

**To:** Oxfordshire Growth Board  
**Title of Report:** Digital Infrastructure Strategy  
**Date:** 28 January 2020  
**Report of:** Craig Bower – Digital Infrastructure Programme Director  
**Status:** Open

**Executive Summary and Purpose:**

The Digital Infrastructure Programme is cross-cutting and although led by the county council, comprises a partnership with districts, city, and OxLEP. This partnership has an MoU in place determining responsibilities for each party. Each party to the MoU have been asked to consider adoption of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy via their decision making process.

**Recommendations:**

The Oxfordshire Growth Board:

1. Welcomes the Digital Infrastructure Strategy as a key component of planning for a sustainable and connected future for Oxford, and;
2. Recommends that each constituent council of the Growth Board considers adoption of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy via their own decision-making process (underway with each party at this stage).

**Appendices:**

- Digital Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan
- Draft Digital Infrastructure Partnership MoU
- Smart County Infographic

**Introduction**

1. Digital infrastructure comprises fixed and mobile telecoms networks as well as connected devices such as sensors and signs that capture information and/or show information. In technical terms this means Full Fibre Broadband (capable of delivering gigabit speeds, 4G and 5G mobile data transmission, and Internet of Things (IoT) devices. Digital infrastructure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is as important, perhaps more so, than traditional infrastructure (roads, rail etc) in previous centuries. **Critically** the build of digital infrastructure if properly planned for alongside major traditional infrastructure upgrades, is very inexpensive to deploy when compared to retrospectively trying to provision. This means the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal creates the perfect opportunity to embed digital infrastructure in the fabric of our county, in turn creating further growth opportunities whilst significantly offsetting the environmental impacts of

additional housing and growth. At the most basic level, world class infrastructure means less need to travel, and if travel is unavoidable, it helps to create a much more integrated and efficient transport capability, paving the way for electric vehicles, autonomous vehicles, improved public transport, and shared car use rather than car ownership

### Financial Implications

2. The financial implications fall into two areas;
  - a. Ongoing programme funding. The digital infrastructure programme is formed from the OCC better broadband programme. Following the county council's initial £10m investment in 2013/14, this programme has largely been self-funding by way of district, city, and LEP funding being contributed for ongoing PMO costs, and now with sight of an underspend and significant income due from Openreach from take-up gainshare. If this is ring-fenced, the digital infrastructure programme can remain as self-funding for some years to come.
  - b. Public Sector Assets. Commercial operators of both fixed and mobile infrastructure can potentially benefit from access to public sector assets such as buildings (rooftops for masts), agricultural land (masts), ducting (for installing fibre), and street furniture (for small cell wireless). The potential revenue stream associated with charging operators to have access to these assets is now significantly reduced by the new Electronic Communications Code, but in any event as set out on the digital infrastructure strategy, we make the case for limiting such revenues to only cover any administrative costs incurred in reaching agreement for our assets to be used. In return, the commensurate use of any public sector assets is not constrained by exclusivity clauses, which in turn creates both an open (neutral host) model and works as an incentive for operators to invest in Oxfordshire. The nett return to the public sector is by way of growth enabled by widespread availability of digital infrastructure.

### Legal Implications

3. By agreeing to work within the scope of the guidance documents contained in the executive summary of this document, legal implications are limited due to the means we would have to be flexible with our interpretation of guidance. Endorsement of the strategies set out here is an agreement to work within a set of principles, each of which would be subject to legal oversight in executing any resulting transaction.

### Other Implications

4. Other implications for consideration include;
  - a. Public challenge to perceived health and safety risks of mobile mast transmissions. (Public Health England and WHO provide risk-based assessments approving the use, but there are always some who will not believe the scientific evidence)
  - b. The digital infrastructure partnership, formed from the better broadband partnership, has a relatively unique ubiquitous support from all district councils. As such it is seen as a force for good in building practical working relationships and delivering public services in partnership. Nevertheless, there is an implicit implication that political relationships

will need to be maintained if this collaborative approach is to maintain its success

- c. As a cross cutting initiative, it will be important to ensure that there is widespread awareness of the programme. One of the key 'soft benefits' of seeking Growth Board endorsement, is to formally coalesce workstreams associated with the housing and growth deal, such that digital infrastructure strategies, blueprints, and activities are consistent in the revised Local Transport Plan, Oxfordshire 2050 vision, Local Industrial Strategy, and individual planning authority local plans.
- d. There are implications for OCC Highways pertained in the street works toolkit. In principle (with continued section 151 officer approval), any direct cost to Highways associated with adoption of the best practice guidelines may be met from the funding set out in 2a above, but as the HA moves to permitting, we need commitment to establish what can be agreed to, and have that documented
- e. The scope of the digital infrastructure strategy has the scope to take a regional perspective, especially along the growth corridor to Milton Keynes and Cambridge. Equally, this initiative resonates with *the agenda set out by England's Economic Heartland (EEH)*

**Conclusion**

- 5. The digital revolution that started with the internet age, now combines with practical applications for Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), Internet of Things (IoT), providing a generational change in how the economy works, how people access services, how health and social care is delivered, and how people live their lives. This combined with the unique high-tech knowledge economy of Oxfordshire, and the timing of the housing and growth deal, presents a huge opportunity to enable sustainable growth. The endorsements sought in this paper form the start of the journey to make sure we are planning for success rather than reacting to change.

**Background Papers**

- 6. None

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