

## **The preparation of Joint Spatial Plan for Oxfordshire – Overview.**

### 1. Introduction

Several Councils in England are considering the establishment of Joint Spatial Plans following the work undertaken on statutory and non-statutory plans/planning frameworks in areas such as Cambridgeshire, Greater Norwich and the West of England. There is a recognition that a strategic approach is required for coherence in plan making and where economic and housing challenges and infrastructure delivery crosses administrative boundaries.

Government policy is to encourage joint planning, away from single local plans, where it can help overcome constraints to strategic planning and delivery and streamline plan making. Recent changes to the Housing and Planning Act, Neighbourhood Planning Bill, the Local Plans Expert Group (LPEG) recommendations and Housing White Paper (2017) all support this direction of travel. Agreed Devolution deals have included strategic planning activities across regions to help address strategic housing and employment targets and allocations, strategic infrastructure priorities and delivery, with long term commitment to a long-term plan.

The key benefits of joint planning arrangements have been seen providing a better alignment of strategic planning, infrastructure investment and delivery; a more coherent framework for investment confidence and regional growth as well as the more effective use of scarce resources across the public sector.

The recent National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) report on the development of a Cambridge - Oxford growth corridor identifies the potential for increasing growth across the corridor and the need for strategic co-ordination and investment. The report highlights the challenges that exist to securing the economic potential of the corridor. This growth corridor is proposed as one of three strategic priority areas for Government investment, together with the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands. A joint response from the Oxfordshire Growth Board is needed to plan and secure essential infrastructure investment. A Joint Spatial Plan will provide the necessary focus at the western end of the corridor.

The recently adopted and emerging Local Plans across Oxfordshire provide for substantial employment and housing growth, which is also reflected in the refreshed OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan, but new development requires significant infrastructure investment. While each Local Plan has its own timetable and sovereignty, infrastructure needs do not stop at administrative boundaries but extend beyond them as working collaboratively for 18 months to address the unmet housing needs of Oxford highlighted. A Joint Spatial Plan will provide a tool for considering the future growth of the County in a more coherent, coordinated, long term way than is possible through separate Local Plans, Local Transport Plans and the OxLEP SEP.

The Oxfordshire Growth Board is recommended to create a Joint Spatial Plan to help ensure that growth locations and investment are considered, funded and delivered in an integrated and effective manner. A Joint Spatial Plan will also have been subject to public consultation and political oversight at each of its stages as a requirement for it becoming a Development Plan Document (DPD).

### 2. Rationale for a Joint Spatial Plan

A Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) for Oxfordshire is proposed for development by the six local authorities in County including the County Council to bring together the different responsibilities for Planning, housing, employment, transport, minerals and waste.

Its purpose is to provide a strategic, overarching vision and framework to help deliver the number of new homes, land for employment purposes and the supporting infrastructure that we anticipate will be needed over the next 30 years. By working on this strategy together, the aim is to ensure that development is sustainable and takes account of the fact that people live, work and travel across council boundaries, which means that what happens in one area affects its neighbours.

By being clearly linked to a statutory process (and reflecting the direction of travel set out by the DCLG in the Housing White Paper February 2017) it will have public accountability & transparency in a way that the Post SHMA process did not.

### 3. Joint Spatial Plan Content and Scope

We recognise that what happens in one District affects its neighbours and because the Government imposes a duty on adjoining local authorities to co-operate, the six councils in Oxfordshire have agreed to work together to consider strategic planning matters more closely.

Most Joint Spatial Plans include the full range of planning topics, including housing, employment, commercial, leisure and other uses, transport and infrastructure, and environment. However, there is currently no standard template for the content of Joint Spatial Plans so the scope is for the working group and Oxfordshire Growth Board to determine.

The six councils agree that it is important to understand the needs of the Oxfordshire housing market area in a way which provides clarity for detailed plans and avoids duplication of costs and effort. Through the Joint Spatial Plan, as a strategic plan establishing the Development Framework for Oxfordshire, the six councils will have prepared a framework to guide the long-term growth in housing and employment, through transport and utilities investment, whilst respecting the environment across Oxfordshire.

The Joint Spatial Plan will set out the spatial strategy (where things should go and why) that identifies the best locations where new growth might be located across Oxfordshire, based on a regularly updated housing market assessment. It will have taken key decisions within which Local Plans will then sit and help speed up their preparation and revision, as well as shaping the delivery of the Local Transport Plan and the OxLEP SEP.

It is proposed that the Joint Spatial Plan should:

- Consider longer term planning by building on the current planned growth of each Local Plan (2011-2031) and providing a strategic view on strategic objectives and priorities between 2031 and 2050.
- Maintain the Oxfordshire SHMAA as the basis for establishing the projection for population, housing and employment growth for the County; this will include the Objectively assessed housing need for Oxfordshire.
- Consider the most appropriate development strategy having regard to the settlement hierarchy for the County including the future growth of Oxford City, the market towns and the rural hinterland.

- Provide the strategic basis for considering new settlements such as Garden Towns & Villages, as well as the policy lessons from newly established settlements.
- Provide a strategic view on the functioning, location and uses of the Green Belt.
- Consider all development options including the potential for development at major brown field sites, such as former military bases and power station sites across the County.
- Align with national and regional priorities including the development of the National Infrastructure Commission proposals for a growth corridor between Oxford and Cambridge.
- Consider infrastructure challenges and show their relationship between growth areas and infrastructure needs. The OxIS infrastructure assessment will be kept up to date as the basis for a countywide strategy for funding to close the gaps. It will consider the potential for increased new development in key growth corridors.
- Provide a clear framework for considering other Government initiatives and national infrastructure priorities.
- Ensure the alignment of the County Minerals and Waste Plan with the growth strategy for the County.
- Provide a strategic framework for Local Plans and the delivery plans associated with the Countywide Local Transport Plan (LTP) and provide the spatial dimension to the OxLEP SEP.

#### 4. Setting a Vision and Strategy for Oxfordshire

The Joint Spatial Plan will be a high-level strategic plan that will set out a clear vision and objectives to guide the growth of Oxfordshire. It will be prepared jointly by all six Councils, through a transparent and publicly accountable process to become a Development Plan Document. It will thus satisfy and exceed the requirements of the current 'Duty to Cooperate'.

It is proposed that the scope of the plan will be:

- Identifying strategic, objectively assessed needs for the County.
- Identify any policy direction that supplements these needs aligned to national and regional priorities and LEP.
- Identify high level development strategy for meeting those needs and policy objectives.
- Significantly boost the delivery of housing including affordable housing.
- Ensuring, collaboratively, that each district meets the housing need identified in the existing SHMA for Oxfordshire building on local priorities.
- Deliver economic growth that enhances Oxfordshire's position in the world economy and collaboratively enhancing wider growth opportunities as identified by the NIC.
- Ensuring each district meets employment and economic needs building on local priorities.
- Considering the strategic spatial distribution of growth.
- Considering major regeneration schemes and any proposed greenbelt development.
- Maximising opportunities for brownfield development.
- Delivering transport improvements and transport focused development.
- Securing sustainable transport opportunities.
- Securing education, health and community-related infrastructure provisions required to support housing growth.
- Securing strategic environmental and biodiversity gains to complement growth and achieve sustainable development.

The preparation will commence on a non-statutory basis, though with close DCLG engagement, so will be developed within the parameters set by the current planning system; but the Housing White Paper (February 2017) has proposed that they are put on a statutory basis. It is understood that a revised NPPF can be anticipated in summer 2017 and new planning regulations by the end of 2017. Early commencement is recommended given the scale of the tasks to be completed.

#### 5. Joint Spatial Plan Geography

The value that the completion and adoption of a Joint Spatial Plan would bring is by covering all of Oxfordshire.

A Countywide approach will enable consideration of the alignment of the Local Plans, together with the Local Transport Plan and the OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan as well as ensure the priorities identified through the assessment of Oxfordshire's Infrastructure needs are addressed in a structured way.

#### 6. Addressing the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Deficit

A draft strategic infrastructure framework for Oxfordshire has been commissioned (OxIS) and all Councils are inputting into this work. But more work is required to set the strategic planning framework, which the Joint Spatial Plan will bring and to demonstrate how strategic infrastructure will be planned and delivered on the identified growth corridors in a phased way.

A Joint Spatial Plan that considers long term needs will help inform investment decisions by Utilities and transport providers by providing a Development Plan Document rationale for route safeguarding, as well as the basis for bids for funding to Government and its Agencies.

#### 7. Integrating Economic and Transport Planning

Central to the preparation of the Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) will be the alignment of Local Plans prepared by the 5 Local Planning Authorities with the County Council led Local Transport Plan for Oxfordshire and the OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan. The Joint Spatial Plan will build on existing synergies and establish framework principles for planning, infrastructure, employment and housing to deepen the alignment over the next 30 years.

While Planning Authorities and County Council work together, closer working will ensure more consistency of approach, agreement on development priorities and a clear shared vision to shape planning, housing, the economy and transport decisions. For example, Oxfordshire already faces considerable challenges of congestion, limited realistic travel alternatives to car use, environmental and social challenges which affect the performance and effectiveness of our transport network.

The transport issues affect our ability to support economic growth and affects people's lives. Whilst we have had recent successes in encouraging more people to walk, cycle and use bus and rail services, congestion remains a major problem, with continued impacts on air quality and people's health.

Given the scale of the transport investment needed it is right to ensure that this is informed by consideration of choices around future growth of the City, the market towns and the rural hinterland. Investment for the long term, considering the growth corridors will be to

encourage sustainable transport choices, reduce the proportion of trips made by car and reduce the amount of time it takes to make journeys across the network.

Through the adoption of a Joint Spatial Plan we will be able to target investment to deal with current and future challenges on the network. Measures to consider will include local bus improvements, 'Rapid Transit' routes, Park and Ride sites, new rail links, rail stations and services and cycling corridors, alongside investment in new highway links and improvements to the strategic motorway network. By taking a long term view we will be able to effectively plan for changes in the technology of travel, the changing patterns of work and be ready for them rather than just reacting.

#### 8. Making the Most of Environment and Historic Assets

It is essential that the Joint Plan considers international, regional and local assets in a comprehensive way. These include:

- The high-quality environment of the County is an asset that draws different investment to different places, from research to the University and commerce to the City, visitors to Blenheim and the historic villages and the AONB's, to the rural hinterland which has drawn in high technology investment; the combination of high quality urban and rural areas continues to draw in high quality investment.
- The quid pro-quo to development is securing bio-diversity gains; pursuing steps to improve air quality and enhancing existing environmental and heritage assets. Without placing these concerns at the centre of our thinking, there is a real danger of a highway dominated approach causing serious degradation of the rural and urban environment and undermining the economic assets of the County.
- The Joint Spatial Plan will need to take into account the SACs, SSIs and Nature Reserves; Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Flood zones.
- It will also have to have regard to 'made' Neighbourhood Plans

#### 9. An Up to Date, Relevant Evidence Base

As A Development Plan Document the Joint Spatial Plan will be tested through an Examination. It will thus require a robust evidence base to justify its contents. The evidence will include:

- Drawing upon the evidence supporting each Local Plan, The Local Transport Plan and OxLEP SEP, including District based SHLAA's that inform capacity assessments.
- Drawing on the evidence prepared for the Growth Board consideration of how to address the unmet housing need of Oxford, including the Green Belt study.
- Transport assessments
- Maintaining an up to date Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Oxfordshire on a 5-year rolling programme.

#### 10. The relationship to the Local Plan

The Joint Spatial Plan is a strategic plan for Oxfordshire and does not supplant the detail of the Local Plan prepared for each District. It will not make detailed site allocations, which will be for Local Plans to do. It will thus play no role in five-year land supply considerations for each District It will be the task of each council to ensure the Local Plans delivers the Joint Spatial Plan requirements and other local allocations and policies which will be required to 2031 and onwards to 2050. Adopted Local Plans will address the Joint Spatial Plan at their review points.

On adoption, the Joint Spatial Plan will be a Development Plan Document and have force in each District and thus will become a 'material consideration' in planning matters.

This coherent, strategic planning approach will provide each authority the opportunity to have an informed Countywide infrastructure assessment underpinning its Local Plan, with the strategic directions of growth agreed between all six Councils, with none acting in isolation. It will also place the current joint working on a more formal footing, provide for a greater level of transparency in strategic decision making and more certainty for local level decision making. This is intended to lead to quicker plan making, enabling Districts to spend more time on place shaping and the quality of development, rather than arguments about Objectively Assessed Need.

### 11. Timescale for District Local Plans

The Oxfordshire councils are at different stages in their plan production:

- Cherwell - Local plan partial review underway, planning to submit by July 2017. Just completed recent consultation on areas of search to meet the agreed apportionment.
- Oxford City - Local plan issues and options consultation completed summer 2016, preferred options consultation planned for summer 2017 and submission planned for end of 2018.
- South Oxfordshire - consulted earlier in 2016 on preferred options to provide 3,500 homes. Reg 19 consultation is expected in spring 2017.
- Vale of the White Horse - Inspector's report published no provision for unmet need which will be covered in Local Plan Part 2/small scale site allocations. This work has commenced and expecting initial consultation in Feb 2017.
- West Oxfordshire - Local Plan examination suspended, and as part of the further work required by the Inspector they are making provision for Oxford unmet need. Consultation completed on proposed main modifications including Oxford unmet need locations. Hearings expected to re-commence in 2017.

There will also be a need to take account of 'made' Neighbourhood Plans as they form part of the Development Framework for each District.

### 12. Proposed Governance

The Joint Plan will be commissioned by the Oxfordshire Growth Board, so it does not rest with any one body. A Memorandum of Understanding between the 6 Councils will initiate the project and set out how each LPA will manage their strategic relationships and issues.

The project will report to the Oxfordshire Growth Board at appropriate stages.

Given the formal legal status of the Joint Spatial Plan several issues need to be considered:

- Council endorsement and support at the right points in the timetable
- Project management and clear lines of reporting
- Clear protocols for the joint approach to communications and media management, like that put in place for the work to consider Oxford unmet need.

- Stakeholder involvement, engagement and consultation will be required at several points of plan development.

### 13. Project team and resources

The preparation of the Joint Spatial Plan is a significant commitment and will require a team of dedicated officers to prepare it. The size of the team, or unit, will need to be considered and it will need to work closely with the Planning Policy teams from each Planning Authority and Transport and Minerals and Waste officers from the County Council and OxLEP. The Growth Board programme Manager will support the project and oversee project management.

It will report to the Executive Officers Group of the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

The cost of funding the Joint Spatial Plan and its programme of evidence will be additional to the funding of the Oxfordshire Growth Board. A detailed work programme and timetable will be required to guide the work and ensure the proposed spending is proportionate. It is anticipated that the project could take 24-36 months from inception to adoption to complete.

### 14. Proposed Timetable

The Joint Spatial Plan will be a Development Plan Document (DPD). It is proposed to align with the Local Plans and their period of operation (approximately 2031) and consider strategic options for the period 2031-2050 to consider new growth and be sufficiently long term to inform infrastructure planning.

To remain up to date, it is proposed to update the Joint Spatial Plan every 5 years to take account of new national policy and emerging regional trends.

The anticipated timetable for preparation with project milestones and plan making stages will include:

- Review and alignment of current Local Plans, their scope and commitments, key strategic sites and issues
- Issues and Options, followed by consultation
- Draft plan, followed by consultation
- Submit of JSP to Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.
- Examination.

Adrian Colwell  
Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy  
Cherwell and South Northants Councils  
16 February 2017