

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Infrastructure Sub-Group

HELD ON MONDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 9.00 AM

VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Councillor Ian Hudspeth (Chair), Councillor Yvonne Constance, Councillor Jeff Haine, Councillor Lynn Pratt, Councillor Judy Roberts and Phil Southall

Officers: Craig Bower (Oxfordshire County Council), John Disley (Oxfordshire County Council), Kevin Jacob (Oxfordshire Growth Board) and John McLauchlan (Oxfordshire County Council)

17 Apologies for absence and notifications of substitutions; declarations of interests; Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Tom Hayes.

There were no declarations of interest

18 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 14 December were agreed as a correct record.

19 Infrastructure Programme Quarter 3 Delivery Update

The subgroup considered a summary performance dashboard setting out the progress of the Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme as of Quarter 3 2020/2021. In presenting the report John McLauchlan, Head of Service, Infrastructure Planning Office, Oxfordshire County Council highlighted that:

- The programme was on track to meet the target within the Growth Deal of £30m infrastructure expenditure within the financial year through a combination of spending and advance spending agreed with Homes England. There would now be an emphasis on design and build.
- The indications were that Covid-19 had not had a significant impact on the delivery of the programme and any impacts would be manageable.
- As more of the programme moved from design and feasibility into construction there would be more certainty around project budget estimates.

Members of the subgroup asked several questions in relation to the progress and delivery of specific schemes and officers responded to these.

The subgroup noted the update.

20 Digital Connectivity and Digital Infrastructure Strategy Update

The subgroup received a detailed presentation Craig Bower, Digital Infrastructure Programme Director, Oxfordshire County Council. The presentation covered a summary of the progress across Oxfordshire in the provision of Superfast, (>30Mb/s), Ultrafast, (>100Mb/s) and Full Fibre broadband, a summary of the Digital Programme Workstream, the Department for Media Culture and Sport, (DCMS) Voucher scheme, Rural Gigabit Connectivity, (RGC) Procurement and current programme issues.

It was highlighted to the subgroup that the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire contract had been completed in July 2020 and that this initiative had been successful in connecting some 74,000 properties to Superfast Broadband in the county. The first premises under the Broadband for Rural Businesses in Oxfordshire had gone live in the Thame area at the end of January 2021. Shared 4G and 5G rural mobile network rollout was expected during the rest of 2021.

The subgroup was informed that Rural Gigabit Connectivity was a DCMS initiative using vouchers which broadband suppliers could use to offset costs of broadband infrastructure provision. As part of this initiative, two new projects were scheduled to launch in March 2021. These had the objectives of driving the delivery of full fibre broadband for residents and citizens and businesses in Oxfordshire by stimulating the fibre broadband market and to improve the digital connectivity of the public sector, (including GP surgeries) by moving more public sector sites onto full fibre broadband.

Members of the subgroup welcomed the presentation and acknowledged the significant progress made, but in discussion commented that areas of poor digital connectivity and slow speeds continued to exist, even within urban and urban fringe areas where it might be assumed connectivity would be good. It was noted that this was acknowledged as an issue, but that a challenge in seeking to secure funding in this area was what was felt to be an overly rigid approach within Building Digital UK in applying a rural focus when urban and urban fringe areas also required broadband investment.

The subgroup noted the update.

21 Briefing note on Highways England A34 project

The subgroup considered an update prepared on behalf of the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum, (OSTF) on an initial briefing it had received from Highways England about a Department for Transport sponsored project to reduce congestion on the A34 between M4 Chieveley and Junction 9 of the M40 at Bicester. Whilst the project aimed to resolve problems with the A34, it had been presented by Highways England as a discrete project and it had been stressed that the project did not form part of previous work associated with an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

The subgroup discussed the scope and implications of such a project for Oxfordshire in the context of the county's wider ranging climate change and connectivity, (as well as

congestion) objectives as well as the models which might be used by Highways England in developing the proposals further.

The subgroup noted the update and that the OSTF would continue to engage with Highways England to discuss the proposals and that Officers would work through the appropriate issues with Highways England and the Department for Transport.

22 Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

- 1 March 2021
- 26 April 2021

The meeting closed at 10.00 am