

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board



HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH 2020 AT 2.00 PM

**FOUNTAIN CONFERENCE CENTRE, HOWBERY PARK, WALLINGFORD,
OXFORDSHIRE OX10 8BA**

Present:

Councillor Sue Cooper, (Chair), (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Councillor Ian Hudspeth, (Oxfordshire County Council), Councillor James Mills, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities' representative), Adrian Lockwood, (OxLEP Vice-Chairman), Catherine Turner, (Homes England), Councillor Emily Smith, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City), Emma Hill (Environment Agency) and Dr Kiren Collison, (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group).

Officers: Kevin Jacob (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Bev Hindle (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Gordon Mitchell (Oxford City Council Chief Executive), Yvonne Rees (Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council CEX), Mark Stone (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils CEX), Susan Harbour (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils) and Stefan Robinson (Oxfordshire Growth Board)

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

51 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Angus Horner, (OxLEP Business Rep – Science Vale), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP Business Rep – Bicester), and Louise Pattern, (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group) who was substituted by Dr Kiren Collison).

The Chair informed the Board that Louise Patten, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, was to leave her role at the end of that week. She expressed the Board's gratitude for her contribution to their work and wished her well for the future. The Chair welcomed the new representative of the Clinical Commissioning Group, Dr Kiren Collison (Clinical Chair of the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group), to the meeting.

52 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

53 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2020 be signed as a correct record.

54 Chairman's announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. She explained that the Growth Board met as a collaboration of local council leaders, along with key stakeholders across Oxfordshire, to plan for and manage growth (and its impacts) to the maximum benefit of current and future residents.

The Chair explained that the meeting would focus upon two major issues:

1. the Board's role overseeing the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal; and
2. a report on how new and existing homes might be developed and adapted to take account of zero carbon ambitions.

Following the previous meeting, the Chair had written to the Secretary of State for Transport seeking clarification on the future of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. Subsequently, she had received a reply from the Minister of Roads, Buses and Places which indicated that an update on the future of the project would be provided in due course. Copies of both letters were available on the agenda webpage.

55 Public participation

The Growth Board received one public question and one public address.

1. Julia Benning on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, submitted a question to be asked in her absence. It welcomed the papers on Zero Carbon Housing and drew the Board's attention West Midlands Combined Authority's setting of a localised definition of affordable housing. The question went on to refer to the Housing and Growth Deal Progress report and the establishment of a series of informal steering and working groups to oversee specialist workstreams associated with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

The Growth Board was asked to provide answers to the following questions:

- a) Which steering/working groups had been established?
- b) Who the members were and how they have been selected?
- c) What are the Terms of Reference for these groups and in turn what brief have they given to consultants?
- d) How this work was being reported to local authority members and/or the public?
- e) How the environment was being taken into account?
- f) What consideration, if any, was being given to a localised definition of affordable housing?

The Chair indicated that, given the technical nature of the questions, officers would be asked to provide a written response – this would also be published online.

2. Professor Richard Harding on behalf of Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth, addressed the Board on the Zero Carbon Housing Report and wider zero carbon issues. Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth had established a working party on the provision of zero carbon housing which was now liaising with a range of public and private sector providers.

To achieve the target of a 1.5° reduction in global temperature, Professor Harding stated that emissions needed to be cut by 50% within the next ten years and to zero by 2050. A quarter of Oxfordshire's emissions currently come from housing and this, alongside emissions from the construction process, would need to be drastically reduced.

In order to achieve the ambition of cutting emissions to zero by 2050, every new and existing home would need to be retrofitted with zero carbon technologies – an expensive process. It would, therefore, be far easier and cheaper to build zero carbon homes (as indicated by the UK Committee on Climate Change). The technologies already exist to make this change and would result in better quality housing. Further, as more homes were built, economies of scale would help to reduce costs – potentially making zero carbon housing cheaper than more traditional methods of construction.

Professor Harding suggested to the Board that each district should advance and promote at least one development in their respective areas that was zero carbon (in both construction and running). Moreover, each local authority should commit to making all new housing zero carbon by 2025. To help achieve this, the Growth Board and the councils needed to further engage with OxLEP to improve skills. There also needed to be a significant improvement in the enforcement of existing building standards requirements.

56 Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update

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

Councillor Gant reported on the outcomes of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 4 March 2020. He thanked Councillor Wood for appearing and expressed his gratitude to the officers who had attended and supported the meeting. The Panel had received a representation from CPRE reiterating their concerns regarding engagement in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 process and the role and scrutiny of influencers. They also received a question from Need Not Greed Oxfordshire raising similar queries to that submitted to the Growth Board.

The main themes arising from the Panel (as set out in its written report) included:

- Oxford to Cambridge Arc – the Panel highlighted the importance of environmental principles in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and its emerging governance structure. The Panel recommended that the Board champion the natural environment in planning for expected growth (as set out in the Arc's Joint Declaration) and that any governance arrangements should only include elected councillor representation.
- Zero Carbon Housing - the Panel recommended that the Growth Board champion the introduction of incremental zero carbon targets by HM Government. The Panel had discussed the need to be clear what was meant by zero carbon housing – in their view, it also included construction omissions and issues around the setting of building

standards. Further recommendations around zero carbon housing related to the need for more accessible mortgage products for homes built with modern methods of construction.

- Housing and Growth Deal Progress – the Panel had been concerned around the deliverability of the programme by its end date. They felt that a reflective paper on performance to date, risks and mitigations would be helpful.
- Oxfordshire Plan 2050 – the Panel recommended that formal confirmation be sought of HM Government's agreement to the requested extension of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timeline.

The Chair thanked Councillor Gant for this report and the Panel's recommendations. She indicated that the Board's full written response would be sent in due course – it would also be made available online.

57 Quarter 3 Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report and Financial Summary

The Growth Board considered a report setting out progress on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of Quarter Three of Year 2 (2019/20). It also laid out details of the Quarter Three financial position.

Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, commented that improvements had been made to the report. He highlighted that while good progress was being made, delivery of the Deal remained difficult.

Across the Deal's programmes, there was a level of variation in delivery. Therefore, work was now being undertaken with HM Government in order to further improve performance.

As part of the annual review process, talks would be held with HM Government around the reality of the current timelines – these discussions would include the possibility of extending Deal timelines for the programmes within it. It was felt that this could be consistent with HM Government's overall thinking around devolution and finance. Further information would be provided on possible mitigations and changes in due course.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board notes the progress at Quarter 3, 2019/2020 towards the Housing and Growth Deal and notes the interim financial report at Annex 1.

58 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update

The Growth Board received the notes of the Oxford Plan 2050 Sub-Group held on 13 February 2020.

Councillor Mills drew attention to the discussion by the Sub-Group regarding the challenge posed by applying the same planning tests for both joint spatial and local plans. Feedback, from the examination of the West of England Joint Spatial Plan, indicated that the inspection requirements for local plans were not suited to the purpose of a joint spatial plan.

In addition, joint working around cycling infrastructure (including the Greenways initiative) had been debated. This tied into consideration of:

- The first and last mile of journeys.

- Connectivity to transport networks
- The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan currently being drafted by the County Council.

The work regarding clean growth, currently being undertaken by OxLEP, should also assume increasing importance. The technical/scientific skills and experience to meet the challenges of clean growth already existed within Oxfordshire.

In discussion, members of the Board welcomed the focus on cycling across the whole of the county. This potentially provided an additional opportunity to link with the work being undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing Board around healthy place and spatial planning. It was felt that it was part of the role of the Growth Board to oversee the different points of works.

In respect of the evidence base requirements for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, Giles Hughes, West Oxfordshire District Council Chief Executive suggested engaging with HM Government to obtain greater guidance. Currently, planning inspectors had to apply the same procedures for both spatial and local plans despite the differences between them.

RESOLVED: That officers be requested to contact relevant officials within HM Government to seek to influence its position on strategic planning – including the process for examination of the evidence base for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

59 Zero Carbon Housing

The Growth Board considered a report summarising the emerging best practice and challenges around both the provision of zero carbon housing and the retrofitting of the existing housing stock. It set out a series of draft recommendations detailing how the Board could support this agenda. In presenting the report, Caroline Green (Assistant Chief Executive, Oxford City Council) highlighted the following key points:

- The Growth Board's Housing Advisory Sub-Group had contributed to the identification of areas of best practice in relation to the zero-carbon agenda – in addition to the challenges it poses for local authorities.
- The decarbonisation of housing was a significant challenge – bold and decisive action would be required at both a local and national level. As HM Government was expected to provide additional policy direction on this matter, it was considered timely for the Board to be discussing what actions it could take to support the decarbonisation of housing.
- The focus of the report was on the challenges and opportunities presented by moving to zero carbon housing. While the retrofitting of existing stock would be a huge undertaking, ensuring that all new homes were zero carbon could significantly reduce the cost of future remedial work.
- Oxfordshire had the opportunity to make a significant contribution to zero carbon housing (including as part of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Arc). Within the county, there were already numerous examples that could provide invaluable lessons going forwards.
- An appreciable shift in current policy and practice would be required to address some of the existing system-wide challenges and barriers to zero carbon housing. Local authorities would also have to consider how to balance the move towards zero carbon alongside their other obligations.

- While zero carbon housing currently had higher upfront costs, these were offset by lower running expenses. The challenge was, therefore, to provide an incentive for landlords (private and public sector) to decarbonise.
- The supply of energy, and the relationship between housing and the overall energy strategy, needed to be reviewed.
- Public awareness around zero carbon housing needed to be significantly improved.

Members of the Growth Board welcomed the report and in discussion raised the following points:

- It was important to act in a timely manner - every new house that was not zero carbon was undesirable.
- Public awareness would be crucially important
- Developer contributions were an area that might be explored in the context of reducing the barrier of higher upfront costs e.g. a potential zero Community Infrastructure Levy rating for zero carbon homes.
- Greater consideration needed to be given to OxLEP's work around clean growth.
- There was a lack of incentives for mass markets conventional builders to switch to zero carbon housing provision. HM Government should be lobbied to address this e.g. through reform of building regulations. While it was expected that the proposed Future Homes Standard would address some of these issues, there were concerns that this would not go far enough. Further, the creation of a national standard might also remove local authorities' ability to set more stringent targets.
- There needed to be a genuine choice for consumers between conventionally built houses and zero carbon. It had to be recognised that, given the higher upfront costs of zero carbon, there was currently no market incentive to buyers.
- The financial crash had led to the withdrawal of previous proposals to introduce higher standard building regulations. It was, therefore, important to note that HM Government's focus for the foreseeable future would be on the Covid-19 emergency – this would affect their capacity in responding to lobbying.
- It would be necessary to address skills shortages and capacity issues in the construction industry.
- Homes England did not set policy. Its role was to advise HM Government and deliver upon priorities with partners (including those in Oxfordshire). Homes England was currently working to promote and develop modern methods of construction as a requirement for land disposals.

RESOLVED: That Growth Board partners:

1. Make the case to Government for clear and ambitious national standards that set a long-term trajectory for minimum standards to 2050 accompanied by investment and incentives for local authorities and developers to move more quickly to higher standards.
2. Champion the exchange of good practice and guidance on sustainable and zero-carbon construction, to promote uptake and set local expectations.
3. Explore opportunities to scale up low carbon technologies through Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and work with Homes England and developers to develop a pipeline of sites for MMC.
4. Include higher energy efficiency and design standards as an objective of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 as the earliest opportunity to achieve weight in the planning

system and consider what can be done in advance of the Plan to set higher expectations of standards (for example through shared evidence base for local plans and guidance).

5. Make the case to Government for sustained incentives, investment guidance and support for local retrofit programmes for existing homes, including sustained employment and skills development incentives to boost capacity in the sector.
6. Support public facing campaigns that raise awareness of what households can do to reduce energy consumption in their own homes, the benefits of energy efficient homes and lifestyle adaptations to make them most effective.

60 Feedback from the Growth Board and Health & Wellbeing Board Networking Event

The Growth Board considered a statement from the Chair and Councillor Ian Hudspeth on the networking event held between members of the Growth Board and the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

It was felt that the event had been useful and had highlighted the importance of both organisations working together on issues such as the promotion of walking and cycling. It had also helped to highlight the impact of housing upon health as a key issue.

RESOLVED: That

1. Officers be requested to consider and propose a few specific priorities that should be the focus of joint working between members of both Boards for agreement at a future meeting of the Growth Board and of the Health & Wellbeing Board.
2. A second networking event be held in the autumn of 2020 between members of the Growth Board and members of the Health & Wellbeing Board to progress action in these identified areas.

61 Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Councillor Barry Wood, as Chair of the Arc Leaders' Group, and Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director, provided a verbal update. Key points included:

- HM Government regards the Arc as a priority and, therefore, it was likely that the development of the programme would accelerate in the near future.
- Two areas of activity for the Arc included, 1) future Arc governance arrangements with an expected allocation of power and responsibility by HM Government to Growth Boards and 2), that future Growth Board strategic planning frameworks should take account of other Growth Boards in a collaborative manner.
- The Oxfordshire Growth Board was at the forefront of these arrangements and, therefore, provided an exemplar for others to follow.
- While timescales had not yet been determined, including for future potential capital projects, it was important that Oxfordshire was ready to respond to any developments.
- The Budget had identified the Arc as a key economic priority. A framework, setting out both a vision and context for the Arc, was to be developed and tested.
- The Arc provided a conduit for Oxfordshire to have influence with HM Government.

- Public engagement was important to ensure that the role of the Arc was understood.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc be noted.

62 Growth Board Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager, commented that the programme was updated and published on a monthly basis on the Board's website. He highlighted the expectation that reports would be brought forward to the next meeting on the Board's draft revised Terms of Reference and on the progression of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. He also stated that the Oxford to Cambridge Arc update would now become a regular item.

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

63 Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

No matters in addition to those set out in the Agenda were raised.

64 Dates of next meetings

The Growth Board noted the dates of future Board meetings as set out below. Meetings to be held in Didcot Civic Hall at 14:00.

- 2 June 2020 – subject to review in light of the Covid-19 emergency
- 22 September 2020
- 24 November 2020
- 26 January 2021
- 23 March 2021
- 8 June 2021

The meeting closed at 3.37 pm

Chairman

Date