

MEETING OF MADE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN GROUPS IN OXFORDSHIRE SATURDAY MAY 11TH 2019 AT CHALGROVE

1. Welcome and Introductions

Martin Lipson (ML) welcomed attendees. There are 26 made NPs at present and, once others have been made, there will be 40 NPs in Oxfordshire - a substantial number. (post-meeting note – there are in fact currently 30 made NPs in the County).

Purpose of the meeting

- To communicate and learn from each other
- To have influence on the new joint statutory spatial plan "Oxfordshire 2050".

2. Minutes: Emily Daly was thanked for minuting the meeting

3. Apologies: from Great Coxwell, Sonning Common and Adderbury NPs. ML received permission from those present for email addresses to be circulated and shared.

4. Short summary by each NP Group

Themes / Issues emerging (see separate note for snapshots of each NP)

- There was a consensus that NPs have been successful. Generally, planning officers are using NP policies to manage development and parishes were glad to have their NP.
- NPs have been successful in fighting large speculative development (in some cases gone to appeal and enquiry) but less effective for smaller developments. Officers take less account of village character policies which are important.
- In South Oxfordshire, the emerging Local Plan has been challenged by NPs for its housing growth. It has provided uncertainty for others who are thinking about reviewing their NPs, and recent political change here and in the Vale increases the uncertainty.
- Allocation of employment land in NPs has been ignored by District Councils in one or two cases.
- Some NPs have allocated housing sites and numbers in order to gain much needed infrastructure. Many referred to the need for infrastructure in line with housing growth.
- There is a feeling that whatever is done by NPs, developers will try to find a way round in terms of housing supply.
- Difficulty of calling on people to review a NP in a village or small community.
- Communication with councils: staff changes; getting officers to read the NPs in full; uncertainty how case officers decide which policies to uphold; suspicion that policies are used to achieve what officers had already set out to achieve; consistency of planning officers (some get it and some don't).

- Housing has generated pots of money for infrastructure but difficulty in getting the work done. Need for part-time officer to service this.
- Oxford City Local Plan does not relate once to NPs.
- It is important to have someone sitting on a PC who has knowledge of NP policies so they can be used to assess applications.

5. Monitoring the Impact of NPs on planning decisions in the County

Possibly best done by District. VWHDC and SODC have the same officers but SODC does not have a Local Plan. There is a move to get together SODC NPs, but no similar attempt in VWHDC. However, assistance to implement this is minimal as there is pressure to deliver SO's Local Plan as well as a lot going on at national level. Struggling with the planning policy team who are liaising but don't appear to understand about Localism.

ML said this was a great initiative but would it provide the info needed to monitor NPs' success and also how NP policies have been applied. Graeme Markland said he had previously been a Monitoring Officer. The only way is by many hours of work. No single database or back office system available. For example, were houses built for those we were trying to build for? DCs don't have the personnel. It's a case for reaching government and contributing towards a framework. All would need to agree to using a British standard for addresses - very technical. **ACTION: ML asked GM if can write something on this and send it round.**

ML said that on 14 May Mid-Cherwell NP were meeting with 20 CDC planning officers to talk through the policies and familiarise them. Mid-Cherwell NP represents one third of the District. He asked others if they had tried this: 3 NPs said they had but got no response. ML would strongly encourage others trying.

Some officers brilliant, some inexperienced, mixed bag BUT no officer has an excuse not to know the policies. They will not read the NP cover to cover but need to understand the ethos behind the policies. We can do their homework for them in our objections by listing the policies and why they were supported. Policy also had to work on its own merits.

Officers' reports have to weigh up policies and NPs are an addition to the mix. We can insist on our policies being noticed but not on how they are weighed up. However, when it comes down to a decision, it will be on merit. Councillors very often don't know their LP so cannot expect them to know the NP.

Peter Stoddart said that as Mid-Cherwell are meeting CDC, they could propose a checklist of NP policies to PCs, planners at District Councils and planning committees in order to make sure they are taken into account in planning decisions. It could provide a useful proforma for other NPs and provide an evidence trail that policies have been considered.

The first priority is to convince planning officers. Some thought that can achieve much more in committee on certain matters, for example housing mix.

A working group was suggested, with one or two representatives from the District Councils. This would help build up ideas and a conversation. Suggestions for taking this forward would be welcomed.

6. Oxfordshire 2050 and Oxfordshire Growth Board

Current Position

Helen Marshall from Oxfordshire CPRE said that the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan is a joint statutory spatial plan driven by District and City Councils with input from Oxfordshire County Council. The CPRE welcomes the principle of a strategic approach to development across the county. At present there is a lack of housing and employment targets. Environmental and social considerations are split with no view of the build-up of impacts.

However, our District and County Councillors have signed up to well in excess of what is needed. The Oxford 2050 Plan concerns the next round (2031-50) of planning beyond the 100,000 houses in the current Local Plans. The National Infrastructure Commission is talking of upwards of 200,000 additional homes for Oxfordshire. This will double Oxfordshire's housing stock and population by 2050. We need to work out if it is possible to accommodate that rate and scale of growth while maintaining rural character. Also in terms of transport, education and health, it is inconceivable that we will be able to keep pace with this rate of increase.

Consultation on vision completed early this year. Next round of consultation will be early Summer. This will include targets for growth and look at broad areas for growth - but not allocate specific sites. She strongly encouraged NPs to get involved. HM showed the diagram about the relationship of plans which was not encouraging. However, it has since been amended with an upward arrow to reflect NPs' statutory role (this was the result of an intervention by GM).

HM said don't underestimate your power as a group. You are engaged in the planning system, understand what is going on and together you could have an influence on how the Oxfordshire Plan might look.

Role of NPs in influencing the JSSP

ML suggested there both "technical" and political options for us.

Technical Level

The Growth Board have a team of officers who regularly meet and are led by Rachel Williams. They report to Director of OCC, Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire Head of Policy Planning) and Bev Hindle.

A scrutiny panel meets just before each Growth Board meeting. They put in recommendations for issues to be reviewed and the outcome is often just "noted" in the minutes.

There is a list of authorised consultees for the Growth Board; we could try both individually and collectively to be included in that. More significantly, if we form into an alliance or group we may be more effective. It was important to open the "black box" up.

What about representation and involvement of parishes without NPs? ML thought the starting point has to be the proper involvement of made NPs in the statutory planning system and this should be a key part of the argument. It would involve much work and effort; we need to be realistic about whether we have enough energy and time. Everyone agreed to push in that direction.

Political Level

The recent local election results could upset the applecart regarding the direction of the Growth Board. It depends how brave the new councillors are; we should support them on this. We should attend the next Growth Board Meeting at Didcot on 4th June 2019. Our voice should be supported by the new administration of SODC and VWHDC. Richard Webber said that he leads the Lib Dem Group on the VWH Council and on the Growth Board. It is necessary to open up the Growth Board as there is a lack of transparency, and to look hard at the “growth at all costs” agenda.

We should register our presence early. ML suggested we form a small Executive group to take matters forward. We would need to constitute ourselves as a body to make us credible. Should we make an early presentation to the Growth Board?

Dave Rushton said that he viewed this meeting as a listening brief, and understood that attendees will want to go back to their PCs and see if the course of action proposed has their support. This was agreed, and that we should aim to move forward as soon as possible.

Concern was expressed that in SODC lack of transparency was a major issue but we have forced a greater level of transparency. There was now a new danger if the Local Plan is disrupted by political change: we don't want to dismantle everything we have worked for in the last 5 years.

The only way we will succeed is as a collective, we need to use our teeth and use Localism effectively. This will involve compromises as we share issues. ML said that because of nervousness about Local Plans being shaken up, it is possible that some PCs won't sign up to the group.

OALC was suggested as an organisation we can use rather than invent a separate body. John Coley (an OALC vice-president) said that it would not support such radical activity as it is more of an advisory body. There is no better way than doing it ourselves.

Support from other bodies and key individuals

John Howell and other MPs should be on a list of contacts to be drawn up.

Next Steps

It was agreed that ML should convene an interim Executive group to prepare next steps on creating a formal body, drafting of letters, etc. No action would be taken by the Executive group without reference to the wider group.

7. Loose alliance/federation of Oxfordshire NPs, or just periodic meetings?

It was agreed that we need to become a properly-constituted body.

There was consensus to meet again as a group and it was agreed this would be early September. We can meanwhile communicate by email.

8. Any other business

None