Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H   B O A R D

HELD ON TUESDAY 1 JUNE 2021 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillors Andrew Gant (Chair), Brad Baines, Andy Cooke, Victoria Haval, Dan Levy, Katherine Miles, Jabu Nala-Hartley, Adam Nell, Lucy Pegg, Alex Postan, David Turner and Sean Woodcock, (Vice-Chair)

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Richard Byard	Director of Business Environment, OxLEP
Andrew Down	Growth Board Director
Ahmed Goga	Director of Strategy and Programmes, OxLEP
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Sarah Haywood	Managing Director, Advanced Oxford
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Stefan Robinson	Growth Board Manager – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

1.   Election of Chair of the Scrutiny Panel for 2021/2022

Councillor Sean Woodcock proposed and Councillor Katherine Miles seconded Councillor Andrew Gant as Chair of the Panel. There being no other nominations, the proposal was agreed upon being put to a vote.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Andrew Gant be elected as Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel for the 2021/2022 year.

2.   Election of Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Panel for 2021/2022

Councillor Andrew Gant proposed and Councillor Brad Baines seconded Councillor Sean Woodcock as Vice-Chair of the Panel. Councillor Alex Postan then proposed himself as Vice-Chair of the Panel which was seconded by Councillor Sean Woodcock.

Each candidate made a short address to the Panel and upon being put to a vote, Councillor Sean Woodcock was elected as Vice-Chair.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Sean Woodcock be elected as Vice-Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel for the 2021/2022 year.

3.   Apologies for absence, substitutes; declarations of interest, Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Matthew Barber, Vale of White Horse District Council and Councillor David Hughes, Cherwell District Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed new and continuing members of the Panel to the meeting and explained that as the Panel was not a formally constituted local authority committee it was considered possible for Panel meetings to continue virtually despite the lapse of the statutory regulations which had allowed for virtue formal meetings. It was noted that the meeting was being livestreamed and that a recording could be found by clicking on this link.

4.   Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021 were agreed subject to the correction of 'realised' to 'released' within minute No 54.

5.   Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference

Amit Alva, Growth Board Scrutiny Officer, presented the Terms of Reference of the Panel for information and indicated that officers supporting the Panel would be happy to put in place arrangements for individual inductions if any members wished to contact them directly.

The Chair drew the Panel's attention to para 6 of the document which set out arrangements for the attendance of substitute members if a member was unable to attend a meeting and commented that para 8.1 extended to items being taken to the Growth Board for information as well as items for decision. Members were also invited to submit potential Growth Board related items for inclusion on the Panel's work programme.

6.   Public participation

Suzanne McIvor on behalf of the Cherwell Development Watch Alliance submitted a question relating to the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, (OGNA) and the response made by the Growth Board to the recommendation made by the Panel at its 16 March meeting, that the Growth Board ensure that OGNA work be published as soon as work was completed; or clarify the reasons for publishing it as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation.

Ms McIvor expressed her view that there was no good reason why the OGNA could not be published, that this was unacceptable and that she did not agree with the explanation why it should not be released given by Growth Board Officers in March.

Ms McIvor suggested that as individual council Cabinets were about to consider the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Consultation Document, with public consultation planned during the summer, the OGNA, as a key evidence base for the Plan must have been finished. Planning Policy Guidance indicated that authorities were encouraged to publish

documents forming part of a plan's evidence base as they were completed rather than when options were published.

The Chair invited Andrew Down, Growth Board Director to comment on the question and points raised. The Panel was informed that the OGNA was not complete. It was important for the document to be as up to date as possible and further work had been commissioned to look at further revisions in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery programme and the process for this was not expected to conclude prior to the end of June 2021 at which final amendments would be made to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation documents. The importance and contribution of the OGNA was accepted as part of a broad base of evidence supporting the Plan itself which would be consulted upon and needed to be seen in the context of a suite of such documents. When published, five themes would be set out in the consultation: Addressing Climate Change, Improving Environmental Quality, Creating Strong and Healthy Communities, Planning for Sustainable Travel and Connectivity and Creating Jobs and Providing Homes. Over 30 draft policies were expected to form the plan of which only two were expected to relate to housing numbers. Finally, it was expected that final consultation documents would be published in early July to allow scrutiny and Cabinet processes to take place at each authority.

In discussion, it was felt that the points made by the Panel in its previous recommendation to the Growth Board that the OGNA should be published as soon as possible remained valid and had been further emphasised by Ms McIvor. It was agreed that the recommendation should be reiterated to the Growth Board.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Growth Board that it ensure the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment work is published earlier than scheduled along with all supporting evidence based documents which would allow the maximum amount of time for consultees to review the document and also ensuring there is a genuine choice of all realistic options rather than presenting a fait accompli to the consultees responding to the Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation.

7.   Growth Board response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

(a)   Growth Board response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations 16 March 2021

The Chair summarised the responses to the Panel's recommendations to the Growth Board from 16 March 2021, including the response to Recommendation 2 which set out how the Growth Board intended to increase the consideration of environmental issues within the development of the Oxfordshire Plan. At the invitation of the Chair, Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager commented on the strengthening of consideration of environmental issues within the Growth Board by the representation of the Chair of the Oxfordshire Environmental Board within the Growth Board Executive Officer Group and the creation of the new Environment Advisory Group. Work to develop a Local Nature Partnership, (LNP) for Oxfordshire was progressing and following the Growth Board Review, it was still intended to offer the LNP a seat on the Growth Board.

(b)   Growth Board response to Task and Finish Group recommendations

The Chair invited Councillor Alex Postan, as Chair of the Task and Finish Group on Private Investment in Public Infrastructure Projects to summarise the Growth Board's responses to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations as set out in the Agenda. Councillor Postan commented that the Growth Board's response to the recommendations had been generally positive and highlighted the role of private investment in funding future

infrastructure as an alternative to borrowing or HM Government funding. He hoped that in future individual scrutiny committees within each local authority in Oxfordshire would when considering funding for infrastructure projects explore opportunities for private sector investment.

Amit Alva, Growth Board Scrutiny Officer informed the Panel that the Infrastructure Advisory Group would be considering the Task and Finish Group report as agreed by the Growth Board.

Members of the Panel were also encouraged to submit further topics for consideration as future Task and Finish Group topics.

8.   Powering Up for the Green Recovery

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board from Advanced Oxford, titled 'Powering Up the Green Recovery – Oxfordshire's role in building a cleaner future' and a summary presentation as set out in the Agenda. Sarah Haywood, Managing Director Advanced Oxford and Ahmed Goga, Director of Strategy and Programmes, OxLEP introduced the report and highlighted that:

- Advanced Oxford was a non-profit membership group for companies and organisations from a range of sectors with an innovation and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics focus, (STEM). It undertook research and leadership activity around issues of importance in order to support the development of the Oxfordshire ecosystem and to provide insight from the innovation business community to policy and decision making.
- A focus behind the development of the report was to highlight the high quality science and technology practice that underpinned innovative companies across Oxfordshire contributing to the green recovery and to highlight opportunities and barriers to green growth.
- The report had identified many positives within Oxfordshire including a supportive policy environment and a strong university base, but also opportunities and challenges within the NHS linked post Covid-19 including more innovation around sustainability in the NHS supply chain.
- A series of case studies had been published to supplement the report and provide examples of companies contributing to green economy and recovery.
- Companies that had taken part in the study had identified investment including investment in green skills as both an enabler and potential barrier to future green growth.
- Recommendations of the report included greater investment from government, increased growth funding, higher number of investments, investment in skills including apprenticeships, business development and the need for more innovation spaces including in City Centre locations.
- In considering issues around clean growth it was important to recognise the dynamism of the green innovation ecosystem within Oxfordshire which included world leading companies that had invested in the county with a worth of around £1.3bn

The Panel welcomed the report.

In discussion, it was noted that report had identified a need for more innovation and lab space within the City of Oxford. Notwithstanding the reasons for this, the Panel expressed some concern that an increase in such space would lead to increases in commuting,

particularly by car from the surrounding districts as Oxford itself was unable to accommodate sufficient new homes. Affordability of housing within the City was also a factor. It was felt that care needed to be taken to mitigate this as part of the Growth Board's future work and strategies which should include a focus towards the promotion of the full range of sustainable transport options for employment centres.

Links between firms in the innovative sector and the universities in Oxford were noted and it was also acknowledged that it was not intended to overheat Oxford as an employment centre. However, the Panel felt it was important to avoid becoming Oxford centric and that other parts of the county could offer the same quality of innovation and lab space if good sustainable transport and connectivity could be provided, such as in Bicester and Banbury.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Growth Board that in its consideration of Advanced Oxford's report on Powering Up for the Green Recovery, it considers the Scrutiny Panel's feedback set out below. The Board is encouraged to reflect how these views can inform key future plans and strategies:

1) Future Growth Board work and strategies should consider how any increase in total office space can remain compatible with the long-term carbon reduction ambitions of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, and the wider need to design any future Oxford city employment spaces to be car-free and include facilities for sustainable travel

2) There needs to be a balance of focus on areas outside Oxford City along the knowledge spine within the Oxford- Cambridge Arc to promote the creation and development of employment space in areas with good rail links to Oxford such as Bicester and Banbury.

3) There needs to be a focus on sustainable means of transport such as cycle lanes and routes, light passenger railways and autonomous vehicles when designing new spin-out and high-tech spaces. In addition revisiting recommendation 3 made on 16th March 2021 that the Growth Board undertake further work to understand the impact that changes in local rail services do and may have on modal shift with regards to personal car use, consideration should be given to the building of new trains stations on existing lines in areas such as Kidlington- Begbroke-Yarnton.

4) In placemaking, consider designing communities, employment spaces, housing, and transport options holistically, especially in light of changes to working practices in a post-pandemic world and how it is likely to reduce levels of commuting in the long term.

9.   Overview of skills landscape

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board and supporting presentation that set out an update on the emerging national skills landscape and the implications for Oxfordshire's skills priorities, including the skills required to support the transition to net zero carbon dioxide emissions. Richard Byard, Director of Business Environment, OxLEP introduced the report and presentation.

During the Panel's discussion, a range of views and issues were raised including some concerns around the availability and quality of apprenticeships and the importance of adapting and developing skills and skills development to take account of Covid-19 related and wider societal change. It was felt that there were not enough students in STEM fields

coming forward and that it was important to develop less rigid forms of study and skills development as alternatives to the more formal structure of apprenticeships. Diversity of leadership was raised as an important contributor towards innovation.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Growth Board that in noting the Overview of Local Skills Landscape report it undertakes to actively consider diversity of leadership, responsible business practices, attracting youth to Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) fields, and addressing traditional imbalances such as the under-representation of women in STEM based businesses.

10.   Housing and Growth Deal Advisory Group Updates

(a)   Infrastructure Advisory Group update
It was noted that this item had been deferred until the next meeting as no update was available.

(b)   Housing Advisory Group update
The Panel noted the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Group held on 27 April 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

(c)   Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group Update
The Panel noted the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group held on 18 March 2021 and 27 April 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

11.   Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Growth Board Director, informed the Panel that a meeting of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leadership Plenary Group was scheduled to take place on Friday 4 June and it was expected that further information would be given by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on its proposed formal 'Growth Body' for the Arc.

The Panel was informed that all principal local authorities within Oxfordshire had now adopted the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles as previously discussed by the Panel and the Growth Board. This was felt to be a positive step which would help Oxfordshire influence the Oxford to Cambridge Environment Strategy and the subsequent Oxford to Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework.

The Chair commented whilst the Panel was not in a position to comment on these expected developments, he wished to reiterate points made previously by the Panel that local democratic accountability would be fundamental to whatever plans HM Government had in respect of the Arc Growth Body.

It was requested that further information on the proposed Growth Body be circulated to the Panel directly after the 4 June meeting. Officers agreed to undertake this.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

12.   Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel - June 2021

The Panel's work programme and action log – as set out in the Agenda were considered. The Chair invited members of the Panel to consider suggesting future agenda items and also potential subjects for future task and finish group reviews. It was noted that Councillor Postan had suggested a potential review around modern methods of construction and that this should be included on the work programme item for the next meeting along with any other topics suggested.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

13.   Dates of next meetings

The Panel noted the dates of scheduled meetings as follows:

- Monday 12 July 2021
- Monday 13 September 2021
- Monday 15 November 2021
- Monday 17 January 2022
- Tuesday 15 March 2022
- Tuesday 31 May 2022
- Tuesday 19 July 2022

Continuation of virtual Panel meetings

The Chair referred to the proposal to continue with Panel meetings on a virtual basis.

RESOLVED: That meetings of the Panel continue to be held on a virtual basis.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm