

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 WEDNESDAY 22 JULY 2020 AT 6.30 PM HELD VIRTUALLY

Present:

Councillors Andrew Gant (Chair), Councillor Matthew Barber, Nick Carter, Councillor Andy Cooke, Derek Cotterill, Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne, Sarah Gray, Damian Haywood, Alex Postan, Craig Simmons, John Tanner, David Turner, 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
Paul Staines	Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Delivery Manager
Nigel Tipple	OxLEP Chief Executive

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

Apologies for absence were received from Julian Cooper, West Oxfordshire District Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair set out the process that would be followed in running the meeting virtually, (including participation by members of the public). It was noted that a recording of the meeting could be found by [clicking on this link](#).

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 May 2020 were approved as a correct record subject to the correction of a minor typographical error in Item 8, bullet 7.

3. Public participation

Dr Peter Collins on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire, submitted a question that referred to the timings of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meetings and the Growth Board Review

Stage 1 outcomes. It asked for the Panel to consider holding meetings further in advance of the Growth Board and whether a sub-committee should be established to deal with issues arising between Panel and Growth Board meetings.

The question advised that a recommendation should be submitted to the Board enshrining the timely provision of documents to the Scrutiny Panel within its own Terms of Reference. It also suggested that the local authority leaders should be more answerable to their own council members in relation to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

In response, the Chair commented that it was part of the role of local authority leaders on the Growth Board to report back to their own council – they could then be held accountable for their actions. He suggested that members of the Panel, at its next meeting, might wish to comment on how they felt this oversight process was working in practice.

In respects of updates on the Arc, the Panel would, by virtue of considering the Growth Board Agenda, receive and consider related reports. The Chair hoped that this would include any form of possible Oxford to Cambridge Arc 'Prospectus'.

In relation to the timings of meetings and the availability of reports, the Chair noted that officers had been working very hard to address these challenges and that the changes that they had introduced were now beginning to take effect. In addition, the Panel was also looking at the possibility of establishing Task and Finish Groups to undertake specific pieces of work.

Charlie Hicks submitted a question which challenged the Panel to consider planning for Oxfordshire in 2050 from the perspective of people born in the 1990s. He advocated for the application of the good design principles used in the tech sector. These focused on the needs of the future user rather than those of the present.

In discussion, members of the Panel supported the sentiments expressed in the question. They agreed with the need to engage with, and be more representative of, young people in both planning for Oxfordshire's future (via the Oxfordshire Plan 2050) and in politics more generally. Continuing concerns were highlighted regarding the level of engagement by young people in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultations and any outputs arising from that. The Chair indicated that he would raise these matters with the Growth Board.

Councillor Simmons suggested that the Panel should consider becoming more proactive in its approach to engaging with young people. He suggested that this might potentially include activity to develop policy. The Chair commented that this could be encompassed within the work of the suggested Task and Finish Groups.

4. Growth Board response to scrutiny panel recommendations - 2 June 2020

The Panel noted the Growth Board's responses to the recommendations from the meeting held on 28 May 2020 as set out in the Agenda.

5. Covid-19 Recovery

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board setting out the collective approach being taken within Oxfordshire to support the local economy and the wider recovery in

response to the pandemic. Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, presented the report to the Panel and answered questions.

In discussion, the Panel noted that, as part of the recovery and renewal process, several well-attended online job fairs had been held. These sought to match vacancies with both current job seekers and those at risk of redundancy. It was acknowledged, however, that these did not yet fully cover staff who are currently furloughed but at risk of redundancy – this was thought to be a significant issue as both lockdown and the current support measures were wound down.

The Panel, in questioning whether any of the fundamentals of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal had changed considering the pandemic, noted that the situation remained unclear. Conversations were ongoing with HM Government on several issues including the deliverability of some of the programme timescales and potential options around extending the flexibilities for the use of Deal funding.

Nigel Tipple referred to the possibility of providing grants to support businesses to pivot towards the new situation created by Covid-19. This potential option was currently being looked into.

The Panel was supportive of the collective action set out in the report. They acknowledged that it represented a snapshot of activity in what was a complex and constantly evolving situation.

Members felt that the situation facing Oxfordshire had changed fundamentally (because of the pandemic and other issues e.g. the climate emergency) and that fresh thinking was now required. It was, therefore, suggested that there was a need to approach the Covid-19 response from the perspective of a genuine renewal of economic plans – the principles of recovery as set out by the C40 Mayors were highlighted as a potential option.

The Panel also emphasised its view on the importance of science and technology industries aiding economic recovery and renewal especially those sectors contributing towards the environment and healthy living in a post Covid-19 Oxfordshire.

With regards to the Active Travel Programme, Councillor Gray referred to what she felt had been the cancellation of the Thame to Haddenham cycleway without consultation with South Oxfordshire District Council. Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, and Susan Harbour, Strategic Partnerships Manager, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, agreed to update Councillor Gray on the specific circumstances of that individual scheme outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends:

1. That the Growth Board, in considering its role in the Post-Covid-19 recovery, supports the principles of recovery as agreed by the C40 Mayors:
 - The recovery should not be a return to ‘business as usual’ – because that is a world on track for 3°C or more of over-heating;
 - The recovery, above all, must be guided by an adherence to public health and scientific expertise, in order to assure the safety of those who live in our cities;
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- Excellent public services, public investment and increased community resilience will form the most effective basis for the recovery;
- The recovery must address issues of equity that have been laid bare by the impact of the crisis – for example, workers who are now recognised as essential should be celebrated and compensated accordingly and policies must support people living in informal settlements;
- The recovery must improve the resilience of our cities and communities. Therefore, investments should be made to protect against future threats – including the climate crisis – and to support those people impacted by climate and health risks;
- Climate action can help accelerate economic recovery and enhance social equity, using new technologies and the creation of new industries and new jobs. These will drive wider benefits for our residents, workers, students, businesses and visitors;
- We commit to doing everything in our power and the power of our city governments to ensure that the recovery from COVID-19 is healthy, equitable and sustainable;
- We commit to using our collective voices and individual actions to ensure that national governments support both cities and the investments needed in cities, to deliver an economic recovery that is healthy, equitable and sustainable;
- We commit to using our collective voices and individual actions to ensure that international and regional institutions invest directly in cities to support a healthy, equitable and sustainable recovery.

2. That the Growth Board, in considering its role in the Post-Covid-19 recovery, champions the role of the science and technology industries in delivering economic recovery and renewal, especially where those sectors can contribute towards our local environmental and healthy living ambitions; areas that the Panel felt were not sufficiently recognised within the report presented to them.

6. Growth Board Review Stage 1 Implementation

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which set out progress to date in implementing early actions from the review. It requested endorsement and approval of a suite of revised governance documents which had been updated to reflect the outcome of the review.

The Chair expressed some concern that the Panel was being invited to give its comments after the report had already been considered and approved by several Growth Board partner councils. He acknowledged that technical approval of the report and recommendations rested with the sovereign local authorities but commented that, in his view, it was not effectively possible for those councils to make any changes or to reject the new Terms of Reference.

In discussion, proposed measures to improve public participation by the earlier publication of Growth Board agendas was welcomed. The view was, nevertheless, expressed that the

size of these documents (at over 150 pages) could act as a potential disincentive. It was, however, acknowledged that, in most cases, the covering reports set out the key information. With regards to public speaking, the Panel felt that the Growth Board's website should clearly set out how members of the public could register to speak at future meetings.

It was noted that a Freedom of Information (FOI) protocol formed part of the suite of revised governance documents for approval by the Growth Board. The Panel agreed that a recommendation should be made concerning the autonomy of responses to FOI requests between the Growth Board partner organisations. The aim of this would be to increase transparency and highlight gaps in governance.

It was commented that although there was reference to environmental bodies within the proposed Terms of Reference, there was not an explicit reference to flood alleviation. Members also felt that more detail was required in respects of the establishment of the proposed Local Nature Partnership. It was agreed that a recommendation should be made to the Growth Board requesting an update.

The Panel recognised the important role of the Growth Board's subgroups in undertaking a significant amount of the Board's detailed work, while also acknowledging the elected representation from each partner council on them. They also noted that the amended Terms of Reference placed a greater emphasis on these councillors to act as conduit between their local authorities and the Growth Board. The Panel, therefore, felt that a recommendation was necessary to further clarify how subgroup members were expected to undertake this aspect of their role. It was also important that the subgroups were aware of the Scrutiny Panel's activity.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that:

1. The Growth Board provide it with an update at its next meeting concerning the development of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire
2. The Growth Board provides clarity about how members of its Advisory Sub-Group will be expected to carry out their conduit role between that group and their local authority, as suggested in the Terms of Reference for those groups.
3. The Growth Board ensures that the Advisory Subgroups have access to the minutes of the Scrutiny Panel meetings.
4. The Growth Board makes visible on its website's home page how the public can register to speak at future meetings of the Board.

7. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board setting out an update on the work currently being undertaken regarding the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. Activities in progress included the formulation of an Arc level response and proposal to HM Government around a Covid-19 recovery strategy. Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, commented that such updates would now be a standing item on the Growth Board's Agenda.

The Chair welcomed the inclusion of natural capital planning within the Arc's workstreams and priorities. The Panel were informed that natural capital mapping had been piloted

nationally within the Arc and was being utilised as part of the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

It was noted that there were no current plans for the Arc to become a combined authority. Moreover, while HM Government's Spring Statement had mentioned the establishment of several development corporations, none of these were relevant to Oxfordshire.

8. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

It was suggested by the Chair – and agreed by the Panel – that the reports in relation to the Housing and Growth Deal could be considered and noted together with queries raised by exception.

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Progress Report - Year Two

The Panel considered and noted a report to the Growth Board which set out progress as of Quarter 4, Year 2 (2019/2020) of the Housing and Growth Deal.

In discussion, the Panel revisited previous debates around the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) definition of affordable housing and whether it captured real affordability for residents. It was felt that further information would be required before an objective calculation, incorporating the median income in Oxfordshire, could establish the actual number of affordable homes.

The view was also expressed that it was important to place the user at the centre of planning for the future – an opinion expressed by the previous public speakers. In addition, there was a need to encourage capital investment from the private sector through incentives and concessions. This would allow for public sector spending to be freed up for other projects.

Concerns were also raised that countryside housing developments on the outskirts of the city of Oxford could lead to a higher risk of flooding in neighbouring rural areas. The Panel, therefore, recommended that Green Belt boundaries should be re-examined as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 – with a focus on flood risk.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that:

1. The Growth Board in its reporting for the Housing Sub-group categorise Affordable Housing in two sub-categories:
 - i) Affordable Housing: 80% market rate (NPPF)
 - ii) Affordable Housing: 5 x median household income (mortgage rates)
2. The Growth Board in its work with Oxfordshire Plan 2050 re-examine the boundaries of Green Belt with a focus on countryside housing developments and its impact on flood risk areas.
3. The Growth Board investigate ways of funding public infrastructure projects by incentivising private sector organisations in order to attract private capital investment; decreasing budgetary pressures on these projects.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Outturn 2019/2020

The Panel considered and noted a report to the Growth Board on the 2019/2020 financial outturn and programme overview of the Housing and Growth Deal.

In discussion, reference was made to Annex 2 of the report which included a table setting out details of capital and revenue expenditure for Housing and Growth Deal schemes. It was expressed that the figures indicated that the current level of activity was minimal and, therefore, it would be helpful if there was indication of expected scheme start dates. The Panel was informed that from September 2020, it was expected that further information on the status of schemes would be presented to the Growth Board in a dashboard format.

(c) Infrastructure sub-group update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Infrastructure subgroup held on 11 May 2020.

(d) Housing sub-group update

The Panel noted the summary notes of Housing Advisory subgroup held on 16 June 2020.

(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 subgroup held between March and June 2020.

(f) Oxfordshire Plan 2050: Letter to HM Government

The Panel noted and supported the draft letter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

9. Community Led Housing in Oxfordshire

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board setting out the findings of a study into the Oxfordshire Community Led Housing (CLH) landscape. It proposed draft recommendations for either individual partner local authorities or the Growth Board to consider. Paul Staines, Growth Deal Service Delivery Manager for Housing, highlighted that the costs of the initial study had been met by a £36,000 grant provided by Homes England and that the Board was being asked to endorse the establishment of action plans in respects of the specific recommendations arising from the study.

The Panel strongly welcomed the report and supported its recommendations. It was felt that CLH should be encouraged wherever possible – notwithstanding that different localities would require tailored needs.

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

The work programme and action log were considered as set out in the agenda. Amit Alva, Growth Board Scrutiny Officer, explained that information and a Gantt Chart regarding the progress of infrastructure schemes to support housing would be available in mid-August. Material relating to the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy would also be provided.

11. Dates of next meetings

The Panel noted the dates for scheduled meetings as follows:

- Tues 15 Sept 2020 6.30 pm
 - Tues 17 Nov 2020 6.30 pm
 - Tues 19 Jan 2021 6.30 pm
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- Tues 16 Feb 2021 6.30 pm
- Tues 16 Mar 2021 6.30 pm
- Tues 1 June 2021 6.30 pm

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm
