with the Expressway. The whole concept of the Arc should be looked at again and adjusted to meet the joint challenges of post-COVID economic recovery, the biodiversity catastrophe, UK food security and retention of best and most versatile agricultural land, and climate change (only the latter making any impact on the text of the documents).

Whilst Oxfordshire may trumpet the claim that the area is one of only three net contributors to the Exchequer, we see this as a rather sad indictment of the imbalance of our society and a justification for a greater sharing of investment across the UK.

NNGO repeats here again that documents relating to the future development of Oxfordshire should prioritise the health and well-being of its residents and environment, with economic growth seen as one potential means of delivering this rather than an objective in its own right.

It is disappointing therefore to see that the OxIS brief still puts economic growth as the overall driver, with its first objective to 'set out the priority strategic infrastructure investment needed to support sustainable, clean and inclusive growth in Oxfordshire'.

It is also widely recognised that the existing Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy was not particularly strong in its recognition of the vital role of green infrastructure, nor in collating the evidence base necessary to attract and guide further funding in this area. The current brief and scope of work for the revision of OxIS must therefore address this.

Can the Growth Board please explain:

- a) How will it put environmental considerations, including climate change but also biodiversity, food production and access to green space, at the heart of the OxIS revision, including decision-making on spatial strategy, and how will this be reflected in the brief to external consultants?

Answer provided: *It is recognised that the OxIS update will need to be developed in the context of a changed policy context- indeed this is one of the reasons why it is being updated. In particular, the updated objectives as set out in section 2 of the Outline Project Brief and Scope of Work reflect the emerging Growth Board themes of the Environment (including addressing the climate emergency), Health, Placemaking, Productivity and Connectivity, and will also link to the emerging policy priorities of the Oxfordshire Plan. The external consultants work will need to build on the latest evidence base, including on healthy place shaping, digital infrastructure, green infrastructure and climate action which will help ensure that OxIS reflects infrastructure priorities across all these areas.*

The OxIS update is proposed to be carried out in two stages to align with, and support, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 (spatial options) and Regulation 19 (submission) consultations, allowing OxIS to develop iteratively taking into account feedback received through the consultation processes. It is expected to form the infrastructure evidence base for the Plan.

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- b) Which partners/stakeholders does it propose to work with to ensure that the evidence base is available and used to best effect to support the necessary step-change of investment in Oxfordshire's green infrastructure and to guide any funding obtained to where it can be most effective (rather than simply a rather random wish-list of projects, no matter how noteworthy)?

Answer provided: *It is planned that we will engage with a wide variety of key infrastructure stakeholders including those involved in the delivery of green infrastructure, utilities, education, health facilities and transport. This will ensure that we have the most up-to-date data set for OxIS, and that relevant policy and strategy is understood and reflected in the work. Wider engagement on the draft Stage 1 study is planned in early 2021 (alongside the first Oxfordshire Plan consultation) which will ensure that wider stakeholders have the opportunity to review and comment on outputs prior to finalisation of the study.*

2. Charlotte Ritchie

In view of the fact that:

- 1) Any investment in infrastructure to boost local economies should and will take place in the north of England, and that
- 2) Oxford's 'housing need' is unclear, and that
- 3) The Green Belt, once destroyed cannot be reclaimed, that its destruction contradicts the aims of sustainability, biodiversity and ecosystemic balance, and in particular government policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs:7-14,117-123 and 133-147, and that
- 4) Working practices including the use of offices and transport, post Covid 19, will change.

Is it not time for the Growth Board to request a review of the local plan, and to meet any unmet housing need using brownfield areas, and in particular, redeveloping the Botley Road/Western gateway to the City (currently occupied by carparks and superstores) and the Oxford Business Park areas that are within the ring road, and which are currently under-utilised and are likely to become more so?

Answer provided: *The Growth Board oversees the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which when adopted by the District and City Councils following a favourable examination by the Planning Inspectorate, will set an overarching strategic planning framework for Oxfordshire. It is not the Growth Board's place to request a review of individual Local Plans, as asked by the question, that is a matter for the individual statutory planning authorities.*

What can be said is that the Oxfordshire Plan is still very much in early development, and the content of the Plan is a matter for ongoing discussion with the public, through several engagements that are publicised on the Plan's website. The Plan will include a spatial strategy which seeks to direct where future growth is best planned and equally where it is best avoided; however, at this time, it is not intended that it will provide specific allocations or detail on individual sites, such as those mentioned in the question.

Addresses:

3. Giles Lewis, Cherwell Development Watch Alliance.

We have recently sent a letter to Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government asking him to intervene to stop the Oxford and Cherwell Local Plans from being adopted. The letter was signed by Layla Moran, twenty four other councillors,

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planning professionals, and community groups. It explains in detail that Oxford's housing 'need' has been exaggerated and is unrealistic, and our evidence is reinforced by the Office for National Statistics' projection of a decline in Oxford City's population over the plan period (published in March 2020, after the Inspectors' initial conclusions).

The report to the Growth Board drafted by Bev Hindle focuses on the impact that the pandemic is having on local delivery against the Deal Programme. In this context it should be noted that Planning consultant Barton Willmore forecasts that net new homes completed nationally will drop by one third over the next five years. Bev Hindle's report also seeks an endorsement of the extension of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan timeline so that the Plan can continue on its trajectory of economic growth, more homes and more infrastructure. We are disappointed to note that the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan continues to be set within the context of Oxfordshire being a contributor to the 'Arc' and wider sub-regional ambitions.

Shouldn't the impact of Covid-19 be seen as an opportunity to revise Oxford's already greatly-overstated housing need assessments downwards, to a level which reflects true need, not one based on expectations of economic growth which are ever more unrealistic.

Response provided: *As set out in the previous answer, it is not the place of the Growth Board to comment on individual local plans, as those matters are best taken up with the relevant local planning authorities. The Oxfordshire Plan is looking to plan for the next 30 years, and it will need to take account of expected changes in the context in which it will sit. This will need to be reflected on and responded to through the evidence base that is gathered. The public and partners are invited from 2 June to contribute to this discussion through the [Oxfordshire Open Thought](#) platform to provide their views on exactly these types of issues. We are inviting people to give their thoughts, knowledge and expertise to help plan for Oxfordshire's future. This will help inform ongoing work and wider separate statutory consultations that will be taking place next year.*