

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON TUESDAY 28 JULY 2020 AT 1.30 PM VIRTUAL MEETING
VIEWABLE BY A WEBLINK

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

Present:

Councillor Emily Smith (Chair), (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor Robin Bennett, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities representative), Councillor Judith Heathcoat, (Oxfordshire County Council), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business rep - Science Vale), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Councillor James Mills, (Vice-Chair) (West Oxfordshire District Council), Catherine Turner, (Homes England) and Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council).

Officers: Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Sue Halliwell (Oxfordshire County Council), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale District Councils), Bev Hindle (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Suzanne Malcolm, Yvonne Rees (Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council CEX), Stefan Robinson (Oxfordshire Growth Board) and Nigel Tipple (OxLEP CEX).

14. Apologies for absence, declarations of interest and Chair's announcement

Councillor Sue Cooper, South Oxfordshire District Council (substituted by Councillor Robin Bennett); Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council (substituted by Councillor Judith Heathcoat); Adrian Lockwood, OxLEP Vice-Chair; Miranda Markham, OxLEP Business rep Bicester; and Dr Kiren Collison, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group

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

15. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2020 be signed as a correct record subject to the correction of a typographical error on agenda page 7.

16. Public participation

Charlie Hicks submitted a question which challenged the Growth Board to consider planning for Oxfordshire in 2050 from the perspective of people born in the 1990s. He advocated for the application of the good design principles used in the tech sector. These would primarily focus on the needs of future users rather than on the requirements of the present population.

The Chair thanked Charlie for raising the subject of engagement with young people. She stated that this was an important issue for her. In relation to the Growth Board, Councillor Smith responded that it was a collaboration of local council and system leaders with the purpose of coordinating efforts to maximise economic, housing and infrastructure developments in an inclusive and beneficial way.

The voice of young people was regarded as critical in informing work on the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Several workshops had already taken place which had put young people at the centre of the process – this has included one with the Voice of Oxfordshire's Youth. In addition, a successful work placement had been offered to a student from the City of Oxford College with the express purpose of assisting with communicating and engaging with young people. It was, nevertheless, recognised that more could be done and that a wider diversity of voices needed to be heard.

Decisions pertaining to the content of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be taken by councillors within the county's different local authorities. They had been elected to represent the views of all of their constituents. It was, nevertheless, also recognised that more could be done to improve the diversity of councillors.

Helen Marshall on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire referred to the development of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA). She asked the Growth Board whether it could provide reassurance to Oxfordshire's residents that it would prioritise sustainable development and quality of life in light of concerns that the OGNA was merely a new version of the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).

CPRE regarded SHMA as an inflationary growth strategy and were, therefore, alarmed that the same consultants were being used for the production of the OGNA. Moreover, CPRE had additional concerns relating to: the lack of publicly available terms of reference for the OGNA, the influence of the Local industrial Strategy and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc wide sales prospectus.

The Chair responded that officers had confidence in the integrity of the firms undertaking work in relation to the OGNA. Further, their efforts were being professionally overseen. It was recognised that this was difficult and sensitive work given that there was little precedent to help inform the development of such a strategy.

The importance of transparency was also noted. The Growth Board was committed to providing this in respects of the OGNA once it had been developed. The Chair also commented that the OGNA work was not policy, nor was it the sole determining evidence for the shared ambitions and goals of the Oxfordshire local authorities or the Growth Board. Assurances were given that the Growth Board, and its constituent Local Planning Authorities, would be scrutinising both the emerging Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and its evidence base. They would ensure that sustainable development, well-being and quality of life would be at the heart of the Plan.

Julia Benning on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO), submitted a question welcoming steps towards the inclusion of social and environmental considerations within the proposed revised Terms of Reference for the Growth Board. She, nevertheless, expressed concern that this would be meaningless whilst the emphasis of the Growth Board remained on managing the impacts of growth. The question advocated the adoption by the Growth Board of the 'Doughnut Economic' model as that used by the city of Amsterdam and asked the Growth Board to:

- 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?
- Ensure that this principle was enshrined in any Arc-wide prospectus?
- Ensure that any such prospectus did not pre-empt the considerations of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan and was 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?

The Chair responded that as part of the Growth Board review over 250 responses, including that of NNGO, had influenced the shaping of the revised Growth Board Terms of Reference. She commented that the Terms of Reference for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Group would be made public soon. As a non-statutory organisation, the Arc had no powers to decide on local planning matters and through regular updates to its meetings, the Growth Board was aiming to increase visibility of the working taken place at an Arc level. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be central to public discussions and votes across local authorities.

Professor David Rogers submitted a written address quoting remarks made by the Growth Board Director in Item 10, Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update. These related to the Arc Leadership Group urging the development of a high-level prospectus ahead of the anticipated Comprehensive Spending Review and the example of a pitch submitted by the West Midlands Combined Authority. Professor Rogers expressed concern that the document cited did not mention protecting or enhancing the natural environment and, therefore, was not an appropriate approach for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc to follow.

In response, the Growth Board Director commented that the reference to the West Midlands Combined Authority was to highlight the type of document that could be potential produced and was not intended to convey an endorsement of its contents. The Arc's narrative was one based on quality of life and the need for clean and green recovery.

Councillor Kate Gregory on behalf of the Thame Ward councillors of South Oxfordshire District Council submitted an address regarding the Thame to Haddenham combined walking and cycling route. She commented that the local community had recently become aware that the Growth Board funding for the dedicated cycle route to

Haddenham Station had been withdrawn. It was believed that the reason for this decision was that the scheme no longer met the required criteria for the provision of infrastructure to support new homes in Thame. The Growth Board was asked to seek more flexibility from HM Government and Oxfordshire County Council in the use of infrastructure funding. Councillor Gregory stated that, in her view, the cycle route did support housing delivery and would provide a dedicated and safe commuter connection to Haddenham Station.

In response, the Growth Board Director commented that the funding provided under the Housing and Growth Deal was designed to deliver infrastructure to unlock and accelerate the provision of housing. In the case of the Thame and Haddenham cycle route, the significant reduction in the estimated levels of housing unlocked by the scheme, meant that it no longer met the required current value for money criteria. He, nevertheless, suggested that the scheme was a pertinent example of the current deal being overly focused on accelerating housing numbers rather than supporting greater quality of life and the Covid-19 recovery.

The Growth Board confirmed that they wished to work with Oxfordshire County Council to find a way to unlock the Thame to Haddenham scheme. They felt it was a worthwhile project and, therefore, it remained on the County Council's Capital Programme. In addition, the frustration of the local community was understood and, therefore, more information regarding the basis of the decision would be published by the weekend if possible.

In discussion, Board members expressed support for the scheme in principle but acknowledged that it had failed to meet the current criteria for infrastructure deal funding. They, nevertheless, felt there was the potential funding for other funding streams to be explored.

17. Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update

The Growth Board welcomed Councillor Sean Woodcock, Vice-Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting.

Councillor Woodcock reported on the outcomes of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 22 July 2020 as set out in the circulated report.

The Chair summarised the Growth Board's initial response to the recommendations. She commented that they had agreed – at least in part - with all of them, with the exception of recommendation three relating to the coordination of Freedom of Information requests (this could not be agreed to on technical grounds). It was noted that the full written responses would be published on the [Agenda website](#).

18. Growth Board Review Stage 1 Implementation

The Growth Board considered a report setting out the progress to date in implementing early actions arising from the review. It also requested the endorsement and approval of a suite of revised governance documents.

In presenting the report, Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, highlighted that there had been around 250 responses to the review. The revised suite of governance documents had been agreed by five of the partner local authorities, with consideration by the final authority expected in early August. It was stressed to the Board that constant

improvement continued to be sought and, therefore, a further report setting out additional recommendations was expected to be presented to the September 2020 meeting.

Members of the Growth Board thanked Officers for their work in undertaking the review. They welcomed the report and its recommendations, particularly the increased reflection of environmental and social priorities through the establishment of a standalone environmental body. It was felt that in many areas the Growth Board had been very successful, particularly in respect of its relationship with HM Government.

It was agreed to look at how OxLEP business representation from West Oxfordshire might be included within the Board's membership – in order to demonstrate balanced geographical coverage. It was, however, acknowledged that this was ultimately a matter for OxLEP. It was also acknowledged that a range of views existed concerning the Board's name and this was still a matter of discussion.

Some members referred to issues which they felt should be subject to future consideration e.g. the Board's title. It was also suggested that there could be greater transparency around sub-groups. Moreover, it was also suggested that, given its importance, the membership of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group could be increased. Officers responded that they had noted these points, and as part of their drive to continually improve the work of the Board, these matters would be discussed.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board:

1. Endorses its revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding. These will take effect following approval by each local authority Cabinet, the last of which met on or before 7 August 2020.
2. Approved the revised Advisory Sub-Group Terms of Reference
3. Approved the revised Executive Officer Group Terms of Reference
4. Approved the revised Public Participation Protocol

19. Covid-19 Recovery

The Growth Board considered a report and presentation which provided an overview of the collective approach being taken within Oxfordshire to support the local economic and wider recovery from the pandemic. Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, and Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP summarised the key points of the report. They both stressed that it was intended to be a snapshot of Covid-19 response activity and was not intended to be fully representative of all of the actions being taken within Oxfordshire.

In discussions, Board members commented that the recovery was likely to take time and raised the importance of planning for a potential second wave of the pandemic. Several points were made highlighting the need to incorporate the principles of a green renewal process within the recovery efforts and to identify the opportunities and challenges such an approach might offer. Oxfordshire was felt to be well placed do this in respect of the skills of its residents and scientific base. Continued partnership working across all Oxfordshire partners was very important.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board supports the approach to recovery as set out in the report.

20. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

It was agreed to take Agenda items 7a to 7e en bloc with questions by exception.

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report -Year Two

The Growth noted a report which updated the Growth Board on progress at Quarter 4, Year 2 (2019/2020) of the Housing and Growth Deal.

Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, also informed the Board of ongoing discussion around the Deal with Homes England and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. While details had not yet been formally agreed, in principle support had been given to the extension of a number of delivery periods. These included an additional year for the affordable Housing Programme and an indication of flexibility related to the challenges of delivering the Homes from Infrastructure Programme. In relation to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, the indications were that there would be some flexibilities for the Plan to be completed within the five-year timeframe. HM Government had also made it clear that they did not regard Deal funding as something that might be used as part of the Covid-19 pandemic recovery.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board notes the progress at Quarter 4, 2019/20 towards the Housing and Growth Deal.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Outturn 2019/20

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board notes the 2019/2020 financial outturn report be noted.

(c) Infrastructure sub-group update

The Growth Board received the notes of the Infrastructure Sub-Group held on 11 May 2020.

(d) Housing sub-group update

The Growth Board received the notes of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group held on 16 June 2020.

The Chair of the sub-group, Councillor Brown, welcomed HM Government's extension of the Affordable Housing Programme delivery period and the proposals about Community Led Housing. Both of these measures had been discussed and supported by the sub-group.

(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update

The Growth Board received the notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Sub-Group held on 19 March 2020, 16 April 2020, 14 May 2020 and 18 June 2020.

The Chair of the sub-group, Councillor Mills, referred to their discussions around the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 guiding principles and highlighted the importance of the proposed letter to HM Government re planning reforms and spatial planning.

(f) Oxfordshire Plan 2050: Letter to HM Government

The Growth Board considered the draft of a letter to HM Government regarding the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, planning reforms and the role of strategic planning. The letter sought an opportunity to discuss these matters with the Secretary of State.

It was agreed that the letter should be signed by Councillor Smith as Chair of the Growth Board. Several minor alterations were made to the draft text of the letter as follows:

- 2nd paragraph, 1st sentence, 2nd line – replacement of ‘clearly articulated ambition for growth’ with ‘ambition for *sustainable development*’
- 5th paragraph, 1st sentence, 2nd line – addition of ‘*local and*’ before neighbourhood planning.

RESOLVED: That the draft letter to HM Government re the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 be approved subject to the amendments above.

21. Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire

The Growth Board considered a report setting out the findings of a study into the Oxfordshire Community Led Housing (CLH) landscape. It proposed draft recommendations for either individual partner local authorities or the Growth Board to consider. Paul Staines, Growth Deal Service Delivery Manager for Housing, introduced the report. It was highlighted that the costs of the initial study had been met by a £36,000 grant provided by Homes England and that the Board was being asked to endorse the establishment of action plans in respects of the specific recommendations arising from the study.

In discussion, members of the Board noted the results of the study and welcomed the report. They commented that it was important to do as much as possible within Oxfordshire to encourage CLH projects where appropriate. It was also agreed that the monitoring of CLH could be undertaken by the Housing Advisory Sub-Group.

RESOLVED: That officers be asked to establish action plans for the recommendations with the intention of maximising the utility of Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire.

22. Growth Board Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, set out the proposed Growth Board Forward Plan. He referred to the addition of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc update as a reoccurring agenda item and the likely addition to the September meeting agenda of a report concerning England’s Economic Heartland’s consultation on its draft Transport Strategy. The expected publication of HM Government’s Devolution White Paper was also highlighted. Once the impacts and implications on this document were assessed, it was expected that a report to the Board would be required.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board notes its forward plan.

23. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

The Growth Board considered a report setting out the work currently being undertaken in relation to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, in presenting the report, highlighted the development of a high-level Arc wide prospectus which would build upon and add value to county-level Covid-19 recovery plans. In addition, it would also be linked to other existing workstreams including those with strong connections to environment, connectivity and place. The aim was to develop this in time for the

Comprehensive Spending Review (expected in October). A further update would be provided at the next Growth Board meeting.

The Growth Board was also informed that civil servants would be engaging with local authority partners around the development of a non-statutory framework covering the Arc footprint.

In noting the update, members of the Board referred to the contribution being made by universities towards the establishment of the Arc. They emphasised that HM Government needed to provide clarity regarding its future plans in order to support a continuation of this activity. Furthermore, the importance of protecting the environment and the safeguarding of Oxfordshire's heritage were also highlighted.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

24. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

Councillor Brown updated the Growth Board on the adoption of the Oxford City Local Plan on 8 June 2020. She paid tribute to all of those involved in the Plan's adoption and referred to the environmental policies contained within it.

25. Dates of next meetings

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

- 22 September 2020
- 24 November 2020
- 26 January 2021
- 22 February 2021
- 23 March 2021
- 8 June 2021

The meeting closed at 15:30

Chairman

Date