

Oxford Strategic Partnership Steering Group

Minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2020

Attendees:

Jan Royall, University of Oxford, Chair
Cllr Susan Brown, Oxford City Council
Tom Bridgman, Oxford City Council
Phil Clare, University of Oxford
Ian Green, Oxford Civic Society
Caroline Green, Oxford City Council
Ahmed Goga, OxLEP
Brendan Hattam, Land Securities
Bev Hindle, Oxfordshire Growth Board
Dan Hodge, Oxford City Council
Lydia Igweh, Oxford Brookes University
Hannah Iqbal, Oxford University Hospital Trust
Emily Lewis-Edwards, Community First Oxfordshire
Jeremy Long, OxLEP
Gordon Mitchell, Oxford City Council
Peter Nolan, Chair, Oxford Economic Growth Steering Group
Matt Peachy, Oxford City Council
Robin Rogers, Oxfordshire County Council
Phil Southall, Oxford Bus Company/Thames Valley Chambers of Commerce
Mish Tullar, Oxford City Council
Richard Venables, VSL and Partners
Stuart Wilkinson, University of Oxford

Apologies

Cllr Gant, Oxford City Council
Cllr Hayes, Oxford City Council
Joe Kidman, Thames Valley Police
Frank Nigriello, Unipart Group

1. Welcome and Apologies

2. Draft minutes of the last meeting & matters arising

Minutes of meeting held on 21st January 2020 (paper 1) were agreed as correct

Gordon Mitchell gave a brief update on the Growth Deal and referred back to how when we met last the South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plans were stuck, but are now going to the inspector with dates being set for a public inquiry.

Cllr Hudspeth added that they have been talking to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government who have been talking to the Treasury about the large Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid linked to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan bid (which was due to be signed off two weeks ago) and hope to have resolution either this week or early next week. If it is not approved it means the 4,500 home Valley Park planning applications cannot go ahead and puts into danger the Vale of White Horse Local Plan.

Gordon highlighted that Oxford City Council's Local Plan 2036 was adopted by the Council on Monday this week.

3. Re-starting the Oxford economy

Gordon Mitchell gave an update on some of the current and possible future impacts on the city. The following points and comments were made:

- There has been a significant negative impact on many firms. However, biotech companies such as Pedal & Post, TOAD are seeing some opportunities
- Issues of landlords and rent not yet worked through. Could be as bad as 1 in 4 shops closed – would change look and feel of the high street
- We expect fewer city centre visitors and tourists for quite a long time, and fewer students
- Lots of office-based organisations are looking at opportunities for homeworking, which reduces the lunchtime economy, and transport needs
- Unemployment was 1.7%, now 3% in city and expected to increase further
- A Good Food Oxford study shows a 3-fold increase in demand for food larders
- Homelessness have seen much higher levels of engagement, but we expect to find exit arrangements a challenge with hotels and YHA. The end of the evictions moratorium could also see an increase in numbers of families and individuals being made homeless.
- Funding gap of c£100m across Oxfordshire local authorities
- However, we are seeing the best air quality in the city in decades, communities supporting each other and a strong scientific contribution from Oxford Companies.

Notes from the discussion that followed:

Cllr Hudspeth said it was disappointing for the Government to call on people to avoid public transport. We do expect people to increase travelling, but there is an opportunity for model shift on transport to bikes and walking.

Peter Nolan said it was worth focusing on the positive messages with research, science etc putting Oxford firmly on the map. For example Oxford Biomedica will be making some of the early batches of the vaccine.

Phil Southall agreed that Government messaging on public transport was not helpful. Their services reduced to 30% of normal (6% at their lowest point) and now back up to 70% however patronage is only running at around 9% so they are on 'Government life support'. However the patronage is higher on the more rural routes and those to more deprived areas (around 16%) which perhaps shows that people don't have the luxury of working from home or other transport options. Mandatory face covering details yet to be provided by Government (should be tomorrow) and its' not yet clear if enforcement of face masks will be up to the company (driver) to enforce or the police.

Cllr Susan Brown expressed sympathy for bus drivers who may get caught in the middle of public disputes and asked if the City Council could support messaging to passengers.

Hannah Iqbal said that the Trust like everyone was focusing on dual role of managing resumption of services which is huge and complex while also having to focus on looking after patients with Covid safely. But as no one knows what will happen it's difficult to model services. It also makes it difficult to manage patients who don't have Covid as there is a challenge with maintaining Covid capacity alongside this. Also need to support staff who are weary and fatigued and concerns about pressure over winter. Also seeing real mental health impact particularly complex mental health needs. However on the positive side there have been partnerships with local business and offers to help staff which is welcome as they very much feel they cannot do it alone.

Ahmed Goga said they were concerned over the arts & cultural sector which is linked to visitor economy, but also to the domestic. The rich vibrancy of the sector in Oxford is under threat as no new work is commissioned. OxLEP is in discussions with the Arts Council and Neil Mendoza, Oriel, who's chairing a task force. Also want to increase focus on manufacturing sector particularly the supply chain into larger companies in the midlands and elsewhere. They are undertaking a piece of work looking at risks and implications for these companies.

Brendan Hattam updated that Westgate is looking to reopen on Monday, probably around 60% of shops, then from July the restaurants, then hopefully cinema and gym. Oxford is likely to be slower at reopening than national figures due to our reliance on students and tourists alongside public transport to get to the shops. We don't expect retailers to open normal hours at first. Late night shopping will be greatly reduced in Oxford and the UK for several months. In Oxford mainly 10-5 and no appetite for extended Sunday trading as retailers are managing staff hours.

Neighbourhood shopping centres in UK have performed relatively better during COVID. Due to less reliance on transport, useful for working from home and perceived as less risky than cities. Brendan asked that partners please be sensitive to the timing of transport changes in the recovery phase.

In the text comments from the meeting:

Phil Southall also asked: I understand that at some point government wants to devolve guidance to 'Local Resilience Forums' to provide more local guidance as COVID possibly becomes more localised. These LRFs are aligned to Police Force areas i.e. Thames Valley and are chaired by the Police with a steer from LA Directors of Public Health with support from agencies. Do we know how Oxfordshire will feature in these going forward and how we influence?

Would be useful to have signage for buses advising people that they will have to turn to the right when alighting until they reach a crossing point?

Action – follow up Phil Southall's question re Local Resilience Forums and signage for disembarking bus passengers (tbc)

Action - Follow up between Oxford Bus Company & Oxford City Council re messaging on public transport rules (Mish Tullar)

Restart

Tom Bridgman went on to talk about the city restart plans (see presentation) such as:

- The practical challenge of opening up urban centres and green spaces. Using Government guidance and key objectives of the High Street Taskforce. Around £3m is being invested by City and County in bike parking, pavements. Then looking to cement active travel benefits.
- These initial measures are ones that don't require changes to the transport network e.g. signage, stencilled on pavements for one-way flows, stewarding, cleaning, removing abandoned bikes, hand sanitizer, cycle parking at P&Rs.
- There are concerns about queuing for the shops that are opening and we're having to insist people queue against shops' façades rather than potentially obstruct the walking routes. There is a separate Covered Market management plan
- Streamline process to get more tables and chairs in the public realm on Cornmarket and Broad St. If network changes happen may be able to do on George St.
- Businesses will need to take ownership – through a risk assessment and responsibility for queuing
- Working closely with County, looking at network changes to widen pavements and segregate cycle lanes. A lot would be made easier if we were to bring forward the city centre bus gates (proposed in Connecting Oxford). These will underpin the active travel measures.

Matt Peachey then talked about the next phase '**Recovery and Rebuild**'

- Oxford has had a higher reduction in credit card spending compared nationally showing the economy's reliance on students and tourists.
- The City Council has many assets in city centre – will need to pivot there.
- There will be changes in the property market and this could lead to an evidence-based review of our planning/property policies. If there is significant vacancies in retail we will need a meanwhile strategy to bridge. Looking at workspace in the city centre - 2 projects of around £2m funded by the LEP. Will also review our asset management plan
- Also looking at a locality response. We have neighbourhood centres, so need to understand how much more important those centres will become.
- The inclusive economy commission is needed more than ever particularly the work we were looking at starting such community wealth building and social value in commissioning.
- There will be a funding challenge for businesses looking to pivot and new businesses looking to start up. So we also need to think about funding for stagnant business and entrepreneurs.
- Brexit is still a concern and we need an inward investment strategy.
- How can we help local residents collectively, skills training is a big piece of work.
- Visitor offer remains strong. Need to rethink our tourism vision.

In the rebuild phase there will be a number of Oxford City Council led initiatives such as

- City-centre public realm, activation & animation strategy
- Community centres and hubs to be used as places of work, training & enterprise
- Develop & deliver Covered Market masterplan proposals to increase footfall & economic activity
- Continued work on Oxpens, SOSV and Blackbird Leys

And partnerships and strategies to be delivered collaboratively include:

- Retain focus on West End, Oxford Station Redevelopment and East West Rail & opportunities in Oxford North
- Push forward with Connecting Oxford & ZEZ and other active transport enhancements
- An additional focus on digital infrastructure needs
- Finalise changes to visitor management (coaches, tour groups etc.) to ensure safe and welcoming approach to international visitors
- Renew Lobby for devolution of skills funding and seek resources for inward investment promotion. This phase will be between 18-36 months from now
- Important to continue to improve our public realm
- Continue to support community centres/hubs which may have bigger role for local economy

Ahmed Goga highlighted that we are in a good position compared with other areas. The LEP has an Oxfordshire wide economic recovery plan. We have a Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) agreed with Government. Also a housing and growth deal mechanism for further engagement with Government. We have good local structures, the LEP, Growth Board, Universities. So these strengths should be emphasised. We need a coordinated voice as Oxfordshire.

The LIS and strategy framework is good going forward. We have a number of interventions we were already taking forward. There will be a fiscal event in the autumn (maybe mini-budget) and those areas that have a strong vision are the most likely to be engaged with. We need plans that can be executed at pace.

The visitor economy discussion doesn't start and end with Experience Oxfordshire. We are one of the top 5 destinations in the UK and the visitor economy supports a huge number of jobs that act as entry points for young people (e.g. apprenticeships) and progress onto other jobs. We have around 20 projects ready to move forward from the LIS – many COVID related.

Bev Hindle said that we are seen from the outside the Arc as good collaborators with a demonstrable track record of delivering locally, we were the first Growth Board which we are in the process of improving. An inclusive economy is part of what the Arcs offer was and as an extension of that, what we want to push for is a future built on sustainable building standards. So sustainability is where we need to focus going forward and we can lead on this space.

The skills agenda is massive, particularly skills in new areas and geographically. That will become more visible and we will be challenged on what we are doing. That will impact on infrastructure of the Arc. You going to start to see community resilience, digital connectivity and schools as areas we want to push locally. Housing must be part of inclusive growth conversation and we must not lose sight of or give into pressure on the need to accelerate work around affordable housing especially low carbon affordable housing.

Emphasis on funding and local control. We will always want to bid to government for further funding, but need to think more about local sources of funding as the pot will be smaller and more people going for it. We don't play well into the levelling up agenda although we know we have issues. We need to do more to address the levelling need within our local area. Local income, local investment and the more we can develop a strong policy framework with a view to take local control over delivery.

Cllr Brown said that we can't lose sight of long term structural issues in our communities, particularly the unequal COVID health and socio-economic impact on our BAME communities. This needs to build into our thinking on inclusivity.

4. Forward Plan

We agreed to find a date to meet in July. Cllr Hudspeth cannot make the current 14th July date.

Action: [If attendees have other suggestions for agenda items later in the year please forward to Shelley Ghazi.](#)

OSP Meeting Date	Standard Agenda Items
Mtg 3. July date and time tbc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Board update • Inclusive growth update
Mtg 4. 13th October 2020 10:30-12:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Board update • Inclusive growth update