

# Public speakers

8 June 2021



## 1. Suzanne Mclvor on behalf of Cherwell Development Watch Alliance<sup>1</sup>

In April 2021 all of Oxfordshire's Local Authorities agreed the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire.

The principles in the Strategic Vision, which we are told '*reflect local people's opinions and priorities*' (i) have not been the subject of any statutory consultation.

Despite the Growth Board's announcements to the contrary (ii), we are concerned that the Strategic Vision will not have any effective influence on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP2050), or in fact any other future plans or strategies. Our reasoning on this is as follows:

OP 2050 will be the subject of a Regulation 18, part 2 consultation in the summer of 2021. This spatial plan supposedly has the Strategic Vision as its 'cornerstone'. (iii)

Yet at the same time, in the summer of 2021, Growth Board Officers have said (iv) that they will be working on the Strategic Vision and in particular on how to measure success, appropriate reporting and when it will be appropriate to review and update the Strategic Vision.

Can the Growth Board explain how the Strategic Vision can be a 'cornerstone' of OP2050 if fundamental aspects of the Strategic Vision, such as measuring outcomes and reporting, will still be incomplete during the period when OP2050 is undergoing the Regulation 18, part 2 consultation?

## 2. Suzanne Mclvor on behalf of Cherwell Development Watch Alliance<sup>2</sup>

Growth Board Officers have indicated (v) that the relationship between the Strategic Vision and OP2050 might require legal opinion to ensure that it strengthens the Board's approach to strategic plan-making.

We suggest that the Strategic Vision, sitting as nothing more than a statement of ambition alongside the statutory OP2050, will not strengthen the Board's approach to strategic plan making.

In fact we predict a situation where growth targets for the next thirty years (economic and housing) are 'set in stone' via OP2050 but the protection of ensuring this is 'Good Growth' is offered by the Strategic Vision which will be subject to unilateral review and updating by the Growth Board.

- a) Has the Board clarified its thinking on whether the Strategic Vision strengthens the Board's approach to strategic plan-making and if so what is the result?
- b) Has legal opinion been sought? If not, why not and when will legal opinion be sought?

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<sup>1</sup> See endnotes/references at end of this document

<sup>2</sup> See endnotes/references at end of this document

### **3. Michael Tyce on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire (address)**

It is CPRE's happy task today to congratulate the Growth Board for its expressed commitment to keep planning decisions regarding the notional Arc within the control of the relevant local authorities, in its response to the Scrutiny Committee point six.

It is not only right and just that planning decisions should only be made by the representatives of the people most affected – that is, those of us who already live and work here – but it is the only position consistent with the commitment in the 2050 Vision that future plans will be “Oxfordshire-specific and reflective of local people's views.

Nevertheless, there is also room for concern in the Growth Board's response, which is at best capable of misinterpretation. Scrutiny recommends that “local planning decisions should be for local authorities”. That could be taken to mean all planning decisions that affect people locally or just those deemed to be within the competence of local authorities by MHCLG. The Growth Board responds that planning decisions should be taken “at the right level”. Who decides what the right level is? What does the phrase “planning decisions” encompass? Is it in the narrow sense of responses to planning applications, or in the widest sense as including spatial strategies?

At the heart of this is whether in principle plans for the Arc will be bottom up – starting with the informed wishes of local people, with decisions made by locally elected representatives, with only unavoidably central decisions like the routes of railways made centrally, and then by local authorities in concert rather than imposed by Government; or whether it will be top down with detailed strategies decided in London, issued as policies, and local authorities able only to decide the minutiae of detail, metaphorically the colour of the door knockers, even then constrained by Government mandated design guide policy.

We all deserve to know clearly how this process is to be conducted, not just because it so personally affects us all but because in practical terms it is essential to get hearts and minds on board from the start – especially as we have already been promised (to repeat) that the future will be Oxfordshire specific and reflective of local people's views. It is unfortunate that there is so much room for misinterpretation, and it is recommended that the Growth Board should revise and amplify its statement against OxCam Arc Recommendation 6 to make it clear and unequivocal.

It is also unfortunate that in the spirit of engagement and transparency, the spatial options emerging for the 2050 Plan, which the committee considered in mid-March, had not already been consulted on with stakeholders like CPRE or with the public. The earlier the engagement the more closely the public will feel part of the process, and, indeed, who knows, the public and stakeholders could have valuable insights to offer, and might indeed have supported options that will have been rejected internally before the consultations officially begin.

CPRE recognises the need for economic growth and its potential to benefit both urban and country people. We applaud the 2050 Vision in recognising that the environment is an equal priority – not least as Oxfordshire's economic success is largely attributable to its unique quality. So too is people's quality of life. These must be absolute constraints on the amount of Arc development that our County should accommodate, especially as we have already done our share through the Growth Deal and need to preserve the exceptional qualities of Oxfordshire for future generations.

A vital ingredient in that mix is that the people most affected – those of us here already – feel engaged throughout in the process and can be assured that decisions affecting our lives will be taken to the greatest practicable extent with their our participation.

#### **4. Ian Ashley on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire**

We are hopefully coming through a time when our lifestyle and expectations have been changed by the Covid pandemic, which has highlighted the importance of good public health and local determination.

Is now the time for you, as our elected local leaders, to start joining up your thinking around climate change and the natural world, recognising the need for only sufficient economic prosperity to meet the needs of people and planet? This would require you to push back on government action to overheat the southeast rather than keep their election promise to level up the UK. It would also mean you would have to look to face up to the challenge of how to deal with the chronic under-funding from central government that previous elected local leaders tried and failed to resolve by committing to build houses that are way beyond local need. Is the logical extension of this position that Oxfordshire local authorities should now withdraw from the Arc Leaders Group, which looks set to entrench rather than resolve these problems?

#### **5. Councillor Jane Murphy, (South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council) (address)**

Thank you chair for allowing me to address the Growth Board. I will be short, and to the point.

As a previous Chair of the Board, I recognise that it is an onerous responsibility, one where the good work achieved by the Board is often hidden and incorrect pre-conceptions about the role of the Board tend to dominate. However, I wanted to congratulate Cllr Smith on her time as Chair, and the manner in which she has represented not only this Board, but residents across Oxfordshire. The work of this Board in taking forward a positive environmental agenda, building on the work of the climate emergencies declared by the local district and city councils has been pleasing to see.

This work is vital, and it is with pride that I recall I was Chair of this board when my own Council, of which I was then Leader, declared a climate emergency and I would commend the Board and the officers across Oxfordshire who have undertaken the work needed to achieve delivery of our collective aim to take forward policies and approaches that will support us to reach net zero and increase bio-diversity. It is clear that working with the Ox-Cam Arc, which is far from being our enemy and will be key to our achieving this, is vital and the impact of our officers, and of Cllr Smith on arc policy development is clear and I wish to applaud that.

Cllr Emily Smith has led this board with distinction, and with fairness to all parties, councils and partners – however, as she has said at this board before, I feel that its name – the Growth Board - is misleading and the cause of considerable confusion, after all the predominate ‘power’ of this meeting is to share information and to develop collective influence. Can I suggest that it would be fitting, as the Chair moves on to another, for the next meeting of the Board to reconsider its name, and to look forward with ever increasing positivity about the role it can play in the promotion and delivery of climate and ecological recovery.

## ENDNOTES/REFERENCES to Questions 1 and 2.

i) Extract from the Growth Board website at 14th May 2021: *Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development sets out what future growth in Oxfordshire should look like based on improving social, environmental, and economic wellbeing for all. It prioritises tackling climate change and reflects local people's opinions and priorities as given through a range of engagement exercises. The Vision provides a number of shared ambitions that reflect the priorities of the county, underpinned by a definition of 'good growth' and a set of Guiding Principles*.....

ii) Extract from the Growth Board website at 14th May 2021: *Now the strategic vision has been agreed, it will not replace or set the specific vision for any individual communities or partner organisations but instead will act as a framework for future plans and strategies for Oxfordshire, such as the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.*

iii) Extract from Supplementary Papers, Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, held in the Virtual meeting viewable by weblink on Tuesday, 16 March 2021 at 6.30 pm, pdf page 7, para 34 states in respect of the Strategic Vision: *'It is hoped that this balanced statement of ambition reflecting the priorities of the county will become the cornerstone of all future plans and strategies for Oxfordshire.'*

iv) As for iii above but pdf page 6, para 31 states: *'The next steps will then be consideration of how we will measure progress against the ambitions of the Vision. Officers intend to develop a business case for this next phase of the project over the summer of 2021. This will include agreement of how we measure success, appropriate reporting of these and when it would be appropriate to review and update the Vision, something that was supported in the engagement process*'.

v) As for iii above but pdf page 7, para 33 states: *'Although the Vision is explicitly non statutory, the Board will recall that in the October report introducing the Vision, officers suggested that the relationship between the Vision and OxPlan may require legal opinion to ensure that it strengthens our approach to strategic plan-making. Once the Board endorses the Vision officers leading the OxPlan will consider whether commissioning this advice is appropriate and report any conclusion through reports on the Oxplan.*