

Growth Board recommends housing and growth deal

The Oxfordshire Growth Board has today (1 February) recommended the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal and its associated Delivery Plan by all of the county's local authorities.

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The Delivery Plan is being finalised in discussion with Government officials.

The Deal, announced in the Autumn Budget Statement, offers £215 million of Government funding over a five year period to support Oxfordshire's ambition to plan and support the delivery of circa 100,000 new homes across Oxfordshire between 2011 and 2031 to address the county's severe housing shortage and expected economic growth. This is the same level of housing growth as identified by the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2014, and is consistent with that planned for in existing and emerging Oxfordshire Local Plans.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer described the Deal as a 'down-payment', and both the Growth Board and Government view it as the initial component of a long-term commitment to invest in Oxfordshire's potential and to avoid unplanned speculative development. Oxfordshire's world class knowledge economy is seen as key to UK plc in a post-Brexit landscape and the Government is proposing the development of a Local Industrial Strategy for Oxfordshire to back the county's science and innovation assets, and identify and grow new sectors.

Further to the Deal, the Government has today announced £34m funding for five infrastructure projects (*see Notes*) in Oxfordshire from its Marginal Viability Fund (MVF), which provides funding needed to get existing sites unlocked quickly or new sites allocated. The intention is to start these projects as soon as possible so the infrastructure can enable new homes to be built quickly.

The announcement of this funding just goes to emphasise the value of the long term, strategic and collaborative approach Oxfordshire has been taking to attracting investment in infrastructure projects that support sustainable housing growth as part of existing local plans.

The Oxfordshire Growth Board comprises the county's six councils – Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, together with representatives of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP), which includes the two Universities.

Full agreement of the Deal with Government is subject to agreement by each local authority in the county and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP). Over the next few weeks each of the five district councils will hold a full Council meeting to agree the Deal and the Delivery Plan.

Once agreed, the Growth Board will be responsible for oversight of the Deal, will agree delivery programmes and make all decisions on the prioritisation and allocation of the funding secured through the Deal.

Councillor Bob Price, Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, said: "The Deal represents a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing Oxfordshire's housing, infrastructure and economic challenges. It demonstrates the Government's commitment to working with Oxfordshire and recognises the critical role the county will play in driving forward the UK economy post-Brexit, attracting global investment. It will help us deliver the potential of our world class knowledge economy, while ensuring high quality sustainable development across the County is properly planned and backed with much needed infrastructure improvements. The Deal is a result of our strong collaboration under the auspices of the Growth Board and demonstrates what this partnership approach can deliver in the interests of the people of Oxfordshire and our array of world-leading businesses."

Infrastructure and housing

The Deal offers £150 million for infrastructure, £60 million for affordable housing and £5 million capacity funding, with the objective to deliver transport and social infrastructure along with properly planned new housing. This includes road and rail investment to benefit existing communities and unlock new development sites. It will also unlock funding for community infrastructure such as schools, health centres and adult social care.

Investment in infrastructure is recognised in the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy 2017 (OxIS) as a prime requirement of sustainable growth. OxIS identified £8.35bn of infrastructure investment needed for Oxfordshire by 2040. A substantial part of this

requirement will be provided from national and strategic infrastructure funding and developer contributions. Closing the remaining infrastructure funding gap will take a long term and sustained approach from Growth Board members to maximise opportunities to secure investment.

In addition to the Deal, in September 2017 Oxfordshire County Council submitted bids for up to £500 million of funding from the Housing Infrastructure Fund to support transport schemes for the Didcot Garden Town, Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village and the North of Oxford Garden Village. The Districts have also submitted a number of bids to the Marginal Viability element of this funding. The decisions on the District bids are expected in February 2018 and the County bids by Autumn 2018.

Affordable homes

The £60 million funding is available to support a flexible Oxfordshire-wide affordable housing programme to deliver a range of tenures. The fund is in addition to the existing Homes England Affordable Housing Programme which will continue. This gives Oxfordshire partners the opportunity to use the funding to deliver schemes according to local priorities and opportunities which would include opportunities to open up new sites, and increase delivery on sites not possible under other funding streams.

The programme will be delivered through a range of partners including Local Housing Companies, registered providers, special purpose vehicles, Oxford City Council (through its Housing Revenue Account) and other partnerships. This provides the opportunity to build on innovative approaches such as Oxford's work with the Universities to deliver employee housing alongside affordable homes, West Oxfordshire District Council's project with the Blenheim Estate, Cherwell District Council's site specific Housing Company at Graven Hill, South Oxfordshire District Council's Berinsfield and South Gateway housing projects and the Vale of White Horse District Council's North West Valley housing project.

Joint Statutory Spatial Plan

The Deal commits Oxfordshire's councils to develop a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) that will set the strategic direction for planning across the county to 2050. The JSSP, which will be in place by 2021, will complement the existing Local Plan process. It will give the public a clear overview of the countywide growth picture and offer greater opportunities to engage in collective decision making and to avoid incremental, speculative and unplanned development.

Increased protection against speculative development

The Government has recognised the challenges Oxfordshire faces from speculative development, and linked to the deal it is offering planning flexibilities on a time limited

basis to provide protection. This will allow councils collectively to prepare the JSSP without having to address the spectre of unplanned development while this major planning exercise is undertaken.

Productivity and economic growth

The Government recognises the importance of Oxfordshire's knowledge-intensive economy which delivers £21 billion a year to the nation's economic output. The Deal commits Government support to expand our world-class assets and employment sites across the county, such as Science Vale UK – one of the most successful science and technology clusters in the UK, that includes Harwell Campus. In total the Government is putting an additional £2.3bn in R&D investment. It will also bring new resources to address specific skills gaps.

Government has also promised opportunities for Oxfordshire to be involved in developing sector deals with life sciences and artificial intelligence sectors – reflecting the county's leading edge research and development in these sectors. It will also provide support to help scale up high-growth companies, with the extension of core funding for the Oxfordshire Growth Hub to 2022.

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