

# Minutes

## OF A MEETING OF THE

# Oxfordshire Growth Board

HELD ON TUESDAY 29 JANUARY 2019 AT 2.00 PM

DIDCOT CIVIC HALL, BRITWELL ROAD, DIDCOT, OX11 7JN

### Present:

**Voting members:** Councillors Jane Murphy (Chairman) (South Oxfordshire District Council), Roger Cox (Vale of White Horse District Council), Susan Brown (Oxford City Council), Judith Heathcoat (substitute for Ian Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council), James Mills (West Oxfordshire District Council), and Barry Wood (Cherwell District Council)

**Non-voting members:** Adrian Lockwood (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Vice-Chairman and Skills Board Representative), Louise Patten (Clinical Commissioning Group), Lesley Tims (Environment Agency), and Catherine Turner (Homes and Communities Agency)

**Officers:** Steve Culliford (South Oxfordshire District Council), Andrew Down (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Christine Gore (West Oxfordshire District Council Chief Executive), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Bev Hindle (Oxfordshire County Council), Gordon Mitchell (Oxford City Council Chief Executive), Yvonne Rees (Cherwell District Council Chief Executive), Paul Staines, Mark Stone (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils Chief Executive), and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)

**Other councillors:** Andrew Gant (Oxford City Council and Chairman of the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel) and Bill Service (South Oxfordshire District Council)

## 15 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Hudspeth (Leader of Oxfordshire County Council) who was substituted by Councillor Judith Heathcoat (Deputy Leader of Oxfordshire County Council), Jeremy Long (Chairman of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), Professor Alistair Fitt (the Universities' representative) substituted by Professor Linda King, and Philip Shadbolt (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's business representative for Bicester).

## 16 Declarations of interest

None

## 17 Minutes

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the minutes of the Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting held on 27 November 2018 and agree that the chairman signs them as a correct record.

## 18 Chairman's announcements

The chairman advised of emergency evacuation arrangements and asked all present to silence their mobile telephones.

## 19 Public participation

The Growth Board received five questions and three statements from members of the public:

### 1. Question from Sarah Couch (read out by Nigel Pearce):

“It is very hard to see how the growth targets you are working with are compatible with the de-carbonisation which is essential to address the climate emergency. We need to reduce CO2 emissions to zero in the next 30 years - the Paris commitments (if implemented) will result in catastrophic 3 degrees warming. All development including infrastructure needs to be far more ambitious. How do you intend to reduce CO2 emissions to zero in the plans you are developing?”

In response, the chairman reported that the Growth Board recognised the challenges that growth brought and wanted to promote good growth that was sustainable. The Oxfordshire Growth Board and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) had recently agreed a countywide energy strategy (developed by OxLEP in partnership with all local councils, the University of Oxford, Low Carbon Hub, the Distribution Network Operator, and other stakeholders). The overall vision of the energy strategy was for ‘Oxfordshire to be at the forefront of energy innovation to foster clean growth’. The strategy set a target to reduce countywide emissions by 50 per cent by 2030, compared with 2008 levels, and set a pathway to achieve zero carbon growth by 2050. The strategy has been underpinned by a carbon emission analysis, taking into account a number of scenarios, including the addition of 100,000 new homes. Delivery of the strategy required ambition and activity in a wide range of areas. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 had a role in setting the vision for low carbon standards in new development. This was integral to its place-making principles that would drive growth that enhanced the environment and quality of life.

### 2. Question from Fleur Woodland (read out by Nigel Pearce):

“In the light of climate change obligations (where England's actions, compared to almost everywhere else is, notoriously poor), why is expanding transport systems seen as a good idea (especially as primarily being for the science / technology hub - when presume they, of anyone, could embrace solar-electric-powered human-carrying drones)?”

In response, the chairman reported that the Growth Board recognised that, in order to support the level of growth planned for Oxfordshire, expanded transport systems would be necessary in some circumstances, for example where new or significantly expanded settlements were proposed. Increasingly however, the Growth Board

hoped and expected that these settlements would also be supported by other, more innovative solutions that would reduce the need to travel. The Growth Board's whole infrastructure approach was about reducing traffic, cutting journey times, improving mass transit options, and reducing the need for travel through the way new communities and workplaces were designed. Travel would be safer, smoother and cleaner. For example, the Growth Board was delivering over 40 separate projects to help improve access and the ability to move around, including journey times. This included better bus transit, cycling and walking routes. The Growth Board recognised that people wanted the infrastructure to be built before new housing, and it was working to plan and forward fund road improvements as much as it could. The Growth Board was also looking at the future, where existing infrastructure would need to adapt to different mass transit and autonomous vehicles. It wanted to roll out roadside electric charging points across the county to accelerate the take-up of clean electric vehicles by businesses and residents. Finally, the Growth Board wanted to increase home-working and locally-based employment, with fewer people having long commutes. Ultrafast fibre and 5G digital networks would improve rural productivity and enable more people to work locally.

Mr Pearce, on behalf of Fleur Woodland, asked a supplementary question to the chairman. In your response you talked about reducing journeys, but how does that align with the A40 consultation that sets out plans to increase journeys?

The chairman agreed to respond in writing.

**3. Question from Nigel Pearce:**

“Are the housing targets in the Oxfordshire Districts' Local Plans being revised downwards in light of the hundreds of thousands of homes due to be built along the CaMKOx Arc? If not, why not? Won't the Arc cover the totality of Oxford City's supposed unmet housing need many times over, not least because it will come with a new rail link and expressway for commuters into Oxford?”

In response, the chairman replied 'no'. The planned houses in the local plans were required to meet Oxfordshire's needs. The government was not proposing to reallocate this planned growth elsewhere in the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Arc. The Arc was a government initiative recognised by the Oxfordshire councils and it was not a formal planning document. There were no set government targets for the scale of future growth across the Arc. Oxfordshire's councils intended to address Oxfordshire's role in the wider Arc through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This approach would allow for a strategic planned approach to growth across the county, beyond the planned timescales in the existing and emerging local plans, and that would be the subject of full consultation and local engagement.

Mr Pearce asked a supplementary question. It was surprising that there appeared to be no co-ordination in planning for the Arc and planning for development in West Oxfordshire. When will the co-ordination begin?

The chairman agreed to respond in writing.

**4. Question from Ros Kent** (read out by Nigel Pearce):

“Given that the government and local councils are ignoring the evidence of their own statistics from the Office of National Statistics which now predict a much lower housing need than estimated in 2014, is this evidence being ignored because:

- (a) building more houses will mean that the Councils will receive central funding from the government for forwarding their Oxford-Cambridge Arc scheme?
- (b) our post-brexiteconomy will appear prosperous with all the extraneous building work going on?
- (c) what will happen when much of the housing lies empty?
- (d) who will take the fall for this error of judgment?”

In response, the chairman reported that the current suite of existing and emerging local plans was planning for growth up to 2031-36, using as their evidence base, the 2014 Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This remained the best and most current evidence for planned growth for this period as evidenced by the planning inspectors’ findings in Cherwell, Vale of White Horse, and West Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire’s councils were now embarking upon a joint spatial plan to 2050 and would be carrying out new work on Oxfordshire’s long-term housing need to support this plan. This work would comply with the requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Mr Pearce, on behalf of Ros Kent, asked a supplementary question to the chairman. A recent study had suggested that Oxford’s objectively assessed need should be almost half that stated in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Were any of the local plan housing numbers being revised downwards?

In response, the chairman replied ‘no’.

**5. Question from Helen Marshall** on behalf of the coalition Planning for Real NEED not Speculator GREED in Oxfordshire, relating to Item 9 - the Oxfordshire Plan 2050:

“We welcome the manner in which the important issue of healthy place-shaping was embraced by the Growth Board at the last meeting, with a number of practical measures also approved to embed it in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 development process and project structure. We would ask that there is similar recognition for sustainability. We accept that the term "sustainability" has been included in many key documents, but to deliver a truly sustainable plan for Oxfordshire requires the range of complex and technical concepts that the term "sustainability" embodies to inform and influence decision making throughout the process, consistently and at many levels. Issues such as social cohesion, the value of ecosystem services, and what scale of growth can be accommodated by various natural resources without depletion or harm over time, underpin every aspiration and objective being explored for the 2050 Plan. Would the Growth Board consider making a similar explicit commitment to sustainability as they have done for healthy place-making, for example by embedding officers, consultants or informed stakeholders with specific remit (and skillset) for sustainability in the Growth Board substructures, and ensuring that the principle of sustainability is given priority and due regard in the project process and all decision making?”

In response, the chairman reported that the Growth Board did not wish to promote growth at any cost, it wanted Good Growth in Oxfordshire that was planned and

managed at a sustainable level, that was inclusive and helped everyone. The Growth Board needed to think long-term about how to provide the new homes, the new jobs and workplaces for careers to prosper, the schools for our children and grandchildren, the facilities to maintain the health and wellbeing of the county, and the transport networks to keep us connected. The best way to embed a sustainable approach to these challenges was through the planning process. Oxfordshire's local plans would now be backed by the county-wide Oxfordshire Plan 2050 to ensure a properly planned approach going forwards that balanced local and strategic needs. Sustainability was and would continue to be a core principle of this plan, recognising that the purpose of the planning system was to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The plan would be developed alongside and in conjunction with a sustainability appraisal to assess and demonstrate how the plan had addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives.

Helen Marshall asked a supplementary question. What practical measures would be taken to ensure sustainable development? What steps would you take to get people with the right skills sets round the table to ensure a robust process to achieve sustainable development?

The chairman agreed to provide a written response.

6. **Mark Beddow** addressed the Growth Board on growth in the 21st Century, on the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and local planning, and on the nature of the Growth Board. He reminded the Growth Board that the world population had almost doubled since 1972 and the sea level was higher resulting from increased CO<sub>2</sub>. This level of growth was not sustainable in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There had been no consultation on the need for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, which was essentially ribbon development. Highways England had not studied the environmental impact of an expressway across the Arc, nor considered the impact on other roads, such as the A34, nor listened to opposition. This was not needed in Oxfordshire. The Arc and other proposed developments such as Thames Water's proposals for a reservoir, made him believe that the government had declared an 'open season' on Oxfordshire. The Growth Board needed to address these issues.
7. **Oxfordshire County Councillor Charles Mathew** addressed the Growth Board on the recent public consultations on the future of the A40. The A40 Housing Infrastructure Fund bid had not recognised that the greatest use of the A40 was through traffic, not local residents travelling to Oxford. The plans also included measures that would delay traffic, such as additional roundabouts and traffic lights at junctions. Adding new housing developments could bring the A40 to a stand-still. The Growth Board needed to think of alternative solutions to overcome these issues.
8. **Ian Green, the Chairman of the Oxford Civic Society**, addressed the Growth Board. He welcomed the draft Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and offered to submit the Society's report as a contribution to the plan's development.

The chairman welcomed the Oxford Civic Society's contribution and asked for a copy of its report.

## 20 Letwin Review

The Growth Board received a presentation from Andrew Down, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils. The presentation reported on the outcome of the Letwin Review, a government review to analyse the gap between the number of homes permitted by local authorities and the number of homes being built. The review identified reasons for the gap and made recommendations to government. The government's response to the Letwin Review was expected in February.

The presentation suggested some actions that Oxfordshire could take:

- Assess current build-out rates in the county (this work was in train)
- Use the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and local plan processes to consider the range of housing types and tenures offered
- Increase co-ordination of planning policy across the county
- Work with large site owners and developers to maximise diversity of the housing offering and increase build-out rates (this work was already in train)
- Continue to work with Homes England to develop strategic sites
- Make the most of the opportunities afforded by the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal to accelerate housing delivery

Future actions could include:

- Explore options for practical responses in Oxfordshire
- Take every opportunity to influence national reform of planning policy
- Establish / confirm credibility by delivering our commitments in the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal
- Build on our already good relationships with Homes England and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The Growth Board agreed with the suggested actions.

**RESOLVED:** to

- (a) agree the actions set out in the bullet points above and request the Executive Officer Group to act on these and reflect on the problems of different size housing developments across the county. The group should not be constrained by the recommendations of the Letwin Review but should seek solutions appropriate for Oxfordshire; and
- (b) request the Housing Advisory Sub-Group to consider promoting a policy for lifetime homes.

## 21 Role of Homes England in the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

The Growth Board received a presentation from Tom Walker, from Homes England. He reported on the role of Homes England in assisting the Growth Board and Oxfordshire's councils in meeting the Housing and Growth Deal. Homes England's mission was to intervene in the market to ensure more homes were built in areas of greatest need and to improve affordability. This would create a more sustainable, more resilient and diverse housing market.

Homes England had been given substantial resources to meet these aims. Since being established in January 2018, in Oxfordshire, it had supported the Growth Board's work on the Housing and Growth Deal, the first such deal in the country. Sustained delivery of housing projects was the aim through strong partnership working. Also, in January 2019 Homes England had supported the Growth Board's submission of the Didcot Garden Town Housing Infrastructure Fund bid to government.

The Growth Board confirmed its commitment to growth in Oxfordshire and working in partnership with others, including Homes England, and thanked Mr Walker for his presentation.

## **22 Housing and Growth Deal delivery update**

The Growth Board received an update on progress with the delivery of the Housing and Growth Deal. The Oxfordshire councils were on target in year 1 to build 148 affordable homes and progress was being made on the targets for years 2 and 3. The infrastructure target for year should also be met.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

## **23 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Sub-Group update**

The Joint Statutory Spatial Plan Sub-Group had been renamed to reflect the name of the new draft plan and would now be known as the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Sub-Group. The sub-group's chairman reported that sub-group had produced a draft plan, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, for the Regulation 18 (Part 1) consultation. A report on this had been included as a separate agenda item (see minute 25).

The sub-group had also considered how to reach younger people and concluded that Oxford Brookes University and Oxfordshire's secondary schools should be targeted during the consultation. There would need to be an on-going engagement process to develop the best plan. The sub-group chairman welcomed input from individuals or organisations, and urged them to feed their comments in as part of the consultation.

## **24 Scrutiny panel update**

The Growth Board welcomed to the meeting Councillor Andrew Gant, chairman of the Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Gant reported on the outcome of the Growth Board's Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 24 January. The Scrutiny Panel had made three recommendations:

1. That the Growth Board reflects on the categorisation of consultees to create a separate list of key consultees in addition to the statutory list of consultees within the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation process. The Campaign to Protect Rural England should be added to this list of key consultees.
2. That the Growth Board redrafts the Regulation 18 consultation document to be more consistent with international, national and local policies and targets concerning climate change and other likely future trends. This should include:
  - a) alignment with the Government's definition of 'growth' as contained within the Clean Growth Strategy 2018;

- b) a greater recognition of the importance of climate change and its relationship with the forward planning of our housing, transport, health, wellbeing and economic infrastructure;
  - c) a greater recognition of the 'mega-trends' that are expected to affect the demographic, climatic and technological environment;
  - d) a 'SMART' target for greenhouse gas reductions against which all the aspirations and objectives are judged.
3. That the Growth Board asks each Leader to establish a clear structure for communications between the Growth Board and each council's members.

In response, the Growth Board accepted the need to have a wider consultation list and advised that this was already in place, including the Campaign to Protect Rural England. The Scrutiny Panel's comments could not be accommodated in the draft being considered by each council this week but the Growth Board would consider these comments as a consultation response. Lastly, the Growth Board chairman reported that each council leader had confirmed that they had already established clear communication with their other council members and would continue with this.

## **25 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (Joint Statutory Spatial Plan)**

The Growth Board considered a report on progress with the joint statutory spatial plan. A draft plan, renamed the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, had been produced by the sub-group and was being submitted to each Oxfordshire council for approval over the next few days. This was the Regulation 18 (Part 1) issues consultation document, setting out a vision for Oxfordshire, strategic objectives, and the level of growth. Once approved by each council, the plan would be subject to consultation for six weeks, from 11 February to 25 March. A second part of the Regulation 18 consultation would take place in the summer to consult on broad locations for growth.

The Growth Board thanked the sub-group for its work on the plan and urged the public to take part in the consultation.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

## **26 Housing Advisory Sub-Group update**

The chairman of the Housing Advisory Sub-Group updated the Growth Board on its work, particularly on meeting the affordable housing programme targets as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The sub-group had proved to be productive, with councils learning from each other's experiences and sharing good practice.

The sub-group had made two recommendations, which the Growth Board supported.

**RESOLVED:** to

- (a) request all district councils to make the best possible efforts to ensure their agreed affordable housing units in the Growth Deal programme are ready to deliver to the agreed timetable; and

- (b) request that district council officers and lead members formally and informally share good practice, which assists the timely delivery of proposed affordable housing schemes.

## **27 Infrastructure Sub-Group update**

The Growth Board received an update from the Infrastructure Sub-Group and noted that the year 1 infrastructure programme was progressing well.

## **28 Oxfordshire local plans progress**

The Growth Board received a report updating on progress towards the adoption of local plans across Oxfordshire's districts. The Growth Board welcomed the news that the local plans were on course to meet the targets in the Housing and Growth Deal programme.

**RESOLVED:** to note the report.

## **29 Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board**

Bev Hindle, of Oxfordshire County Council, gave a short presentation on progress with the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study. This was a strategic study of the Oxfordshire rail markets, which had recommended a rail strategy detailing growth benefits of interventions and set out a proposed investment strategy. The second part of the study was to develop options. The study looked at passenger needs and the future demand for freight traffic by rail. The study was expected to report in the summer. This was the first step to re-opening the Cowley branch line.

The Growth Board welcomed the update.

## **30 Dates of next meetings**

The dates of future Growth Board meetings are below. These will be held on Tuesdays at 2pm in Didcot Civic Hall.

- 26 March 2019
- 4 June

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

Chairman

Date