

**To:** Oxfordshire Growth Board  
**Date:** 22 September 2020  
**Report of:** Growth Board Scrutiny Panel  
**Title of Report:** Recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 15 Sept 2020

<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present recommendations from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 15 September 2020 to the Growth Board.
<b>Scrutiny Lead:</b>	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel.
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That the Oxfordshire Growth Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.

## **Introduction and overview**

1. The Scrutiny Panel would like to thank Councillor Emily Smith (Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board & Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council), Bev Hindle (Growth Board Director), Andrew Down (Acting Deputy Chief Executive- South and Vale District Councils), Paul Staines (Service Delivery Manager - Housing & Growth Deal), Hannah Battye (Head of Infrastructure Delivery – Oxfordshire County Council), Hannah Doney (Head of Corporate Finance – Oxfordshire County Council), Susan Harbour (Strategic Partnerships Manager - South and Vale District Councils), for attending the meeting to answer questions.
2. The Panel considered a public question from the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), in view of the granted extension of timelines of the Housing and Growth Deal by HM Government; the impact it would have on planning flexibilities and the 3 & 5 year land supply within the districts.

**Recommendation 1: That the Growth Board ask HM Government to provide greater clarity in terms of the planning flexibilities within the local authorities and implications on the 3 and 5 year land supply with regards to the granted extension of timelines of the Housing and Growth Deal.**

3. The Panel welcomed Councillor Emily Smith – Chair of the Growth Board who updated the Panel on Arc Leadership representatives and governance structure. The Chair of the Growth Board also emphasised the need to look beyond Carbon Zero into Carbon Negative which is a process of removing excess carbon from the environment.
4. The Panel also received a foundation document on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Local Natural Capital Plan. The Panel discussed the Plan in detail raising questions on methods, sources, scales of measurement and impact of developments on natural capital. In addition, the Panel was interested in knowing more about the implementation of the Natural Capital Planning tool and investment toolkit. The Panel discussed the need for this Plan to have a status in the refresh of Local plans within districts. They further questioned environmental protections offered by this plan in addition to existing planning constraints of AONBs and Greenbelt. The Panel raised questions on the need for a county-wide natural capital assessment, carbon sequestration objectives and consideration of flood risk areas within this plan.

**Recommendation 2: That the Growth Board, when it receives a presentation on the Arc Local Natural Capital Plan, asks questions to understand:**

- i. What methodology and sources of information will be used in quantifying natural capital?
  - ii. What measurement will be used to assess the current level of natural capital, and to what extent this is being subsumed by development?
  - iii. How will the Natural Capital Planning tool and investment toolkit be practically implemented?
  - iv. What additional protections will be added to existing planning constraints with regards to AONBs and the Greenbelt?
  - v. What status does the Local Natural Capital Plan have in the refresh of local plans within the districts?
  - vi. Whether there is an ambition to undertake a natural capital assessment across the county?
  - vii. Whether there is an ambition to have carbon sequestration objectives within the Plan?
  - viii. How the existence of flood risk areas will be considered as part of the Plan?
  - ix. How the Plan links with the EEH Draft Transport Strategy?
5. The Panel received an update from Bev Hindle – Growth Board Director on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. The Panel agreed that in order to drive economic growth within the Arc it was important that manufacturing industries are established and that there was a need for teaching and training of engineering skills at all levels.

**Recommendation 3: That the Growth Board in its aspirations of economic growth within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc organise workshops and events to –**

- i. **Promote the establishment of manufacturing industries**
- ii. **Promote teaching and training of engineering skills at all levels**

6. The Panel also considered the draft consultation responses by the Growth Board officers on the England Economic Heartland (EEH) draft Transport Strategy. On page 49, Policy 12, the Panel agreed that terminology such as Northern and Southern Arc are confusing; Policy 23 that a spatial strategy for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc should precede efforts to build a transport plan; Policy 24 that Central Oxfordshire should not be left out from investment in transport infrastructure especially with regards to the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor.

**Recommendation 4: That the Growth Board again seeks clarity from HM Government concerning the current status of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway project.**

**Recommendation 5: The Scrutiny Panel supports the draft comments made by Growth Board on its consultation on the emerging EEH Draft Transport Strategy especially on policies 12, 23 & 24,**

7. The Panel also discussed the need for a stronger digital infrastructure network especially in a dynamic post-Covid world. The Panel emphasised the need for research into alternative autonomous transport combined with electric power. The Panel also discussed the lack of emphasis on the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor as a key Strategic area in the national rail infrastructure.

**Recommendation 6: That the Growth Board, in responding to the EEH Draft Transport Strategy:**

- i. Gives greater importance to Digital Infrastructure considering the revelation of its importance in a post-Covid world.
  - ii. Asks EEH to include research into autonomous vehicles in terms of personal, mass and freight transport in its strategy i.e. e-bikes, electric scooters, mid-level and long-range autonomous freight vehicles.
  - iii. Indicates the lack of emphasis on Oxfordshire Rail Corridor and its key strategic nature, not just as part of East-West rail, but as part of the national rail infrastructure.
8. The Panel also received a report from Paul Staines on Housing and Growth Deal progress and from Hannah Doney on Housing and Growth Deal finance. The panel also discussed challenges met by developers during the Covid-19m Pandemic and the extent to which these can be overcome. The Panel also discussed the need for affordable housing to be desirable and challenges faced in delivering affordable housing.

## **Future Work**

9. As well as reviewing the Growth Board's response to these recommendations at its next meeting on 17th November 2020, the Panel will also be considering in detail:
  - Q2 Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report and Financial summary
  - Oxford-Cambridge Arc Update

- Oxfordshire Plan 2050 update (provisional)
- Devolution White Paper (provisional)

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