

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON FRIDAY 30 OCTOBER 2020 AT 2.00 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY A WEBLINK

Present:

Councillors Councillor Emily Smith (Chair), (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities representative), Councillor Tom Hayes, (Oxford City Council), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Councillor Ian Hudspeth, (Oxfordshire District Council), Adrian Lockwood, (OxLEP Vice-Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business representative - Bicester), Councillor Michele Mead, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City), Catherine Turner, (Homes England) and Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council).

Officers: Andrew Down (South Oxfordshire District Council), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, Bev Hindle (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Gordon Mitchell (Oxford City Council CEX), Yvonne Rees (Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council CEX), Stefan Robinson (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Mark Stone (South and Vale District Councils CEX) and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership CEX)

Also present: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel.

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

Councillor Susan Brown, Oxford City Council, (substituted by Councillor Tom Hayes), Dr Kiren Collison, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Angus Horner, OxLEP business representative – Science Vale.

The Chair congratulated Councillor Michele Mead following her election as Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council and welcomed her to the Growth Board. Councillor Mead was to take on the chairing of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Sub-group from Councillor Mills and would lead the subgroup's continuing work with Giles Hughes as the lead Chief Executive for the Plan.

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

41. Public participation

Michael Tyce on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire made an address referring to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and Oxford to Cambridge Economic Prospectus which asked the Growth Board to not endorse the Prospectus. Mr Tyce expressed the view that the Arc was an organisational fiction without formal status and that contrary to the Prospectus, Oxfordshire was a rural county and not a unique home of technology. The Prospectus did not contain enough financial information or explain the investment required to secure return on investment.

Concerns were expressed that if the Prospectus was endorsed by the Board, governance structures would be required, which it was argued, would be top-down, leading to a reduction in local accountability and decision making. In the view of CPRE, this was not what the public wanted and ran counter to the aims of the Draft Oxfordshire Vision to develop an approach that is more Oxfordshire specific.

The Prospectus had been submitted to HM Government prior to Board consideration and without consultation with the public. It contained references to climate change and the protection of countryside, but the view was expressed that these were felt to be superficial. With the withdrawal of Buckinghamshire Council from the Arc Leadership Group, he said this demonstrated that a rethink was necessary.

In response, with the support of officer advice, the Chair commented that there were several comments made in the address that needed to be factually challenged. She said the Oxford to Cambridge Arc had been identified as a region of economic significance by HM Government in response to work undertaken by the National Infrastructure Commission. It was a construct, but not one that was fictional or without merit and there were many benefits of working in collaboration with neighbouring areas. The Arc with its links to Oxford, Cambridge and other universities was of international significance and capacity.

The Prospectus did not present itself as attempting to capture the entire economic value of the Arc, but it did make appropriate references to other sources of information such as the Joint Local Industrial Strategy work and the Local Enterprise Partnerships within the Arc geography. Buckinghamshire Council in withdrawing from the Arc Leadership Group had been incorrect to state that decision making for the Arc Spatial Framework rested with the Group because the Arc Spatial Framework was being developed, funded and delivered by HM Government. The Arc continued to be a forum where members could choose to work collaboratively together to positively influence national decision makers. The principles of the Arc had already been established by HM Government and the Prospectus did not attempt changes these, what it hoped to gain was better outcomes for Oxfordshire.

It was expressed to be misleading to refer to the Arc as lacking in democratic accountability given that HM Government had established the Arc concept and locally elected Leaders were engaging with it. No statutory decisions had been taken and accountability would be served through those organisations. Finally, the development of the Prospectus had been a bottom up process involving many local stakeholders.

It was noted a full copy of the address and response was available from [this link](#).

42. 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 outcomes and recommendations from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 21 October 2020 as set out in the circulated report. He highlighted the Panel's discussion of the importance of aligning end dates and existing policy documents including local plans with the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and the need in the Panel's view for local authority Leaders to engage with councillors within their authorities and their wider communities about the vision. It was particularly important to engage with younger people given the long-term nature of the Vision.

The Chair set out the Growth Board's initial response agreeing the recommendations, highlighting that the need to engage with young people was fully recognised.

43. Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

The Growth Board considered a report introducing a draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire's sustainable development. The report set out the purpose of the proposed approach, the scope and content of the Vision and the anticipated benefits. In presenting the report, Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director highlighted that Vision had links to and contributed to the ongoing work to draft the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 by providing a single set of long-term spatial planning goals for the county. Whilst it was not a statutory plan, it was an important document that would be subject of a public engagement exercise before being brought back to the Board for final endorsement, expected in March 2021. The Growth Board Scrutiny Panel was thanked for its comments that there should be a strategic link between the Vision and what was happening with the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

All the members of the Board supported the development of the Vision for public engagement and that an updated document would be brought back to Board in the New Year. It was felt that public engagement should commence as soon as was practical and that it was important for as many individuals and stakeholders to take part as possible.

Various Board Members referred to the importance of Oxfordshire to the national economy and the importance of thinking strategically through the Vision to make sure the area remained in a favourable competitive position which included the need to consider infrastructure improvements. The inclusion of inclusivity, health and wellbeing and climate change was welcomed, although some of the Board felt that the Vision could potentially go further on these issues.

RESOLVED: That the Oxfordshire Growth Board:

1. Agrees the content of the Draft Strategic Vision attached as Appendix 1, which will form the basis of a programme of public engagement, and return for Growth Board endorsement by March 2021;
2. Agrees that any minor changes to the Draft Vision are agreed by the Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group in consultation with the Chair of the Growth Board before public engagement begins.

44. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus Update

The Growth Board considered a report which requested the Board's endorsement of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus which had been submitted to HM Government with the support of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leadership Group at the end of September.

Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, highlighted that the Prospectus was a product of the Arc Leadership Group covering the entire geographic area of the Arc, notwithstanding the withdrawal of Buckinghamshire Council, Buckingham LEP and the University of Buckingham from the Arc Leadership Group. The intention of the Prospectus was to respond to HM Government's ask around capturing what local leaders and stakeholders wanted to achieve through collaboration through the Arc and what was needed to achieve those aims. The final document represented the consensus of joint working across local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and universities and provided a useful expression of the Arc's asks that it was hoped would inform HM Government's forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. It would also inform development of an Arc spatial planning framework.

In discussion, the Growth Board supported the endorsement of the Prospectus and its contents. The Prospectus was felt to have value and represented a genuine opportunity for the Arc area to set out its ambitions to HM Government at an important time, particularly in respect of the promotion of world leading innovation on green issues and the environment which were welcomed.

The importance of effective communication around what the Prospectus proposed, and what it did not, was stressed by several Board members, particularly that it did not include support for an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

RESOLVED: That the Oxfordshire Growth Board endorses the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus (attached as Appendix 2).

45. Dates of next meetings

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

- 26 January 2021
- 22 February 2021
- 23 March 2021
- 8 June 2021.

The Chair concluded the meeting by paying tribute on behalf of the whole Board to Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, for all his work in support of the Growth Board and the Housing and Growth Deal, prior to him taking up the role of Oxford to Cambridge Arc Director on a full time basis.

The meeting closed at 15:05

Chairman

Date