

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading



Report of Acting Deputy Chief Executive - Partnerships

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To: CABINET

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Strategic vision for Oxfordshire

Recommendations

That the Cabinet:

(a) Provides its views on the draft strategic vision for Oxfordshire

(b) Delegates responsibility to the Acting Deputy Chief Executive – Partnerships to develop a response to the Strategic Vision engagement exercise, in consultation with the cabinet member for strategic partnerships, reflecting the views expressed at this meeting.

Purpose of Report

1. This report introduces a first draft of a Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire (attached as Appendix 1). The report explains the purpose of this unique approach, the scope and content of the Vision, and the timeline for the current engagement and finalising the Vision. The Draft Vision is presented for discussion and comments to help inform revisions prior to future Growth Board endorsement.

Introduction

2. The Oxfordshire Growth Board ('the Board') was established in 2014 as a Joint Committee¹ of the six councils of Oxfordshire, together with key strategic partners. Following a recent review, the Board's aim is to help coordinate economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits. The Board's establishment was premised on strengthening partnership arrangements across Oxfordshire for pragmatic working on key strategic issues. It has successfully done this by overseeing the delivery of cross-county projects that the councils of Oxfordshire were seeking to deliver in a collaborative way – between local authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership and wider partners and stakeholders².
3. Oxfordshire has considerable and diverse strengths. It is also facing significant change, but with change comes the opportunity for progress based on new ways of thinking. Conversations between Growth Board partners and the public, and innovative work on economic inclusivity, have shown that there is a desire to see a different approach to place-shaping in Oxfordshire. For example, the public's responses to the consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 document gave us a clear steer that there is an appetite for an approach that:
 - is ambitious, radical, innovative and creative
 - is Oxfordshire-specific and reflects the views of local people
 - prioritises climate change
 - focusses on social, economic and environmental well-being, not solely on a narrow definition of growth.
4. Through the Growth Board, the councils have collectively expressed their desire for plans, strategies, programmes and investment priorities for Oxfordshire to be ambition-led and outcome-focussed. Achieving these ambitions will require all those who make future decisions about investment, and those planning for and delivering place-making across Oxfordshire, to maximise impact by working together based on shared strategic priorities and by embracing innovation to develop solutions. Developing a Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire is a unique opportunity to respond to this challenge, through the Growth Board, on behalf of local councils and partners.
5. Establishing a clear and coherent vision for Oxfordshire setting out what the partners are seeking to achieve and their strategic priorities, also plays an important role in helping manage some of the risks to the Oxfordshire Plan at Examination.

Purpose and status of the draft strategic vision

6. Building on the success of recent engagements and consultations, the Growth Board partnership wishes to consider in a positive, open and transparent way what the ambition for Oxfordshire should look like and how it can be achieved by drawing on

¹ Under s101 (5), 102 Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) and s9EB Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000) and pursuant to the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012.

² As a Joint Committee, the Board may discharge executive functions if delegated to it by each constituent local authority, but each constituent authority retains the ability to exercise all executive and non-executive functions generally and specifically in relation to economic development including where applicable provision of housing, strategic spatial planning and strategic transport planning.

new ways of thinking about sustainable development. The Draft Vision is intended to be the start of a conversation with our communities to build consensus around a common set of goals for Oxfordshire, strengthening and improving the Vision.

7. In doing so, the Strategic Vision is not intended to replace or set the specific vision for any of our individual communities or partner organisations. It is crucial to not lose sight of the rich variety of places that make up Oxfordshire and all that is valued about the character of our city, towns and villages and our natural and historic environments. It is recognised that delivering the Strategic Vision will require place-focussed responses to specific challenges and opportunities that reflect particular circumstances. That happens best through a detailed understanding of places and communities to arrive at solutions that work for them. Delivering the Vision will require long-term collective commitment and investment by the partners that make up the Growth Board but also, crucially, by a wider set of strategic stakeholders and partnerships.
8. The Strategic Vision is part of the existing portfolio approach to plan and strategy development in Oxfordshire. The Vision has a specific role and a clearly defined non-statutory status. While it is similarly looking to 2050 and is intended to support the development of the Oxfordshire Plan indirectly, it is not part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 itself. It explicitly does not deal with the quantum of housing or economic growth for Oxfordshire, nor direct where it should go. Those are matters more appropriately dealt with through other plans (Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and Local Plans). The Vision can however play an important role in seeking to drive improvements to environmental, social and economic well-being which may be reflected in emerging plans, strategies and programmes.
9. The Oxfordshire Plan will deliver parts of the Vision, but not all the ambitions and outcomes are within its sphere of influence. The Strategic Vision cuts across many sectors and is designed to inform a range of plans, strategies and programmes. Local plans, infrastructure plans, economic strategies and associated plans and programmes will all have important roles to play. For example, having a set of long-term, strategic, economic, infrastructure and environment investment priorities aligned to shared outcomes will help ensure Oxfordshire is investing in the right infrastructure and other assets in a timely way, maximising the benefits of that investment, avoiding unnecessary expenditure and helping ensure it is better placed to influence the priorities of other relevant organisations. Having a 'whole system' agreed vision of where we are heading, and our expected outcomes would go a very long way to help align our work and our infrastructure programmes.
10. The Vision should also be read by partners beyond Oxfordshire as a statement of intent by the partnership that has prepared it. Of particular significance is the Government's announcement in March 2020 of its backing for a spatial framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Oxfordshire can help achieve its collective ambition by looking to influence any framework for the Arc based on its Strategic Vision.

Scope of the draft strategic vision

11. The Draft Strategic Vision is high-level, overarching and long-term. It is positive, optimistic and aims high in its ambition for Oxfordshire. The Vision sets out how the plans, strategies and programmes for Oxfordshire, including the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, can be ambition-led and outcome focussed, facilitating a step-change in the approach to delivering sustainable development in Oxfordshire. In much the same way that local councils adopt corporate plans to guide their work, the Vision will help guide

the approach to joint working and joint programmes between those councils and their partners.

12. The Strategic Vision is centred on people's well-being, with Oxfordshire a place where current and future generations thrive. Well-being of individuals is important, but the Strategic Vision also addresses well-being in the round in ways that make important connections because there are well-recognised intrinsic links between the environmental, social and economic dimensions of well-being and how these need to be underpinned by improved resilience. The ambition is to utilise the unique opportunities and assets in Oxfordshire to shape healthy, sustainable, resilient communities.
13. The Strategic Vision defines the ambition for Oxfordshire as a set of outcomes, which if we are successful, will have been achieved by 2050. To help achieve the ambition the Vision defines what is meant by 'good growth', with the approach based on improvements in quality and circumstances for individuals and society. The aim is that growth in Oxfordshire will be inclusive, focussing on progress in improving health and well-being, transitioning to a low carbon future, addressing inequalities and prioritising the natural environment, alongside greater resilience to climate and economic change. The Vision also includes a set of Guiding Principles (or inter-related ground rules) which together articulate how Oxfordshire will change as a place over the next 30 years.
14. Delivery against a 30-year vision will require pragmatism and realism as the tools of our innovation and ambition develop. However, the Strategic Vision recognises that decisions, actions and investments are required now to place Oxfordshire on the pathway to delivery by 2050.
15. It is very likely that achieving the final, agreed outcomes by 2050 will require some trends to be reversed, while for some other trends, where progress is already being made, there will need to be an increase in the pace of change, making the most of the vital role place-making plays in delivering positive outcomes. Measuring progress, so that we know what responses are needed, will be an important part of the approach to delivering the Strategic Vision. It also provides a robust basis on which Oxfordshire's communities and stakeholders may hold the Growth Board to account. At this stage we have not attempted to define or agree targets or the indicators for monitoring delivery. Development of a robust framework for monitoring progress and continual improvement will form a key part of the next phase of work on the Strategic Vision, drawing on public and stakeholder engagement.

Timescales and next steps

16. Work on the Strategic Vision is time-critical. It is intended to indirectly support the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, as well as the Government's planned spatial framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Work on a spatial framework is now gathering momentum and is expected to progress at pace; having an agreed Strategic Vision in place will provide Oxfordshire with a firm basis to influence any framework for the Arc.
17. Preparation of the Draft Strategic Vision is the beginning of a process. Because the Growth Board wants to be open about what it is trying to achieve, it is carrying out bespoke and wide public and stakeholder engagement, providing an early opportunity for people to share and shape its thinking through public discussion and debate. The

programme of public and stakeholder engagement will run from 16 November 2020 to 3 January 2021.

18. Due to COVID-19, the Growth Board is using the Oxfordshire Open Thought digital engagement platform which has already proved very helpful in engaging on wide-ranging topics and long-term thinking. Engagement on the Strategic Vision will respond to that earlier conversation, and use Open Thought to seek support, build consensus and make improvements.
19. The Growth Board partners have important linkages with communities and grassroots networks in Oxfordshire. The views of the Growth Board partners will therefore be crucial in shaping the Strategic Vision as it evolves. The more consensus that can be built, the more it will be possible to develop and implement effective plans and programmes for Oxfordshire. The Growth Board is therefore asking that the Strategic Vision is considered by each local authority's Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet during the engagement period.
20. The Vision will be refined by the Growth Board taking account of the engagement and further work (informal sustainability advice for example). Early, pre-engagement comments made through the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel and Growth Board process will be picked up as part of the post-engagement re-drafting.
21. Subject to the feedback received and support generated, the Growth Board will seek endorsement of a revised Strategic Vision at its meeting scheduled for 22 March 2021.

Financial Implications

22. The preparation and development of the Strategic Vision will be covered within existing budget and resource allocations. No additional financial commitments are required as part of this report.

Legal Implications

23. The Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire has a clearly defined non-statutory status. Nevertheless, it may be prudent to seek legal advice following engagement but prior to agreement of the Vision, to ensure the agreed language of the Vision moving forward is helpful to, rather than in conflict with, the emerging next stage of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

Conclusion

24. The development of a Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, which encompasses the shared ambitions of local councils and key organisations, provides a unique opportunity to bring together a clear and unambiguous statement about what it is we want to achieve in Oxfordshire. This bold and striving approach is being developed as part of a wider engagement process with Growth Board partners, councillors and residents. Cabinet is asked to provide its feedback on the draft Strategic Vision, and delegate responsibility to agree final wording of a response to the Acting Deputy Chief Executive - Partnerships, in consultation with the cabinet member for strategic partnerships, before 3 January 2021.