

Supplementary Papers

Oxfordshire Growth Board

held in the Virtual meeting viewable by weblink
on Monday, 22 March 2021 at 2.00 pm

4. Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update

- (a) Growth Board response to recommendations from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting 16 March 2021 (Pages 2 - 5)

- (b) **Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group Report - private investment in infrastructure** (Pages 6 - 9)

Growth Board response to recommendations from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish group.

**Growth Board response to recommendations of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel
Recommendations made on 16th March 2021**

The Growth Board is requested to provide a response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel for decision at its meeting on 22 March 2021.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
Recommendation 1: That the Growth Board ensures the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment work is published as soon as that work is completed; or clarify the reasons and timescale for publishing it as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation.	Partial	The OGNA work is not yet finalised as the consultants with officers review the findings in the light of the pandemic. It is the intention that once completed the OGNA will be a key evidence base for the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The OGNA will not seek to prescribe growth but will offer a range of three scenarios and invite consultees to reflect upon what would be appropriate for the future of Oxfordshire. The Board is content to publish the OGNA when it is complete but in practice, given the tight timescales for the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation later this year it does not practically see that this will be possible significantly before the consultation and believes that the fact that the OGNA will be published alongside the consultation will give both appropriate context for the OGNA and time to reflect and respond.
Recommendation 2: That the Growth Board clarifies how it intends to increase the consideration of environmental issues through the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and wider programmes of work.	Agree	The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation will be structured under the following sections; addressing climate change, improving environmental quality, providing homes and creating jobs, creating strong and healthy communities and planning for sustainable travel and connectivity. These themes ensure that environmental issues are given due priority. The Oxfordshire Plan Team has already drawn on strong environmental representations made through the Regulation 18 Part 1 consultation, and wider Open Thought engagement opportunities, to inform the Part 2 consultation in Summer 2021, which will provide another opportunity to listen and reflect on feedback from a wide range of respondents.

		<p>Concerning the Growth Board’s wider programmes, there continues to be a substantial focus and priority given to environmental considerations within the Board’s work. We know from a range of engagement activities and consultation exercises that this must be an area of priority and there is good evidence that this is being taken seriously. We believe our messaging has been consistent that the environment is of the upmost importance, as shown through various outputs including: The Strategic Vision, recent Board agendas, press releases, letters to HM Government, our Open Thought Platform, Terms of Reference. Healthy Place Shaping work, OxIS Scope, Arc Environment Principles and membership changes. The establishment of an Environment Advisory Group and a Local Nature Partnership will add to Oxfordshire’s capacity to look at these issues in more detail, with grater input from a range of partners. The Scrutiny Panel’s challenge in this area over recent years has been helpful in shaping our approach. There remains room for improvement and to evolve however, and we will continue to do that.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: That the Growth Board undertake further work to understand the impact that changes in local rail services do and may have in the future on modal shift, particularly with regards to personal car use, to help inform the 2022 Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and future business cases for rail investment. There should be cross referencing between the rail study and the LTCP.</p> <p>i. Especially the A40 Oxford – Witney rail corridor should be considered since traffic in these areas will continue to rise with the reduction of services in northwest of the Cotswolds railway line bringing in traffic from areas such as Charlbury.</p> <p>ii. In addition, consideration should also be given to the building of new stations on existing lines especially in areas such as</p>	<p>Partial</p>	<p>The A40 Witney to Oxford rail corridor is not within the scope of the ORCS agreed by the Growth Board, Department for Transport and other partners. The outputs of the ORCS work have identified a programme of priority investments to support planned growth, particularly focused on the core rail corridor through Oxford station. This investment is needed to provide the capacity for other identified rail enhancements, including the planned upgrade of the North Cotswold Line (which includes the development of Hanborough as rail hub with up to 4 trains an hour). This remains the priority project for rail investment in West Oxfordshire, and an updated business case for this significant corridor upgrade has recently been submitted to Government.</p> <p>Any further development of the rail network would be a much longer term proposal, and new or additional train services would require additional rail capacity on the wider network. This is beyond the scope and timescale of the rail investment identified in the ORCS. It would need to be considered in the context of any future development identified through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and could potentially be included in the updated Oxfordshire Rail Strategy which would form part of the Local Transport & Connectivity Plan, which also extends to 2050. Should the feasibility study work for Witney to</p>

Kidlington-Begbroke-Yarnton where there are large scale development plans.		<p>Oxford be agreed, the Growth Board would obviously be kept informed of its progress and conclusions.</p> <p>To support modal shift on the A40 corridor, and directly support planned growth in the area, the agreed A40 Science Transit and Housing Infrastructure Fund Schemes are currently being progressed, which are linked to specific Government funding streams and delivery deadlines. These would provide a transformative enhancement to this established bus/rapid transit corridor, including significant dedicated bus priority (which would lead to a reduction in bus journey times and increase in reliability compared to today) and a new Park & Ride site, work on which is well advanced with scheme delivery taking place over the next few years. Whilst these (and associated development plans) may not be compatible with the suggested rail corridor as it is currently envisaged, any proposal for a new railway line would require different options and route alignments to be considered, which would presumably form part of the feasibility work if the funding bid is successful.</p>
Recommendation 4: That the Growth Board take steps to ensure that the Strategic Vision is supported by a communications strategy containing appropriately concise and engaging literature especially summarising the vision in a one-page format and user-friendly language.	Agree	It is our intention to have a communication plan for the Strategic Vision and to develop material tailored to different audiences once a final text has been agreed. For example, it is intended that we will produce a one-page summary for wider distribution.
Recommendation 5: That the Growth Board recognise that the following statement contained within the Strategic Vision could be misunderstood as a justification for using a narrow definition of growth: "Growth can be defined narrowly in terms of expansion in numbers of homes and jobs and economic output." The Panel recommends that this is revised to assert that growth can and should be defined in a more holistic way, as intended through the "good growth" definition set out in	Not agree	<p>The Board's view is that paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of the Strategic Vision set out that Good Growth - the Board's definition of what growth for Oxfordshire should look like - is set out clearly in the Vision as encompassing a wider set of parameters than is suggested. The Vision states that <i>"Rather than seeing economic, social and environmental objectives as competing demands that need to be balanced, our approach for Oxfordshire is to align and integrate these priorities, so that economic progress benefits business, society and the environment."</i></p> <p>The Board also believes that the definition of Good Growth encompasses terms such as clean growth (which is referenced in the document) and</p>

<p>the Vision. Consideration should also be given to whether the definition of Good Growth can be moved to an earlier position in the document, and whether mentions of prosperity and clean growth can be more frequently referenced throughout the document.</p>		<p>prosperity, which are narrower in their meaning than the Good Growth definition in the Vision aspires to. Finally, the Board notes the point about reordering the Vision but are content that it offers an appropriate balance, however when developing the communication tools to deliver the Vision, the point made will be considered.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: That the Growth Board makes clear through the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Executive Group that local planning decisions should remain as a matter for local planning authorities through the plan making process. Any proposal from HM government to reduce local democratic accountability and oversight with respect to planning would be strongly opposed. Similarly, any future proposals concerning HM Government's plans for the emerging Arc "Growth Body" and the Arc Spatial Framework must have local accountability, oversight and engagement built into its structure.</p>	<p>Partial</p>	<p>The Growth Board agrees that planning decisions should be taken at the right level, with local decisions taken by local planning authorities, and that HM Government should continue to engage with Arc leaders to ensure their proposals are informed by local views. The Board believes that it would be prudent to await greater detail concerning HM Government's proposals for the Arc Growth Body, as much of this remains unclear, before a view is taken on its role, structure and engagement mechanisms. The point is well made and agreed with however that there should be a route for making local views heard.</p>

Growth Board response to recommendations of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, Task and Finish Group- Private Investment in Public Infrastructure Projects.

Recommendations endorsed by the Scrutiny Panel on 16th March 2021

The Growth Board is requested to provide a response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel, Task and Finish Group for decision at its meeting on 22 March 2021.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
<p>Recommendation 1. That the Growth Board encourage its constituent local authority member organisations to seek external advice on whether any large-scale Infrastructure schemes in the Oxfordshire pipeline might be appropriate for private investment, where funding does not meet the criteria for lending from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB).</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Firstly, the Board would like to commend the detailed work undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel’s Task and Finish Group in this area. To support this recommendation and bring visibility to this important work, we would want the Scrutiny Panel’s report to go to the Infrastructure Advisory Subgroup. As a space for the relevant Cabinet leads across Oxfordshire to come together, it will provide an opportunity for each to consider how the report’s findings relate back to their own council’s work, and specifically whether external advice would be beneficial. The report should also go to the Growth Board’s Executive Officer Group, which is made up of senior officers from each local authority.</p> <p>Officers have clarified that PWLB borrowing is only prohibited for projects which are for commercial purposes, and that infrastructure schemes will almost always be eligible for borrowing at the most competitive rate, as set out in the Panel’s report. Since the last meeting of the Task and Finish Group, HM Government has made further announcements with respect to the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB). From Summer 2021, the UKIB will offer loans to local authorities at a rate comparable to PWLB. The UKIB will also have an advisory function. In responding to Recommendation 1 and Recommendation 5, it could also be beneficial to invite a representative of the UKIB to a meeting of the Board’s Infrastructure Advisory Group to understand the UKIB’s role going forward, and to make use of their advice</p>

		<p>on whether any pipeline schemes might be appropriate for private investment, as recommended. It would be particularly beneficial to understand where private investment may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve a lower interest rate on borrowing • Boost public engagement in the delivery of projects and encourage changes in behaviours (e.g. community facilities, climate action) <p>Motivate investors to consider donating investment returns to a specific project (e.g. running costs of community facility, development of active travel schemes)</p>
<p>Recommendation 2. That the Growth Board encourage its constituent local authority member organisations to identify opportunities where engagement with private sector companies may be justifiable such as:</p> <p>a) The private sector is bringing an asset into the partnership which is a fundamental pre-requisite for the design and delivery of an infrastructure project for e.g. Land</p> <p>b) The private sector partner is wholly owned by the local authority such as Oxford City Housing Limited where all profits are retained by Oxford City Council.</p> <p>c) Privately developed infrastructure assets are transferred back into the public sector after a certain period of time which would provide some benefits to local authorities.</p>	Partial	<p>The Growth Board notes that local authorities are increasingly benefitting from establishing wholly owned companies, or working with private sector partners, to deliver services and schemes in some circumstances, which is a matter of local choice. It is recognised that the proposals set out in this recommendation would require detailed assessments on a case by case basis at a local level, including an appropriate business case and risk assessment to take place, before specific arrangements could progress. The Growth Board would encourage all partners to explore opportunities in this area but would want to distinguish that these are matters for local decision. Bringing visibility to the Scrutiny Panel's work through the Infrastructure Subgroup and Executive Officer Group is one way we hope to encourage further conversations in this area.</p>

<p>Recommendations 3. That the Growth Board, through the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) Refresh process, review existing case studies where local authorities have had a leading role in securing private investment in green infrastructure projects, to help inform the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) refresh. Consideration should be given to whether the lessons learnt, and opportunities experienced from other schemes can be transferred to Oxfordshire, where they offer a viable alternative to PWLB borrowing. As a starting point, options to review include:</p> <p>a) Issuing local authority infrastructure bonds, as undertaken by Swindon Borough Council to support the development of a local solar farm.</p> <p>b) Issuing community municipal investment bonds to the public to support investment in shared projects that respond to the climate emergency, as undertaken by West Berkshire District Council</p>	Partial	<p>OxIS has been an important piece of work for supporting the development of funding bids and agreements, but it does not set a framework for how projects should be funded, and this would be a separate piece of work. The OxIS refresh process will seek to identify infrastructure needs across Oxfordshire. Once that has been done, subsequent work will be needed to inform and identify how priorities will be funded and/or financed, and the Scrutiny Panel's report and the case studies outlined will be useful in this process. There is a significant gap between the cost of the infrastructure Oxfordshire is likely to need and the funding available to deliver it, which will require new and innovative ways of funding schemes such as those suggested in the Scrutiny Panel's report. The OxIS Project Brief and Scope confirms that the call for projects has included green infrastructure requirements and the scoring matrix being developed to prioritise the projects will afford such projects due priority.</p> <p>The Local Industrial Strategy provides a long-term framework against which private and public sector investment decisions can be assessed. As the Scrutiny report notes, with the support of the LIS, OxLEP have worked with the Department for International Trade to produce a joint delivery plan bringing together developers, commercial agents and landowners to explore investment opportunities in Oxfordshire. In noting the case studies presented here, it should be noted that Oxfordshire itself is a relative leader in this space, such as the work done through the Low Carbon Hub.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4. That the Growth Board explore opportunities for establishing shared plans and strategies which support OxIS, specifically focusing on delivering green infrastructure, and improving access to green space.</p>	Agree	<p>The Growth Board believes that green infrastructure is best addressed through the spatial planning process, which will be informed in part by OxIS, but also by wider projects and evidence. The Board also agree that developing appropriate green infrastructure projects is a priority and the establishment of an Environment Advisory Group for the Growth Board will afford some capacity to look at the issue. We will ask that the Group consider reviewing this area to see what shared work can be done to improve Oxfordshire's green infrastructure provision and access to it, to help inform the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. More evidential work would be beneficial in understanding the quantum of investment needed in green infrastructure and the value and benefits created.</p>

<p>Recommendation 5. That the Growth Board invite a representative from the emerging UK Infrastructure bank to attend a meeting of the Growth Board's infrastructure Sub-group to explore new opportunities of funding infrastructure projects.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>The Growth Board, through the Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Subgroup, will ask for this to be included in the group's 2021/22 work programme. The recent announcement that the UKIB will have an aim to help tackle climate change and reach the national net zero carbon target by 2050 is particularly welcome. We believe the attendance of a UKIB representative will help to achieve recommendation 1 also.</p>