

Cherwell District Council

Executive

6 April 2021

Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire

Report of Assistant Director – Growth and Economy

This report is public

Purpose of report

This report introduces a final version of the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire (hereafter referred to as “the Vision”). A copy of the final version of the Vision is attached as Appendix 1.

This report updates the Executive on the consultation process, the response to the consultation and briefly summarises the main changes to the Vision, with the detail provided in Appendix 3. Appendix 2 is the report that was considered by Growth Board on 22 March 2021.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended to:

- 1.1 Agree the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire.
- 1.2 Ask that officers delegate responsibility to the Assistant Director – Growth and Economy to consider how to embed the Vision’s aspirations for Oxfordshire in future plans and strategies of the Council.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Members will recall a report detailing the Oxfordshire Growth Board’s (hereafter referred to as “the Growth Board”) ambition to develop a Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire was presented to the Executive meeting in December 2020. The Draft Vision was considered and supported by the Executive at its meeting on 7th December 2020, following consideration of it by the Council’s Overview Scrutiny’s Committee on 1st December 2020. The Council’s response to the consultation was submitted on 3rd January 2021 confirming Cherwell District Council’s support of the version endorsed by the Growth Board for consultation.
- 2.2 The previous Executive report detailed the background behind the decision to develop the Vision and advised that whilst the genesis of the Vision was the need to

develop an overarching framework for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, the wish was for the Vision to have a wider remit and serve as an overarching Vision ‘umbrella’ under which both the Board and partners could develop the future plans and strategies for their communities that articulated and planned for the future of Oxfordshire.

3.0 Report Details

Consultation on the Vision

- 3.1 The Vision approved by the Growth Board in autumn 2020 was for consultation and engagement, both with key Growth Board partners and the wider general public. Accordingly, a comprehensive consultation and engagement process was undertaken during November and December 2020. As mentioned in paragraph 2.1 above, the Vision was considered by both the CDC Overview and Scrutiny and Executive during December 2020.
- 3.2 The results of the consultation were positive, especially as it was held during the COVID-19 pandemic limiting engagement options to online and specific meetings. The report attached at Appendix 2 and consultation summary at Appendix 3 provides detail on the consultation responses. Of particular note is the innovative work done by Oxfordshire Plan 2050 officers to engage with young people through the use of social media and college based workshops. This was a consequence of the stated wish of the Growth Board that the Vision should be influenced by younger age groups for whom it will have the greatest impact for a longer period of time.
- 3.3 Overall, the results of the consultation proved to be largely supportive of the draft Vision. Of the comments received most were constructive and positive. There was broad support for the range of ambitions highlighted in the Vision. Inevitably, perhaps, in a document that is attempting such a wide reach, there were respondents who felt that their interests, whilst included, did not have the weight or profile that they should, whilst others commented that the document needed to be more Oxfordshire specific.
- 3.4 The Vision has been amended following the consultation exercise and taking into account the points consultees made. Growth Board officers have reflected upon the responses and, without changing the overall balance of the document, have offered additional phraseology to highlight the importance of, for example, the need to address inequalities and the role of Oxfordshire and its place as a national and international centre of excellence. Issues such as the need for inclusive growth have also been strengthened in the revised text. Various changes, to make the document more Oxfordshire specific, have been included, such as references to the County’s rural landscape, countryside and the importance of the rural economy. Finally, the Growth Board proposed that alongside the public consultation, officers would commission consultants to reflect upon the draft Vision and offer informal sustainability advice, specifically whether the draft Vision was consistent, both within the document and when compared to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and whether there were any gaps in the sustainability issues identified. This commission was completed, and all relevant comments incorporated in the attached final version of the Vision.

Timescales for the Vision

- 3.5 The timing of the Vision's agreement, both by the Growth Board and partners, is of great importance. This is because the Vision has an important role to play in shaping the first phase of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 as it heads towards consultation in the summer. To play this role, endorsement by the Growth Board is required ahead of pre-election purdah and subsequent agreement by all partners needs to be in place before the consultation begins in the summer.

Next steps for the Vision

- 3.6 Upon agreement of the Vision by the Growth Board and partners, attention will turn to the development of a communications plan by relevant officers drawn from across the Growth Board organisations to launch the Vision.
- 3.7 The Growth Board will then need to consider how to embed the Vision in plans and strategies beyond the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, both within the Growth Board and wider stakeholders. There are two proposals:
- 3.7.1 *Proposal One* - that the Vision becomes a reference point for all future plans and strategies and all reports to the Growth Board will be expected to formally set out in summary form how recommendations will support the ambitions of the Vision.
- 3.7.2 *Proposal Two* - For local authority and other Board partners - that they individually agree the Vision, thereby giving it the profile required within their respective organisations and then consider how to embed the Vision in their plans and strategies.
- 3.8 A third action will then be consideration of how the Board will measure progress against the ambitions of the Vision. Growth Board 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 success is measured; appropriate reporting of measures and when it would be appropriate to review and update the Vision (something that was supported in the engagement process).

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 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 the Growth Board wants to achieve in Oxfordshire.
- 4.2 Following the consultation exercise, both officers and members who have reflected upon the consultation and revised the Vision believe that the Vision has improved because of the consultation. The document now has a bolder more ambitious narrative that articulates in a balanced way the collective ambitions for what Oxfordshire should be in 2050, both societally, economically and as a place to live work and to thrive.
- 4.3 The Growth Board endorsed the revised Vision at its meeting on 22 March and asked that each partner consider agreeing to the Vision. Accordingly, the Executive is requested to consider and agree the Vision as attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

5.0 Consultation

A programme of public and stakeholder engagement ran from 16 November 2020 to 3 January 2021.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Do nothing

This was rejected as the Strategic Vision is a unique opportunity to agree the strategic direction of the District and the Council has been engaged in the Vision. By not agreeing the Draft Strategic Vision, it could limit the impact of the partnership approach.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 The preparation and development of the Vision will be covered within existing budget and resource allocations. No additional financial commitments are required as part of this report.

Comments checked by:

Michael Furness, Assistant Director - Finance 01295 221845

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Legal Implications

- 7.2 The Vision has a clearly defined non-statutory status. It is understood that the Growth Board officers may seek legal advice, to ensure the agreed language of the Vision moving forward is helpful to, rather than in conflict with, the emerging next stage of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

Comments checked by:

Christopher Mace, Solicitor 01295 221808 christopher.mace@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Risk Implications

- 7.3 There is a risk that by not engaging in the Vision, the Council's views and comments will not be included in shaping the long-term ambitions for the district and wider county. This will be managed as part of the Board's risk register and escalated, as and when necessary, to the Leadership Risk Register.

Comments checked by:

Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes 01295 221786

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Equality and Diversity

- 7.4 The public consultation was designed to reach out to a wide and diverse audience in a positive way that involves communities in determining the future of their area. Given the long-term nature of the Strategic Vision, specific attempts were made to engage with young people within the county. Gathering the views from a diverse range of stakeholders and the wider community will better inform the approach to inclusive growth.
- 7.5 The overall Vision contains guiding principles which aim to create the conditions for inclusive growth and reduce inequalities which should result in a positive impact on equality diversity.

Comments checked by:

Emily Schofield, Acting Head of Strategy, emily.schofield@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: Yes

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

The work contributes to all four strategic priorities within the Council's 2020-21 Business Plan.

Lead Councillor

Councillor Barry Wood, Leader of the Council

Document Information

Appendix number and title

- Appendix 1 Final Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire
- Appendix 2 Oxfordshire Growth Board report
- Appendix 3 Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – Summary of Consultation Responses

Background papers

None

Report Author and contact details

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