

To: Oxfordshire Growth Board
Title: Oxfordshire Strategic Vision
Date: 22 March 2021
Author: Paul Staines – Interim Head of Programme

Executive Summary and Purpose:

This report presents the Growth Board with a final version of the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire's Long-Term Sustainable Development (the Vision) - attached as Appendix 1. This follows the Board's endorsement of an earlier draft for public engagement.

The report reminds the Board of the purpose of the Vision and provides a thematic summary of the consultation and our response - with a detailed engagement report provided in Appendix 2.

Finally, the report proposes the next steps to embed the Vision, subject to endorsement, in any future plans and strategies and measure against progress.

Recommendations:

That the Oxfordshire Growth Board:

1. Endorses the Revised Strategic Vision attached as Appendix 1.
2. Asks all members of the Growth Board to consider their respective organisations agreeing the Vision as the basis for informing future plan and strategy development.
3. Request officers to develop a communications strategy for the Vision and a suitable approach to measuring success in delivering the Vision.

Appendix 1:

Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development

Appendix 2

Strategic Vision Engagement Summary

Introduction

1. The Board will recall that they received a report in October 2020 introducing the Draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire (the Vision).
2. This draft Vision was prepared in response to feedback to the Board and partners via consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan that plans, strategies, programmes and investment priorities for Oxfordshire needed to demonstrate an approach to planning for growth that was ambitious, outcome focussed and that aligned the priorities of Oxfordshire. Specifically, feedback suggested that there was an appetite for an approach that:
 - is more Oxfordshire-specific and reflects local people's opinions and priorities.
 - prioritises climate change.
 - focusses on social, economic, and environmental well-being, not solely on a narrow definition of growth.
3. This feedback echoed the sentiments that recently led to revised Growth Board Terms of Reference and a belief that the Board could articulate Oxfordshire's common and shared ambition in a long-term Vision for our county.
4. The Strategic Vision will establish this common and shared ambition and provide an overarching framework for future plans and strategies – but it is not intended to replace or set the specific vision for any of our individual communities or partner organisations. The Board fully recognises that delivering the Strategic Vision will require place-focussed responses to specific challenges and opportunities that reflect circumstances.
5. The Board will recall that when it endorsed the draft Vision for consultation it recognised that whilst the genesis of the Vision was a recognition that an overarching strategic framework was considered important to guide the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (the OxPlan), the Vision's relevance and use goes well beyond the OxPlan.
6. Accordingly, the Board agreed that to be most helpful both to the OxPlan and other emerging plans and strategies, the Vision should be considered on its own merit – first through endorsement by the Oxfordshire Growth Board after a period of public engagement and then agreed by our individual organisations across the Growth Board.
7. The Board also noted that the timing of the Vision's endorsement is important. There are several reasons for this:
 - For the Strategic Vision to play its role in supporting the OxPlan, agreement will need to be no later than Spring 2021- ahead of the pre-election purdah period before the May elections. This will then allow the Vision to play its appropriate role in helping shape the next stage of OxPlan ahead of the Regulation 18 consultations timetabled for Summer 2021.
 - The OxPlan is also supported by two other emerging strategies that need to be in place by the time the OxPlan heads to Examination. The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. Both also will need to draw upon the Vision as the framework for their conclusions as they head towards consultation later this year.

- The Government has recently announced detail of its ambitions to develop a spatial framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Oxfordshire will want to be well-positioned to influence the Framework as it gathers momentum and the Vision will provide a framework for our contribution to this emerging work.
8. The Board will also recall advice from officers that alongside the public consultation, officers would commission consultants to reflect upon the draft Vision and offer informal sustainability advice, specifically whether the draft Vision was consistent, both within the document and when compared to the OxPlan and whether there were any gaps in the sustainability issues identified. This commission was completed, and officers have incorporated all relevant comments in the attached final version of the Vision.

Public Engagement on the Vision

9. Following endorsement by the Board of a draft Vision for public engagement, a period of public and stakeholder engagement ran from mid-November 2020 to early in 2021.
10. Due to concerns with COVID-19 and recognising a need to reach as wide a cross-section of respondents as possible, it was agreed that the focus of the consultation would be the Oxfordshire Open Thought digital engagement platform, a platform that has already proved very helpful in engaging on wide-ranging topics and long-term thinking for the OxPlan.
11. Officers were broadly pleased with the engagement that this platform generated, summarised as:
 - There were 1,265 users accessing the website and 3,759 page-views during the engagement period.
 - There was good response from several key stakeholders outside of those represented on the Growth Board, for example CPRE.
 - Overall, we received 113 responses through the platform, a number of these being from organisations with multiple representation, together with 28 email responses, including 9 member organisations of the Growth Board.
12. A detailed breakdown is provided in Appendix Two.
13. One aspect of the consultation to highlight is the work on engaging with young people following a Board request that officers prioritise their engagement. Officers responded to this by focusing upon this easily accessible digital engagement platform bolstered by giving wide publicity to the Vision engagement on social media.
14. In addition, officers arranged several workshops in conjunction with local colleges of further education and Oxford Brookes University. These workshops were well attended and engendered good engagement. Again, Appendix Two provides detail on these.

Engagement Summary

15. Whilst the engagement report contained in Appendix Two provides full detail on the engagement, this report provides the Board with a broad flavour of what

officers consider to be the main themes and how these have influenced the revised draft.

General comments

16. Overall, officers believe that the Board can be pleased with the supportive responses to our engagement exercise. Respondents commented that the Vision was both welcome as a “good starting point” and essential for clarifying what the collective ambitions for Oxfordshire should be. Very few responses suggested that the establishment of the Vision would be detrimental and many recognised that it was a genuine attempt to frame required growth in a constructive and sustainable way.
17. Many also considered that the document achieved the balance that the Board is aiming for across the priorities, albeit with some noting what they considered to be the inherent tensions between them.
18. Consequently, the Board will note that although changes to the Vision have been made in response to the engagement, as detailed below and in Appendix 2, large parts of the document were supported and remain unchanged or have merely benefitted from clearer or more concise language.

Document structure

19. In considering the layout and structure of the vision, there were some comments that the Vision was too lengthy and repetitive, though this conflicted with the view also expressed that the document required greater detail, referencing and specificity.
20. Officers reflected on this feedback and in response the revised Vision has a slightly different structure which officers believe is more logical. The Board will note that the Vision now comprises three components - these being:
 - A statement of what the Vision for Oxfordshire is – these are the outcomes that Oxfordshire is seeking to achieve
 - A statement of what constitutes the ‘Good Growth’ that will deliver the Vision
 - A set of principles that will guide Oxfordshire in achieving ‘Good Growth’.
21. Officers have also edited the Vision to make it more readable and succinct and consequently it is some 15% shorter than the original draft.

The components and overall balance of the Vision

22. As stated earlier, overall, the ambitions of the document received broad support with many respondents noting that they were hard to disagree with and had captured the correct priorities.
23. Where respondents did not agree with the consultation draft these broadly fell into two categories.
 - That the document has not provided enough balance in certain areas – most notably climate change, carbon reduction, the positioning of the economy as a driver for social and economic wellbeing and increased emphasis for tackling inequalities.
 - That the document was not ambitious enough- for example, our ambition for carbon reduction.

24. In response to these comments the Vision has seen revisions to the text designed to clarify and enhance key messages without losing the overall balance. Thus, in the revised Vision enhanced language has raised the profile of the importance of Oxfordshire as a place both nationally and internationally as well as reinforcing messages on, for example mental health, active travel, the need for digital connectivity, the heritage of Oxfordshire and the need for affordable housing.
25. We have also added a new Vision Outcome for a more equal place supported by inclusive growth, reflecting the point about equality and a statement about the role of Oxfordshire's economy in creating prosperity and furthering social, environmental, and economic wellbeing.
26. Officers believe that these revisions have strengthened the Vision and provided appropriate profile for several key components, whilst maintaining the overall balance of the document.

Creating a Vision that is Oxfordshire Specific

27. Many respondents commented that although they agreed with the Vision, it could, they felt, relate more to Oxfordshire rather than just a series of generic statements. Consequently, officers have revised the draft to make it more Oxfordshire specific, examples include highlighting aspects of the Oxfordshire economy, natural assets and heritage that makes Oxfordshire unique. We also sought to highlight both the urban city and rural aspects of the county, including the importance of the rural economy in the most rural county in the South East.

How to measure achievement of the Vision

28. Finally, several respondents, whilst supportive, questioned how we will implement the Vision, what success would look like and how we will measure it. This issue is the subject of officer consideration and highlighted in the next steps section of this report below.

Next steps

29. Upon endorsement of the Vision, officers will turn their attention to the development of a communications plan by relevant officers drawn from across the Growth Board organisations to launching the Vision.
30. The Board will then need to consider how to embed the Vision in plans and strategies, both within the Board and wider stakeholders. Two proposals are:
 - That the Vision becomes a reference point for all future plans and strategies, and all reports to the Board will be expected to formally set out in summary form how the recommendations in the report will support the ambitions of the Vision.
 - For wider stakeholders, in the first instance the ask the Board to recommend to its partner organisations that they individually consider and agree the Vision, thereby giving it the profile required within their respective organisations.
31. The next steps will then be consideration of how we will measure progress against the ambitions of the Vision. Officers intend to develop a business case for this next phase of the project over the summer of 2021. This will include agreement of how we measure success, appropriate reporting of these and when it would be appropriate to review and update the Vision, something that was supported in the engagement process.

Legal Implications

32. Although the Vision is explicitly non statutory, the Board will recall that in the October report introducing the Vision, officers suggested that the relationship between the Vision and OxPlan may require legal opinion to ensure that it strengthens our approach to strategic plan-making. Once the Board endorses the Vision officers leading the OxPlan will consider whether commissioning this advice is appropriate and report any conclusion through reports on the Oxplan.

Financial Implications

33. The Vision has been prepared and consulted upon from existing resources. Officers will reflect upon any resource implications of developing the Vision further as outlined in the next steps section and report as appropriate.

Conclusions

34. The Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire marks a significant development for Oxfordshire as a comprehensive articulation of what future growth in Oxfordshire should look like based on enhanced social, environmental and economic wellbeing. It is hoped that this balanced statement of ambition reflecting the priorities of the county will become the cornerstone of all future plans and strategies for Oxfordshire.
35. The report asks the Growth Board to agree the recommendations set out at the start of this report.

Background Papers

None

Report Author:

Paul Staines Interim Head of Programme- Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

Contact:

Paul.staines@Oxfordshire.gov.uk