

# Minutes

## OF A MEETING OF THE

# Oxfordshire Growth Board

HELD ON TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2020 AT 2.00 PM VIRTUALLY

[\(recording of the meeting available here\)](#)

### Present:

Councillor Emily Smith, (Chair), (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Ian Hudspeth, (Oxfordshire County Council), Councillor James Mills, (Vice-Chair) (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities' representative), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business rep - Science Vale), Adrian Lockwood, (OxLEP Vice-Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business rep Bicester), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business rep - Oxford City) and Catherine Turner (Homes England).

**Officers:** Andrew Down (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), John Disley, (Oxfordshire County Council), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Bev Hindle (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob, (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Yvonne Rees (Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council CEX), Stefan Robinson, (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Mark Stone (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils CEX) and Nigel Tipple (OxLEP CEX).

## 1 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for the 2020/2021 year

Councillor Sue Cooper welcomed all present to the virtual meeting and made a statement as outgoing Chair. She referred to the extraordinary circumstances facing Oxfordshire and the country in light of the Covid-19 emergency. Councillor Cooper thanked all residents for their forbearance and expressed her gratitude to all of those tackling the pandemic. She added that local councils were, in addition to continuing to deliver many existing regular services, working tirelessly as part of the national response effort. The Growth Board would have a key role in planning for the post-Covid-19 recovery and the Councils working in partnership with sharing of skills and resources would become even more important.

Referring to her year as Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, Councillor Cooper thanked both the members and those supporting its work for their help and assistance. During the last 12 months, significant progress had been to improve the Board's transparency and openness. Councillor Cooper commented that her view was that economic prosperity remained a key priority, but it was also important for the county to live within its environmental limits.

Councillor Cooper proposed Emily Smith as Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the year 2020/21 and this was seconded by Councillor Susan Brown. There being no other nominations this was confirmed by the voting members present.

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Emily Smith be elected as Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the 2020-2021 year.

Councillor Smith took the Chair at this point and proposed that Councillor James Mills be elected as Vice-Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the 2020/2021 year. This was seconded by Councillor Cooper and upon there being no other nominations this was confirmed by the voting members present.

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor James Mills be elected as Vice-Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board for the 2020/2021 year.

Councillor Smith paid tribute to Councillor Cooper for her service as Chair during the previous year, particularly in relation to the review of the Growth Board. She referred to the need to implement the changes that the Board had committed to from the review. She also highlighted the need to continue to make improvements around communications and engagement with the public. Oxfordshire faced significant challenges coming out of the Covid-19 emergency, but opportunities also existed. It was important for the Growth Board to work in partnership with neighbouring counties as part of the Oxfordshire to Cambridge Arc to get the best outcomes for residents and the planet.

## **2 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Dr Kiren Collison, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

## **3 Adoption of Virtual Meeting Procedure Rules**

**RESOLVED:** That the virtual meeting rules of Vale of White Horse District Council be adopted.

## **4 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **5 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020 be signed as a correct record.

## **6 Chair's announcements**

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being broadcast live online and recorded.

## 7 Public participation

**Julia Benning on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire** submitted a question. It challenged what was felt to be an implicit assumption that, despite the impacts of Covid-19, the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and the Expressway would go ahead unchanged. It also articulated the view that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on the provision of green infrastructure within the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy. The Growth Board was asked to provide answers to the following specific questions.

- a) How will it put environmental considerations, including climate change but also biodiversity, food production and access to green space, at the heart of the OxIS revision, including decision-making on spatial strategy, and how will this be reflected in the brief to external consultants?

John Disley, Infrastructure delivery Manager at Oxfordshire County Council, responded that it was recognised that the OxIS update would need to be developed in the context of a changed policy environment. In particular, the updated objectives as set out in section 2 of the Outline Project Brief and Scope of Work reflected the key theme of the Environment (including addressing the climate emergency). The external consultants work would need to build on the latest evidence base. This would help to ensure that OxIS reflected the infrastructure priorities across this entire area.

The OxIS update was proposed to be carried out in two stages to align with, and support, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 (spatial options) and Regulation 19 (submission consultations). This would allow it to develop iteratively through the consultation process. The expectation was that the OxIS update would form the infrastructure evidence base for the Oxfordshire Plan.

- b) Which partners/stakeholders does the Growth Board propose to work with to ensure that the evidence base is available and used to best effect to support the necessary step-change of investment in Oxfordshire's green infrastructure and to guide any funding obtained to where it can be most effective (rather than simply a rather random wish-list of projects, no matter how noteworthy)?

John Disley responded that it was planned to engage with a wide variety of key infrastructure stakeholders including those involved in the delivery of green infrastructure, utilities, education, health facilities and transport. This would ensure that the Growth Board had the most up-to-date data set for OxIS, and that the relevant policy and strategy was understood and reflected in the work. Wider engagement on the draft Stage 1 study was planned in early 2021 (alongside the first Oxfordshire Plan consultation) This would ensure that wider stakeholders had the opportunity to review and comment on outputs prior to the finalisation of the study.

**Charlotte Ritchie** submitted a question in relation to the Oxford City Council Local Plan. In view of the fact that:

- a) Any investment in infrastructure to boost local economies should and will take place in the north of England, and that
- b) Oxford's 'housing need' is unclear, and that
- c) The Green Belt, once destroyed cannot be reclaimed, that its destruction contradicts the aims of sustainability, biodiversity and ecosystemic balance, and in particular

government policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs:7-14,117-123 and 133-147, and that

- d) Working practices including the use of offices and transport, post Covid 19, will change.

Was it not time for the Growth Board to request a review of the local plan, and to meet any unmet housing need using brownfield areas, and in particular, redeveloping the Botley Road/Western gateway to the City (currently occupied by car parks and superstores) and the Oxford Business Park areas that are within the ring road, and which are currently under-utilised and are likely to become more so?

The Chair responded that the Growth Board oversaw the preparation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which when adopted by the District and City Councils, would set an overarching strategic framework for the county. It was not the Growth Board's place to request a review of individual Local Plans, as asked by the question, which was a matter for the individual statutory planning authorities.

The Oxfordshire Plan was still very much in early development, and its content was still a matter for ongoing discussion and engagement with the public. While the Plan would include a spatial strategy, which will seek to direct where future growth was best planned, it was not intended to provide specific allocations or detail on individual sites.

In response to the previous questions, Councillor Brown commented that the Oxford City Local Plan had been through a long and thorough period of development and consultation. It had now been subject to a public examination and the inspector had agreed with the plan's conclusions in respect of Oxford City's future housing needs.

**Giles Lewis, on behalf of Cherwell Development Watch Alliance** submitted a written address to the Board asking it to agree that the Covid-19 emergency should be used as an opportunity to revise Oxford City's housing needs assessment downwards. A letter had been sent by the Alliance to Robert Jenrick citing evidence from the Office of National Statistics that the currently identified level of housing need had been exaggerated and was unrealistic. Concerns were also expressed over what was regarded to be a continuation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 trajectory of economic growth, more homes and further infrastructure. In addition, there were fears that the Plan was set within the context of Oxfordshire being a contributor to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and wider sub-regional ambitions.

Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, responded that it was not the place of the Growth Board to comment on individual local plans, as those matters were best taken up with the relevant local planning authorities. The Oxfordshire Plan was looking ahead for the next 30 years and needed to take account of expected changes in the context in which it would sit. The Oxfordshire Plan was looking to plan for the next 30 years and needed to take account of expected changes in the context in which it would sit. This needed to be reflected on and responded to through the evidence base that was gathered. The public and partners were invited from 2 June to contribute to this discussion through the [Oxfordshire Open Thought](#) platform to provide their views on exactly these types of issues.

## **8 Growth Board Scrutiny Panel Update**

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

Councillor Gant reported on the outcomes of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 28 May 2020 as set out in the circulated report. He thanked Councillor Hudspeth for attending and expressed his gratitude to the officers who had attended and supported the meeting.

Councillor Smith outlined the Growth Board's initial response to each recommendation, the majority of which were accepted, and it was noted that the full final text of this would be published on the [Agenda website](#).

## **9 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal**

The Growth Board considered a report providing an update on the early impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. It included a recommendation to revise the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timeline. In presenting the report Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, highlighted that:

- The report represented a point in time and there remained significant uncertainty around the length and severity of the impact of the pandemic.
- These issues would need to be monitored and there would now be regular updates to the Growth Board on the issue and potential mitigations.
- The pandemic was expected to impact on deliverability across the whole of the Housing and Growth Deal, not just the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 elements. In many cases, the completion of the Deal objectives depended on the ability of external stakeholders to deliver. These were outside of the Board's direct influence.
- The expected changes in public behaviour as a result of the pandemic might affect issues such as housing type and infrastructure planning.
- A joint approach to the recovery was being developed with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).
- A joint approach to the recovery was being developed with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP).
- Given the uncertainties, it was impossible to rule out the need for a further extension of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timeline.

Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP, supported the comments made, particularly those with regard to the uncertainty of timescales. He commented that there was likely to be a period of economic renewal, with businesses recalibrating over a period of at least 12 months, rather than a recovery to a pre-Covid position.

Councillor Wood expressed the view that it was possible that developers, citing the economic impact of Covid-19 on viability, might seek to renegotiate previous planning application commitments on financial contributions. There was merit in local authorities continuing to liaise regarding their response to this. Potential opportunities for local authorities also existed. For instance, the provision of land for affordable housing or infrastructure in lieu of a financial contribution by developers. The pressing need for more affordable housing was also commented upon.

### **RESOLVED:** That

1. The early impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal be noted by the Growth Board, and in considering this;

2. The Growth Board endorses the revised timeline for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, as set out in the report, for officers to take forward in discussion with MHCLG.

## 10 Updating the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)

The Growth Board considered a report on the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) which outlined next steps for delivery to align with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timescales. John Disley, Oxfordshire County Council Infrastructure Strategy and Policy Manager, presented the report and highlighted that:

- OxIS had been originally completed in 2017 and was considered to have been successful in supporting funding bids for infrastructure across Oxfordshire.
- There had been a commitment within the Housing and Growth Deal to refresh OxIS linked to the infrastructure priorities of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.
- It was sensible for OxIS to be revisited in light of the forthcoming revised purpose of the Growth Board.
- A two-stage process was envisaged for the update. It would be undertaken in partnership across Oxfordshire.
- The timing of the update allowed for impacts arising from the Covid-19 pandemic to be taken into consideration as it progressed.

In discussion, the Growth Board welcomed the report and the proposed update of OxIS. While it was observed that the delivery of OxIS schemes was not as evident on the ground as it could have been, it was recognised that the Infrastructure strategy had been very successful in helping to secure funding and providing links to HM Government.

Support was expressed for the introduction of a new scoring matrix as part of the strategy. This would focus upon local needs, whilst taking account of priorities such as the climate emergency and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jeremy Long, Chair of OxLEP, commented that OxIS (along with the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy) represented a coherent understanding of the county moving forward. He remarked that it was the right time to reflect on the county's infrastructure needs and that the impacts arising from the pandemic should rightly form part of that.

**RESOLVED:** That the Oxfordshire Growth Board endorse the outline project brief and scope of work for the OxIS update, in line with the current commitment to update OxIS in the Oxfordshire Growth Deal.

## 11 Growth Board Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, set out the proposed Growth Board Forward Plan. He drew attention to an additional meeting scheduled for late July 2020 to consider the continued response to the pandemic and ongoing developments within the Arc. If appropriate, other items which had been provisionally programmed for the September meeting would also be brought forward.

It was also highlighted that consideration would be given as to how the Growth Board annual work planning event might be replaced by a virtual workshop or offline discussion.

**Resolved:**

That the Growth Board notes its forward programme.

## 12 Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

### Oxfordshire Open Thought

Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, informed the Board that the recently launched Oxfordshire Open Thought website had been designed to be innovative and provide a different non-statutory form of consultation than that traditionally associated with local government. Work had commenced prior to the pandemic, and the aim was to access the ideas of Oxfordshire's population (and other interested parties) about how people might live, work and travel up to 30 years in the future. Growth Board members were encouraged to visit and promote [the website](#) as much as possible.

### Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Executive Group

Bev Hindle reminded the Board that the Oxford to Cambridge Arc was an area of economic priority for HM Government. At the Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had made a commitment to the development of an Arc spatial framework as a major plank of HM Government's economic strategy. Across the geography of the Arc, local authorities had been working collectively with partners including Local Enterprise Partnerships and universities to try and see how they could mutually add value. Facilitation of this work, including meetings of the organisations involved, formed part of his role.

The Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leadership Group comprised of approximately 30 local authorities and partner organisations within the Arc area. The group had recently established a governance structure to include an Executive Leaders Group based upon Growth Board representation.

The Growth Board was invited to appoint three local authority representatives to the Arc Executive Leaders Group. The issue had been brought to this meeting, because it could not reasonably be deferred. It was noted that representatives from the LEP and universities sectors would also be represented on the group via a separate appointment process.

Members of the Growth Board agreed unanimously that it was important for Oxfordshire to fully engage in the work and development of the Arc for the benefit of Oxfordshire's residents and this was followed by detailed discussion around the appointments.

It was proposed by Councillor Mills that the three representatives should comprise Councillor Smith (as the current Chair of the Growth Board), Councillor Hudspeth (as the current Leader of Oxfordshire County Council – the transport authority) and Councillor Barry Wood (in light of his service as Chair of the Arc Leaders Group). Furthermore, Councillor Brown should be the standing deputy for all three appointments. In response, Councillor Brown commented that, in considering the Terms of Reference of the Executive Group, the Arc Leaders Group had accepted the importance of the respective Growth Boards being mindful of the overall political balance of appointments across the Arc. It was, therefore, important to ensure the voice and perspectives of cities, including Oxford, were recognised and represented.

After further discussion, Councillor Mill's proposal was seconded by Councillor Hudspeth and agreed by a majority vote.

## **RESOLVED:**

1. That Councillors Smith, Hudspeth and Wood be appointed as the Growth Board's representatives on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Executive Group for the 2020/21 Growth Board year.
2. That Councillor Brown be appointed as the Growth Board's standing deputy in respect of the above appointments for the 2020/21 Growth Board year.
3. That the above appointments be reviewed on an annual basis.

## **13 Dates of next meetings**

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

- July (tbc)
- 22 September 2020
- 24 November 2020
- 26 January 2021
- 22 February 2021
- 23 March 2021
- 8 June 2021

The meeting closed at 16:00

Chairman

Date