

Public speakers

28 July 2020

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

Questions

1. Charlie Hicks

To each board member, ask yourself: How old am I? How old will I be in 2050?

My name is Charlie, I'm 25. Born in the JR in May 1995. I grew up here, did my undergrad here, spent a few years in London and now I'm back living here. At uni I was lucky enough to visit Silicon Valley and learn the best way to think like a designer - just like Apple, Google, Uber and the like. If Oxford - Cambridge and Oxfordshire within that is to become the 'Silicon Arc', it would probably be wise to adopt some thinking from California. The context of the question is this:

What is the purpose of this group of people? What power do you hold between you? What will be impacted by the decisions you make? *Who* will be impacted by the decisions you make?

Good design principles, fit for the 21st century - used by all the best tech companies in the world - always start with one thing: the user. The user is the person or people who use the product or service that is being created. Good design *obsesses* over the user: the every last detail of their journey, their need, their context, their background, their hopes, their dreams, their desires.

Good design has core to it an overwhelming empathy for the user. An empathy that can only happen through one thing: *listening* to the user. So, the purpose of this group is to design an Oxfordshire for 2050.

So ask yourself this:

How old am I today? How old will I be in 2050? Who are the working-age users of Oxfordshire in 2050? Where are *their* voices in any of the work that we are doing? Where are *their* voices in any of the decisions we make? If they - people born after 1990 - are not central to everything you do, including as a part of this group, how can you even begin to have a hope of designing a future that will work for people in 2050?

So ... how old am I? Who is this group for? How are we designing for the future?

Answer provided: *Thank you for your question Charlie and your challenge to us on engaging young people – an issue close to my heart.*

The purpose of this group is included in today's agenda at page 22. We are a collaboration of local council and system leaders with the purpose of coordinating local efforts to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits.

While we meet to share information and discuss ideas and solutions to county wide issues, our coordination role does not extend to taking any statutory decisions. Instead, we have been asked by Oxfordshire's councils to provide oversight of various pieces of joint work they are undertaking.

Most relevant to your question is our role in overseeing the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which will set a spatial framework for Oxfordshire's future from now up to 2050. The voice of young people is critically important in this work. Officers supporting that work have held several workshop events that place young people at the centre of that process.

We held a workshop with the Voice of Oxfordshire's Youth earlier this year. As a youth-led countywide forum for young people in Oxfordshire, they were keen to discuss with us their concerns and ambitions for the future, and how this might shape the Oxfordshire Plan. There have also been several workshops held with local college and university students designed to help inform our planning. The outcomes of these engagements can be read about on the Oxfordshire Plan website.

Recently, a successful three-month work placement was offered to a City of Oxford College student to help communicate and engage with young people. Additional work was done with college students in producing youth-targeted material for future social media campaigns. Further engagement with colleges and schools is being developed while complying with any future Covid-19 guidance.

Your question is well put, and we can of course always do better. We recognise that a diversity of voices, young and old need to be heard and inform how we plan for Oxfordshire's future. I am encourage by the comments and ideas being submitted through the Oxfordshire Open Thought online platform and encourage people to use that to let us know what is important to them and their communities.

On a technical point, it is important that we are clear that any decisions pertaining to the content of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 are matters for individual councils to agree at key milestones in the Plan's development. Councillors are of course elected to represent all the residents in their council area, whatever their age, but with the average age of a councillor being 59 and 45% of councillors being retired I think there is some work to be done to improve diversity...although that is a matter for individual councils and political parties rather than the Growth Board.

2. Helen Marshal on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire.

CPRE Oxfordshire notes that the new Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) – this time known as an Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) – is continuing behind the scenes. (Agenda Item 7e)

Given that:

- The consultants working on it are the same as those that worked on the previous inflationary growth strategy
- The terms of reference have not been made publicly available
- It is likely to be influenced by the expansionist Local Industrial Strategy, drawn up by the unelected Local Enterprise Partnership and signed off by Government without any public consultation
- An Arc-wide sales prospectus, that is also likely to set aggressive growth targets, is being prepared entirely behind closed doors

What reassurance can the Growth Board give Oxfordshire residents that it will be able to 'prioritise sustainable development and quality of life' as per its newly defined purpose?

Answer provided: *Officers are confident with the integrity of the firms undertaking the work in relation to the OGNA. The work is being overseen and scrutinised as it is developed by*

several professional layers across all of our local authorities. It is sensitive work due to the nature of what it is assessing and developing and by the fact that there is little precedent out there for such work informing a statutory plan covering a 30-year time horizon across a strategic geography. We understand there is a desire to have this open and transparent and we are committed to doing that when we are confident that the methodology we have deployed has been adhered to and we are happy the product is in a state where we professionally are confident in its robustness.

The OGNA work though is not policy, nor is it the sole determining evidence for how we seek to deliver the shared ambitions and goals of the Oxfordshire authorities or the Growth Board. The assurance we give is that we as a Growth Board, including our constituent Local Planning Authorities, as well as groups such as CPRE and the wider public, will be scrutinising the emerging Oxfordshire Plan 2050 as well as the evidence it uses to base its emerging preferred options on, to ensure that sustainable development, well-being and quality of life will be at the heart of the Plan. That is part of the plan-making system and what we all seek to achieve...not something that is derived from one source or piece of evidence.

3. Julia Benning on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, (put in her absence).

'Need not Greed Oxfordshire notes the proposed revised Terms of Reference for the Growth Board and welcomes the steps towards including social and environmental considerations within its purpose. However, this is largely meaningless whilst the emphasis is still only on managing the impacts of growth, not informing the actual level of growth that Oxfordshire can reasonably accommodate.

Fully embracing the Doughnut Economics model for the county in the way that Amsterdam has done would greatly assist in creating an Oxfordshire that is more respectful of our environment and wildlife, desists in concreting unnecessarily and creates an economy that provides sufficient wealth to deliver services and infrastructure that sustains quality of life for most and provides significant improvements for others. It would also contribute to a more balanced regional economy, supporting the Government's levelling up agenda.

Will the Growth Board therefore:

- Amend the proposed purpose of the Board (as set out Para 1.1, Appendix 1, Agenda Item 5) to seek only sufficient economic growth to support organic population growth rather than unconstrained business expansion and jobs growth (which is widely acknowledged and evidenced as such a major contributor to the climate emergency)?
- Ensure that this principle is enshrined in any Arc-wide prospectus (Para 7, Agenda Item 10, Arc update)?
- Ensure that any such prospectus does not pre-empt the considerations of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan and is prepared in an open and transparent manner, including public consultation and debate/vote at full council meetings?
- And meanwhile ensure that the terms of reference for the OxCam Arc Leaders Group and Executive Sub-Group are subject to public debate and consultation, with no further meetings of the OxCam Arc Leaders/Chief Executives/Executive Group taking place unless such meetings are held in public (virtually, if necessary), with published agendas and minutes, and with the opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and address the Groups?

Answer provided: *The Growth Board Review was tasked with considering what direction the Growth Board's future purpose should take. That review welcomed over 250 responses, which have shaped the Terms of Reference presented today. I am glad to say that Need Not Greed's own submission to that review is strongly reflected in our new purpose. Our new draft purpose has been in the public domain since January, and I do not propose that we change it, given the support we have received.*

I am pleased to say that the Terms of Reference for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Group will be made public soon. As a non-statutory coalition of the willing, the Arc and its governance structures have no powers to decide on our local planning matters. Through updates presented at this meeting, we aim to bring much more visibility to the work taking place at an Arc level.

In answer to other parts of your question, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will be central to numerous public discussions and votes across all our local authorities, and a comprehensive schedule of consultation is in place. The Board trusts in the role of individual local authorities to plan for their own future, and our role is to provide some coordination to that work.