

Minutes of a meeting of the OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD on Thursday 26 April 2018

Voting members of the Committee present:

Councillor Bob Price	Chair - Executive Member of Oxford City Council
Councillor Jane Murphy	Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor Barry Wood	Leader of Cherwell District Council
Councillor Ian Hudspeth	Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor James Mills	Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council

Non-Voting members of the Committee present:

Professor Linda King (substitute for Professor Alistair Fitt)	Universities Representative
Catherine Turner	Homes England Representative
Veronica James	Environment Agency Representative

Officers:

Paul Staines	Oxfordshire Growth Board Partnership Programme Manager
Nigel Tipple	Chief Executive, OXLEP
Caroline Green	Assistant Chief Executive, Oxford City Council
Gordon Mitchell	Chief Executive, Oxford City Council
Peter Clark	Chief Executive, Oxfordshire County Council
Giles Hughes	Head of Strategic Planning, West Oxfordshire District Council
Yvonne Rees	Joint Chief Executive of South Northamptonshire and Cherwell District Councils.
Christine Gore	Executive Director, West Oxfordshire and Cotswold District Councils
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 District Councils
Jennifer Thompson	Committee and Members Services Officer, Oxford City Council

Apologies:

Councillor Matthew Barber	Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council
Jeremy Long	Chairman of OXLEP

Adrian Lockwood	Vice Chairman of OXLEP and Skills Board Representative
Phil Shadbolt	OXLEP Business Representative – Bicester
Professor Alistair Fitt	Universities Representative (substituted by Prof Linda King)
Louise Patten	Oxfordshire CCG Representative
Lesley Tims	Environment Agency Representative (Substituted by Veronica James)

78. Declarations of interest

None.

79. Minutes of the last meeting

The Board confirmed as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board held on 26 April 2018.

80. Growth Board: Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed South Oxfordshire District Council's new Leader, Councillor Jane Murphy, to the Growth Board.

He noted this was the last meeting for him and for the Vale of White Horse District Council's Leader, Councillor Matthew Barber, and for OxLEP representatives Richard Venables and Andrew Harrison.

81. Growth Board: Public Participation

In accordance with the public participation scheme the Chair invited those who had submitted questions or registered to give an address to speak to the Board.

The Board had before them a written question submitted by the Oxford Civic Society and a written response from the Chair

Ian Green, Chair of the Oxford Civic Society, read the submitted question, and the Chair read the response.

Councillor Emily Smith read an address submitted by Councillor Debbie Hallett (Vale of White Horse District Councillor) on agenda item 8: Statement of Common Ground, particularly addressing the issue of affordable housing.

The Chair said that the statement and the referenced reports would be considered when finalising the Statement of Common Ground and in the development of the JSSP.

Sue Haywood, representing Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, gave an address on agenda items 8 and 10 asking for consideration of accountability, transparency and openness in setting up the proposed sub-groups.

The Chair gave a short response.

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

82. Presentation on the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy

Nigel Tipple introduced the developing Oxfordshire Energy Strategy.

Tim Allen (Peter Brett Associates) gave a presentation on the Energy Strategy, its objective being to ensure that a shortage of clean, reliable, low cost energy does not constrain the delivery of growth, and its links with other industrial and infrastructure projects in Oxfordshire and beyond.

In speaking to the presentation (attached) and in answer to questions he said:

1. Objectives would be refined as the strategy developed;
2. Clean energy and low-carbon dioxide producing energy could halve damaging emissions in the county, but there was a considerable challenge to deliver this: opportunities to increase low-carbon and clean generation would be included in the strategy.
3. Generating capacity compared to energy needs within the county was low compared to the national average and there was a low diversity of sources. The county's energy production and use should however fit within a national strategy of generation and usage.
4. The capacity requirements to support planned growth to 2030 were considerable; the configuration of the grid was under pressure from the change to two-way and distributed generation; and suitable locations for clean energy generation, employment or housing could not be utilised because of lack of grid capability or connectivity.
5. Changes to energy usage (eg rising numbers of electric cars and increasing demand from technology including 'always on' and 'intelligent' devices) posed significant challenges. If all cars were electric, electricity demand for charging batteries would quadruple and the domestic supply network would be unable to handle the load.
6. Neither energy consumption nor cost would decrease on current trends.
7. Lack of suitable energy supplies and connections was becoming a factor when commercial and research enterprises chose their location or considered expansion.
8. The strategy highlighted opportunities for scalability, efficient energy use through passive house building, better building standards, increasing generation through local energy-from-waste schemes and photovoltaics. However some solutions may be unfeasible in certain locations or in combination with others, or be impossible to use in the county: for example the topography meant large-scale hydropower was not feasible.
9. Energy suppliers SSE were building models to allow them to plan the capacity needed to support economic and domestic growth, and this strategy, the developing industrial strategy and the plans for housing growth needed to be built into this.

10. More pro-active energy capacity planning was required, and a different regulatory framework which did not (as now) discourage energy infrastructure and capacity installation during the initial planning stages of major developments.
11. Key conclusions were: make planning more innovative as a route to change; get the information flows right; scale existing technologies; major investment is required; develop a coalition of key partners and community support for change.

The Board noted in comments:

- The final report should contain an evidence base for the current and future energy needs of Oxfordshire to enable the Growth Board and OxLEP to lobby for investment.
- Investment strategy should recognise potential investments into the energy network from other sources including innovation funds and private investors, and involve other relevant funding partners.
- The draft of a final comprehensive strategy incorporating the comments of the Board would be presented to OxLEP at its June meeting for approval and then made available on the Growth Board website (www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org)

83. NPPF consultation briefing

Giles Hughes (Head of Strategic Planning, West Oxfordshire District Council) and Adrian Colwell (Cherwell District Council) gave an overview of the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the published consultation documents, reporting:

1. Consultation closes on 10 May 2018
2. There was an emphasis on policies permitting speedy delivery of housing but an under-emphasis on the relationships between housing, infrastructure and economy.
3. A standardised methodology of calculating housing need was proposed; with the 'presumption for sustainable development' remaining in the absence of a 5-year land supply.
4. The need for a 5-year land supply was retained, with the addition of an annual update and performance and position statement.
5. Development was still a plan-led process, with a continual review process and scope for Statements of Common Ground between planning authorities, and with viability being determined as a whole as part of making the plan rather than site by site – so once the local plan was agreed, each site was deemed to be viable.
6. Policies on Green Belt, town centre protections, and pooling developer contributions on larger sites were amended.
7. The direction generally supported the Growth Deal, including the outline of likely freedoms and flexibilities for local authorities, but care should be taken in individual and joint responses to coherently reflect the wider common issues.
8. Health is included as a key issue; there is a strong emphasis on design; and on the role played by neighbourhood plans.
9. Government reports would form material considerations for both developments and local plans.

The Growth Board agreed that Giles Hughes should send on behalf of the Board a collective response to the consultation including views on new flexibilities and freedoms.

84. Housing and Growth Deal - approval of Draft Statement of Common Ground

The Board considered a report setting out the submitted draft Statement of Common Ground.

Giles Hughes introduced the report, noting that it would be finalised after the new NPPF was published and it would be subject to at least annual review.

The Growth Board noted the report and endorsed the attached Statement of Common Ground.

85. Approval of Planning Freedoms and Flexibilities consultation including three year housing land supply

The Board considered a report setting out a proposed consultation paper on planning freedoms and flexibilities.

The Growth Board approved the publication for public consultation of Appendix 1 to the report (proposed planning flexibilities consultation paper) on the proposed Oxfordshire planning freedoms and flexibilities specifically the introduction of a three year housing land supply requirement.

86. Approval of Revised Growth Board Terms of Reference

The Growth Board considered a report setting out the revised terms of reference including the new structure for sub-groups and scrutiny, and arrangements for delegation to the Executive Officers Group to provide resources for the new structures and the delivery plan.

Details of the three advisory sub-groups and the formal Growth Board Scrutiny Committee would be presented to the June meeting, by which time councils would have filled their allocated seats. Changes to officer structure would be made to support these groups.

Councillor Mills asked and was assured that the Board would continue to press Highways England to use data and evidence from Oxfordshire as a whole in its work on the Ox-Cam corridor.

The Growth Board endorsed the revised Terms of Reference for the Oxfordshire Growth Board (the Joint Committee) contained in the report with the following changes:

- To amend 4.4 to allocate the Environment Agency a non-voting place on the Board;

- Redraft some sections of the terms of reference to improve clarity of expression;

and asked that the final terms of reference be circulated for confirmation.

87. Matters arising from OXLEP including implementation of productivity strand and LIS

Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP, reported that:

- Work on the Local Industrial Strategy was continuing as planned, including work with government ministers on strategy and budget requirements;
- The Local Industrial Strategy was taking account of government guidance documents on clean growth and environmental strategy;
- OXLEP were seeking senior officers' input into the strategy and would take account of the JSSP as it developed;
- It was intended to be a dynamic strategy reviewed periodically to reflect progress and activity.

88. Oxfordshire and cross corridor Transport update

Bev Hindle (Strategic Director, Oxfordshire County Council) informed the Board that there was no report for this meeting but there would be an update at the June meeting on the HIF bids, cross-corridor work and the rail connectivity study.

Cllr Mills reminded the Board that, in his view Highways England needed to ensure that when considering the impacts of the growth corridor that they considered the impacts upon Oxfordshire as whole and not just those districts through which the Corridor could potentially travel.

The Chairman asked officers to write to Highways England on this matter to state this point.

89. Updates on matters relevant to the Growth Board

No reports.

90. Dates of next meetings

The Growth Board noted the dates of future meetings as set out in the agenda.

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.30 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 11 June 2018

GROWTH BOARD QUESTIONS AND WRITTEN RESPONSES

26 APRIL 2018

1. Question from Oxford Civic Society, read by Ian Green Chair of the Oxford Civic Society

We very strongly welcome the preparation of the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan and, as we have indicated several times at earlier OGB meetings we are ready to actively support the preparation of the JSSP.

We note the intention to shape the JSSP by early, proportionate and meaningful engagement with communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and statutory consultees and we would welcome the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement. Will the OGB agree to a participatory approach to the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement?

In a similar way, the Oxfordshire Futures Group of the Oxford Civic Society would like to submit to the OGB a report which is intended to be a contribution to the dynamic continuing formulation of the Statement of Common Ground. Will the OGB agree to receive and consider this contribution to the continuing formulation of the Statement of Common Ground?

He noted in his reading that 'early and meaningful' discussions were critical.

Response

The Board is willing to explore with the Civic Society and other stakeholders a participatory approach to finalising the Statement of Community Involvements for the Joint Strategic Spatial Plan (JSSP), and have asked the relevant officers from the JSSP Project Team to contact the Oxford Civic Society and other organisations that have an interest in planning and development to set up meetings to discuss how this can be taken forward. I hope that you will hear from our officers in the next few days.

In a verbal response, the Chair reminded all present that collective working was key to the success of the JSSP.

2. Address to the Board by Cllr Debby Hallett, Vale member for Botley & Sunningwell and Chairman of Scrutiny on agenda item 8: Statement of Common Ground - affordable housing or houses that people can afford.

I'm Cllr Debby Hallett, Chairman of the Vale Scrutiny committee, and co-chairman of the joint SODC and Vale Scrutiny Committee.

Today, we're creating an opportunity for the Oxfordshire Growth Board to collaborate across boundaries to help solve the most intractable problems we face: 1) our main highways are regularly operating over their capacity, and 2) houses here are too expensive for the people who work here to be able to afford them.

I recently asked for a report to come to Vale Scrutiny on the state of housing affordability locally. It came in Feb 2018; it's called 'Houses that People Can Afford'. Vale's report confirms what's previously been anecdotal evidence. Here are some main points:

1. The affordability level as defined by SHMA, is higher than as defined by Institute for Public Policy; SHMA uses gross income, IPP uses net income, so income is considered after tax. We need a consistent definition of 'affordability'. Basically, a useful heuristic might be this: housing is unaffordable if a household spends more than 35% of its net income on housing.
2. There was no data available for Vale or Oxfordshire housing specifically, so we used data from all of Western England, as the closest comparable area. Housing in Vale is more expensive though, so the affordability is likely even lower than what's quoted in the report.
3. We looked at house prices and rents in quartiles. In order to buy a lower quartile property costing £255,000 in Vale, an income of £57,000 is needed, which is an upper quartile income. So only the highest income levels can afford to buy the lowest priced properties.
4. Only 18% of ownership options are comfortably affordable at all, and then only to the highest incomes. (Ownership options are shared ownerships, first time buyers, help to buy, starter homes etc.) So four out of five ownership options are basically unaffordable to everyone.
5. Help to buy schemes make houses affordable only to top earners (over \$56,000).
6. Private rentals and any sort of ownership tenure are unaffordable to lower quartile income households. Only social rent is affordable to them, and we don't have enough social housing. (Social rents are approximately 50% of market rents.)

The whole report is available here:

<http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/documents/s43516/Housing%20that%20is%20truly%20affordable%20FINAL.pdf>

Last month (March 2018) Parliament published a useful report:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7747>

I urge the leaders of Oxfordshire's councils to do all you can under these new rules of working and within upcoming new planning policies to make some measurable headway into solving Oxfordshire's housing problem. Explore the options, be courageous and creative, and find sustainable solutions that improve people's lives here in the county.

Response

In a verbal response, the Chair said that the statement and the referenced reports would be considered when finalising the Statement of Common Ground and in the development of the JSSP.

3. Address to the Board by Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, given by Sue Haywood on agenda items 8 and 10

As Growth Board members will be aware, Need Not Greed Oxfordshire is broadly supportive of the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan process, which we hope will introduce a more strategic approach to assessing, avoiding and mitigating the environmental and social impacts of growth.

We believe public engagement and transparent and open decision-making is an essential pre-requisite to a successful process and outcome. It is also clear that decisions taken to benefit one area of the county could have significant impacts, either positive or negative, on the whole county including areas well away from the immediate vicinity of a project.

We therefore welcome the announcement of a Scrutiny Committee to help oversee the JSSP process. However, as accountability for decision-making moves further away from elected members, the responsibility, powers and make up of this committee are of particular importance. Equally important is an early decision on the make-up and terms of reference for the JSSP board and project team.

As we understand it, there will be a JSSP project team but no further details about make-up or terms of reference. Then there is the JSSP project board, also without details about make-up or terms of reference. There is the Joint Board Sub-committee, make-up unknown, which will meet in private to overview progress. And then there is the Scrutiny Committee, which will be public and have representation at least from each authority but there is no apparent provision for timeliness, meaningful input, transparency or power of veto.

How will the Growth Board guarantee that all these bodies will be effective, not self-selecting, properly accountable, and will include not just expert consultation but also proper representation for active input into the decision processes?

For example, what opportunity will there be for each authority to have a meaningful voice, given the restriction for their Council input going forwards to just three decision points? Will any one District have a power of veto over proposals?

What role might there be for other stakeholder bodies such as the Environment Agency or the Cotswold Conservation Board on any of these committees?
How will the Scrutiny Committee have a sufficiently timely and transparent view of the progress of the project that they can canvass opinion from the local authorities

they are representing and genuinely protect the interests of the communities to which they are accountable?

There are also still many unknowns that remain to be decided upon, such as the relationship of the JSSP and Local Plans, and the methods and timescales of public engagement. We would have welcomed the opportunity to have input to these.

The Growth Board has a valuable opportunity here to put specific wording on transparency and accountability into both the Terms of Reference and Statement of Common Ground, to protect the needs of each authority whilst ensuring sustainable outcomes for the whole county. We hope the Growth Board will now take that opportunity.'

With regards to the housing supply flexibilities package, we very much welcome the Growth Board's acknowledgement of the damage caused by speculative development in the county over recent years and support any attempt to minimise this risk going forward.

The news of a potential 3 Year Housing Supply for Oxfordshire is welcome as far as it goes, but we would seek clarity on what would happen at the end of this temporary situation. If there is a backlog of unfulfilled quotas, would we run the risk of being penalised more heavily further down the line?

Need not Greed Oxfordshire is asking that, **where local authorities are choosing to opt for growth over and above that identified by the new Government assessment of housing need, their housing supply test/housing delivery test should only rest on the lower figure.** We trust the Growth Board and/or constituent authorities will be responding to the Government's current consultation on the revised National Planning Policy Framework and ask you to support NNGO's position on this point.

Response

The Chair gave a verbal response outlining the main points where there were opportunities for the public to engage with the proposed committees and sub-committees in the terms of reference before the Board. The final decisions on the JSSP would be taken by each council, and he reassured the speaker that there would be opportunity for public involvement and consultation during the development of the JSSP. The points about the potential 3 year land supply were noted.