Report of the Oxfordshire Growth Board 30 July 2015

Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme

Recommendations

That the Growth Board:

(i) Confirm that the emphasis on the Sovereignty of Local Plans in the key principles for the Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme remains appropriate.

(ii) Endorse the detailed work programme and revised timetable.

(iii) Request a more frequent pattern of Growth Board Meetings aligned with the Strategic Work Programme.

(iv) Request that the Partners adopt a Coordination and Communication Protocol.

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide a synopsis of the Post-SHMA Strategic Work Programme (the Programme) along with a revised timetable, provided as an appendix to this report.

Background

2. Public bodies have a Duty to Co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries. A key issue in Oxfordshire is the potential unmet housing need arising from Oxford City. The Programme has been developed to help the Oxfordshire Councils fulfil the duty on this issue.

3. The Growth Board considered a report on the Programme at its last meeting on 25 June 2015. It resolved that further consideration of the detailed Programme be deferred to a special meeting of the Growth Board to be held as soon as possible in July to enable the Executive Officer Group to produce a revised timetable, together with a synopsis of the work involved.

Key Principles

4. The Growth Board in November 2014 approved the key principles which should underpin the Programme. The principles as endorsed are set out below:
- The district Local Plans are sovereign and all work should feed into Local Plans for them to determine the spatial future of the districts;
- A recognition however that the work must be collaborative and joined up to provide a county wide spatial picture and strategy;
- A recognition therefore that joint work on future spatial options, transport infrastructure and green belt will be required to feed into Local Plans;

- Recognition that the City cannot fully meet its housing needs and there is a need to agree on the level of unmet need. However work on determining spatial options in Local Plans can commence alongside this;
- A wish that the timescale for completing the Review is 12 – 18 months and that this should not hold up Local Plan timescales.

Synopsis of Strategic Work Programme

<u>Defining Oxford's Unmet Need</u>

5. An important element of the Programme is to clarify the extent of Oxford's housing need that can be accommodated in Oxford City itself. The Critical Friend, engaged to help the programme, has been asked to review the documentation on this issue and recommend a way forward. A single figure or narrower range is being sought around which hopefully the relevant authorities can coalesce, at least as a working assumption, in order to inform the assessment of Strategic Options.

<u>Development of Strategic Options</u>

6. A range of Strategic Options will be developed for meeting Oxford's unmet housing need. The intention is that the Strategic Options will identify potential areas of search for additional housing, above a threshold of 500 dwellings which will then be used to help inform the future distribution of this unmet need between the various local authority areas.

<u>Green Belt Study</u>

7. A study into the Oxfordshire Green Belt is underway. This will assess the contribution that different parts of the Green Belt make to the purposes of the Green Belt according to the 5 statutory criteria. This study will, in combination with the Strategic Options Assessment, help to identify the potential, or not, for development, and the case for additional areas to be added to the Green Belt. Local Planning Authorities will consider any changes to Green Belt boundaries through Local Plan Reviews.

<u>Strategic Options Assessment</u>

8. A common set of criteria will be used to assess the Strategic Options. The assessment process will look at each of the Strategic Options and provide a high level sustainability assessment. It will also identify any strategic constraints on the scale of growth in Oxfordshire.

It has always been recognised that this is an informal process which does not form part of the statutory planning system but one that is intended to demonstrate compliance with the Duty to Co-operate without compromising the principle of individual local plans sovereignty. The assessment process itself will involve a two stage process with transport modelling restricted to a shortlist of Strategic Options owing to the significant costs involved with this element of the work.

<u>Infrastructure Delivery Planning</u>

9. The County Council will prepare an Infrastructure Delivery Framework to set out the strategic infrastructure investments required to support growth. A draft framework will be prepared in parallel with the assessment of strategic options. This will allow the cumulative impact of growth to be properly considered alongside the identification of infrastructure priorities.

<u>Housing Need Distribution</u>

10. The outcomes of the Strategic Options Assessment will inform the distribution of Oxford's unmet need between the various district council areas. This will be set out in a Statement of Cooperation to be approved by the Board and which will feed into subsequent Local Plan Reviews. A package of background reports will be published documenting the process carried out and the technical evidence underpinning the Statement of Cooperation.

<u>Local Plan Reviews</u>

11. Local Planning Authorities will complete Local Plan Reviews, if required, to address the issue of Oxford's unmet housing need. This will involve detailed technical work at a sites level and will provide extensive opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement. Local Planning authorities will need to commission detailed evidence, and full Sustainability Appraisals to support their Local Plan Reviews. It will be for each Council to consider whether they adopt any of the Strategic Options assessed through the Strategic Work programme or whether they develop an alternative approach supported by their own evidence prepared in conjunction with local plan reviews.

Revised Timetable

12. Officers, through the Growth Board Executive Officer Group, have prepared a revised timetable and detailed work programme to reflect the current position. This is attached in Appendix 1.

13. The revised timetable shows that the partnership will not be in a position to reach a short list of strategic options until January 2016. It is now anticipated that the Statement of Cooperation will be published in May 2016 alongside a draft Infrastructure Delivery Framework and the background reports.

Issues

<u>Local Plan Sovereignty and Robustness</u>

14. The Strategic Work Programme exists to help Councils satisfy the Duty to Cooperate. It is not a formal planning process and its outputs will not be Statutory Planning Documents. It will help inform the future Local Plan Reviews of City and District Councils. The individual Local Plan Review processes will provide extensive opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement, and will formally test the outcomes of the Programme.

15. A more formal approach could be adopted for the Strategic Work Programme but this would, to some extent, constrain future Local Plan Reviews and undermine the sovereignty of Local Plans. The Growth Board could consider this aspect.

Governance

16. It is important that key stages of the Strategic Work Programme are reported to the Growth Board for agreement. Additional Growth Board meetings can be arranged to facilitate this. It is anticipated, for example, that the conclusions of the Critical Friend on the figure for Oxford's unmet need can be reported to the Growth Board in September.

Coordination and Communication

17. In order for the programme to be successfully completed it will require commitment and co-operation from the partners. A number of coordination mechanisms have been established. For example the Executive Officers Group and a Project Team. But the development of a Coordination and Communication Protocol could be useful given the complex nature of the issues being considered.

Conclusions

18. The Programme and timetable demonstrates the progress made to date but also recognises the slippage. Officers believe that the revised timetable is realistic, albeit challenging but acknowledge that it will not be achieved without the full continued commitment of all partners to the programme and ask the Growth Board to reaffirm that full commitment.