

Minutes of a meeting of the OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD on Thursday 1 February 2018

Voting members of the Committee present:

Councillor Bob Price	Chair - Executive Member of Oxford City Council
Councillor John Cotton	Vice- Chairman - Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Barry Wood	Leader of Cherwell District Council
Councillor Ian Hudspeth	Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Matthew Barber	Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council
Councillor James Mills	Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council

Non-Voting members of the Committee present:

Adrian Lockwood	Vice Chairman and Skills Board Representative
Professor Alistair Fitt	Universities Representative
Kevin Bourner	Homes England Representative
Lesley Tims	Environment Agency Representative

Officers:

Paul Staines	Oxfordshire Growth Board Partnership Programme Manager
Patsy Dell	Head of Planning, Sustainable Development & Regulatory Services, Oxford City Council
Caroline Green	Assistant Chief Executive, Oxford City Council
Gordon Mitchell	Chief Executive, Oxford City Council
Peter Clark	Chief Executive, Oxfordshire County Council
Christine Gore	Executive Director, West Oxfordshire District Council
Bev Hindle	Strategic Director, Oxfordshire County Council
Andrew Down	Head of Partnership and Insight, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
Adrian Colwell	Executive Director for Place and Growth Cherwell and South Northamptonshire Councils
Nigel Tipple	Chief Executive, OXLEP
Jennifer Thompson	Committee and Members Services Officer, Oxford City Council

Apologies received from:

Jeremy Long	Chairman of OXLEP
Phil Shadbolt	OXLEP Business Representative – Bicester
Andrew Harrison	OXLEP Business Representative – Science Vale
Richard Venables	OXLEP Business Representative – Oxford City
Louise Patten	Oxfordshire CCG Representative

Attending as observers:

Councillor Susan Brown Leader of Oxford City Council
Councillor Judith Heathcoat Executive Member of Oxfordshire County Council

52. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

53. Minutes of the last meeting

The Board confirmed as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board held on 30 November 2017.

54. Chair's Announcements

The Chair announced that the local authorities in Oxfordshire had been awarded £36m from the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) Marginal Viability Fund for specific development projects.

55. Public Participation

In accordance with the public participation scheme the Chair invited those who had submitted questions to speak to the Board.

The Board had before them:

- written questions submitted by
Colin Thomas on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire
Charles Mathew, Oxfordshire County Councillor for the division of Eynsham
- and written responses from the Chair.

Colin Thomas asked a supplementary question and the Chair responded.

Councillor Mathew asked a supplementary question and Councillor Hudspeth responded.

Full details of the written and supplementary questions and responses are in the supplement to these minutes.

56. Housing and Growth Deal - delivery plan update

Caroline Green reported that Government's feedback on the final draft of the Delivery Plan was expected shortly and then each council would be asked to consider and

decide whether to approve the Deal and Delivery Plan at a series of special co-ordinated council meetings in February.

In approving the Deal councils would be cognisant of the fact that the proposed draft revised NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) could impact the planning freedoms and the arrangements for the JSSP agreed within the Deal , The Deal brings significant investment in several work strands supporting housing and infrastructure , productivity including skills.

Kevin Bourner, Homes England, outlined the ongoing work on the HIF bids and noted that the Deal puts Oxfordshire in a relatively advantageous position with regard to the HIF Forward Funding Bids. A decision on shortlisting for these bids was expected in March

Board members commented that:

- The Deal was a good start, if with limited funding, and a credit to the work by officers, and was ready to put to each council for consideration.
- The funds should be seen as a down-payment.
- There were concerns over potential changes resulting from the revised NPPF including the impact of any new flexibility.
- The Board needed to ensure that there was no penalty for failure to meet targets due to uncontrollable factors and officers were asked to ensure appropriate wording in the Deal to this effect
- Considerable progress had been made since the announcement in November but the detail and delivery mechanism was not certain yet. Methods for calculating successful delivery were key. The Board welcomed the fact that there was potential for further funding since the Deal whilst significant was only a small percentage of the requirements and did not for example address the costs of non-transport infrastructure.

The Growth Board resolved:

- 1. to note the ongoing conversations around the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal and delivery plan and the comments at this meeting**
- 2. to endorse the progress made on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal and recommend this to the Oxfordshire Partners subject to satisfactory completion of the Delivery Plan.**

57. City and Growth Deal Programme reports

Nigel Tipple gave an update on the progress on projects within the City and Growth Deal; and reported that the Environment Agency and partners were still confident the flood alleviation channel could be delivered as planned.

The Growth Board noted the report and the operating plan update.

58. Matters arising from OXLEP

Nigel Tipple gave an update on the work of OxLEP.

In summary he outlined:

- Work on funded projects in the Local Growth Fund 3 programme was progressing at a good pace
- There was good progress on remaining Local Growth Fund 1 and Local Growth Fund 2 projects and on City Deal projects as highlighted in the programme reports,
- BEIS (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) had confirmed 2 years of funding from BEIS for extended support for the Business Growth Hub
- EU funds running to 2020 were in place including EU social fund programme for developing apprenticeships and working with those far from the workplace: in Oxfordshire about 19,000 people were not working while 16,000 of those were not registered as seeking work.
- OxLEP was piloting The Local Industrial Strategy response, and was starting work towards an agreed delivery-focussed plan to mutually reinforce the Growth Deal over the summer, aiming to submit for funding to start 1 March 2019.

Councillor Price reported that the Local Government Association were putting pressure on the government to set out how the EU funded programmes would continue after 2020.

The Growth Board noted the update.

59. Growth Board Forward Plan

The Growth Board considered the updated Forward Plan setting out reports and decisions arising from the draft delivery plan for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

Members noted that the timetable for the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan was very ambitious and depended in part on the contents of the as-yet unpublished new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Forward Plan may therefore need to be amended in light of the NPPF.

The Growth Board noted the report setting out their Forward Plan, noting that this would be updated to reflect changes arising from the awaited NPPF and delivery of the planning functions of the Deal.

60. Oxfordshire Local Plans progress report - January 2018

The Board considered the report setting out the progress towards adoption of Local Plans and noted that South Oxfordshire District Council had delayed submission of their plan until it could be assessed against the new NPPF, and that the statutory 6-week notice period for submission had not been given.

The Growth Board noted the report.

61. Oxford to Cambridge corridor - update on progress

Corridor

Members and officers had given evidence to the newly established Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge all-party parliamentary group, and saw this as a useful way of overseeing the processes and decision making.

The consultation on the expressway was set out and would run in parallel with the technical studies. The plans showed the stretch from the M40 to Cambridge but the Board was emphasising the need to connect to Oxford and beyond, and the need for sub-corridor connectivity. The corridor route would be decided in Summer 2018, public consultation on the route within the corridor would be in Autumn 2019 in two phases, with construction starting in 2025.

Councillor Cotton, who is chairman of a group of leaders of local authorities in the corridor area; Councillor Price; and Nigel Tipple reported on the work on the corridor:

- Corridor leaders had sent a letter welcoming the NIC report and setting out options for on governance and management of the corridor, and received a clear message from NIC that they want to see progress that local authorities can be creative in tackling issues.
- Work on the corridor would be taken forward by the MHCHLG who were seeking a meeting with LA leaders.
- In the budget statement there was a request for LEPs to prepare a collective industrial strategy. LEPs were commissioning work building on Central Bedfordshire's work on the corridor; a brief was ready to circulate; and requisite meetings set up.
- There was a commitment to fund rail improvements between Bedfordshire and Cambridge by mid-2020s.

The Board noted that a collective vision of the possibilities, ambition for, and potential of this project should be developed by local authorities and managing boards.

Rail connectivity

The Board considered a late report and recommendations submitted by Bev Hindle (Strategic Director for Communities Oxfordshire County Council) setting out information about the Government's proposed Rail Connectivity Study for Oxfordshire as a result of a meeting held a few days earlier.

Bev Hindle reported that meeting had agreed that a sub-group of the Growth Board and an appropriate governance mechanism may be the most appropriate mechanism to support the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study. The final decision lay with the Department of Transport.

The Growth Board noted proposals in the report to:

1. Work with Department for Transport, Network Rail and Oxfordshire train operators to develop a brief and complete the Government's announced Rail Connectivity Study for Oxfordshire; and

2. Provide the governance framework and accountable body role (via Oxfordshire County Council) for the project from conception to completion, including establishing an Oxfordshire Growth Board Rail Sub-Group; and
3. Agree to consider providing some element of local match funding in the form of officer capacity to support the completion of this project.

62. Sub-national Transport Body (STB) - update

Bev Hindle (Strategic Director for Communities Oxfordshire County Council) reported on discussions about wider infrastructure including superfast cable networks and internet access.

Members of the Board:

- Reported that a consultation about major roads not controlled by Highways England was underway and asked for all councils to consider and respond, as there needed to be serious investment in the major roads such as the A40 and A420 that local authorities could not provide alone.
- Commented that ICT network and broadband infrastructure were crucial for successful businesses but an investment in hardware was not accompanied by an appraisal of its use. The STB would be able to drive this and give consistency in approach across the corridor

The Growth Board noted the discussion and updates.

63. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

There were no updates.

64. Dates of next meetings

The Board noted the meeting dates.

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.15 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 27 March 2018

GROWTH BOARD QUESTIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES **1 FEBRUARY 2018**

1. Question from Colin Thomas for CPRE

Introduction

We understand that the Joint Spatial Plan is now considered an integral aspect of the Housing & Growth Deal to be discussed under agenda item 6 today.

Unfortunately the papers for this item were not available in the very limited timescale available for submitting questions. Therefore we have submitted this question in expectation that it is pertinent to this agenda item. We note that under the forward plan for the Growth Board, the Terms of Reference are due to be re-considered in March and once again ask that these are reviewed to encourage and support meaningful public engagement by the provision of timely information.

Question

As members of the Growth Board will be aware, CPRE Oxfordshire has long championed the case for a Joint Spatial Plan to allow effective strategic level planning, including consideration of the overall environmental and social impacts of growth. We therefore welcomed the Growth Board's decision at the November meeting to take this forward. We have also proposed that this should be a Statutory Plan, to ensure a robust and transparent process subject to independent examination, and we are delighted to learn that this is now the intention and is indeed a requirement of the Housing and Growth Deal as set out in the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government 20th November letter.

We are sure Growth Board members will agree that moving forward, the overall acceptance and success of the Plan will be inescapably linked to the extent to which local communities are allowed genuine engagement in the process, right from the inception, not just belated consultation on decisions effectively already taken. We note that some of the original milestones set out in the Business Plan and the Growth Board Forward Plan, such as the February Approval of Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Delivery Programme and Assurance Framework and updates on the Communications Strategy and development of the Statement of Community Involvement, are already under pressure.

Given the overall tight timeframe for the JSSP, it is vital that the public engagement element of the process is not squeezed out at the expense of other more 'bureaucratic' elements of the Plan. CPRE propose that time spent engaging with local residents and stakeholder organisations at the start of the plan process will help ensure that the overall process is more efficient and effective with better and more productive outcomes for all concerned.

Therefore, can the Growth Board advise how it plans to engage with the public and stakeholder organisations, particularly in the formative stages of the JSSP, and most importantly how organisations such as CPRE can effectively and constructively engage in this process?

Response

The development of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan forms part of the Housing and Growth Deal and will be a high level framework plan, with District Plans

continuing to deal with planning in their areas. The JSSP will be prepared on a statutory footing so will follow the appropriate regulations and procedures for plan making and preparation including community engagement and consultation and public examination.

Supplementary question

CPRE want to work with the Growth Board to make sure the public are involved and were hoping to come in a constructive frame of mind, especially considering the support in the response to questions on consultation with Highways England. CPRE wish to work in partnership on the JSSP and the Deal, but bearing in mind there is no consultation taking place today how can we do this?

Response

It is not possible to discuss the terms of reference for the JSSP until the draft revised NPPF is published next month. Following that the Board will have a clear basis for consultation over an 18-24 month period, and will certainly take up CPRE's offer to work with it on this.

2. Question from Charles Mathew, Oxfordshire County Councillor for the division of Eynsham

I represent the division of Eynsham, which covers the A40 from Barnard Gate to Cassington. This section of the main road to the west from Oxford is subject to constant daily traffic jams on a rush hour basis and often more – and a source of constant and exasperated complaints from local residents. Eynsham Parish Council is strongly in support of this potential solution.

Plans to install a Park and Ride at Evenlode for 500 vehicles (and maybe extended to 1,000, I understand) and a bus lane on the north side to Duke's Cut have been proposed, although not finally funded, and have received your approval; there is also a declared wish to extend the dual carriageway from the Witney by pass to the Park and Ride and further to mirror the aforesaid bus lane on the south side. None of this has been consulted with local residents, nor has the HiF bid, currently awaiting a decision from Government, been consulted on.

The total bill for these plans amounts to some £250 million plus to be spent on the A40. In addition the housing planned in the Carterton/Witney/Eynsham corridor will ensure that any improvement to the access to Oxford via the A40 will be negated by the volume of traffic increase from that housing. In short, these taxpayer funds are in danger of being spend with no effect to the flow of traffic on the A40 and therefore will be money down the drain.

The argument is given that all this has already been consulted; however the documentation, some three years ago, accompanying this general discussion of options, contained a serious flaw in that it claimed that traffic going straight through on the A40 was less than 20 per cent, when the actual figure is estimated at double that; there is an argument to say that plans based on wrong data will inevitably produce the wrong solution.

The first 'improvement' to this road should be a new road joining Duke's Cut to the Loop roundabout to carry all traffic heading north before meeting the Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts and that is now needed urgently.

As the total funds reflect the almost identical estimated cost of a light railway/Wuppertal option/tram predominantly along the old railway line from Carterton through Witney and Eynsham to Oxford (perhaps via Long Hanborough), surely that should be pursued in preference as it would draw passengers off the A40 and negate the necessity of spending any money on that road.

Was this seriously considered before you in the Growth Board approved the A40 plans and the HiF bid and if not, will you now do so urgently as this is the only way the current and future problems of the A40 will be met?

Response

The A40 Project to which the question refers was approved by the County Council prior to the existence of the Growth Board, and is now a confirmed and funded project, subject to the submission and approval of the final Business Case.

The Dukes Cut proposal (A40 – A44) scheme is a separate proposal under consideration as part of the wider growth and infrastructure planning for Oxfordshire.

The reinstatement of the old rail line as a transport corridor has also been previously considered. However, the County Council's assessment is that this would be an extremely challenging and very costly scheme, primarily because the previous rail alignment (which was only a single track) has been built over at several locations. Consequently, it is not a priority for rail development or investment for either the rail industry or local authorities within the current planning framework. Instead, other investment that would support the A40 transport corridor – for example to further enhance and upgrade the Cotswold Line – is being taken forward. There will be a joint analysis of rail development opportunities in the Central Oxfordshire area as part of the next phase of the infrastructure studies that we are undertaking.

Supplementary question (read out at the meeting)

It would be courteous of me to thank the Growth Board for their response, but I find myself severely disappointed by the negative approach adopted.

The problems of traffic on the A40 and access to Oxford, as well as its role as a national 'trunk' road, requires an innovative blue sky thinking approach today; tomorrow with the 16,000 plus new houses to be built by 2031 in the Carterton/Witney/Eynsham corridor, no loop roundabout road from the A40 to the A44, a Park and Ride at the wrong end of where the congestion is and able to accommodate only some five per cent of daily passing traffic, the prospects of the current plans achieving an improvement to the flow on the A40 are nil.

Clearly the West Oxfordshire economy is throttled by the current situation. Your response indicates to the residents of Oxfordshire that you are not really interested in solving the current A40 problems for now or the next decade.

Would the Growth Board therefore at least support a comprehensive and constructive review of the most effective possible options to this major bottleneck, which is such a nightmare in the lives of local residents, and through traffic equally, since the present plans merely spend public money through government funding without any prospect of it achieving any improvement to the flow of the A40?

Response from Cllr Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council Leader

There was £35m of public funds definitely available for improvements. The HIF bidding round was 15x oversubscribed so the likelihood of funding for this realistically was low. So between the HIF, the Deal, and other available but limited funds we would need to see what was feasible. However the County Council would continue to work on productive and suitable improvements.