

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

HELD ON TUESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 2.00 PM
DIDCOT CIVIC HALL, BRITWELL ROAD, DIDCOT, OX11 7JN

Present:

Voting members: Councillors Sue Cooper (Chair), Susan Brown, Ian Hudspeth, James Mills, Barry Wood and Emily Smith, (Vice-Chair).

Non-voting members: Professor Alistair Fitt (Universities' Representative), Adrian Lockwood (OxLEP Vice-Chairman and Skills Board Representative), Jeremy Long (OxLEP Chairman), Lesley Tims (Environment Agency), Catherine Turner (Homes England), Angus Horner (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale) and Miranda Markham (OxLEP Business Representative - Bicester).

Officers: Andrew Down (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Ahmed Goga (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Bev Hindle (Oxfordshire County Council), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Gordon Mitchell (Oxford City Council Chief Executive), Yvonne Rees (Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council), Stefan Robinson, (Oxfordshire Growth Board) and Mark Stone, (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse).

Other councillors: Councillor Andrew Gant, (Oxford City Council and Chair of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel).

15 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Louise Patten, (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group representative) and Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative – Oxford City).

16 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

17 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board held on 4 June 2019 be signed as a correct record.

18 Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed Miranda Markham to her first Growth Board meeting as the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) representative for Bicester.

The Chair indicated that, with the meetings concurrence, she intended to vary the order of the Agenda so as to consider the report of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel after public participation.

19 Public participation

The Growth Board received one public question and four public addresses.

1. Daniel Scharf MRTPI

Homes England is the HM Government's housing accelerator and attends the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

Homes England is committed to the building of sustainable housing (advice from the Home England) Policy Analyst – Strategy, Performance & Delivery Unit). Given that the carbon embodied in the housing built just last year was at 30x (thirty times) the level necessary to reach net zero carbon, what measures will be taken to ensure that all new housing will now only be permitted to be constructed in ways that ensure this target will be met?

Answer

In reply, the Chair read out a response prepared by Homes England.

'Homes England are committed to working with the sector to deliver on HM Government's target of net zero emissions by 2050 and ensure new homes are fit for the future. There are a number of emerging Government policies which would help achieve this aim, such as the development of a Future Homes Standard by 2025 and an uplift in part L of building regulations in 2020. The agency is currently looking at what else we can do to support this issue, engaging with experts in this field such as the Green Building Council and HM Government's Committee for Climate Change. In addition to the reduction of carbon, the agency is also keen to find practical opportunities to support other areas of environmental sustainability such as biodiversity net gain and the development of onsite sustainable energy systems. Our work around modern methods of construction, in particular, offers opportunities to consider new ways of building the homes we need in a more productive and less carbon intensive way. There is more work to be done here, but we recognise the importance of this issue and are working hard to identify further opportunities to support this agenda'.

The Chair indicated that she felt that action did need to be taken on the issue. At her invitation, Catherine Turner, representing Homes England, added that it was recognised that more work did need to be undertaken. Nevertheless, the agency was taking on board opportunities for learning.

Addresses

1. Martin Lipson on behalf of the Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance.

I would like to introduce the members of the Growth Board to our new organisation, the Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance, formed earlier this month to represent neighbourhood plans in the county of Oxfordshire.

Neighbourhood plans involve about three to four years of hard work by volunteers, closely engaging the local communities we represent. Many of us are parish councillors, but only a few have training in planning. What we do have, though, is a very clear mandate from our communities, because all the policies - rigorously tested by independent experts, and ultimately by an Examiner – have emanated from the aspirations of each community. Each plan has been put to Referendum, with the entire electorate entitled to vote. The average percentage vote in favour of adopting our plans is nearly 90%.

I am explaining this because we think the Growth Board members should understand why the members of our organisation feel so passionately about planning for growth in Oxfordshire. Not only have we put in vast numbers of hours in order to produce our plans, but we also feel very strongly that, as part of the formal Development Plans for each of the five Oxfordshire Districts, we have a right to expect the policies in our plans to be applied with equal weight alongside the planning policies of District, County and NPPF. There is a danger that a focus solely on growth will shift that planning balance away from the aspirations of local communities.

We, therefore, welcome the decision to undertake the Review which is on today's agenda. It is clear that one of its aims is to satisfy a demand that the work of the Board be more transparent. This can be achieved by including input from the many communities which will be affected by growth in the County. The rigorous process that our 33 statutory neighbourhood plans have been through is an ideal platform from which to build improved accountability for the Growth Board. 123,000 people are represented by those 33 "made" plans alone - nearly 20% of the population of the County. Many more thousands are involved with 30 other neighbourhood plans in the pipeline across the County. By involving our organisation, you can not only take an important step towards making the process more democratic, but you can also implement your statutory responsibility to take seriously all the work we have done, ensuring that the detailed knowledge of local people adds significantly to the quality of planning in the County.

We have met with the Growth Board Director, and we are meeting him again next month. We would like the Board to give its approval for him to discuss with us how Neighbourhood Plans in Oxfordshire can have proper involvement in the Board's work, and in particular in the development of Oxfordshire 2050. We do not expect to be merely consultees or stakeholders. We expect to be involved in the work, and we look forward to your response in due course as to how that might happen.

In response the Chair commented that the Growth Board was aware of the issues raised by Mr Lipson and these would be considered in the future as part of the Growth Board review.

2. Sue Haywood on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire

Need Not Greed Oxfordshire welcomes the proposed extension of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan timetable. We trust this will create space for improved engagement with local communities and the establishment of a robust environmental evidence base.

We also welcome the proposed review of the Growth Board. However, we ask if the scope of the Review could consider the mandate of members appointed to the Growth Board, its sub-bodies, and to externally linked programmes and projects, and the degree to which they can make decisions or endorse strategies without further recourse.

For example, the Joint Declaration of Ambition, defining the “direction of travel” for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc programme, was signed up to by Leaders, but with no visible mandate or awareness by other councillors. This potentially severely compromises the opportunity for local members and the Growth Board to subsequently challenge the strategy. Likewise, the Local Industrial Strategy was developed without locally elected member input. It is perhaps shocking to note that the words “farming” and “rural economy” are used once only each in the 100-page document about one of the most rural counties in the South East. It is statutory to consider and accommodate LIS targets in strategic planning and this will have a significant impact on the parameters for the scale and nature of growth Oxfordshire can consider.

Furthermore, the perception that these external projects have had mandated local authority input and endorsement, either directly or via the Growth Board’s actions, is misleading and dangerous. Subsequent consultations and decision-making – not only for the 2050 Plan but also within and between these other programmes - will be influenced and skewed by such erroneous assumptions of local member scrutiny and endorsement.

Better communication about how these projects integrate with each other is also needed. The Growth Board’s own reports acknowledge that these external linked projects will have a major impact on the 2050 Plan, yet the risks and details for this are often not qualified.

We accept that the scope of the Review cannot include the external linked projects per se, but we ask if the interface between these projects and the Growth Board, and the 2050 Plan, could be urgently reviewed and every opportunity taken to ensure that local authorities have a meaningful (and mandated) input at the earliest stages of strategic planning, as well as a full and appropriate understanding of the implications of these projects on Oxfordshire’s own planning and other priorities.

Finally, we would like the Review to consider how the environment can be embedded at all levels of the Growth Board’s activity, including sub-groups. Having met yesterday with Defra officials, we suspect they thought this was already in place, but sadly we had to report that this was not so. Given that it would be entirely in line with the ambitions of HM Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan and climate change commitments, we ask the Growth Board to consider inclusion of an environmental specialist or champion at all relevant levels, including voting membership on the Board.

In response, the Chair referred to review of the Growth Board which was due to commence, and which would consider the type of issues referred to in the address.

3. Councillor Ian Middleton, Cherwell District Council

As someone who is very concerned about how Oxfordshire is represented by an un-elected body wielding far more influence than it will admit to, I very much welcome the imminent review of the roles of the Growth Board. In my view, the board’s claim to democratic accountability, that it’s made up of the leaders of local government bodies, is a somewhat reductionist interpretation of democracy.

Many people see you as a self-appointed group, independently predetermining policy that local councils then just go on to rubber stamp. That isn’t democracy, it’s government by quango. That needs to be addressed both in terms of perception and outcome. you to facilitate broader representation, perhaps by direct election of additional board members by public vote or random selection, as with a citizen’s assembly. I suggested this to the Oxfordshire Growth Board scrutiny panel last week and there seemed to be

some support. I'd also like to see wider cross-party and non-partisan membership of the board.

It's also encouraging that you want to be more focussed on environmental issues. But if you're going to tackle climate change, you have to step away from what Greta Thunberg described yesterday as "the fairy-tale of eternal economic growth".

I was pleased to see that the scrutiny panel also passed a motion criticising the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. I hope you'll adopt that motion and signal to HM Government that building more massive motorways is incompatible with zero net carbon targets.

The term 'sustainable growth' is an oxymoron. Continuing to push growth in an already oversubscribed area like Oxfordshire is the epitome of climate change denial. The board's questionable 'working assumption' of Oxford's unmet housing need and the associated encouragement of greenbelt erosion is a perfect example of this.

Green areas have a vital role in sequestering carbon and reducing climate change. Their replacement by housing, roads, car parks etc has a direct impact on the environment, in terms of loss of habitat, carbon sinking capability and increased emissions. Building unneeded houses also adds unnecessarily to the net carbon burden. Oxford's projected housing figures have been criticised as an over-estimate by both the planning inspectorate and several planning consultants, including one commissioned by the city council itself. By implication this also throws doubt on the 'working assumption'.

In view of the questions surrounding Oxford's local plan, and with their public examination only 2 months away, it's vital that you urgently and transparently re-examine these assumptions, and if they're found to be wrong, signal local councils that they should reconsider their own plans before unnecessary and irreversible damage is done to vital green infrastructure.

These are the difficult decisions that can no longer be avoided if we're serious about tackling climate change. How seriously you take that responsibility will be apparent by how you act now.

At the invitation of the Chair, several members of the Growth Board made comments in response to the address.

Councillor Brown commented that in respect of Oxford City's unmet housing need, this figure had been through a formal statutory planning process and had been upheld on three occasions. It would be further considered as part of the enquiry into the Oxford City Local Plan to be undertaken by the Planning Inspectorate. She commented that there was significant unmet housing need within Oxford which represented real need which needed to be addressed.

Councillor Wood commented that the use of word 'Board' in the Growth's Board's title had unfortunately led to a misunderstanding that it was key decision making entity whereas the true position was that it was a partnership of the willing which was seeking to find a way for the Oxfordshire local authorities to work together for the benefit of all. The use and preference by HM Government for the use of the term had not helped, but no other similar 'boards' had directly elected representatives. He hoped this could be considered as part of the Growth Board review along with seeking clarity on what the Board did and did not do.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth commented that an issue constantly raised on the doorstep to him was where future generations would live and therefore the Growth Board had a responsibility to take on board and consider housing need as a real problem.

4. Councillor Charles Mathew, Oxfordshire County Council.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to express my deep concern over the decision, emailed to me by Robert Freshwater (Oxfordshire County Council) on September 19 that the LEP was withdrawing the funding, match funded by the North Oxford City Deal, to the A40/A44 Loop Farm Link Road.

Many of you will be aware that my division traverses the A40 and I have spoken to you on two previous occasions over my heartfelt concerns over the fruitless plans for the bus lanes, (the A40 Park and Ride HiF 1 and 2) and that those concerns are mirrored by the vast majority of my residents in Eynsham and area. It was vital in our view that this link road and the improvements to/smart carding of Swinford Toll bridge should be made forthwith- indeed they should have been done some years ago.

I am very frustrated by the LEP's latest decision- this link road would have been an important connection in access from the A40 to roads north (A40/A34/ in particular and thereon to M1) without adding to the existing traffic jams on the Northern bypass (Cuttslowe and Wolvercote roundabouts).

Without repeating myself, this link road I have been constantly assured was going to happen- now the funding has been withdrawn without consultation or local discussion or an explanation of why or what priority the money will be used for instead. Is this acceptable?

I would request that this decision is revisited urgently in the interests of local residents and those travelling the A40 from further afield. Maybe you, therefore, would be kind enough to listen to local opinion before making unilateral decisions on major infrastructure matters?

The Chair indicated she had attended a public consultation event regarding the issue and was, therefore, aware of the strength of public opinion around the issues.

As this was not specifically a Growth Board decision, Jeremy Long, Chair of OxLEP, indicated that a direct written response would be provided by OxLEP direct to Councillor Mathew.

20 Growth Board Scrutiny Panel Update 19 September 2019

The Growth Board welcomed Councillor Gant, Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting.

Councillor Gant reported on the outcome of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 19 September 2019. He set out its written report, which included several recommendations to the Growth Board. In addition, he thanked not only Councillors Brown and Smith for their attendance at the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel, but also the officers who had attended and contributed to it.

The main themes that the Panel had discussed had included: concerns about the scale of growth, democratic accountability and the need to place the environment at the forefront of

the development of future planning documents and strategies. Councillor Gant summarised the six recommendations that the Scrutiny Panel had agreed to present to the Growth Board.

Regarding the responses of the Growth Board to the Panel's previous recommendations in May, Councillor Gant made a number of additional remarks. These related to:

- The detail of any methodology or guidance to be used in any review of the assessment needs (response to Recommendation 3).
- Whether there had been any public scrutiny of the Joint Declaration of Ambition (response to Recommendation 6)
- Whether a public engagement process relating to the Declaration had actually taken place as indicated (response to Recommendation 6)

In respect of public engagement on the Joint Declaration of Ambition, the Growth Board Director clarified that at the time of compiling the Growth Board's response in June it had been expected that a public engagement exercise would take place over summer and autumn but that subsequently the start of this process had been delayed for six months.

In response to Councillor Gant, the Chair responded that the Scrutiny Panel's report and comments would be considered by the Board during the meeting. A written response to its specific recommendations would be provided in writing in due course.

RESOLVED: That a written response to the recommendations of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel be provided.

21 England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Outline Transport Strategy

The Growth Board considered a report summarising progress on the development of a Transport Strategy for England's Economic Heartland (EEH). This asked the Growth Board to comment on the strategy and to consider the principle of a joint Oxfordshire response to the current engagement exercise. It was noted that the sign-off on the detail of any joint response would be a matter for each local authority through its own processes. It would remain open for each individual council to make a separate response instead of, or in addition to, the joint response.

The Growth Board welcomed Naomi Green, Head of Technical Programme at EEH, who gave a presentation on the outline strategy.

A summary of the key points raised during the Board's discussion of the report and presentation was as follows:

- It was right of EEH area partners to come together, but it also needed to be recognised that transport and connectivity issues did not stop at the boundaries of the EEH area.
- There needed to be coordination between the work of EEH in relation to the Transport Strategy and that of Transport for the South East, (TfSE). The Growth Board noted there was a good relationship between EEH and TfSE, for example, both organisations used the same modelling systems. Nevertheless, both bodies were at different stages in the development of their transport strategies.

- The Growth Board felt there was a need for the importance of the Oxfordshire rail network to be reflected in the development of the Strategy, in particular improvements to Oxford Station and the opening of the Cowley branch line.
- There needed to be greater recognition of the need for inclusive growth and greater sustainability in terms of public transport infrastructure around the 'first mile and last mile' of journeys.
- The growth in freight delivery traffic through on-line shopping needed to be examined. This should include consideration of the innovative zero carbon solutions to the issue, for example, bicycle deliveries.
- It was important to begin to move to zero carbon as soon as possible.
- The need to plan better and to co-ordinate in order to achieve the maximum benefit for current and future residents was recognised.
- There was an opportunity to reshape how areas worked as communities in a way that was less London-centric.
- There was a need for accessibility, inclusion, affordability and reliability in providing transport solutions that encouraged less car use.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Oxfordshire Growth Board notes development of the EEH Transport Strategy and its content;
- 2) That the comments made by the Growth Board in discussion of the information provided by England's Economic Heartland on the Outline Transport Strategy be noted;
- 3) That the Oxfordshire Growth Board supports the principle of a joint Oxfordshire Authority response to the Outline Transport Strategy.

22 Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study Update

The Growth Board considered a report summarising progress on the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study and emerging conditional outputs which would form the basis of ongoing work. Points highlighted to the Growth Board included:

- The Growth Board had previously endorsed the remit of the study and agreed to fund it as a stakeholder.
- The study followed a two-stage structure. The first stage was a strategic study to assess changes in rail travel demand from planned housing and economic growth up to 2031 and additional growth beyond that reflected in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The first stage of the study had demonstrated that the case for rail investment was strong and that such investment needed to happen sooner than previously envisaged. This would make the evidence based stronger for future business cases.
- The second part of Stage 1 of the study would be to develop a Train Service Specification.
- Good progress had been made on an outline definition study for the Cowley Branch Line which had been fast-tracked in parallel with the strategic study.

In discussion, the members of the Growth Board welcomed the report and, the progress made with the Cowley Branch Line. Given that a passenger trial was undertaken on the

line five years ago, comment was made that the project demonstrated the difficulties and time needed to develop such schemes.

The potential opportunities for improvement in other areas of the Oxfordshire rail network, through the emerging outcomes set out in the report, was also welcomed. It was also felt that HM Government should be encouraged to recognise the importance of Oxfordshire as a strategic rail hub in supporting growth.

Councillor Hudspeth suggested that there should be consideration of how local authorities might be able to contribute towards rail or station projects, perhaps be being part of their business cases. He argued that this would help to send a positive message to organisations such as Network Rail.

Some concerns were expressed that the level of proposed investment was relatively small. In response, the Growth Board was informed that it was an evolutionary approach rather than revolutionary and that this reflected the relatively high cost of rail, the degree of competition in seeking to progress rail projects and the long-term timescales involved.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board notes progress of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study.

23 Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report Q1

The Growth Board considered a report which set out an update on progress of Quarter 1 Year 2 (2019/2020) with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The report gave details of the Deal strands relating to the Infrastructure Programme, Affordable Housing Programme, Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and Productivity.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board:

- 1) Notes the progress at Quarter 1 2019/2020 on the Housing and Growth Deal;
- 2) Notes the adoption of the Local Industrial Strategy by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

24 Growth Board Review

The Growth Board considered a report setting out a proposed scope and approach for the Growth Board Review. It was suggested that the review be undertaken around three key areas:

- Clarity of the role and function of the Growth Board and how these should be communicated;
- Capability and Resources;
- Process and Structures (this would include arrangements for engagement with the public and councillors).

The Chair welcomed the scope of the review and stated that she was looking forward to the feedback it would provide.

RESOLVED: That the scope and approach to the review of the Growth Board's role and functions be approved as set out in the report.

25 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Revised Programme

The Growth Board considered a report providing an update on progress in producing the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and requesting that the Growth Board endorse a revised plan programme.

In presenting the report, the Growth Board Director informed the Board that having reflected on progress and the work to do, it was apparent that more time was required. This would allow for greater understanding and opportunity to take account of outside factors such as Highways England plans for an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and the potential for an Oxford to Cambridge Arc spatial planning framework. Lessons learnt from other spatial planning processes could also be taken on board and the revised proposed plan was more realistic but remained significantly challenging.

In discussion, members of the Growth Board supported the extension of the programme given the importance of creating the best Oxfordshire Plan possible. It was noted that discussions with HM Government to seek agreement for the extension were ongoing and the query raised regarding what the fall-back position would be if the programme was not agreed. The Growth Board Director indicated that there was not a practical alternative to an extension. However, although HM Government had not given agreement in writing, there had been indications that the time needed to draft a plan was recognised given the fundamental nature of the plan for Oxfordshire.

In response to a question around the impact of possible changes to national planning policy, for instance any implications arising from the Glover Review, the Growth Board Director indicated that these would be taken into consideration along with other issues that might influence the development of the plan.

The Growth Board requested a future report setting out spending to date in developing the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and future spending plans.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Growth Board endorses the proposed updates to the timeline and scope of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050;
- 2) That the Growth Board Director seek agreement from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government for the amended timeline and scope.

26 Oxfordshire Local Plans Update

The Growth Board considered a report setting out progress towards the adoption of local plans across Oxfordshire. The Chair also invited a representative of each district council to also comment verbally.

Councillor Brown indicated that dates for the independent examination of the Oxford Local Plan were not yet confirmed. The expectation was that it would start in early December. Issues and questions from the inspectors were expected to be available from early October.

Councillor Smith commented that following the issuing by the planning inspectorate of its final report, Vale of White Horse was continuing to consider the adoption of Part 2 of its

local plan. In September, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked for additional information. The local plan was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 4 October with a recommendation to Full Council on 9 October.

Councillor Mills commented that, in West Oxfordshire, work had started on a new Area Action Plan for the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village. Responses to an initial issues and options consultation held over the summer were currently being considered.

Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive of Cherwell District Council, commented that the Cherwell Local Plan was, as set out in the report, on track.

Councillor Cooper informed the Board that, since the publication of the Local Plans Update report, initial questions from the Planning Inspector in respect of the submitted South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan had been received.

Following the 18 July Full Council meeting – at which South Oxfordshire had expressed its continued support for the Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF) – a significant amount of work had been put into the objective of keeping the HIF, with various meetings held with ministers and officials from HM Government. An observation from these meetings was the emphasis placed by HM Government on the continuation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The Board was informed that a decision on the future of the local plan would be considered by South Oxfordshire's Cabinet on 3 October and Full Council on 10 October.

In response to Councillor Cooper, Councillor Brown stated that the work the Oxfordshire local authorities did in partnership through the Growth Board represented more than the sum of its parts. She hoped that this, alongside the various correspondence sent to South Oxfordshire on this issue, would be taken into consideration by councillors when coming to a decision. Referring to letters from the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick, M.P., to Councillor Cooper, Councillor Brown commented that it was clear the future of the HIF was at risk. Notwithstanding these concerns, Oxford City Council wanted to continue to work in partnership with South Oxfordshire District Council.

Councillor Hudspeth spoke in support of the sentiments expressed by Councillor Brown. Through working in partnership, the councils had discovered that they had many areas of common agreement. Further, by working together in the wider interests of all the residents of Oxfordshire, they had made significant progress in addressing some of the key issues facing the county. He supported continuing to work in this way in order to provide infrastructure before development as it was an opportunity he felt should not be missed. It was his view that a variation in this approach could have detrimental consequences.

Councillor Cooper responded that a significant number of representations had been received and that they all would be duly considered by South Oxfordshire councillors when coming to a decision. She reminded the Board that copies of the correspondence referred to were available on the South Oxfordshire District Council website.

Jeremy Long, Chairman of OxLEP, commented that companies welcomed the dovetailing of infrastructure projects and development in making investment decisions. He highlighted the importance of partnership working in delivering the already significant achievements around infrastructure and the continued importance of working together.

In response to a query, Mark Stone, Joint Chief Executive South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council commented that confidential legal advice had been sent to all South Oxfordshire councillors.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board note the update on progress towards Local Plans adoption across Oxfordshire.

27 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update

The Chairman of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Sub-Group presented an update of its most recent meeting held on 25 July 2019 as set out in the attached notes. Councillor Mills highlighted the presentations the Sub-Group had received in respect of the potential of Natural Capital mapping and how this might be worked into the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

It was noted that the scheduled meeting in September had been cancelled pending the variation to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Programme.

28 Infrastructure Sub-Group update

Councillor Hudspeth provided an update of the meetings of the Infrastructure Sub-Group held on 28 May 2019 and 23 July 2019 as set out in the attached notes. In addition, he provided a verbal summary of the most recent meeting held on 18 September 2019.

He commented that the meetings had focussed on the challenge of delivering annual spending for infrastructure as part of the Growth Deal and ways in which this might be accelerated in years 3-5 of the programme.

Councillor Cooper commented on the importance of the provision of infrastructure before development. This included utilities infrastructure such as shared access channels allowing for greater future planning and connectivity. She commented that she felt the provision of electric car charging points connections in new houses was an example of this.

Councillor Hudspeth agreed that connectivity in general, such as access for full fibre internet connections, was very important. He noted that utilities were beginning to look at shared access channels and that this was something that planning policy could help support. He invited members of the Growth Board to let him know of any other ideas that they felt should be included in the refresh of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Policy (OxIS). They could then be discussed and prioritised.

29 Housing Advisory Sub-Group Update

Councillor Brown updated the Growth Board on the work of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group as set out in the note of its meeting held on 3 September.

She highlighted that the meeting had focussed on the potential for a construction skills shortage which had implications on the ability to deliver homes within Oxfordshire and the implications that this would have on both the ability to deliver homes within Oxfordshire, and general productivity. The Sub-Group had heard of the good work being undertaken by OxLEP to mitigate the issue through the support of construction skills training and construction as a career. The Sub-Group had noted what local planning authorities could

potentially do to assist through the Section 106 process to promote Community Employment Plans (CEPs) – a local example of this had been the redevelopment of the Westgate Shopping Centre.

The meeting had also considered data on incomplete planning applications which all districts would need to more proactively monitor in the future and formulate way to encourage developers to progress sites as a quickly as possible. It was recognised this would be difficult given that the increased powers for local planning authorities suggested in the Letwin review had yet to be implemented.

Other members of the Growth Board supported the aim of raising the profile and status of careers in the construction industry.

In response to a question regarding whether the Sub-Group had previously considered the issue of empty properties, Councillor Brown responded that this had been looked at, but had not been thought of as a productive area to pursue as the numbers of empty homes were relatively low and the issue was not directly linked to the delivery of the Growth Deal. Notwithstanding this, she was aware that every council did what they could to reduce the number of empty properties in their areas.

Councillor Mills suggested that the Sub-Group might wish to consider pressures on the private rental sector. Councillor Brown indicated that inclusion of the issue as a future agenda item could be considered.

30 Growth Board Forward Plan

The Growth Board considered its published forward programme as set out in the Agenda.

Councillor Brown suggested a potential item relating to modular building methods.

Yvonne Rees welcomed the addition of healthy placemaking work and referred to the importance of the Growth Board engaging with health sector partners in light of developments such as Integrated Care Systems.

31 Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

The Chair commented that this was the last meeting that Lesley Tims would attend as the representative of the Environment Agency. The members of the Growth Board thanked her for the valuable contribution she had provided.

32 Dates of next meetings

The Growth Board noted the dates of future Growth Board meetings as set out below. Meetings to be held at 2pm in Didcot Civic Hall.

- 26 November 2019
- 28 January 2020
- 7 April 2020 (rescheduled from 31 March 2020)
- 2 June 2020

The meeting closed at 4.25 pm

Chairman

Date