

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Oxfordshire Growth Board Infrastructure Sub-Group

HELD ON TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2020 AT 1.00 PM
 MEMBERS BOARD ROOM, COUNTY HALL, OXFORD, OX1 1ND

Present:

Councillors , Yvonne Constance, Jeff Haine, Lynn Pratt, Judy Roberts, Linda Smith and David Turner

Officers: Sue Halliwell, Kevin Jacob, Owen Jenkins and John Disley

32 Apologies for absence and notifications of substitutions; declarations of interest; Chair's announcements

Apologies were received from Councillor Ian Hudspeth, (Chair, Oxfordshire County Council). In the absence of Councillor Hudspeth it was agreed that Councillor Constance would chair the meeting.

33 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 6 November 2019 were received.

34 Digital Infrastructure Strategy

The sub-group considered a draft report to the Growth Board and draft Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan. The subgroup noted that the Growth Board was to be asked to welcome the Strategy and to request that each Growth Board local authority partner consider adoption of the strategy through their own decision-making procedures. This was already in process and it was expected that Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet would consider the Strategy in February.

The sub-group was informed of the following key points:

- A clearer mandate in respect of full fibre connectivity was emerging
- Community engagement to facilitate an environment supportive of the implementation of the strategy would continue to be important.
- The strategy could provide a bedrock for future digital investment
- The strategy contained ambitious targets and it was important to recognise that there would be challenges in rolling out infrastructure such as full fibre and 5G in difficult to access urban environments such as the City of Oxford.

- As a county, Oxfordshire would be in a stronger position with HM Government to seek to influence future digital infrastructure decisions if there was an agreed position on digital infrastructure across local authorities.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme had been very successful in improving broadband connectivity and internet speed, but provision remained poor in some locations and in future more capacity and speed would be required. It was noted that broadband roll out was now at the point of trying to connect the hardest to reach and most remote areas.
- The Better Broadband Contract operated on a gain-share principle which it was felt had been a beneficial arrangement for Oxfordshire. The Digital Infrastructure Strategy would help leverage in further investment which would need to be applied in systematic way.
- It was hoped that if agreed by Oxfordshire local authorities, the Memorandum of Understanding associated with the strategy would represent a mutual recognition of the importance of digital infrastructure to Oxfordshire's future and help facilitate a general consistency of approach to the consideration by local planning authorities to the provision of digital infrastructure, whilst acknowledging local sovereignty of planning matters.
- Members felt that in some locations, even those relatively close to urban areas, it was likely to remain uneconomic or unaffordable to put in place full fibre connectivity and queried whether satellite broad band had also been considered. It was noted that this had not been ruled out, but that at this stage such provision was not expected to be generate enough return on investment for providers. It was not felt that the existing presence of satellite provision to some communities or individual users would slow down or act as an inhibitor to full fibre provision in those areas in the future.
- Although 5G represented the next stage in mobile infrastructure provision, not all areas had access yet to a reliable 4G provision. New arrangements between mobile providers would facilitate greater sharing of infrastructure like masts.
- Members commented on the importance of effective public engagement around full fibre and 5G mobile connectivity, particularly in respect of making sure accurate information was available to address potential public concerns. Officers were asked to take this into consideration.

The sub-group welcomed the paper and supported the recommendations to the Growth Board. A further update in June/July was requested.

35 Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study

The sub-group considered a draft report to the Growth Board which set out the findings of the first stage of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study which had been part funded by the Growth Board. The report also summarised a specific report undertaken in respect of the Cowley branch line and set out a proposed approach in respect of second stage of the programme. It was noted that the final published version of the report would include an Executive Summary of the study.

Key findings from the first stage of the strategy included:

- There was a need for more rail capacity and connectivity in Oxfordshire in the future.

- A significant proportion of the future provision would be required prior to 2028, earlier than previously estimated.
- East West Rail Phase 2 (Oxford to Bedford and Milton Keynes) would significantly increase demands at key stations including Bicester village.
- The study had the need for around 20 priority connections and the need for better connectivity through Oxford.
- Further business cases would be required and the challenges in moving forward were fully recognised.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members of the sub-group queried and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of submitting a series of individual business cases relating to individual rail projects or a combined business case encompassing several projects. It was noted that it was likely that a balanced approach would be needed, but it was difficult to tie different projects together.
- Member queried the alignment of the study with Network Rail infrastructure programmes in terms of extra lines, signalling improvements etc. It was noted that the paper had taken account of this.
- Increasing or providing new rail capacity also had implications on wider access to station issues, such as the provision of carparking which would be a separate piece of work.
- Bicester Village Outlet had seen a significant amount of its customers travel by rail.
- Consideration had been given to the linkages between the rail study and ongoing work on the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, (LTCP5).
- It was noted that the study did not in itself lead to any automatic commitment of funding and it was important that expectations were managed. It did strength Oxfordshire's case.
- Although the boundaries of the study were roughly focussed on Didcot Parkway in the South and Banbury in the North, the impact and potential opportunities arising from other studies and projects further afield would continue to be assessed and considered.

Members of the sub-group welcomed the paper and supported the recommendations.

36 Housing Infrastructure Fund Update

The sub-group received an update on bids to HM Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund, (HIF).

A40 Smart Corridor

Work was continuing to progress the draft Heads of Terms agreement, and it was hoped that agreement on this might be reached in February leading to a funding agreement in early spring.

Didcot Garden Town

It was noted that correspondence and discussions were continuing between South Oxfordshire District Council, (SODC) and HM Government in respect of the future of the SODC Local Plan. Oxfordshire County Council's position was that it remained ready to sign the Didcot Garden Town HIF project funding agreement, however Homes England are still waiting for MHCLG to confirm they are content that all the conditions of the funding

agreement have been met i.e. SODC have a submitted Local Plan. Due to the level of the financial exposure, if no agreement was reached by 31 January work by Oxfordshire County Council would have to cease with an impact on the project's timelines.

37 Growth Deal Infrastructure Delivery Programme Update

The sub-group received an update on the Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme. Key points included:

- Whilst accepting the challenge of meeting the spend profile from a standing start, Growth Deal infrastructure spend had been below expectations and work had taken place to accelerate this by a conducting a through end to end review of the systems in place from initial project feasibility to delivery.
- Where appropriate the programme had been reprofiled to prioritise delivery and discussions with the supply chain were taking place.
- Additional staff resource and expertise was now in place to support the programme and a more linear process adopted.
- Leadership and management of projects had been further strengthened by managers having overall oversight and responsibility for a coordination of a transport corridor, (including all the individual schemes and funding streams within in).
- It was acknowledged that communication with local communities and stakeholders could be improved.

In discussion, members of the sub-group commented that they would wish to see the detail of the revised programme. The sub-group was informed that a report would be brought to a future meeting as well as the Growth Board itself.

38 Indicative Forward Plan

The subgroup considered an indicative forward programme. It was noted this did not yet include provisional meeting dates considering the potential need to change the date of the March meeting. The following topics were noted:

- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)
- Natural Capital
- Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, (LTCP5)
- England's Economic Heartland, (EEH) – Transport Strategy for the South East – update on emerging strategies.
- HIF Delivery Programme
- Digital Infrastructure Strategy Update.

39 Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was scheduled for 13 March 2020, but that it might be necessary to find an alternative considering the rescheduling of the Growth Board to 11 March 2020.

The meeting closed at 2.30 pm