

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON TUESDAY 26 JANUARY 2021 AT 2.00 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Emily Smith (Chair), (Vale of White Horse District Council), Dr Kiren Collison, (Oxfordshire CCG), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), David Crook, (Homes England), Councillor Tom Hayes, (Oxford City Council), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Councillor Ian Hudspeth, (Oxfordshire County Council), Prof. Linda King, (Universities representative), Adrian Lockwood, (OxLEP Vice-Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business representative - Bicester), Councillor Michele Mead, (Vice-Chair), (West Oxfordshire District Council), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City) and Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council)

Officers: Andrew Down (South and Vale Councils), Ahmed Goga (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale Councils), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Yvonne Rees (Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council CEX), Stefan Robinson (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Rosie Rowe, (Oxfordshire Healthy Place Shaping), Paul Staines, (Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal), Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) and Martin Tugwell, (England's Economic Heartland)

Other councillors: Councillor Sean Woodcock, Vice-Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel

59. Apologies for absence, declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Councillor Susan Brown, Oxford City Council (who was substituted by Councillor Tom Hayes); Professor Alistair Fitt, Universities representative (who was substituted by Professor Linda King); Emma King, Environment Agency; and Catherine Turner, Homes England (who was substituted by David Crook).

In order to consider the briefing from England's Economic Heartland immediately after the report of the Vice-Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, the Chair – with the concurrence of the meeting – indicated that the order of the Agenda would be amended.

In her announcements, the Chair referred to the public consultation on Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision – which had closed on 4 January 2021. She commented that there had been significant interest, with some 1,250 unique users and 3,700-page views on the

Open Thought website. In total, 100 responses, from a combination of individuals and organisations, had been received. Of responders who had provided their age, 40% were under 44 years of age. This was felt to be encouraging.

Officers had also attended meetings of partner organisations to help promote awareness of the consultation. To help further these efforts, and to help young people engage with the Oxfordshire 2050 process, a series of workshops were due to be held at the end of January at Oxford City, Abingdon and Witney Colleges. In addition, a member of the Voice of Oxfordshire's Youth would be consulted via a survey.

All of the responses to the consultation would be considered, and where appropriate amendments made to the draft Vision. A revised version of this document (together with a full analysis of the responses made) would be presented at the March Growth Board meeting.

There were no declarations of interest. The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed.

60. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2020 be agreed for signing by the Chair as a correct record.

61. Public participation

Councillor Debby Hallett, Deputy Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council, submitted a question which was put in her absence. The question referred to concerns about the affordability of housing with Oxfordshire (this had been the subject of an earlier question to the Growth Board in 2019). It requested an update on the work done to establish the accurate scope and nature of the county's affordability issues. It also asked what decisions had been taken by either the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 team, or the wider Housing and Growth Deal Team, to consider the issues affecting the affordability of housing.

In response, the Chair commented that the task of establishing the need for affordable housing within Oxfordshire – including an assessment of the scale, type and rent levels – was the responsibility of the district councils. A summary of their different strategies had been provided to the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel (this was available within the full written response to the question).

All of Oxfordshire's local authorities recognised that market rents within the county were at such a level that the charge allowed by the national definition of affordable housing would still not be within the price range of many working people. The Housing and Growth Deal programme, nevertheless, through funding, supported the ambitions of the districts to provide affordable housing. In its first two years, 528 affordable housing units (split between different housing tenures) had been delivered by the Deal – a further 794 units would be delivered during the rest of the programme period.

While the Affordable Housing Subgroup had considered whether the Growth Board could adopt a localised definition of affordable housing, it had concluded that this was a matter for districts to determine – in their role as local planning authorities. Work was, however, being undertaken within the county to develop a policy approach to help address issues

around the affordability of housing. For example, as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, evidence base data and existing strategies would be considered as part of the Growth Needs Assessment.

The Growth Board recognised and supported the view of all of Oxfordshire's councils that securing genuinely affordable housing was a priority. It would, therefore, continue to work to support that ambition.

Michael Tyce submitted a question on behalf of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE Oxfordshire). The question referred to future new housing numbers for Oxfordshire and a suggestion that the National Infrastructure Commission was proposing an additional one million homes within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc – of which 250,000 would be allocated to Oxfordshire. Although these figures have been disowned, a report from Bidwells Property Consultants had claimed that the figures would be 50% higher over both the Arc and Oxfordshire. The Board was, therefore, asked, in light of comments attributed to the Chair, what figure for new housing it would seek to moderate towards?

In response, the Chair stated that, as both a member of the Arc Leaders Group and as one of the Growth Board's representatives on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, specific housing numbers/targets had not featured as part of their discussion with MHCLG. Further, the housing numbers identified in the question did not have any status in planning policy and that the only known housing figures for Oxfordshire were those identified in the district's local plans.

The development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would include a new assessment of housing need based on tested evidence base. Once this work had been completed, there would be a wide-ranging public consultation on several to gather the views of residents and test options further. Speculation about the outcome of that work and of the consultation was therefore not appropriate. HM Government had identified the Oxford to Cambridge Arc as a economic region to invest in and the Growth Board's 'objective' in relation to this HM Government led project was to continue to engage with its neighbours and partners across the Arc to ensure the best possible outcomes for Oxfordshire.

With the permission of the Chair, Michael Tyce asked a supplementary question. The Growth Board was asked whether it was still the plan, (despite evidence which in the opinion of the CPRE was to the contrary) for Oxfordshire to produce an Oxfordshire Plan 2050 plan almost entirely founded upon the ambitions of local people for the future of the county, or was the plan at best, to modify whatever 'growth at all costs' plan was handed down by HM Government over the heads of Oxfordshire's people?

In response, the Chair stated that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be based on the needs and wants of the county – as shaped and directed by the Oxfordshire Vision.

Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group, added that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be a local plan. It would, therefore, have to be considered and adopted by each of the local planning authorities within the county.

Moreover, while it was not possible to state with certainty what the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Strategic Framework – a HM Government initiative – would say, it did not currently refer to housing numbers. Nevertheless, the expectation was that while the Framework would not be statutory, it would, to some extent, form part of national policy. Consequently, the Growth Board would be obliged to take it into account – it would not, therefore, be

possible for Oxfordshire (or any local authority within the Arc geographical area) to avoid its implications.

62. Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update

The Growth Board welcomed Councillor Sean Woodcock, Vice-Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting.

Councillor Woodcock referred to the recommendations arising from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 19 January 2021 – as set out in the circulated report. He highlighted that the Panel wished to reiterate their previous recommendation that HM Government should adopt the UK Green Building Council's definition of zero carbon.

The Panel had strongly welcomed development of a Health Impact Assessment Tool and supported its endorsement by the Growth Board. They did, however, recommend that the Toolkit (and supporting text) be amended to emphasise that it can apply to existing developments as part of ongoing and new place shaping initiatives.

In addition, the Panel had been dissatisfied with the Environment Agency's response to one of its recommendations. They, therefore, invited the Board to write to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs requesting greater investment in preventative measures to address flooding across Oxfordshire.

The Chair summarised the Growth Board's responses to the recommendations which was to accept them in full.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel be agreed as set out in the Growth Board's written response.

63. Update on Healthy Place Shaping

The Growth Board considered a report updating them on the activities that had been undertaken to embed healthy place shaping into its workstreams (and the strategies that underpinned them). As part of this work, a Health Impact Assessment Toolkit had been developed for use in Oxfordshire. The Board was asked to endorse its use.

In discussion, members of the Board were supportive of the work that had been undertaken. They also highlighted the importance of taking forward healthy place shaping as a strategic priority. It was, however, stressed that this did not necessarily have to be achieved by large projects and that relatively small initiatives could make a real difference to individual health outcomes. It was, therefore, incumbent on healthy place shaping leads within each local authority to act as advocates for such projects.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board:

1. confirms its continued support of healthy place shaping as a strategic priority and the approach that is being taken to deliver it.
2. endorses the use of the Health Impact Assessment Toolkit and to support its use across the county.

64. Economic Recovery Plan Update

The Growth Board received a presentation from Ahmed Goga, OxLEP Director of Strategy and Programmes. This set out the background of the preparation of the Oxfordshire Economic Recovery (ERP) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This work was being led by the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership but involved a wide number of stakeholders across the public, academic and private sectors. The focus was on creating an ERP which would address economic resilience and be aligned with wider Oxfordshire Recovery Planning.

The Board was informed that an assessment of Oxfordshire's economic base had indicated that the county had been less affected than the wider UK economy, but that key challenges had, nevertheless, been found. (These included geographical and sectorial variations – Cherwell, Oxford City and the visitor economy had been particularly impacted).

Although it was expected that the economic contraction would be short, and would be followed by a strong recovery, the response would need to remain agile to react to any potential changes in circumstance.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

65. Community Led Housing

The Growth Board considered a report and attached draft letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government asking for a continuation of the Community Housing Fund.

The Growth Board welcomed the drafting of the letter and asked for a further update on Community Led Housing in due course (including any examples of best practice).

RESOLVED:

1. That the Growth Board endorses the letter attached to the report;
2. That the Chair and Councillor Susan Brown be authorised to make minor changes to the letter before submission if required.

66. England's Economic Heartland Briefing

The Growth Board received a presentation from Martin Tugwell, Programme Director, England's Economic Heartland (EEH). This detailed the work of EEH in promoting, with strategic partners, the economic potential of the region, while responding to challenges such as climate change and pressure on infrastructure. The Board was briefed on the development of the EEH Transport Strategy and the accompanying consultation. They were also informed of EEH's ambition to support sustainable growth through a world class, decarbonised transport system.

It was highlighted to the Board that there was a continued need for HM Government to invest in infrastructure if the EEH region and greater South East region was to continue to be economically successful. In addition, the transition to zero carbon and the implementation of the wider environment agenda would also require significant extra funding.

In order to achieve its national targets, HM Government will have to significantly accelerate the decarbonisation of transport, while at the same time recognising that the nature of travel is changing. This will, therefore, require not just a focus on the actions and behaviours of users, but also the use of a place-based approach when planning for infrastructure.

In discussion, members of the Board emphasized the importance of coordinated joint working and collaboration at the strategic level on infrastructure issues. They also highlighted, with particular reference to rail provision, the need for additional investment in infrastructure projects within Oxfordshire. As part of this debate, the importance of decarbonising rail transport was raised and that any planning for new/upgraded lines should, as a matter of course, include the provision of infrastructure to support future diesel free rolling stock.

In light of the wider, national discussions surrounding the decarbonisation of public transport, the Chair would seek clarification as to the Board's formal position on a diesel free East/West Rail. She commented that it was an opportune time to emphasise/reemphasise their support for the electrification of the route.

The need for strategic infrastructure planning to meet the future demands for water was also raised – as was the potential use of rivers and canals as freight transport routes.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

67. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Infrastructure sub-group update

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Infrastructure Subgroup meeting held on 14 December 2020.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Chair of the Infrastructure Subgroup, referred to a joint meeting with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup which had taken place on 21 January 2021. This had considered the activities of both subgroups and the overall strategic picture of the Growth Board's work. The meeting had helped to improve the mutual understanding of the work the respective subgroups were undertaking and, therefore, Councillor Hudspeth suggested that it might be helpful to share the presentation as a briefing and discussion tool. The slides were also publicly available via the [Growth Board website](#).

RESOLVED: That the summary notes of the Infrastructure Subgroup held on 14 December 2020 be noted.

(b) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup held on 18 December 2020.

Giles Hughes, Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council, mentioned the update that the group had received in respect of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and highlighted the presentation of the mapping data being collated to help prepare the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This data is included in a series of comprehensive layers around environmental, socio-economic and development information. Consideration is now being given to how this data might be made more widely available.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup held on 18 December 2020 be noted.

68. Growth Board Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, set out the proposed Growth Board Forward Programme. The Board was reminded that the meeting originally scheduled for 22 February 2021 had been replaced by an informal joint meeting with the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

All members of the Board were encouraged to submit any additional ideas for potential agenda items to him.

69. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

No matters were raised.

70. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group, provided a verbal update on developments within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The MHCLG was moving ahead with drafting an Arc Spatial Framework and had started an early process of engagement with local government, universities and local enterprise partnerships. This exercise would provide an opportunity for Oxfordshire to help influence what went into the Framework and to have its voice heard (e.g. the work being undertaken to develop an environmental strategy – the Green Arc – which MHCLG seem to suggest they would support in forming a key part of the Spatial Framework).

The Chair commented that it had been clarified that the Arc Spatial Framework was HM Government driven, but there was an opportunity via the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders' Group to shape and influence it by sharing the views of Oxfordshire and via Officer contacts.

71. Dates of next meetings

The Growth Board noted the dates of the future meetings set out below:

- 22 March 2021 (amended from 23 March)
- 8 June 2021

The meeting closed at 4.05 pm

Chairman

Date