

# 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 16 MARCH 2021 AT 6.30 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

#### Present:

Councillors Andrew Gant (Chair), Nick Carter, Councillor Andy Cooke, Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Jenny Hannaby, Victoria Haval, Damian Haywood, Dan Levy, Mark Lygo, Alex Postan, Craig Simmons, David Turner, Richard Webber and Sean Woodcock, (Vice-Chair)

#### Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Amit Alva       | Project and Scrutiny Officer – Oxfordshire Growth Board               |
| John Disley     | Infrastructure Strategy & Policy Manager - Oxfordshire County Council |
| Andrew Down     | Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group                     |
| Susan Harbour   | Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils     |
| 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       |

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

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Matt Barber, Vale of White Horse District Council; Councillor Julian Cooper, West Oxfordshire District Council (who was substituted by Councillor Dan Levy); Councillor Derek Cotterill, West Oxfordshire District Council; Councillor John Tanner, Oxford City Council, (who was substituted by Councillor Mark Lygo); and Councillor Lucinda Wing, Cherwell District Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

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

#### 53. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021 were approved as a correct record.

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## 54. Public participation

**Suzanne McIvor on behalf of Cherwell Development Watch Alliance** submitted four questions relating to the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. She asked the Panel to seek assurances from the Growth Board that:

- The Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would contain policy options on the level of growth planned for Oxfordshire;
- The Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA), (or some interim information) would be realised immediately, citing planning practice guidance;
- An explanation would be provided on the work of ICENI in respect of the OGNA work and why the output of the ICENI work had not been provided in the Spring of 2020;
- Environmental considerations had been addressed in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, including details of the arrangements for representation on and consultation by the Growth Board.

Ms McIvor expressed her view that Oxfordshire's residents had never been invited to give their opinion on the growth implied by HM Government's proposals for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The growth proposals also lacked any form of public endorsement as they had never appeared in any local or national political manifesto.

Moreover, Ms McIvor was concerned that the OGNA would be used to justify growth at an Arc level, instead of providing an accurate reflection of the needs of the county's population. In her opinion, not publishing the OGNA work immediately was contrary to HM Government's Planning Practice Guidance.

The Chair invited Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, to comment on the questions raised. Mr Staines, in response, stressed that the regulation 18 Part 2 consultation would test a range of assumptions and that no policy decisions had been prejudged around levels of growth. He also stated that the OGNA was not yet complete – having been revisited in light of the pandemic – but would, once finished, be published as part of the extensive Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation process taking place during Summer 2021. Finally, the Growth Board was continuing to take steps to address environmental concerns as set out in the proposals to establish an Environment Advisory Group.

After discussion, the Panel:

**RESOLVED** to recommend that the Growth Board:

1. ensures the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment work is published as soon as that work is completed; or clarify the reasons and timescale for publishing it as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation;
2. clarifies how it intends to increase the consideration of environmental issues through the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and wider programmes of work.

## 55. Growth Board response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Panel noted the Growth Board's response to the recommendations from the meeting held on 19 January 2021 as set out in the Agenda.

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The Vice-Chair referred to the Growth Board's agreement to Recommendation 1 relating to the application of the Health Impact Assessment Toolkit to existing developments. While he was pleased with their decision, he, nevertheless, raised concerns that the application of the toolkit, if not closely monitored, would be disproportionately focused on new – rather than existing – developments.

## **56. Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group Report - private investment in infrastructure**

The Panel considered the report of the Task and Finish Group established to investigate options around private investment in public infrastructure. Councillor Postan, Chair of the Group, introduced the report and its recommendations. In his remarks, he highlighted Recommendation 5 which suggested that the Growth Board should invite a representative of the emerging UK Infrastructure Bank to a future meeting of the Infrastructure Advisory Group.

Councillor Postan suggested that the process followed to produce the report presented a model for future Panel Task and Finish Groups. He paid tribute to the other members and to both Amit Alva, Growth Board Scrutiny Officer and Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, for their assistance in producing the report.

In discussion, the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group were supported by the Panel. In addition, the importance of considering green infrastructure – alongside more traditional examples such as bridges and railways – was mentioned.

**RESOLVED:** That the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group report be endorsed by the Panel for onward submission to the Growth Board.

## **57. Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study: Completion and Next Steps**

The Panel considered a report – presented by John Disley, Infrastructure Strategy & Policy Manager, Oxfordshire County Council and Andrew Down, Chair of the Executive Officer Group – providing the Growth Board with the final conclusions of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS). It built on a previous update in January 2020 and quantified the rail network improvement interventions and projects which would be required to enable connectivity and capacity enhancements.

It was highlighted that:

- The core proposition made to the Growth Board in January 2020 which set out the need for, and opportunity offered by, an uplift in rail connectivity and capacity across Oxfordshire remained valid.
  - The specific work required to increase connectivity and capacity in the areas of greatest need across the Oxfordshire rail network had now been quantified and outline costs identified. The costs were significant but reflected the amount of investment that would be required to realise the level of ambition expressed.
  - The establishment of the Oxfordshire Connect Programme would enable a plan of investment for the development of rail within the county. The report set out the stages, project milestones and bids for funding that would be involved in its delivery.
  - Key high value for money projects included improvements to infrastructure south of Oxford Station and west of Didcot.
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- While the study had focussed on meeting the needs associated with planned growth in the county, consideration had been given to potential additional growth.
- Although the study had identified priorities for rail investment, the costs were significant, and no funding had yet been identified. Moreover, the path to delivery would be a complex and long-term process. Nevertheless, Oxfordshire was in a positive position due to its work with partners such as Network Rail and the Department for Transport.

In discussion, several members of the Panel referred to the A40 corridor, reductions in services on the Cotswold Line and the campaign by the Witney to Oxford Transport Group regarding the re-establishment of a train line between Carterton and Oxford. It was also suggested that greater reference could have been made within the report to the potential for new rail lines. In addition, the importance of cross-referencing the ORCS and the emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) was highlighted.

In response, the Panel was informed that the agreed scope and remit of the ORCS was focussed on where investment in existing core infrastructure could make the most impact on supporting planned growth over the current Local Plans period. It, therefore, did not include the consideration of potential new lines. It was also emphasised that if the improvements envisaged in the report were fully realised it would represent a significant achievement. Furthermore, while the issue of future growth needs and the potential for new lines remained open, it was necessary to recognise that improvements to existing rail infrastructure were necessary prerequisites.

Although the Panel acknowledged these points, several members felt that consideration should be given to the building of new stations on existing lines where large scale developments were already planned.

Members also expressed the view that an objective of improving rail travel was to encourage a modal shift away from the car. They would, therefore, have liked to have seen greater reference made to this within the ORCS study with some analysis of the impacts of new rail provision – for example the opening of Oxford Parkway.

In response, the Panel was informed that there was a feeling that the opening of Oxford Parkway had seen some modal shift, but that information was limited. It would, therefore, be interesting to see what the impact of the East West Rail improvements would be.

Panel members referred to Oxfordshire's importance in terms of the regional and national economy, commenting that it was important to emphasize that investment in Oxfordshire rail infrastructure had wider benefits.

**RESOLVED:** That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Growth Board undertake further work to understand the impact that changes in local rail services do and may have in the future on modal shift, particularly with regards to personal car use, to help inform the 2022 Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and future business cases for rail investment. There should be cross referencing between the rail study and the LTCP.

1. Especially the A40 Oxford – Witney route should be considered since traffic in these areas will continue to rise with the reduction of services in the northwest of the Cotswolds railway line, bringing in traffic from areas such as Charlbury.
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2. In addition, consideration should also be given to the building of new stations on existing lines especially in areas such as Kidlington-Begbroke-Yarnton where there are large scale development plans.

## 58. Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

The Panel considered a final version of the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire's Long Term Sustainable Development (the Vision, a cover report and a summary of the public engagement exercise undertaken on the previous draft version. The Growth Board would consider the Vision at its meeting on 22 March.

In presenting the Vision, Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, highlighted that:

- The public engagement process was positive in terms of the scope and scale of response received (particularly considering the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic). The majority of responses had been positive, and even those that disagreed with the Vision's narrative were often positive about it as a concept.
- Whilst the core components of the revised Vision remained intact, reflecting the support offered, numerous changes had been made as a result of the public engagement exercise.
- In considering the Vision, it was important to be cognisant of the fact that it had been designed to be wide ranging with a much broader reach than that of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Although the Vision was strategic in nature, it had been developed to meet the narrative challenge of providing enough data to be tangible to residents as a statement of intent for Oxfordshire's future.
- Every effort had been made to draft the Vision in a balanced way and thus provide a strategic umbrella under which specific interests could be articulated and developed in more detail.
- In addition to the full Vision document, there was the intention to produce a short summary version. Consideration would, therefore, need to be given as to how the Vision could most effectively be presented.
- For the Vision to inform the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation, it had to be approved by Oxfordshire's five planning authorities before the commencement of the Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation.

In discussion, the view was expressed that it was important that the Growth Board established the consequences of its actions in terms of carbon inputs and outputs. Concerns were raised that para 2.2 of the Vision could be misunderstood as a justification for using a narrow definition of growth. It was, therefore, suggested that a wider, more holistic, definition of growth would be more reflective of what the vision was seeking to achieve. It was also felt that it would be helpful to move the definition to earlier in the document. This would help to give readers a greater understanding of what was implied by future growth in Oxfordshire.

Whilst acknowledging that the Vision would have a range of audiences, the Panel fully supported the drafting of a shorter and more user friendly summary.

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

1. take steps to ensure that the Strategic Vision is supported by a communications strategy containing appropriately concise and engaging literature especially summarising the vision in a one-page format and user-friendly language.
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2. recognise that the following statement contained within the Strategic Vision could be misunderstood as a justification for using a narrow definition of growth: “Growth can be defined narrowly in terms of expansion in numbers of homes and jobs and economic output.” The Panel recommends that this is revised to assert that growth can and should be defined in a more holistic way (as intended through the “good growth” definition set out in the Vision). Consideration should also be given to whether the definition of “good growth” can be moved to an earlier position in the document, and whether mentions of prosperity and clean growth can be more frequently referenced.

## **59. Establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory Group**

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board setting out the proposed establishment of an Environmental Advisory Group (it included a draft Terms of Reference). It also contained further details on the creation of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire and requested the endorsement of the emerging Environment Principles for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

Andrew Down, Chair of the Growth Board Executive Officer Group, commented that the Arc Environmental Principles represented a valuable piece of ‘bottom up’ work that set a high level of environmental ambition. He also highlighted that the proposed Environment Advisory Group linked back to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and was, therefore, consistent with the actions outlined in the Growth Board’s review.

The Panel supported the establishment of the Environment Advisory Group and the development of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environmental Principles. Nevertheless, while it was felt that the principles represented a welcome starting point, the view was expressed that there could have been greater reference to abiotic resources (such as industrial materials) and the need for improved efficiency in resource use via a circular economy.

## **60. Housing and Growth Deal Reports**

### **(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Year 3, Quarter 3**

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which set out progress at Quarter 3, Year 3 with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

In response to a question regarding the Homes from Infrastructure Programme, Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programmes, clarified that the Jubilee Way Roundabout and Golden Balls Junction project feasibility studies would be met from Housing and Growth Deal Funds. It was still expected that – subject to the outcome of the feasibility stage – both studies would be delivered within what would have been the original window of the Deal (up to 2023).

The extension of the Housing and Growth Deal up to 2025 was primarily to allow for housing considered to be ‘accelerated’ to come forward and be counted, under its terms, as delivered. This additional leeway would take account of the slow down in delivery related to the impact of Covid-19.

The Panel was informed that the Affordable Housing Programme had been extended into a fourth year, with the potential to run into a fifth year if circumstances warranted it.

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**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

**(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report - Year 3, Quarter 3**

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which set out an update on the financial position of the Housing and Growth Deal as at Quarter 3, Year 3.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

**(c) Infrastructure sub-group update**

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Infrastructure sub-group held on 8 February 2021 and 1 March 2021.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes be noted.

**(d) Housing sub-group update**

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Housing Advisory sub-group held on 23 February 2021.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes be noted.

**(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 subgroup update**

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 subgroup held on 18 February 2021.

**RESOLVED:** That summary notes be noted.

**(f) Joint Oxfordshire Plan 2050/Infrastructure Subgroup**

The Panel noted the summary notes of the joint Oxfordshire Plan 2050/Infrastructure sub-group held on 21 January 2021. Members were reminded that the slides from the meeting had been published and could be found on the Growth Board website.

**RESOLVED:** That the summary notes be noted.

## **61. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update**

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board setting out recent developments in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. During his presentation, Andrew Down, Chair of the Executive Officer Group, highlighted the publication by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) of its policy document introducing a spatial framework for the Arc.

It was emphasised to the Panel that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was a document designed and drafted by the local authorities of Oxfordshire. It would be built upon a local evidence base and would not be driven by the Arc. Nevertheless, it was important to recognise that councils within the Arc would be required to have regard to national planning policy (which would eventually include the Arc Spatial Framework).

To date, the MHCLG had been open and collaborative in its approach to the creation of an Arc Spatial Framework. Several productive workshops had been held with officers which had provided some reassurance. It was, however, important to recognise that the work on

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the Arc Spatial Framework was at an early stage and, therefore, the full policy implications remained unknown.

The Panel was referred to the expected phases in the development of the Spatial Framework. This was set out in the report and would include public consultation.

MHCLG had also announced its intention to create a Growth Body for the Arc. While details had not been made available about its governance arrangements, it was anticipated that there would be a broad representation of interests including local government, universities, local enterprise partnerships and business. It was also expected that the timescale for the creation of the Growth Body would be comparatively rapid, with the possibility that an outline would be circulated by the end of Summer 2021. Although this work will be driven by HM Government, MHCLG were, nevertheless, seeking ideas and contributions on governance arrangements from partners (including those in Oxfordshire).

In discussion, the Panel raised serious concerns regarding the governance arrangements for the proposed Growth Body. It was felt that these might be unduly influenced by the developer industry and, therefore, it was important to reiterate to HM Government that local planning decisions should remain a matter for local planning authorities. Any proposal or attempt to reduce democratic accountability through structures such as the Arc Growth Board should be vigorously resisted.

**RESOLVED:** The Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Growth Board make clear – through the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Executive Group – that local planning decisions should remain a matter for local planning authorities through the plan making process. Any proposals from HM Government to reduce local democratic accountability and oversight with respect to planning would be strongly opposed. Similarly, any future suggestions concerning HM Government's plans for both the emerging Arc Growth Body and Spatial Framework must have local accountability, oversight and engagement built into its structure.

## **62. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - March 2021**

The Panel's work programme and action log – as set out in the Agenda - were considered. Attention was drawn to Appendix 1 to the report which set out the letter written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by the Chair of the Growth Board in respect of Flood Risk Management Funding. This had been a recommendation to the Growth Board from the Panel at its previous meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **63. Dates of next meetings**

The Panel noted the dates of scheduled meetings as follows:

- Tuesday 1 June 2021
  - Monday 12 July 2021
  - Monday 13 September 2021
  - Monday 15 November 2021
  - Monday 17 January 2022
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- Tuesday 15 March 2022
- Tuesday 31 May 2022
- Tuesday 19 July 2022

It was noted that consideration was being given to a range of options around the logistical arrangements for the holding of meetings in the next municipal year (these included the possibility of continuing with virtual meetings).

Finally, the Chair thanked the members of the Panel for all their hard work and contributions over the previous year. He also expressed his appreciation to all of the officers who had supported the work of the Panel, including Amit Alva, Kevin Jacob, Susan Harbour and Stefan Robinson.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm

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