

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny

Panel

HELD ON THURSDAY 28 MAY 2020 AT 6.30 PM HELD VIRTUALLY

Present:

Councillors Andrew Gant (Chair), Matthew Barber, Nick Carter, Andy Cooke, Peter Dragonetti, David Grant, Sarah Gray, Damian Haywood, Dan Levy, Alex Postan, Craig Simmons, John Tanner, David Turner, Tom Wallis, Richard Webber, Lucinda Wing and Sean Woodcock, (Vice-Chair)

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Amit Alva	Project and Scrutiny Officer – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Bev Hindle	Growth Board Director – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Stefan Robinson	Growth Board Manager – Oxfordshire Growth Board
James Gagg	Infrastructure Strategy Team Leader, Oxfordshire County Council
Paul Staines	Oxfordshire Growth Deal Delivery Manager – Housing

Other councillors: Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Chair of the Infrastructure subgroup

1 Election of Chair of the Scrutiny Panel for 2020/2021

Councillor Richard Webber proposed and Councillor John Tanner seconded Councillor 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 2020/2021 year.

2 Election of Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Panel for 2020/2021

Councillor Andrew Gant proposed and Councillor John Tanner seconded Councillor Woodcock as Vice-Chair of the Panel. There being no other nominations, the proposal was agreed upon being put to a vote.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Sean Woodcock be elected Vice-Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel for the 2020/2021 year.

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

Apologies were submitted from:

Councillor Julian Cooper, West Oxfordshire District Council, (substituted by Councillor Dan Levy)

Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne, Vale of White Horse District Council (substituted by Councillor David Grant).

Councillor Matt Barber indicated that he would need to leave the meeting prior to its conclusion.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair set out practical guidance to the Panel for the virtual running of the meeting. It was noted that a short adjournment would take place at 20:00 hrs to allow Members to participate in the Clap for Carers tribute.

The Chair and the Panel thanked officers for their work in preparing for the meeting to be held virtually. It was to be one of the first cross local authority meetings to be held in this way.

4 Adoption of Virtual Meeting Procedure Rules

RESOLVED: That the virtual meeting procedure rules be adopted.

It was noted that the recording of the meeting could be found [by clicking on this link](#).

5 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

6 Public participation

It was noted that no requests for public participation had been made.

7 Growth Board response to scrutiny panel recommendations - 11 March 2020

The Panel noted the Growth Board's response to the recommendations from the meeting held on 4 March 2020 as set out in the Agenda.

The agreement by the Growth Board to the Panel's recommendations was welcomed. In respects of Recommendation 2, the Growth Board had made clear that it wished to see representation from Local Enterprise Partnerships and Universities within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc governance structures. Discussion took place regarding the role and interests of such organisations and whether access should be further widened to include other groups.

The Chair stated that he would highlight the Panel's comments at the next meeting of the Growth Board. In his view, there remained a general lack of transparency around the Oxford to Cambridge Arc's governance arrangements. It was agreed to make a further recommendation.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Growth Board confirm that the emerging governance structures within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc concept will ensure that matters retained for local authority decision making will remain reserved and within the responsibility of locally elected council leaders; accepting that there is value in engaging with wider non-local authority members such as local enterprise partnerships, health and environmental groups but in a non-voting capacity.

8 Update from Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Chair of the Infrastructure sub-group

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Chair of the Growth Board Infrastructure Advisory Sub-Group (ISG), to the meeting. Councillor Hudspeth provided an update on the work of the sub-group, highlighting the following key points:

- Covid-19 would impact on all aspects of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal including infrastructure delivery.
- The remit of the ISG included monitoring the delivery of Housing Infrastructure Fund, (HIF 1 and 2 deals). It also included oversight of the infrastructure elements of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.
- There were currently delays within the programme. The importance of ensuring delivery of the projects within the specified time periods was highlighted as it might affect Oxfordshire's reputation in respects of future bids.
- The renewal of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS), was an important project and a key document in providing a solid evidence base of Oxfordshire's infrastructure needs.
- The ISG had received presentations from the Environment agency and Thames Water on future environmental and water/sewerage infrastructure at the strategic level.
- Important work had been undertaken to improve digital infrastructure within Oxfordshire. It was, nevertheless, recognised that much more needed to be done.
- The ISG continued to examine and consider the county's transport infrastructure. This included the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study which had highlighted the need for the Cowley Branch Line. Consideration of transport infrastructure including the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study which had highlighted the need for the Cowley branch line. Despite the difficulties presented by Covid-19, rail connectivity and resolving the 'first mile, last mile' elements of journeys remained very important.
- Approval by the Cabinet of Oxfordshire County Council of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

In discussion, the Panel asked if further information could be provided on what had been achieved to date regarding the delivery of projects. The Housing and Growth Deal had been in place for three years, with several projects due to culminate during Year 2. The Chair of the Panel repeated a request that a Gantt Chart would be a useful way of conveying this information. Members were informed that this information could be made available in due course.

The Panel was informed that whilst the impact of Covid-19 had not explicitly changed the remit of the Growth Board and the ISG, the sub-group would continue to seek to facilitate the provision of projects supporting a transition away from car use. Although the HIF 1 deal already contained cycle and bridge provision, it was possible that there would be wider changes arising from the recently announced Active Travel Fund.

Panel members welcomed the importance placed on cycleway scheme provision but cautioned that they needed to be designed with the needs of cyclist's front and centre. While reassurance was given that the requirements of cyclists would be thoroughly considered, the challenges around funding (especially in relation to the retrofitting of existing routes) was highlighted.

In addition, every effort would be made to fairly balance the recognisably different needs of rural and urban communities. Part of this was improved digital connectivity and initiatives such as the provision of smaller scale park & rides along the A420, and the co-location of secure cycle storage and bus stops.

Several members felt, given the importance of climate change, that there should be more active encouragement of changes in personal behaviour. It was believed unlikely that the necessary lifestyle adjustments would occur organically. While it was recognised that Oxfordshire had a good record in securing funding to support such schemes, it was for individual councils to take the lead role in bringing about change within their own geographical areas.

Members observed that across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc there remained a wide range of opinions regarding the Expressway proposals. They acknowledged, however, that any decision on its future remained in the hands of HM Government.

RESOLVED: The Scrutiny Panel recommended that the Growth Board commission officers to produce a Gantt chart or table showing progress against delivery of investment in infrastructure to support homes (as part of the Homes from Infrastructure workstream within the Housing and Growth Deal), including any available information on the likely impact of Covid-19 on these projects.

9 Oxfordshire Growth Board papers 2 June 2020

a Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board giving an update on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of the Housing and Growth Deal. It highlighted its impact to date upon each of the different strands and its likely future consequences. The report recommended that the timeline of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was amended by seeking an extension of seven months.

In presenting the report, Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, emphasised that the report represented an initial base line analysis in response to the effects of the pandemic. The overall picture remained fast changing and difficult to predict.

While the intention of the report was not to set out a recovery strategy, consideration was being given to the formulation of a plan by OxLEP (in partnership with other stakeholders).

In discussing the report, the Panel made and noted the following key points:

- That it wished to endorse the recommendation to request an extension of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timeline by seven months. HM Government would need to respond formally to both this request and a previous submission to extend the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal by 12 months.
- A view was expressed regarding the use of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in relation to housing numbers. As a consequence of the repeated challenges to the accuracy of the SHMA (and the potential impacts of Covid-19 on social and commercial activity), members argued that it was incumbent upon the Growth Board to review its utility going forwards. The Panel was informed that the SHMA, while undertaken in 2014, remained valid. Further, it had been tested at local plan examinations and was, therefore, an established evidence base. Prior to the Covid-19 emergency, work had already been undertaken by consultants regarding future housing need. There was now the opportunity to refine this recent evidence base work in light of the impact of the pandemic. The view was also expressed that, notwithstanding the potential effects of Covid-19, there remained a substantial housing need within Oxfordshire.
- In several cases, planning permission for housing had been granted based on the provision of infrastructure projects associated with the Housing and Growth Deal. The Panel was informed that in such cases the potential impact to infrastructure delivery arising from the effects of Covid-19 arose principally from the reticence of developers – some were seeking to make a case that certain projects were no longer required. The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy would be crucial in setting out the future infrastructure needs of the county.
- The Oxfordshire Open Thought exercise had been designed to seek to generate engagement in what was recognised to be a long-term vision.
- The view was expressed that there was a need to encourage investment to facilitate as fast a recovery in Oxfordshire as possible.
- Members of the Panel explored the contact that had been made with Homes England over the possibility of adjusting the Housing and Growth Deal.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Growth Board endorses a seven-month extension to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timetable as proposed in the Covid-19 Impact Report, whilst also urging HM Government to respond to its previous request for an extension and to make clear a definitive timeline.

b Updating the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board providing an update on planning for the review of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and attached outline project brief. The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which provided an update on planning for the review of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and attached outline project brief. James Gagg, Infrastructure Strategy Team Leader, presented the report to the Panel.

It was highlighted that the review of OxIS was to be carried out in two stages. Stage 1 was due to be delivered by December 2020 to support and link into the Regulation 18 Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Stage 2 would be delivered in spring/Summer 2021 to support the Regulation 19 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation. This allowed for the OxIS and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 to develop iteratively with increased transparency and integration.

The Panel expressed the view that the refreshed scoring matrix referred to in para 8.1 of the outline project brief for funding via OxIS needed to be based on clear eligibility criteria and local need rather than available funding.

The Panel also suggested that it was unclear where democratic oversight of the OxIS process sat. The Panel was informed that officers involved in the OxIS Steering Group were expected to act as conduits for the provision of information back to the councils (via their democratic processes). The Growth Board Infrastructure Advisory Sub-Group would also be engaged and would monitor progress. Further reports regarding the Infrastructure Strategy would also be brought to the Growth Board via the Panel.

It was noted that, as a result of the recent review of the Growth Board, a statement of intent had been developed. It was agreed that this could be shared with members that wished to receive a copy outside of the meeting. The OxIS sought to manage any negative impacts of growth and maximise the benefits via the provision of supporting infrastructure.

In response to a question, it was confirmed to the Panel that many of the projects which had been included within the first iteration of OxIS did have confirmed funding allocated to them via either the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal or the Housing Infrastructure Fund. Officers advised that the existence of OxIS had been beneficial in demonstrating to HM Government that detailed consideration had been given to Oxfordshire's infrastructure needs and that credible mechanisms were in place to support its delivery

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that

1. The Growth Board clarify the channels of democratic accountability and oversight to ensure there is openness and transparency in the process undertaken to revise the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS).
2. The Growth Board ensures that projects in the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy are based on locally identified need as opposed to being funding led, and commission officers to provide project schedules and progress reports.

10 Work Programme for the Scrutiny Panel and Action Log - May 2020

The work programme of the Panel was considered as set out in the Agenda. The Chair drew the Panel's attention to the note on affordable housing definitions included within the appendix – this had been requested at a previous meeting.

Amit Alva, Growth Board Scrutiny Officer, summarised the work programme and encouraged Panel members to contact him if they had any further suggestions.

11 Dates of meetings

Kevin Jacob, Growth Board Democratic Services Officer, introduced an amended list of meeting dates for 2020/2021 which reflected a move to a quarterly reporting cycle. It was flagged that an additional Growth Board and Panel meeting was planned for July.

- Wednesday 22 July 6.30 pm
- Tuesday 15 Sept 6.30 pm
- Tuesday 17 Nov 6.30 pm
- Tuesday 19 Jan 2021 6.30 pm

- Tuesday 16 Feb 2021 6.30 pm
- Tuesday 16 Mar 2021 6.30 pm
- Tuesday 1 June 2021 6.30 pm

The meeting closed at 8.32 pm