

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET - 20 APRIL 2021

OXFORDSHIRE'S STRATEGIC VISION FOR LONG TERM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Report by Corporate Director for Environment and Place

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- (a) Agree the final Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Long Term sustainable Development (attached at Annex 1), noting that it was endorsed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board at its meeting on 22 March.**
- (b) Consider agreeing the Vision as the basis for informing future county council plans and strategy development, notably the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OXIS) and the future Nature Recovery Network Strategy.**
- (c) Note the implications and observations outlined in paragraphs 13 to 25 in this report.**

Executive Summary

1. As a partner of the Growth Board, the County Council has been part of the commissioning and development of a new Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development. The Growth Board published a draft Vision document for engagement in November which was considered by Cabinet on 15 December.
2. Cabinet welcomed the ambition of the Vision and endorsed the timing of a new vision with respect to the development of associated partnership strategic and plans. Cabinet welcomed the definition of *Good Growth*.
3. Since then the Growth Board has further refined the Vision through significant engagement with stakeholders (See Annex 2 for the Engagement Summary). Specifically, feedback suggested that there was an appetite for an approach that:
 - is more Oxfordshire-specific and reflects local people's opinions and priorities;
 - prioritises climate change;
 - focusses on social, economic, and environmental well-being, not solely on a narrow definition of growth.

4. This feedback echoed the sentiments that recently led to revised Growth Board Terms of Reference (See Annex 3) and a belief that the Board could articulate Oxfordshire's common and shared ambition in a long-term Vision for our county.
5. The Strategic Vision will establish this common and shared ambition and provide an overarching framework for future plans and strategies – but it is not intended to replace or set the specific vision for any of individual communities or partner organisations.
6. The Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire marks a significant development for Oxfordshire as a comprehensive articulation of what future growth in Oxfordshire should look like based on enhanced social, environmental and economic wellbeing. It is hoped that this balanced statement of ambition reflecting the priorities of the county will become the cornerstone of all future plans and strategies for Oxfordshire.
7. Officers have reviewed the final Strategic Vision and recommend that the Cabinet agree it and so thereafter it acts as the overall Vision under which county council future plans and strategies should be aligned. These would include the emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OXIS) and the future Nature Recovery Network Strategy for example.
8. We have however made some observations that could result in some very minor changes to the Vision before it is published and launched. These relate to the reference to the environmental strategy in the diagram on page 12 of the Vision. Other observations are associated to transport/connectivity and zero carbon targets and require no changes.

Background

9. 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.

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.

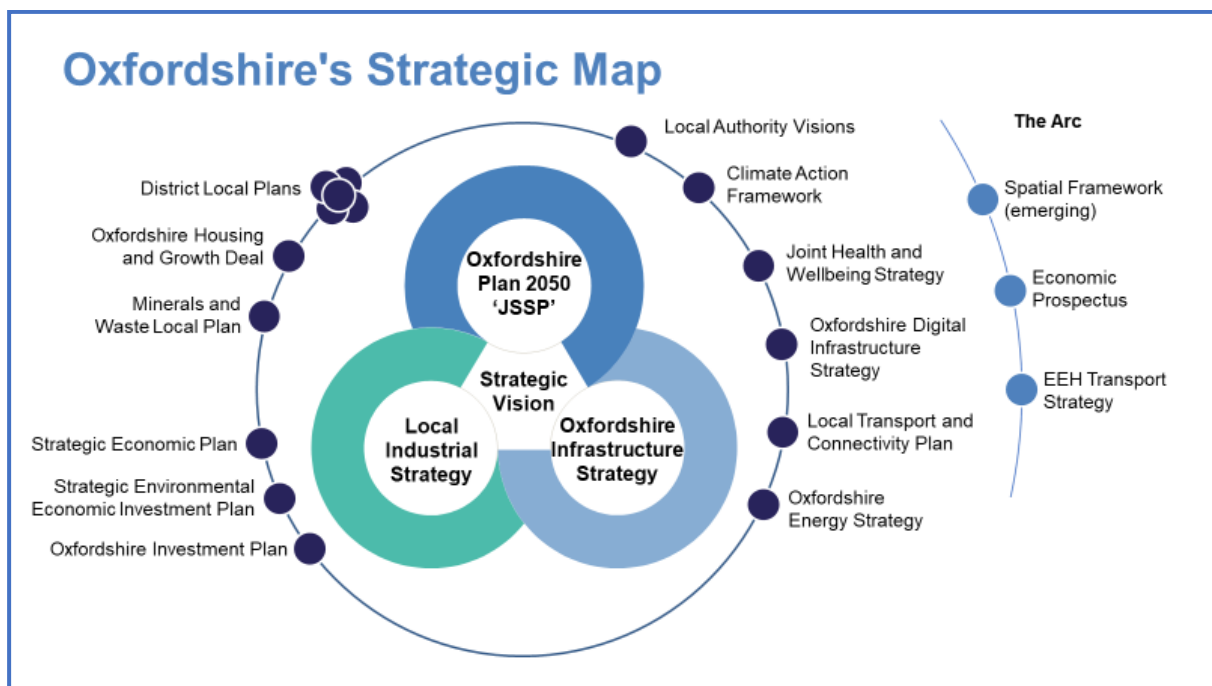
² As a Joint Committee, the Board may discharge executive functions if delegated to it by each constituent local authority, but each constituent authority retains the ability to exercise all executive and non-executive functions generally and specifically in relation to economic development including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

10. 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.
11. The Strategic Vision was endorsed by the Growth Board at its meeting on 22 March. The Vision is being considered for endorsement by all local authorities in Oxfordshire throughout the spring.
12. At its meeting on 15 December Cabinet:
 - Welcomed the ambition and timing of the draft Vision. The document and responses during consultation would bring together a sense of the ambition and vision of all the councils in Oxfordshire;
 - Commended the efforts to define good growth particularly in light of and in support of the Housing and Growth Deal.

Implications and Observations on the final Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

13. It is noted that the timing of the endorsement of the final Strategic Vision is important. There are several reasons for this:
 - For the Strategic Vision to play its role in supporting the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, agreement will need to be no later than Spring 2021- ahead of the pre-election purdah period before the May elections. This will then allow the Vision to play its appropriate role in helping shape the next stage of the Oxfordshire Plan ahead of the Regulation 18 consultation timetabled for Summer 2021;
 - The Oxfordshire Plan is also supported by two other emerging strategies that need to be in place by the time the Plan heads to Examination. The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. Both also will need to draw upon and align with the Vision as the framework for their conclusions as they head towards consultation later this year;
 - The Government has recently announced detail of its ambitions to develop a spatial framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Oxfordshire will want to be well-positioned to influence the Framework as it gathers momentum and the Vision will provide a strong basis for our contribution to this emerging work.
14. Cabinet will note that the Vision now comprises three components - these are:

- A statement of what the Vision for Oxfordshire is – these are the outcomes that Oxfordshire is seeking to achieve;
 - A statement of what constitutes the ‘Good Growth’ that will deliver the Vision;
 - A set of principles that will guide Oxfordshire in achieving ‘Good Growth’.
15. Growth Board Officers have also edited the Vision to make it more readable and succinct and consequently it is some 15% shorter than the original draft.
 16. The County Council has welcomed the opportunity to contribute to a new Strategic Vision for long-term sustainable development in Oxfordshire. We agree that it is important to develop shared purpose and objectives that sit outside of the formal planning regime and we think that this must be a key tool for engaging residents on the future of communities.
 17. We are pleased to see the Oxfordshire Strategic Map on page 12 that demonstrates how the Vision will influence plans and strategies at a district and city, county and regional level. At an Oxfordshire-wide level they include the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy, the Climate Action Framework, the Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, while sub-nationally the spatial framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and England's Economic Heartland's Transport Strategy will have important roles to play.



18. Although we are not seeking any major changes to the final Strategic Vision, we have the following points to make at this stage which the Growth Board should consider before final publication and launch.

Environment and natural capital

19. In the list of strategies and strategic influencers diagram (p12) there is reference to the Strategic Environmental Economic Investment Plan (SEEIP). In the relatively near future (i.e. next couple of years) we expect there will be a Nature Recovery Strategy (NRS). This will either be mandated by government or, if not, Oxfordshire will prepare one anyway. This will supersede the SEEIP which itself never really got much traction in the environmental sector. For a Strategic Vision that is forward looking it would seem appropriate to refer to the NRS even if it does not yet exist.
20. We suggest that this could be done by using “**SEEIP / Nature Recovery Strategy**” in the diagram and including reference to it in the list of influencing strategies e.g. **Oxfordshire's Draft Nature Recovery Network [Nature Recovery Strategy]** on p14. The Nature Recovery Strategy will build on but supersede the Nature Recovery Network.

Transport and Connectivity

21. We note there is no specific Guiding Principle related to transport, movement and connectivity in its own right. However, they are woven into the following GPs:
 - **Guiding Principle 2:** We will create the conditions to support a world leading and innovation rich economy which is clean, prosperous, diverse, inclusive, successful and sustainable – refers to *‘improved physical and digital connectivity’*;
 - **Guiding Principle 3:** We will improve our overall health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities – refers to *‘better access to sustainable, inclusive and resilient active and low carbon transport and improvements in air quality’*;
 - **Guiding Principle 7:** We will embrace technological changes – refers to *‘addressing inequalities, and in its impact on mobility, communications...’*;
 - **Guiding Principle 8:** We will expect high-quality development – refers to *‘New development will contribute to connected communities’*;
 - **Guiding Principle 9:** We will help people to help each other by supporting communities and individuals to achieve positive change for themselves – refers to *‘We will help communities to be more cohesive and better able to adapt to change, based on accessible and quality key services and infrastructure, excellent digital connectivity and strong community networks’*;
 - **Guiding Principle 10:** We will maximise the benefits of strong collaboration within Oxfordshire – refers to *‘We will build stronger collaboration with our partners to secure a plan-led approach to good growth, delivering strategic development opportunities that are aligned*

with our shared ambition and long-term investment priorities, particularly where these provide opportunities to enhance our strategic connectivity’;

- **Guiding Principle 11:** We will proactively and positively engage and collaborate beyond Oxfordshire – refers to ‘*ensuring that our strategic priorities inform regional and sub-regional priorities, including the emerging Oxford-Cambridge Arc*’.

22. We consider that the references to transport, movement and connectivity are sufficiently outlined within the Guiding Principles. Furthermore, the Vision mentions the LTCP within it as a key strategy guiding transport in Oxfordshire in the long term.

Carbon targets

23. Both the emerging Growth Board vision statement and the Arc Environmental Principles target working towards carbon neutrality by 2040 in the County and region (see Inset 1).

Inset 1:

Growth Board Strategic Vision extract (in Guiding Principle 1):

Oxfordshire will be carbon neutral by 2040, or earlier if possible, and by 2050 will be moving towards a carbon negative future.

Arc Vision Statement extract:

Work towards a target of net zero carbon at an Arc level by 2040. This will include:

- a. Ensuring all decisions about development and new infrastructure support this goal.*
- b. Working with Government to enhance building regulations and planning policy to actively reduce the carbon footprint of, and energy consumption in, new buildings.*
- c. Pursuing a major programme of transformation in existing settlements and infrastructure to reduce energy intensity and carbon emissions.*

24. This target is ahead of the national policy context, and as such the implications of meeting such a target are unclear. As an example, net-zero will require all vehicles to be operating at zero carbon. With current government policy allowing the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles until 2030, it’s currently assumed that some would still be in operation by 2040. In addition, there is currently significant uncertainty regarding the decarbonisation of heat on an earlier timeline than 2050. However, agreement to work towards an earlier target marks a statement of ambition for Oxfordshire and the region to draw on its innovation and partnership working strengths.
25. The County Council’s Climate Action Framework is currently targeting 2050 for net zero emissions in line with national policy and the Countywide Energy

Strategy. Alongside the Districts and the LEP, the County Council has commissioned a report on Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire from the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford – setting out pathways to 2050.

Financial Implications

26. The Vision has been prepared and consulted upon from existing resources. Officers will reflect upon any resource implications of developing the Vision further as outlined in the Communications section and report as appropriate.

Comments checked by: Rob Finlayson, Finance BP (Communities, C,OD and CDAI), rob.finlayson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

27. There are no legal implications related to the approval of the Strategic Vision

Comments checked by: Christian Smith, Principal Solicitor (Contracts and Conveyancing), Christian.smith@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality & Inclusion Implications

28. 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, and in particular around addressing persistent inequality.
29. The vision sets out what is means by Good Growth, and a number of the of the definitions is that by 2050 Oxfordshire will:
- Be **healthy and inclusive**, with all development addressing inequalities and contributing positively to the overall health and wellbeing of Oxfordshire's communities, environment and economy.
 - Support diverse, accessible employment, generating a highly productive and **inclusive economy** based on our world-class research, innovation and technology.
 - Build **resilience** to change, with growth planned in ways that: build on strengths and assets to support communities during periods of change; support economic diversity and can accommodate changes in technology; recognise changes in the way that people live and work and changing demographics; and respond to global impacts, particularly from climate and economic changes.

30. There are included in the Vision 11 Guiding Principles (GP) to direct the future direction of Oxfordshire in the longer term. GP 3 is directly related to reducing inequalities:
- We will place overall health and physical and mental wellbeing at the forefront of our decision-making. We will seek to deliver a net increase in the health and wellbeing of people in all our place-shaping decisions and activities, reducing inequalities and helping to enhance the overall quality of life, health and happiness of existing and future residents, recognising the diverse needs within our communities. This will include providing public services to support excellent physical and mental health outcomes, homes to meet all people's needs, jobs to support livelihoods, enhanced access to public and private green spaces, better access to sustainable, inclusive and resilient active and low carbon transport and improvements in air quality. We have access to some of the greatest health care facilities and minds in the world in Oxfordshire and through working closely with the universities and health organisations, we will ensure we are leading on prevention and healthy place-shaping.

Sustainability Implications

31. Sustainable development at the heart of the Strategic Vision. Guiding Principle 1 states:
- We will reduce the impacts of climate change by making climate action a top priority in our decisions. We will maximise opportunities through our plans, strategies and programmes, to reverse the impacts of climate change, demonstrating leadership in carbon reduction, developing nature-based solutions to help mitigate the impacts of climate change, championing more sustainable ways to improve connectivity and supporting emerging transformative technologies and sectors. Our aim is that Oxfordshire will be carbon neutral by 2040, or earlier if possible, and by 2050 will be moving towards a carbon negative future.

Risk Management

32. There are no identified risks for the county council related to the work on the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire.

Communications

34. Upon endorsement of the Vision, Growth Board officers will turn their attention to the development of a communications plan by relevant officers drawn from across the Growth Board organisations to launching the Vision.
35. The Board will then need to consider how to embed the Vision in plans and strategies, both within the Board and wider stakeholders. Two proposals are:
- That the Vision becomes a reference point for all future plans and strategies, and all reports to the Board will be expected to formally set out in summary

form how the recommendations in the report will support the ambitions of the Vision.

- For wider stakeholders, in the first instance ask the Board to recommend to its partner organisations that they individually consider and agree the Vision, thereby giving it the profile required within their respective organisations.
36. The next steps will then be consideration of how the Growth Board will measure progress against the ambitions of the Vision. Officers intend to develop a business case for this next phase of the project over the summer of 2021. This will include agreement of how to measure success, appropriate reporting of these and when it would be appropriate to review and update the Vision, something that was supported in the engagement process.

BILL COTTON

Corporate Director for Environment and Place

Annexes:

1. Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development;
2. Engagement Summary;
3. Oxfordshire Growth Board Terms of Reference

Contact Officer: Dawn Pettis, Strategic Planning Team Leader, 07771 983395

April 2021