

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON TUESDAY 8 JUNE 2021 AT 2.00 PM

FIRST FLOOR, 135 EASTERN AVENUE, MILTON PARK, MILTON, OX14 4SB

Present:

Councillor Michele Mead (Chair), (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Ian Corkin, (Cherwell District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities representative), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Adrian Lockwood, (Oxfordshire Skills Board Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Councillor Emily Smith (Vale of White Horse District Council) and Catherine Turner, (Homes England)

Officers: Richard Byard (Oxfordshire LEP), Andrew Down (Growth Board Director and South and Vale Councils), Ahmed Goga (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), 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 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.

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for the 2021/2022 year

Councillor Emily Smith welcomed all present to the meeting. As outgoing Chair, she made a statement in which she thanked the members of the Board and officers for their support in what had been a challenging year and for how they had worked together to deliver a truly Oxfordshire wide agenda including the advancement of climate changes issues. The Growth Board had continued towards a more open approach to engagement with the public and improved its transparency, but its name was misunderstood and implied decision making and a focus on housing growth when its remit extended far wider. Councillor Smith suggest reconsideration of one of the alternative names suggested during the Growth Board review.

Councillor Smith proposed Councillor Michele Mead as Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the year 2021/2022 and this was seconded by Councillor Susan Brown. There being no other nominations this was confirmed by the voting members present.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Michele Mead be elected as Chair of Oxfordshire Growth Board for the 2021/2022 year.

Councillor Mead took the Chair at this point and paid tribute to Councillor Smith for her service as Chair of the Growth Board during the previous year. It was then proposed by Councillor Mead that Councillor Barry Wood be elected as Vice-Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the 2021/2022 year. This was seconded by Councillor Sue Cooper and upon there being no other nominations this was confirmed by the voting members present.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Barry Wood be elected as Vice-Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the 2021/2022 year.

2. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcement

Apologies for absence were submitted from Miranda Markham, OxLEP business representative – Bicester; Peter Nolan, OxLEP business representative – Oxford City and Councillor Barry Wood, Cherwell District Council, (who was substituted by Councillor Ian Corkin).

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and live streamed and that it was the first to be held since the regulations allowing for completely virtual formal meetings had lapsed. Voting members of the Growth Board were present physically and other members were present remotely via video conferencing.

The Board was also informed that Oxfordshire local authority leaders had been requested to attend a virtual thank you to NHS volunteers later that afternoon and given the importance and exceptional nature of that event it was hoped the meeting would end promptly.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2021 be agreed for signing as a correct record.

4. Public participation

The Chair indicated that in light of the meeting time constraints summary answers would be provided initially, but full responses would be made in writing and published in due course.

Michael Tyce made an address on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire in which he expressed the CPRE's caveated congratulations to the Growth Board for its expressed commitment to local planning decision making within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc as set out in its response to the Scrutiny Panel recommendation 6 on 22 March. In the CPRE's view it was important for the planning decisions to be taken by those most affected by them, but it was concerned that the Growth Board's response was open to misinterpretation as the statement that planning decisions should be taken at the "at the right level" could be taken to mean different things and that it was unclear whether a 'planning decision' related narrowly to the individual planning applications or more widely to include spatial strategies.

Mr Tyce expressed the view that the issue around the level of planning decisions was linked to the principle of whether wider plans for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc would be developed led by the informed wishes of local people and local decision making, or an approach which was primarily one of decisions centrally imposed by HM Government. The Growth Board's response to the Scrutiny Panel recommendation did not go far enough and should be clear and unequivocal. The public deserved to know how the process for the Arc was to be conducted and therefore it was unfortunate in his view in the spirit of engagement and transparency, that there had not yet been any consultation of the emerging Oxfordshire Plan 2050 spatial options with stakeholders like the CPRE and the public. This was a missed opportunity to gain valuable insights.

Whilst the CPRE recognised the need and potential benefits of economic growth and welcomed the recognition within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision of the environment of being of equal value, absolute constraints on the amount of development in Oxfordshire were required to preserve quality of life and the county's exceptional qualities.

The Chair responded to the address stating Growth Board members were happy to confirm their view that planning decisions should be taken at the local level wherever possible, using the local development framework which includes adopted local plans and neighbourhood plans. Of course, the Board was obliged to have regard to national planning policy, and it was expected that the government led Arc Spatial Framework would in due course form an addition to national policy. The Board did not expect the Arc Spatial Framework to supersede local plans or the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The Growth Board believed it should focus on matters of regional significance and take a leading role in the national response to climate change.

Ian Ashley asked a question on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire which asked local elected leaders to start joining up thinking around climate change and the natural world, informed by the societal changes arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the importance of good public health. Mr Ashley expressed the view that this required local leaders to keep their election pledges and oppose nationally led measures which would overheat the economy of the South East. Local leaders also needed to deal with a chronic underfunding of local government which previous leaders had tried unsuccessfully to address by commitments to provide housing in excess of local need. Local authorities in Oxfordshire were invited to withdraw from the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Group which it was argued had entrenched rather than addressed these issues.

The Chair responded that the view of the Growth Board was that it would be unhelpful to disengage from regional discussions that affect Oxfordshire's future, particularly when the Arc Leaders Group had been set up to give a voice to local leaders in responding to the Government's Arc agenda. Thinking was increasingly joined up across the Arc with respect to climate change and the natural world, and this could be seen between the Arc Environment Principles, the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, and a range of local action plans. The Growth Board expected to see an Arc Environment Strategy being developed soon. The Board had also lobbied HM Government on issues such as flooding and building standards to strengthen ability to act locally on climate change. The Growth Board recognised the complexity and diversity of opinions when it comes to housing numbers, and we will pay close attention to the responses to the forthcoming consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan.

Councillor Jane Murphy asked a question which congratulated Councillor Smith for her actions as Chair of the Growth Board in the previous year and which referred to the achievements of the Board often not being fully recognised with many incorrect pre-conceptions around the role of the Board. Councillor Murphy expressed the view that rather than it being Oxfordshire's enemy, engagement by the Growth Board with the Oxford to Cambridge Arc would be key to achieving collective aims to take forward policies around climate change, net zero and biodiversity. However, the name of the Growth Board was misleading, and the Growth Board was asked to reconsider this at its next meeting.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Smith thanked Councillor Murphy for her kind remarks and commented that as she has set out earlier in the meeting, she felt that a name change for the Growth Board was needed and she wished to work with colleagues on this. In respect of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc she wished to clarify that the Oxford to Cambridge Arc was a HM Government project, not a Growth Board one and the spatial framework that was under development by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government might or might not, assist Oxfordshire in achieving net-zero and biodiversity gains. Whilst Oxfordshire's representatives on the Arc Leaders Group would continue to represent local concerns and issues there was no guarantee that these would be listened to. The action being taken through engagement with the Arc was with the aim of lobbying HM Government to take actions which would be as positive for local people and the environment as possible.

Suzanne Mclvor asked a question on behalf of Cherwell Development Alliance which referred to the principles expressed in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision around reflecting local people's opinions and priorities and expressed concern that these priorities had not themselves been subject to statutory consultation. Ms Mclvor then expressed her view that the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision would not, despite announcements to the contrary by the Growth Board, have any effective influence over the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The Board was asked to explain how the Strategic Vision could be a 'cornerstone' of OP2050 if

fundamental aspects of the Strategic Vision, such as measuring outcomes and reporting, would still be incomplete during the period when the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 the Regulation 18, Part 2 consultation was taking place.

The Chair responded that the Strategic Vision had now been agreed by each of the six councils of Oxfordshire. As a result, the Growth Board would expect to see that the upcoming Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation had taken account of the Vision and its content.

Suzanne Mclvor asked a question on behalf of Cherwell Development Alliance which referred to the legal status of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and stated the view of the Cherwell Development Alliance that the Strategic Vision would not strengthen the Board's approach to strategic plan making. The Board was asked whether it had clarified its thinking on whether the Strategic Vision strengthened the Board's approach to strategic plan-making and if so, what was the result and whether a legal opinion on this issue had been sought.

The Chair responded that the Board was confident that the Strategic Vision strengthens its approach to strategic plan-making by providing a clear vision of what the Board wanted Oxfordshire to look like in 2050, based on feedback from residents. With regards to the legal opinion, this commission was ongoing as part of wider legal opinion on the development of the Oxfordshire Plan.

5. Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update

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

Councillor Gant referred to the summary of the discussions and recommendations arising from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 1 June 2021 as set out in the Agenda. He highlighted that many of the Panel's observations, themes and recommendations were aligned and supported questions and points made by the previous public speakers which was positive. The Growth Board's attention was drawn to the repeat of the Panel's recommendation that the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, (OGNA) work be published earlier than scheduled. Secondly, that any increase in office space in Oxford City should not result in an increase in private car use to the greatest extent possible in Recommendation Two and that there was a need to consider the diversity of leadership within consideration of the wider local skills landscape in Oxfordshire as set out in Recommendation Three

The Chair responded that a full response to the Panel's recommendations would be set out in writing and published following the meeting. In respect of Recommendation One she commented that the OGNA work was in the final stages and was scheduled to be completed by the commencement of consultation on the Regulation 18 draft Oxfordshire Plan 2050 on 31 July 2021. The consultation would present a genuine range of options and although the Board noted the wish of interested parties to study the OGNA in advance it was not possible to meet this request as all councils were fully engaged in the final stages of the process.

6. Powering Up for the Green Recovery

The Growth Board considered a report produced by Advanced Oxford titled 'Powering Up for the Green Recovery – Oxfordshire's role in building a cleaner future' and a set of summary slides as set out in the Agenda. Sarah Haywood, Managing Director of Advanced Oxford presented the report highlighting that the research had been commissioned by the membership of Advanced Oxford and represented the views of those businesses that had taken part in the study.

The report's recommendations related to significant opportunities and challenges linked to the support of the Green Recovery in Oxfordshire from the research which included investment, development of skills, market making, business development in appropriate skills and the need for innovation spaces in Oxford City. In the interests of time management, if Growth Board members had questions or feedback arising from the report, they were encouraged to contact Sarah Haywood outside of the meeting.

The Chair indicated suggested that it would be helpful to identify any particular areas where the Growth Board could add value or assist value to the work being undertaken which would be progressed outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. Overview of skills landscape

The Growth Board considered a report and supporting summary slides presented by Richard Byard, Director of Business Development, OxLEP which set out an update on the emerging national skills landscape and the implications for Oxfordshire's skills priorities including an overview of the skills required to support the transition to net zero. It was highlighted that:

- Skills mattered within Oxfordshire because the United Kingdom lagged behind major competitors in respect of productivity and significant skills shortages existed within the county particularly in respect of science, technology, and mathematics skills whilst the transition to new economic sectors including net zero was in progress.
- There was a need to adjust in light of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and reskilling was needed as key priority to support a thriving economy and communities.
- HM Government, through the Skills and Post 16 Education Bill, had set out its intention to place business representative organisations close to learning providers in order to increase collaboration around skills development. As part of this Agenda, it was expected that business centres would be created within colleges to focus on driving innovation and collaboration between colleges and employer groups.
- New rules were coming into force regarding the allocation of the national £1.5bn skills capital funding pot which would have a direct impact on the work of the Oxfordshire Skills Board and the work of OxLEP in supporting the Growth Board's wider skills priorities.
- Skills Boards including the Oxfordshire Skills Board were expected to take on a more strategic role within the changing skills landscape through the Strategic Skills Strategy, now in its third iteration.
- The report set out the skills challenges and opportunities of the transition to net zero which had links to the work of Advanced Oxford on the Green Recovery

RESOLVED:

1. That the Growth Board notes the report and reaffirms the Oxfordshire Skills Board as the body responsible for strategic skills development in Oxfordshire.
2. That the Growth Board notes the emerging skills challenges and opportunities presented from the transition to net zero.

8. Housing and Growth Deal Advisory Group Updates

(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 26 May 2021. It was highlighted that the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, (OxIS) was heading towards public consultation on the outcomes of Part One of the in OxIS in July 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 26 May 2021 be noted.

(b) Housing Advisory Group update

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Group held on 27 April 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Group held on 27 April 2021 be noted.

(c) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

The Growth Board received the notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group held on 18 March 2021 and 27 April 2021. The Board was informed that preparations were progressing well prior to the commencement of the Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation with consideration of the consultation document by individual councils scheduled for to take place during July 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group meetings held on 18 March 2021 and 27 April 2021 be noted.

9. Growth Board Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, - set out the published Growth Board Forward Plan commenting there were no specific amendments other than potentially to add an item to the Plan for July relating to the name of the Growth Board's title.

10. Other Growth Board related appointments

The Chair proposed that the following Growth Board appointments be made en bloc for the 2021/2022 year. This was seconded by Councillor Emily Smith:

- a) Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Executive Group - (3 local authority nominations plus one standing deputy) - Councillor Liz Leffman, Councillor Michele Mead, Councillor Barry Wood and Councillor Susan Brown, (Standing Deputy).
- b) Growth Board Housing Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Susan Brown.
- c) Growth Board Environment Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Sue Cooper.
- d) Growth Board Infrastructure Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Liz Leffman.
- e) Growth Board Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Emily Smith and;
- f) To confirm that the England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum nomination will continue to rotate with the chairing of the Growth Board – Councillor Michele Mead.

RESOLVED: That the following Growth Board related appointments be made for the 2021/2022 Growth Board year:

1. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Executive Group - (3 local authority nominations plus one standing deputy) - Councillor Liz Leffman, Councillor Michele Mead, Councillor Barry Wood and Councillor Susan Brown, (Standing Deputy);
2. Growth Board Housing Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Susan Brown.
3. Growth Board Environment Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Sue Cooper.

4. Growth Board Infrastructure Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Liz Leffman.
5. Growth Board Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group Chair – Councillor Emily Smith and;
6. To confirm that the England’s Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum nomination will continue to rotate with the chairing of the Growth Board. –Councillor Michele Mead.

Councillor Brown commented that she wished to repeat her formal disagreement as expressed previously about the allocation of appointments to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leadership Executive Group on the grounds that in her view, one of the appointments should be a representative of Oxford City to ensure a city perspective was explicitly included.

11. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Growth Board Director provided a verbal update. The Board was informed that Councillor Barry Wood had been confirmed as the Chair of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leadership Group for the current year. The Arc Leadership Group had also pushed for the electrification of the East-West Rail line and was in ongoing discussions with HM Government about the arrangements for its proposed Oxford to Cambridge Arc Growth Body.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

No matters were raised.

13. Dates of next meetings

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

- 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 15:00

Chairman

Date

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