

# 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 21 OCTOBER 2020 AT 6.30 PM VIRTUALLY

#### Present:

Councillors Andrew Gant (Chair), Nick Carter, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Councillor Andy Cooke, 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

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

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Derek Cotterill, West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Peter Dragonetti, South Oxfordshire District Council, (who was substituted by Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye); and Councillor Jenny Hannaby, Vale of White Horse District Council, (who was substituted by Councillor Hayleigh Gascoigne).

Councillor Casey-Rerhaye declared that she was employed by Oxfordshire County Council in its Public Health department.

With the Panel's permission the order of the meeting was amended to consider public participation immediately before Agenda item 4, Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus and after Agenda item 3, Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

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

#### 25. Public participation

**Dr Peter Collins, on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire**, submitted a question referring to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus and expressed his view that there had been critical lapses of democratic practice in the production and promotion of the Prospectus, including:

- a. the Oxfordshire to Cambridge Arc Leaders' Executive Group exempting itself from public scrutiny on the Prospectus
- b. a failure in CPRE's view to bring the Prospectus through the Growth Board constituent local authorities
- c. a lack of recognition within the document that Buckinghamshire Council, Buckingham Local Enterprise Partnership and the University of Buckingham had withdrawn their support
- d. the presentation of the Prospectus for endorsement by the Growth Board after it had been submitted to HM Government.

Considering these comments, the Panel was asked to recommend to the Growth Board that it not endorse the Prospectus until there had been public engagement and local authority scrutiny.

In response, the Chair stated that a full written answer to the question would be provided in due course and published [here](#). Further comments raised were addressed under the substantive Arc Prospectus agenda item.

Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director summarised the status of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Group as a non-statutory committee which met informally to discuss and advance the progress the Arc in response to HM Government's invitation to engage with it about the region. As such, the Prospectus itself, whilst an important document, did not carry the status of a formal planning policy document. Finally, the geographic area of the Arc as defined by HM Government included all the communities within it and this was not affected by participation in the Arc Leaders Group.

During the Panel's discussion, the Chair acknowledged that there were some public concerns, which the question had referred to, around a perceived inherent democratic deficit and lack of democratic oversight around the Arc as a regional body. These had extended to the production of the Prospectus. The Chair indicated that he would make a general point to the Growth Board around the nature of decision making involving the Arc and that this was something the Panel felt should continue to be kept under review.

## **26. Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board introducing a draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire's long-term sustainable development. The report set out the purpose of the proposal, the scope and content of the Vision and the benefits of wider public engagement and future Growth Board endorsement.

In presenting the report, Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, highlighted that the Vision was important to the future of Oxfordshire, but stressed that the draft included in the Agenda was the basis for public engagement and not a final product. An objective of the developing the Vision was to gain greater clarity of Oxfordshire's shared future ambitions to help inform and support wider strategies including the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, but it was not a formal statutory planning document and its remit went beyond questions of land use to include questions around the kind of places residents wished to live in. It was also designed to precede the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It was intended that public engagement on the Vision would take place prior to Christmas and once the results of this had been taken into consideration to present an updated draft to Growth Board for endorsement in the New Year.

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In discussion the Panel was generally supportive of the draft Vision and of the planned public engagement exercise whilst raising several questions of clarification and comment. The links and relationships between the Vision, Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and sub-regional strategic documents including the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus were explored. It was felt by some members of the Panel that there were some apparent contradictions in the draft Vision between a stated aim to remain Oxfordshire focussed and other parts of the document that referred to sub-regional and external influences. The Panel was informed that Vision aimed to strike the right balance between local issues and the wider context which also needed to be taken into consideration.

The view was expressed that there was a need for clarification and correlation between existing forward looking local planning documents and policies and the Vision. There was also felt to be a tension between the reference to historical documents in the Vision, (many of which were considered to now be outdated, particularly around climate change and bio-diversity), and the aim of the Vision to be forward looking and based on the most up to date information.

Discussion of the engaged engagement exercise focussed on the Panel's view that participation amongst younger people was crucially important given the long-term nature of the Vision. The Growth Board, particularly its local authority Leader representatives, needed to do all they could to engage with all their councillors around the Vision and to use their wider community network as much as possible to encourage as wide a possible response.

**RESOLVED:** That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Growth Board:

1. be requested to acknowledge that the timescales in the final version of the Strategic Vision running from the year 2021 and its content may not necessarily align with existing forward-looking policies, plans of individual councils and partner organisations running up to the year 2030 and with this in mind the Growth Board ensure that continuity between this Vision and other policies & plans is carefully considered.
2. be requested to ask Council leaders to ensure there is clear visibility of the Strategic Vision public engagement exercise to the elected members of their respective councils and guarantee that they would be given the opportunity to read and comment on the text.
3. be requested to ask Council Leaders to encourage their wider networks and the public to engage with the Strategic Vision engagement exercise.
4. be requested to ensure that the public engagement exercise actively targets engagement with younger people (who are traditionally underrepresented in local government consultations) as part of a wider effort to ensure that views are sought across Oxfordshire's demographic.

## **27. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus Update**

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board summarising the key points of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus and appended full copy of the Prospectus.

In presenting the report, Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, commented that the Arc Leadership Group had been invited by HM Government to submit proposals which could inform the expected Comprehensive Spending Review, currently expected at the end of

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November. The primary target audience of the Prospectus was therefore HM Government, although it was intended to engage more widely on the Prospectus in due course. The Arc had been recognised by the National Infrastructure Commission as an area of national economic significance which would not grow as might be expected unless there was investment in the region's communities and the infrastructure supporting that growth. The Prospectus sought to make the case to HM Government why investment was needed in the region, reflecting the net contribution the Arc area made to the national economy, balancing this with a focus towards inclusive and sustainable growth.

It was stressed that whilst the Prospectus did make the case for investment for improvements in existing road infrastructure to improve connectivity such as to the A34 or A14 it did not propose or advocate an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. It did advocate the point that such improvements in road infrastructure should run alongside decarbonisation and initiatives such as Active Travel.

In discussion the Panel noted and acknowledged that the Prospectus did not propose or seek to revive the idea of an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, although the view was expressed by one member of the Panel that the prospectus should have gone further to explicitly rule out an Expressway given the perception of many members of the public and media coverage.

It was confirmed to the Panel that the Prospectus was based around the principle of sustained economic growth, but that the challenge recognising the climate emergency was to ensure that this growth was environmentally sustainable as a key priority.

After further discussion, the Panel did not feel it was necessary for it to give a view to the Growth Board on whether it should endorse the Prospectus. The Panel felt that there was some potential tension between the positions advocated within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and the Prospectus and that in producing the final version of the Vision, care would needed to be taken by the Growth Board to ensure that endorsement of the Prospectus did not undermine the Vision.

**RESOLVED:** That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Growth Board ensure the policies and plans within the final version of the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire are not undermined by the endorsement of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus.

## **28. Dates of next meetings**

The Panel noted the dates of scheduled meetings as follows:

- Tues 17 Nov 2020 6.30 pm
- Tues 19 Jan 2021 6.30 pm
- 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 8.15 pm

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