

# Minutes

## OF A MEETING OF THE

# Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON TUESDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2020 AT 2.00 PM  
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

[Link to watch the meeting](#)

### Present:

Councillor Emily Smith (Chair), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Councillor Ian Hudspeth, (Oxfordshire County Council), Prof. Linda King, (Universities representatives), 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:** Lorna Baxter, (Oxfordshire County Council), Andrew Down (South and Vale District Councils), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale District Councils), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Gordon Mitchell (Oxford City Council CEX), Yvonne Rees (Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council CEX), Stefan Robinson (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Paul Staines, (Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal), Mark Stone (South and Vale District Councils CEX), Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership CEX) and Rachel Williams, (Oxfordshire Plan Team)

**Other Councillors:** Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel.

### 46. Apologies for absence, declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Dr Kiren Collison, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Professor Alistair Fitt, Universities Representative substituted by Professor Linda King.

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

### 47. Election of Vice-Chair of the Growth Board

It was proposed by Councillor Emily Smith and seconded by Councillor Barry Wood that Councillor Michele Mead be elected as Vice-Chair of the Growth Board for the remainder of the 2020/2021 Growth Board year. Upon being put to the meeting it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Michele Mead be elected as Vice-Chair of the Growth Board for the remainder of the 2020/2021 Growth Board year.

The Chair commented that Councillor Mead would also be taking over the role of Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup.

## **48. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 22 September 2020 and 30 October 2020 be agreed for signing by the Chair as a correct record subject to:

1. 22 September – correction to list of Officers present
2. 30 October – correction of minute 43, first paragraph, third sentence to read, “Whilst it was not a statutory plan, it was an important document that would be the subject of a public consultation exercise before being brought back to the Growth Board for final *endorsement*, expected in March 2021”.

## **49. Public participation**

**Ian Ashley submitted a question on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, (NNGO).**

The question referred to ongoing work to refine policy options for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and public engagement on those options as set out in the update report to the Board. It expressed concern that in the opinion of NNGO, the current range of partners involved in the engagement did not go beyond internal local authority groupings and that unless this was addressed a confrontational situation would arise where decisions were taken behind the scenes with the public given a tick box at the end. The Growth Board was asked how it planned to test its internal assumptions and draft policy options with external stakeholders such as a NNGO and CPRE prior to formal consultation.

In response, the Chair commented that the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would continue to be supported by a comprehensive consultation and engagement process using a range of engagement methods as used during the previous Regulation 18 (Part 1) which had generate some 1,200 responses including stakeholder events. It was stressed that the report to Board made clear that the next consultation would set out a range of policy options and no decisions had been mad. The next opportunity for the Growth Board to test options with stakeholders and critical friends would be during the next consultation in 2021. Seperately, a public engagement exercise had been launched to support the development of a Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire and organisations including Need Not Greed were encouraged to part in that process.

With the permission of the Chair, Ian Ashley made a follow up point that it was the view of Need Not Greed that the policy options open to the Growth Board could be limited within an existing context of ‘build, build, build’ rather than recognising the limits to housing and job growth. Loss of countryside to concrete as recognised as a contributory factor to climate change, but he recognised that it was still part of an overriding strategy for Oxfordshire as this was the only way in HM Government funding for infrastructure could be obtained to secure the Oxfordshire Vision. The Board needed to be explicit that this was a choice that was being made on behalf of residents, rather than an alternative approach that would do more to protect the environment.

Councillor Brown responded that Oxfordshire faced a huge affordable housing shortage and crisis and therefore it was important to also recognise the context of the need to build houses for those needing homes including the homeless whose condition was often hidden. The Board was supportive of good housing growth and developments which were sustainable but had to take housing need into consideration.

**Charlie Maynard submitted a question on behalf of the Witney to Oxford Transport Group** which related to the work of the Witney to Oxford Transport Group to investigate and develop proposals for a rail route from a junction with the Cotswold Line at Yarnton, through Eynsham and Witney, to Carterton and RAF Brize Norton. A presentation, setting out the detail of the Group's work could be accessed by the Board and public [here](#). It was felt that this strongly set out the case for a feasible route for a new route which could generate large economic and environmental benefits for West Oxfordshire.

The Group was working to quantify the costs of its proposals and was intending to apply to HM Government under the Restoring your Railway Ideas Fund to develop the idea further. The Group was in the process of securing support for the application from local MPs and local authorities and a motion supportive of the undertaking of a feasibility study, should funding be confirmed, had been supported by the Council of Oxfordshire County Council in November.

The Group acknowledged what it recognised to be critical links between improvements in capacity to existing rail infrastructure in Oxfordshire and any new rail route to Carterton and Witney and asked that members of the Board consider the proposals carefully and that the Board consider giving its support for a feasibility study, noting that this did not imply support to rebuild the railway.

At the request of the Chair, Councillor Hudspeth provided an initial response stating that a full response would be supplied in writing. He welcomed the aspiration within the question to locate housing near to rail stations on sustainability grounds as the best way to enable residents to get round the County, but stressed the importance of securing the support of Network Rail for any rail schemes as Network Rail were ultimately the decision makers on taking any scheme to HMG and have to deliver it. Councillor Hudspeth stressed that for potential schemes such as the Carterton to Oxford line to ever happen, improvements had to be made first to capacity at Oxford Station which were crucial. The costs of the works required were significant, running into many hundreds of millions of pounds. Cllr Hudspeth added that the motion agreed by Oxfordshire County Council had included a request that the county council look into the rationale of the reallocation of funding previously approved to assist delivery of the A40/A44 Strategic Link Road (via Loop Farm) to towards improvements at Oxford station, a decision taken by OxLEP in recognition of the need to support the Oxford station works.

**Councillor Liz Leffman, Oxfordshire County Council** made a statement to the Growth Board in which she supported the proposals within the Investment in improved rail connectivity report and the draft letter to the Secretary of State for Transport and additionally made the case for the upgrading of the railway line between Long Hanborough and Charlbury. The Growth Board was asked to amend its letter to include reference to the North Cotswold line, to emphasise the importance of doubling the line and to request that the doubling of the line along its entire length would be included in plans for Phase 3 funding bid.

The Chair responded that the issue raised by Councillor Leffman was within the purview of Cotswold Line Taskforce as any development of service would require the support of the network's operator. It had also not been within the remit of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study which was due to be considered by the Growth Board soon. This has identified a significant gap between infrastructure current infrastructure capacity around Oxford and future demand for rail. Investment in this area was a pre-requisite for a wider programme of service improvements including potential improvement on the Cotswold Line. The proposed letter was deliberately focussed on the pending decision of Phase 2 of the Network Rail capacity programme as the next building block in boosting capacity and therefore it was felt important to maintain this focus rather than adding additional reference to other schemes that could come forward in the future.

## **50. 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 recommendations and outcomes arising from the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 17 November 2020 as set out in the circulated report. He highlighted the scepticism felt by the Panel regarding the response provided by the Environment Agency to its previous recommendation relating to flood risk assessments in rural areas as part of the Local Natural Capital Plan and the new recommendation made to the Growth Board that the Environment Agency clarify its response.

The Panel's discussion had also focused upon the Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan and the need in the Panel's view to build back in a different and more environmentally friendly way from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Panel had recommended that there was a need for clarity around definitions for Zero Carbon within the letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and had recommend the definition used by the UK Green Building Council. Finally, the Panel had strongly supported proposals to the Board for the establishment of an Inclusive Growth Commission, making recommendations relating to early years provision, child poverty and promotion of different economies and sectors across the county.

The Board was informed that the Panel has agreed to the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to consider opportunities for private sector funding of infrastructure.

The Chair summarised the Growth Board's response to the recommendations which had been accepted in full, except for Recommendation 4 which had been accepted in part. It was noted that the full formal response would be published [on the Agenda webpage](#).

## **51. The promotion of Low/Zero Carbon Housing in Oxfordshire**

The Growth Board considered a report providing an update on the promotion of low/zero carbon housing within Oxfordshire. This followed the agreement by the Growth Board of several recommendations with this objective at its meeting in March 2020.

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, Oxfordshire Growth Deal introduced the report as the first of a series of periodic updates and drew the Board's attention to a draft letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government attached to the report concerning the need for higher building standards and to progress by district and city authority. The Board was informed that the grant flexibilities and changes to the

Affordable Housing Programme, (AHP) timelines recently agreed by HM Government had led to circumstance where it was expected to be possible to include approximately 423 units of low and zero carbon housing within the AHP.

In discussion, Growth Board members welcomed the report and progress made, but highlighted the challenge of strengthening national regulations to enforce the goal of zero carbon and the need to make this case to HM Government through the letter set out in Appendix 1. It was considered important to maintain flexibility within the zero carbon building regulations to enable local authorities to go further than national standards if they decided to.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

- 1) Notes the report and progress made against recommendations of the March 2020 Zero Carbon Housing Report;
- 2) Approved the submission of a draft letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government at Appendix 1, subject to any minor amendments agreed by Councillor Brown and Councillor Smith.

## **52. Inclusive Economy Seminars Summary Report**

The Growth Board considered a report summarising the findings of the Inclusive Economy Seminars and learnings as well as the report's recommendations to help inform next steps to establish an Inclusive Economy Commission.

Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive Oxford City Council presented the report and set out the background to the Inclusive Economy work which had been based on the reflection that the benefits of Oxfordshire's economy were not always accessible for all residents and that unless inequality was addressed a harmonious and contented society could not be achieved. A partnership between Oxford City Council, OxLEP and the Oxford Strategic Partnership had commissioned the seminars, the outputs of which had been set out in the full seminar summary attached to the report as an Appendix 1 and the Board's attention was drawn to key learnings set out in para 1.7 of its report.

Members of the Board from across its Local Authority and non-authority membership commented on the importance of inclusivity as a work stream and paid tribute to the work undertaken through the seminars which was felt to be timely. The attention given to the importance of 'soft infrastructure' such as support for learning as well as hard infrastructure was welcomed. Jeremy Long, Chair of OxLEP spoke of OxLEP's commitment and support of the work from its inception which linked closely to the Local Industrial Strategy.

In terms of next steps, Board members recognised that the focus of inclusivity efforts needed to be broadened to allow for a whole county consideration of the issues as there were some differences in the challenges faced, for instance by those in more rural locations. It was important to follow up on the work undertaken to date and that there were inclusivity measures that Board members could consider putting in place themselves, for example via procurement policy or use of a living wage.

**RESOLVED:** That:

The Growth Board endorses the Summary Report and the establishment of an Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Commission; and requests that:

1. The Growth Board's Executive Officer Group work with the OxLEP and the OSP to agree how the next steps should be taken forward and;
2. The Growth Board's Executive Officer Group work with the OxLEP and the OSP to agree how to resource the next steps i.e. Commission going forward.

### **53. Housing and Growth Deal Reports**

#### **(a) Oxfordshire Plan: Proposed new timetable and quarter two report**

The Growth Board considered a report that set out an update on the work to produce the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Rachel Williams, Oxfordshire Plan Programme Lead introduced the report and highlighted that the proposed new Plan timetable reflected the agreement in principle by HM Government to an extension of time to produce the Oxfordshire Plan. Work. The Plan timetable linked closely to the work being undertaken to produce the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy.

In discussion, whilst welcoming the extension of the timeline it was felt that the Plan timeline remained tight and that it was important to recognise the risks to delivery. A key risk identified was the lack of guidance and framework from HM Government around the production of a spatial plan like the Oxfordshire Plan. It was noted that several representations had been made to HM Government about this and there were signs these had been recognised, but it was important to continue to take mitigating actions and funding would remain a challenge.

**RESOLVED:** That:

1. That Growth Board endorses the proposed new timetable
2. That Growth Board notes the quarter two report.

#### **(b) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update**

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Subgroup meetings held on 17 September 2020 and 15 October 2020.

Councillor Mead highlighted that at its most recent meeting on 19 November, the Subgroup had considered an update on the good progress being made to draft the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, (OGNA) which would form part of the evidence base of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and be consulted upon formally in 2021. In light of the changes in circumstances since the work on the OGNA had started, including any implications arising from Covid-19 and the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, officers would be reviewing the remit of the OGNA brief to look at whether there were any issues which needed to be taken account of.

#### **(c) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Quarter Two, Year Three**

The Growth Board considered a report which set out an update on progress at Quarter Two, Year 3 with the Housing and Growth Deal.

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, Oxfordshire Growth Deal drew the Board's attention to further clarification on the effect of Covid-19 on the delivery trajectory of the Affordable Housing Programme and Infrastructure Programme and commitments made as part of the Housing and Growth Deal. The material impact of the pandemic was that

delivery would now fall outside of the original timelines and therefore the agreement by HM Government to extensions and flexibilities to the programmes was welcomed.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board notes progress as at Quarter 2, 2020/21 towards the Housing and Growth Deal.

**(d) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report - Quarter Two, Year Three**

The Growth Board considered a report which set out an update on the Housing and Growth Deal financial position as of Quarter 2, Year 3.

Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, Oxfordshire County Council drew the Board's attention to para 3.1.4 of the report. The outstanding annual Growth Deal Infrastructure Grant payment of £30m referred to had not, at the time of the meeting been received, but it was expected that HM Government would make the payment to the County Council during December 2020.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board notes the 2020/21 Quarter 2 Housing and Growth Deal financial report.

**(e) Housing Advisory Sub-group update**

The Growth Board received the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Subgroup held on 27 October 2020.

Councillor Brown referred to the Subgroup's discussion around HM Government's proposed changes to planning regulations, the Planning White Paper, the Affordable Housing Prospectus and the concerns expressed regarding the implications of the proposed changes.

## **54. Growth Board Forward Plan**

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, set out the proposed Growth Board Forward Programme. He updated the Board that officers were looking at the current schedule of Growth Board dates in the New Year with a view to reducing the number of meetings to two. An item was to be added to the Forward Programme setting out progress toward a common statement of intent on climate change.

It was also highlighted public engagement on the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision was open via the [Oxfordshire Open Thought website](#) and members of the Board were encouraged to promote responses through their respective organisations.

## **55. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update**

Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group, provided a verbal update on developments within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc including an outline of its work programme. This had included the launch of the Arc Economic Prospectus previously considered by the Board. The outcome of HM Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, (CSR) was now awaited to see what projects, if any, HM Government might wish to launch within the Arc.

The Arc Environment Group was continuing to work on the concept of establishing a Green Arc which it was felt would eventually lead to the establishment of an Arc

environmental strategy. Finally, it was expected that following the announcement of the CSR, there would be further announcements relating to the establishment of a spatial framework for the Arc and that HM Government would launch a wider public engagement exercise to boost wider public awareness and understanding of the Arc.

Councillor Smith and Councillor Wood summarised the key points of the Arc Leaders Group meeting held on 17 November 2020 and highlighted the holding of webinar on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc which had been attended by over 300 delegates. This was available to watch on the [OxLEP YouTube Channel](#). Jeremy Long, Chair of OxLEP updated the Board on developments relating to productivity across the Arc.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board note the update.

## **56. Investment in improved rail connectivity in Oxfordshire**

The Growth Board considered a report which requested approval of a joint letter on its behalf to HM Government backing Network Rail's application for funding for significant rail infrastructure improvement in the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor.

Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive Oxford City Council presented the report and commented that all the Oxfordshire authorities and many other stakeholders had shared the ambition to improve rail infrastructure over a long period of time and achieving this goal had taken a significant step forward through the jointly produced and co-funded Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study. This study had concluded that future demand for rail was limited by the existing track capacity. Network Rail's bid prioritised improvement in these areas which was a required as a foundation for other potential schemes. The request to support the bid was before the Board as the bid was expected to be considered by Ministers prior to Christmas. Given the national context of Covid-19, greater scrutiny of capital projects, uncertainty around the likely return to use of railways and HM Government working to identify its priorities, it was important for the Growth Board to send a strong and clear message around the priority and timeliness of projects within the Phase 2 bid.

Members of the Growth Board strongly endorsed the priority for rail capacity improvements within Oxfordshire and their support for the Network Rail bid as a fundamental first step. These improvements needed to be prioritised first as the potential for other potential rail schemes was contingent on its completion. In discussion, the importance of rail freight as well as rail passengers was highlighted given Oxfordshire's geographical relationship with ports.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

1. Notes the report requesting support for Network Rail's Phase 2 funding bid.
2. Approves the submission of a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Transport supporting Network Rail's application.

## **57. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board**

Growth Board members were reminded that a Growth Board webinar was to take place on 9 December 2020 around the promotion of low carbon housing within Oxfordshire and asked to promote this as much as possible.

## **58. Dates of next meetings**

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

- 26 January 2021
- 22 February 2021 (subsequently cancelled)
- 23 March 2021
- 8 June 2021

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chairman

Date