

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

## Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON MONDAY 22 MARCH 2021 AT 2.00 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

### Present:

Councillor Michele Mead, (Vice-Chair), (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Councillor Yvonne Constance, (Oxfordshire County Council), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities representatives), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Adrian Lockwood, (Oxfordshire Skills Board Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business representative - Bicester), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City), Councillor Judy Roberts, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Catherine Turner, (Homes England) and Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council)

**Officers:** John Disley, (Oxfordshire County Council), Andrew Down (Growth Board Director and South and Vale Councils), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council CEX), 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), Paul Staines (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team) and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership CEX)

**Other councillors:** Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel.

### 72. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Dr Kiren Collison, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group; Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council (who was substituted by Councillor Yvonne Constance); and Councillor Emily Smith, Vale of White Horse District Council (who was substituted by Councillor Judy Roberts).

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

In her announcements, the Vice-chair referred to three replies received from HM Government in response to letters from the Growth Board. The responses concerned:

- Future building standards and the route to net zero 2050. Confirmation that from 2021, new homes would be expected to produce 31% less CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, rising to 75% by 2025
- Confirmation that options for the electrification of East West Rail were still being investigated
- That £4m of funding has been made available to reopen the Community Housing Fund.

The Board was informed that more information and copies of the letters could be found on the Growth Board's [social media pages](#)

HM Government had also confirmed that it was ending Oxfordshire's temporary three-year land supply flexibility. The Vice-Chair expressed the Board's disappointment that this had not been extended (unlike the dates for the completion of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 which it had been intended to support). The land supply flexibility had helped to provide certainty to local communities while longer-term plans were being developed. It was felt that its withdrawal could lead to an increased focus on short-term land supply considerations at the expense of longer-term planning.

Finally, the Vice-Chair commented that she was delighted to announce that, with effect from 1 April 2021, Andrew Down was to take up the role of Oxfordshire Growth Board Director.

## 73. Minutes

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2021 be agreed for signing as a correct record.

## 74. Public participation

**Charlie Maynard made an address on behalf of the Witney Transport Group** (a not-for-profit, cross-party organisation which sought a fast, sustainable, rail transport solution along the A40 corridor). He informed the Board that the Group had recently (5 March 2021) submitted an application for a £50,000 grant to HM Government's Restoring Your Railways Fund. If successful, this support would be used to fund a feasibility study on the potential for a new railway line.

A survey undertaken by the Witney Oxford Transport Group had reported that 97% of respondents supported the reestablishment of a railway link along the A40 corridor. The proposed new line also had the backing of many organisations and local authorities within Oxfordshire. Mr Maynard, therefore, asked for the Growth Board to include within the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS) report reference to the actions being undertaken to develop and support a Carterton to Oxford Rail Link.

The Witney Oxford Transport Group were, however, concerned that the A40 dualling project could potentially scupper the reestablishment of the rail link. As currently proposed, the road improvements would block off the route of any potential rail link. The Group's view was that the logical site for an Eynsham Railway Station would be as part of an integrated

Park and Ride site. They, therefore, asked for the Growth Board's support in defining and protecting a rail route between Carterton and Oxford via Eynsham.

The Vice-Chair invited John Disley, Infrastructure Strategy & Policy Manager, Oxfordshire County Council, to comment on the address. Mr Disley informed the Board that a Carterton to Oxford rail link sat outside the agreed scope of the ORCS. The Study was specifically focussed on the rail infrastructure required to support planned growth. It already contained a significant programme of enhancements which still needed to be funded and delivered. Inevitably, this would mean that any further, additional, developments of the rail network would be longer-term proposals – the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan would, nevertheless, carefully consider any feasibility work that had been undertaken on the proposed new line.

It was also unclear, without supporting evidence – requirements, funding, timelines etc – how any potential rail corridor could be protected. In contrast, there was already an agreed programme of works in place for the dualling of the A40. Furthermore, it was impossible to the potential consequences and results of future collective spatial planning work e.g. the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

## **75. Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update**

### **(a) Recommendations from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting**

The Growth Board welcomed Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting.

Councillor Gant referred to the summary of discussions and recommendations arising from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 16 March 2021. He highlighted that the Panel, following public questions asked by Mrs McIvor, Chair of the Cherwell Development Watch Alliance, had sought and received assurance that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation would contain substantive around growth.

The Panel had also expressed some concerns around the unknown composition of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc 'Growth Body' as proposed by HM Government. They felt that local elected and accountable representatives should be at the centre of any future arrangements and that planning decisions affecting the Arc should continue to be made at the lowest possible level.

The Vice-Chair welcomed the recommendations and indicated that the Growth Board's formal response would be given in writing within ten clear days.

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

The Growth Board welcomed Councillor Alex Postan – Chair of the Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group – to the meeting.

Councillor Postan referred to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations (as set out in the circulated report) and highlighted Appendix 1 which set out a local authority guide and process flow chart for the crowd funding of capital projects. It was emphasised that when considering potential capital projects, local authority finance officers should be explicitly looking to include or exclude private funding options.

In his remarks, Councillor Postan thanked the members of the Group for their contributions and praised Amit Alva, Growth Board Scrutiny Officer, for his work in both supporting the review and drafting the report.

The Vice-Chair welcomed the report and thanked the members of the Task and Finish Group for the recommendations. She indicated that the Growth Board's formal response would be given in writing within ten clear days.

## **76. Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study: Completion and Next Steps**

The Growth Board considered a report - presented by John Disley, Infrastructure Strategy & Policy Manager, Oxfordshire County Council and Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group- providing the final conclusions of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS). It built on a previous update in January 2020 and quantified the rail network improvement interventions and projects which would be required to enable connectivity and capacity enhancements.

It was highlighted that:

- The report positioned Oxfordshire as a nationally important rail infrastructure hub.
- The report set out the interventions that would be required to achieve the improvements in connectivity and capacity previously identified as needed to support planned growth and costs of the interventions.
- A key conclusion of the report was the level of ambition, opportunity and need for investment in Oxfordshire' rail infrastructure. It was also recognised that the proposed interventions would need to be funded in the right way and that the timelines for their approval and delivery would be long-term. The report, therefore, set out how opportunities for securing support might be best achieved through either the Rail Network Enhancement Programme process or other potential funding opportunities.
- The report identified potential future considerations beyond the package of improvements to support planned growth. This included the potential for additional rail schemes.

In discussion, Growth Board members thanked officers for their work in supporting the ORCS. They also welcomed the proposed recommendations and highlighted how important the proposed improvements works were to both Oxfordshire and the wider region.

Professor Alistair Fitt, on behalf of the universities within Oxfordshire, referred to the report's consideration of the potential for a new station at Begbroke. He set out the benefits that he felt would arise from the development of a new station at that location. Cllr Constance, likewise, highlighted the case for Grove station. In response, Mr Disley commented that these points had been noted and that the potential for a new station at Begbroke had been included within the scope of the study. He, nevertheless, stressed that, as with any rail intervention, the provision of a new station would require significant investment. Furthermore, line capacity issues would also need to be addressed.

Councillor Brown referred to the role that the improvements to Oxford Station played in delivering the county's wider rail ambitions. She also highlighted the importance of delivering the Cowley branch line project.

Councillor Brown referred to the to the role of the improvements to Oxford Station as a building block in achieving the wider ambition of the proposals and highlighted the importance of the delivery of the Cowley branch line project.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

1. welcomes the outcomes and conclusions of the completed Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study.
2. endorses the proposed next stage of work, to be progressed in partnership with Network Rail and the rail industry via the Governance mechanism outlined, under the 'Oxfordshire Connect' banner.

## **77. Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

The Growth Board considered a report – presented by Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme – providing a final Vision for Oxfordshire's Long-Term Sustainable Development. It also included the results of the public engagement exercise on the previous draft Vision and set out the proposed next steps to embed the Vision in future plans and strategies.

It was highlighted that:

- There had been a good response in terms of scope and scale to the public engagement and consultation undertaken on the draft version of the Vision earlier in the year. Feedback had generally been positive and even where there had been challenges to the specific content, respondents had been supportive of the aim of developing a strategic vision for Oxfordshire;
- A focus of the engagement and consultation exercise had been young people. Officers had supported this via social media channels and through virtual workshops with local colleges.
- While the latest version of the Vision shared many of the aspects of the earlier draft, important changes had been made in several areas.
- The current version of the Vision reflected the Board's direction that it should have a wider remit than the minimum requirements necessary to support the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It should instead inform a range of plans, strategies etc that would guide Oxfordshire's future.
- The Vision had been drafted in a balanced way which sought to provide an overall strategic umbrella. It was not intended to rank priorities.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

1. Endorse the Revised Strategic Vision attached as Appendix 1.
2. Asks all members of the Growth Board to consider their respective organisations agreeing the Vision as the basis for informing future plan and strategy development.
3. Request officers to develop a communications strategy for the Vision and a suitable approach to measuring success in delivering the Vision.

## 78. Establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory Group

The Growth Board considered a report – presented by Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group and Jayne Manley, Chief Executive of the Earth Trust which set out a proposal to establish an Environment Advisory Group for the Growth including draft Terms of Reference for endorsement. It included an update concerning the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire and together with a request that the Growth Board endorse emerging Environment Principles for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

It was highlighted that:

- The emerging Environment Principles had been developed by the Arc Leadership Group. It was expected that they would help to inform the development of HM Government's Oxford to Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework and an Environmental Strategy for the Arc.
- It was hoped to establish an Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership later in the calendar year.
- The proposed establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory Group was consistent with the outcomes of the Growth Board review undertaken in 2020. The proposed Terms of Reference included the ability for the Group's membership to include non-local authority representatives. It was hoped that it could start to meet shortly after the 2021 local government elections.
- While the concepts and language of both the ecological and climate emergencies had now permeated into the thoughts of most people, the nature of the response to address these challenges would require radical ideas and actions. The Strategic Vision articulated a significant environmental ambition for Oxfordshire but for it to succeed would require new ways of doing things.
- The urgency of the environmental challenges being faced meant that actions needed to be put in place as quickly as possible. Oxfordshire needed to be able to demonstrate its commitment and leadership role on these issues prior to COP26.

Members of the Growth Board strongly welcomed the proposals. They noted that, in many aspects, they represented a continuum and formalisation of existing work being undertaken within Oxfordshire.

In addition, members stressed the need for the Advisory Group to begin work as soon as possible after the local government elections. They highlighted the importance of bringing together partners and sharing best practice.

Strong support was also given to the emerging Environment Principles for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

1. Supports the establishment of an Environment Advisory Group and endorse its Terms of Reference as set out at Appendix 2.
2. Notes progress concerning the development of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire.

3. Endorses the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles as set out at Appendix 3, recognising that this statement of ambition applies to a diverse range of urban and rural communities, and that further evidentiary work will be required at a local level to understand their longer-term implications.
4. Supports the development of an Arc Environment Strategy which will provide for how the principles can be delivered.

## **79. Housing and Growth Deal Reports**

### **(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Year 3, Quarter 3**

The Growth Board considered a report which set out an update on progress at Quarter 3, Year 3 with the Housing and Growth Deal.

At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, drew attention to references in the report to the evidence base for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 – of which the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) was part. Mr Staines, in light of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel's request that the OGNA be published as soon as it was completed, stressed that work was still ongoing. Furthermore, once the OGNA was completed, it would still need to be approved by the individual planning local authorities.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board notes the 2021/2022 Quarter 3 Housing and Growth Deal report.

### **(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report - Year 3, Quarter 3**

The Growth Board considered a report which set out an update on the Housing and Growth Deal financial position as of Quarter 3, Year 3.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board notes the 2021/2022 Quarter 3 Housing and Growth Deal financial report.

### **(c) Infrastructure Subgroup update**

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Infrastructure Subgroup meetings held on 8 February 2021 and 1 March 2021.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes of the Infrastructure Subgroup meetings held on 8 February 2021 and 1 March 2021 be noted.

### **(d) Housing Subgroup update**

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Subgroup held on 23 February 2021.

Councillor Brown, Chair of the Housing Advisory Subgroup, stated that, since its last meeting, positive responses had been received from HM Government to letters from the Growth Board concerning future building standards and the route to zero carbon, and the extension of the Community Led Housing Fund.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Subgroup held on 23 February 2021 be noted.

**(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup update**

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup held on 18 February 2021.

Giles Hughes, Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council highlighted the progress that the subgroup had made in relation to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. They were now beginning to discuss some of the draft information that would form part of the summer public consultation.

Mr Hughes also paid tribute to Rachel Williams and the work that she had done in leading the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 project to this point. He wished her well in her new role at Oxford City Council. Interim measures had been put in place to ensure the continued progression of the project while the recruitment of a replacement Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Lead was taking place.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 held on 18 February 2021 be noted.

**(f) Joint Oxfordshire Plan 2050/Infrastructure Subgroup**

The Growth Board received the notes of the joint meeting of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and Infrastructure Subgroups held on 21 January 2021.

The Vice Chair, commenting as the Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup, stated that she had found the joint meeting very useful and believed that, where appropriate, future such events should be held.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes of the joint Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and Infrastructure Subgroup held on 21 January 2021 be noted.

## **80. Growth Board Forward Plan**

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, – set out the published Growth Board Forward Programme commenting that it was proposed to add the following items:

- Zero Carbon Economy Report – June Growth
- Oxfordshire Local Skills Plan Update – June Growth Board
- Community Led Housing Update – November Growth Board

## **81. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board**

No matters were raised.

## **82. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update**

The Growth Board considered a report – presented by Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group – providing an update on recent developments within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. He reiterated the strong collaboration taking place between partners within the Arc which had driven the environmental principles.

Mr Down also commented that both the level and vigour of HM Government's engagement with the Arc Leaders Group had significantly increased. This signalled that they viewed the



Arc as a high priority. It had also, within the Budget announcements, been referenced as one of four Project Speed Pathfinders.

The Oxford to Cambridge Arc had been referenced as one of four Project Speed Pathfinders with the Budget announcements and a MHCLG team was progressing the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework. Whilst it was early in the development of the Spatial Framework and it was not possible to prejudge the output, the MHCLG had shown a strong collaborative approach which was welcome.

At the Budget, HM Government had also referred to the creation of a Growth Body for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. While no information had so far been released regarding its constitution and membership, it was anticipated that there would be representation from both local government and other sectors.

In discussion, Councillor Wood, commenting as the Chair of the Arc Leaders Group, welcomed both the fact that the Arc appeared to be a key priority for HM Government and the collaborative approach that was being taken. Professor Alistair Fitt stated that although it was important that work in this area progressed quickly, it was also vital that this be communicated to the wider public in an engaging and interesting way. This would help to increase awareness and understanding of what the Arc might look like in the future and the potential benefits that it could bring.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board note the report.

### **83. Appointment to England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum**

The Growth Board considered the appointment of a member to England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum. They noted that this was required to be a councillor from one of the constituent local planning authorities.

**RESOLVED:** That the Chair of the Growth Board be appointed as the Growth Board's representative on England's Economic Heartland Strategic Forum, and that this role rotates with the Chair as required.

### **84. Dates of next meetings**

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

- 8 June 2021
- 19 July 2021
- 20 September 2021
- 23 November 2021
- 25 January 2022
- 22 March 2022
- 7 June 2022
- 26 July 2022

The meeting closed at 3.20 pm