

Growth Board 26th July 2017
Public participation
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To: Oxfordshire Growth Board
Date: 26 July 2017
Title of Report: Public participation - requests to address the meeting and questions submitted have been listed in the order submitted.

Introduction

1. Members of the public can address or ask questions of the Oxfordshire Growth Board.
2. Addresses and questions submitted by the deadline are listed below in strict order of receipt by the host authority.
3. Where written responses are available, these will be circulated at the meeting. The Chair may give a verbal response in place of or in addition to this. If no response is available for the meeting a written response will be sent and circulated to all Board members within ten working days of the meeting.

Addresses and questions

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1. Question from Helen Marshall, Director, CPRE

Given that the Oxfordshire Growth Board is actively engaging in the O2C Corridor discussions, based on the National Infrastructure Commission's stated ambition of creating 700,000 jobs and 1million new houses, what assessments have been made of the environmental impacts in relation to the supposed economic benefits.

Response

The National Infrastructure Commission or NIC is a Government advisory body, tasked with looking at the long term economic potential of the corridor and will make recommendations to government in respect of growth strategies and the implications for infrastructure necessary to achieve that economic growth potential. Oxfordshire has current commitments of homes and jobs growth to 2031, with an examination of infrastructure needs rolling forward to 2040. Infrastructure to support current committed growth has been a key focus for our engagement with the NIC.

Our involvement in the O2C discussions has two aspects, as set out in the NIC update report.

- An examination of the issues and implications of such growth upon transport connectivity in what's called the first/last mile; i.e. the end of the corridor here in Oxford/Oxfordshire
- The development of a pan-corridor governance model that could oversee future collaborative work on infrastructure, transport and strategic planning activities in the corridor.

Clearly it is very early days for these projects which may or may not lead to more detailed planning work above and beyond our current growth commitments. If this is the case this work will be undertaken in accordance with statute and regulation and involve full public engagement on the full range of implications for any proposals including environmental impacts.

2. Question from Robert Warne, Chairman of Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE), on behalf of the Need not Greed Oxfordshire coalition

Need not Greed Oxfordshire welcomes the principle of an Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy as a necessary first step to a more strategic approach to development. However, we wish to ask the Growth Board:

- why the level of consultation now proposed falls far short of what was originally set out in the May 2016 paper to the Growth Board?

- how it anticipates that constructive contributions from knowledgeable organisations, such as those involved in the environmental sector, can now genuinely be obtained (noting that the deadline for comment is 3 September, but the whole document is intended for sign-off by the Growth Board on 26 Sept)?

- and what steps might be taken to re-visit the growth targets in light of the fact that only 1/18th of the infrastructure funding deemed necessary to support them has so far been identified?'

Response

The Board gave a commitment in the brief for the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy or OXiS that it would engage with the public and stakeholders. We would not agree that the plans we have for engagement falls short of the commitment given.

At the time of response all available work completed so far on OXiS is available to the public on the Growth Boards web pages, including an opportunity to respond. Further engagement is planned for later in the summer via a drop-in session for interested parties and stakeholders, although at the time of response dates have yet to be confirmed. In addition to the drop-in session we have promoted the public consultation process through the media and on the various Councils' websites – such that everyone that can add value through their engagement are being included.

We are therefore confident that we are fully meeting our obligations to engage and will of course ensure that when the final report is brought before the Board, that the narrative reflects the input we will have received to the engagement exercise and our response to that where appropriate.

Finally you ask about the identified gap between the funding required and that currently identified. It is important to note that OXiS covers the period up to 2040 and is a collation of the entire infrastructure requirements identified as being required by the various providers/sectors during that period. Not all infrastructure is required now, but will be necessary should all the growth as set out in District Local Plans come forward.

The Board recognises the challenge this poses to us as we develop our growth strategies for Oxfordshire and all partners will be working with the developers, infrastructure providers and government to ensure that funding is available to meet the required infrastructure where we can. Part of the rationale for OXiS is that it will provide a framework that will better enable us to make the case to attract funding for infrastructure required to support sustainable growth.

3. Address by Ian Green, Chairman, Oxford Civic Society relating to items 6,7,11 and 12

Text of address submitted:

Thank you for this opportunity to make a statement to the Board.

My statement concerns the Minutes of the previous meeting (para 65), Items 6 and 7, 11 and 12. All in 3 minutes. Here goes.

Minutes Para 65 – Growth Board Public Participation. *We made comments on the Growth Board public participation process in the recent Growth Board consultation. However from Growth Board's comments on our comments, it seems that our main point has been missed.*

Our main point was that before we focus on how statements are made at Growth Board meetings, or how questions are asked and answered, attention should be given to explaining to the Oxfordshire community at large what the Growth Board does and how it does it. We have plenty of evidence that the purpose and process of the Growth Board is not widely understood.

The Growth Board is doing very good things and should not hide its light under a bushel.

Oxford Civic Society also offered to collaborate with the Growth Board Secretariat to research how organisations similar to the Oxfordshire Growth Board, and across the country, work with their communities. Disappointingly, there was no response to this offer, but it still stands

Items 6, 7 and 11 – Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and Joint Spatial Plan – we very much support these initiatives and recommend that they and especially the Joint Spatial Plan, are developed in a way which includes thorough public discussion of key issues.

OCS is very willing to constructively support this by, for example, organising public meetings.

Along with Friends of the Earth we contributed to a meeting at Brookes some weeks ago on Climate Change and Planning – we saw this as an early attempt to collaborate constructively to joint planning in Oxfordshire, but such events would be more effective if they were integrated into the Joint Spatial Plan preparation process.

We would welcome discussion on how civic organisations might contribute in this way - perhaps discussion of the way in which this could be done could be included in the preparation of the Business Plan before the next Growth Board meeting?

Item 12 – NIC E-W Corridor – linked of course to Items 6, 7 and 11 – we very much support this national level initiative as well and have been participating in NIC E-W corridor workshops and events.

OCS organises talks and events throughout the year, on topics concerning Oxford and Oxfordshire. We would be happy to include a public talk or talks on the E-W corridor with speakers from Growth Board members. The talk or talks do not need to be held in Oxford – they would be organised by our Oxfordshire Futures Group which includes civic groups from Oxfordshire and could be held anywhere where they would be useful.

We are sure that this would be a very popular topic

Overall comment –

With the Growth Board doing so much that is so positive is it possible for the Unitary County proposal supported by 3 Oxfordshire local authorities and the counter proposal supported by the other three local authorities to be taken off the table of the Secretary of State at DCLG?

It is not helpful to have the Damocletian sword of massive local government disruption hanging over these very forward looking and positive Growth Board activities.

Thank you

Verbal response at the meeting

The Chair noted the address and thanked Mr Green, and said that he and officers would consider the offers of help and suggestions above .

4. Address by Robert Warne, Chairman of Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE), on behalf of the Need not Greed Oxfordshire coalition – relating to OXIS

Text of address submitted:

I am Robert Warne, Chairman of Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE), speaking today on behalf of Need not Greed Oxfordshire, a coalition of over 30 local organisations from across the county.

Need not Greed Oxfordshire welcomes the principle of an Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OXIS) as a necessary first step to a more strategic approach to development.

However, we are concerned that the level of consultation now proposed falls far short of what was originally set out in the May 2016 paper to the Growth Board.

We are unclear how constructive contributions from knowledgeable organisations, such as those involved in the environmental sector, can now genuinely be obtained (noting that the deadline for comment is 3 September, but the whole document is intended for sign-off by the Growth Board on 26 Sept).

It is hard to envisage that any comments will be taken on in any meaningful manner in this timeline. We would appreciate any reassurances that the Growth Board can give that this will be the case.

The Growth Board press release claims the report is “independent” – this seems to be a claim without any justification as there has been no independent objective assessment of the claims made by commercial, privately owned, infrastructure providers of their requirements. It is essential to identify the scale of infrastructure provision that is required to address the existing deficit and planned growth in Oxfordshire, as opposed to that required by infrastructure providers for servicing their shareholders or other clients – such as Thames Water’s focus on building a mega-reservoir in Oxfordshire to serve their list of assets and the needs of London, (rather than mending their leaking pipework).

This assessment is simply not evident in the Stage 1 report.

Finally, we are concerned that only £500million of the £9billion of infrastructure funding deemed necessary to support the growth targets has so far been identified. This £8.5billion funding gap seems unbridgeable – even the DUP only got £1billion!!

Whilst it is noted that a ranking system to prioritise investments will be used, the sole determinant for this is listed as “directly supporting sites that will deliver the required economic and housing growth”. We invite the Growth Board to consider other determinants, such as where funding could best deliver protection and enhancement of the environment in light of both existing and planned development.

However, given that securing the total amount is vanishingly unlikely, we look forward to seeing the growth targets revised downwards to reflect this situation.

We reiterate that Need not Greed Oxfordshire supports the principle of OxIS as a vital stepping stone to a robust Joint Spatial Plan. It must therefore not just be a tick box exercise, but addressed properly, with genuine public engagement (not just lip service),

Thank you

Robert Warne

Verbal response at the meeting

The Chair said that the funding shortfall, while very large, would be met over a long period and sources for funding for different stages and projects would emerge over time and from a variety of sources. Cllr Barber shared reservations about the need and benefit of the proposed reservoir and that he considered there were far more pressing problems to deal with.

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