

# Oxford Economic Growth Strategy and Action Plan – Update and Priorities

## Summary and key issues for consideration

Since the adoption of the Oxford Economic Growth Strategy (OEGS) in 2013 and the subsequent Action Plan, a significant amount of progress has been made. This applies both in terms of actions and partner organisation's strategic priorities making them much more aligned. These can be summarised as follows:

- an economic vision for the county has been set out in the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's [Strategic Economic Plan](#), embracing evidence from the [Oxford Innovation Engine](#) report commissioned by the University of Oxford and Science Oxford with support from the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the [Low Carbon Economy](#) report commissioned by Low Carbon Oxford with support from the Environmental Change Institute;
- an updated [Strategic Housing Market Assessment](#), commissioned jointly by the five planning authorities in the county, has indicated housing need targets to support the economic success of the area;
- City Deal and Growth Deal bids have been successful and the Oxfordshire Growth Board has been established as a Statutory Joint Committee, charged with collaborative implementation of the projects concerned;
- District Councils are at various stages of implementing new and revised Local Plans;
- Oxfordshire County Council has been consulting on a new [Local Transport Plan](#) with ambitions to change the shape of travel in the region;
- Oxford City Council has published its [Oxford Growth Strategy Route Map](#), and is progressing major development proposals at Barton, Oxpens and Northern Gateway;
- The Oxford Strategic Partnership and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership has recently endorsed the [Oxford Smart City](#) vision and strategy developed on behalf of the Partnership by the City and County councils, both universities and the LEP

Whilst the OEGS is still relevant in its long-term strategic approach, and is a 10 year strategy, it is useful to revisit the action plan annually to ensure activity is targeted to priority areas. As such, this paper provides a brief progress update and highlights changes that have taken place against the 11 elements of the OEGS Action Plan adopted by the –Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) in 2013. It also suggests areas that the partnership may choose to focus on and key actions to prioritise within the plan. In summary these are:

- I. Deliver regeneration, housing and employment sites that will support economic growth and inward investment
- II. Effective business engagement and support for Oxford's business voice
- III. A wider city centre strategy, building on 'strengthening the city centre retail offer'
- IV. Expanding the value of Oxford's tourism across the region
- V. Continuing to improve education and skills attainment to support future economic growth opportunities
- VI. Increasing the annual rate of housing development in locations which are easily accessible to the city centre and other main employment areas by cycle, bus, and rail

- VII. Promoting and delivering Smart Oxford projects for the benefit of all who live, work and visit the city
- VIII. Investing in the physical and transport infrastructure to enable economic growth
- IX. Working in partnership to meet the growth and devolution opportunities for the city and wider region.

### **The 11 Elements of the Economic Growth Strategy Action Plan**

Full detailed copies of the Strategy and Action Plan can be found at

<http://www.oxfordpartnership.org.uk/PDF/Oxford%20Economic%20Growth%20Strategy%20January%202013.pdf> and

[http://www.oxfordpartnership.org.uk/PDF/OESEG/Oxford%20Economic%20Growth%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan%20\(updated%20June%202014\).pdf](http://www.oxfordpartnership.org.uk/PDF/OESEG/Oxford%20Economic%20Growth%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan%20(updated%20June%202014).pdf) respectively.

1. Expanding Oxford’s knowledge economy using the global connections of Oxford’s Universities and major/large employers to attract new companies, and promote new start-ups
2. Supporting the growth of existing employers including large, global companies, high value small and medium sized enterprise, the Universities, and the health care sector
3. Ensuring sufficient supply of employment land

These first three elements are closely linked and reported on together. We would recommend that in updating the Action Plan, the group considers combining these into a broader “Deliver regeneration, housing and employment sites that will support economic growth and inward investment” theme.

Since the development of the EGS and AP the Oxfordshire Innovation Engine Report has been published, the Oxfordshire LEP has published the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), the City Deal and Growth Deal have been agreed and further projects are being put forward for funding through the Growth Fund.

Key developments include:

- A more joined up collaborative approach is being taken to Inward Investment with the LEP, County, City and District Councils and both Universities engaged in a joint partnership approach to inward investment, to be co-ordinated by a new Inward investment Manager. The Smart Oxford initiative is proving a positive hook to engage with businesses and discuss potential projects and further collaboration with the Smart Oxford partners
- Development sites (Northern Gateway, Oxford Station, Oxpens, Osney Mead) provide tangible opportunities to attract inward investment and enable growth of existing businesses. Also, work has started on the major housing development at Barton Park.

The business engagement work has been carried out under element two, but since the adoption of the Action Plan we have developed and agreed the Business Engagement Framework and are working to support the creation of the Oxford Business Voice that forms a key component of the Framework. Wider business engagement in a variety of forms, will

continue to be a key priority that underpins other work (housing, transport and devolved government spending opportunities for example).

We are working with our partners (County and District Councils, Universities, LEP Network Navigators) on a joint CRM system that will allow sharing of information and intelligence from business engagement and inward investment attraction.

#### 4. Strengthening Oxford's city centre retailing offer

The Westgate development is due to be completed in autumn 2017 and the Westgate Alliance is developing the Retail Employment and Skills Plan. Transport improvement projects in the city centre are progressing well with Frideswide Square currently in development and The Plain completed earlier in the year. More will follow within the city, including the Rail proposals.

The Town Team is leading on a number of projects including the potential for the creation of a Business Improvement District in 2016 for which funding and resource will be required to co-ordinate and administer the bid.

Linked to all of this is the proposed development of a holistic City Centre Strategy that will focus on all elements of the city centre from management of streets to transport connections and site availability. A wide-ranging focus on ensuring the city centre can continue to thrive and grow for the benefit of its diverse users is now needed, building on the excellent work to date and the forthcoming plans for the expansion of the city-centre.

#### 5. Expanding the value of Oxford's tourism across the region

Experience Oxfordshire is developing new plans for 2015-16 and beyond, and considering outstanding work from the existing action plan (MICE review & business tourism, Destination Management Plans, increasing overnight stays, incorporating visitor information alongside new developments).

In addition, work on a new Oxfordshire Creative, Cultural, Heritage and Tourism Strategy is being led by the County and LEP, and will inform this element and future work plans.

Work has been started on the 'World Class Visitor Welcome' work stream and this will be taken forward over the course of the year particularly around customer focused issues linked to the visitor welcome (e.g. taxi firms and role of ambassadors).

#### 6. Continuing to improve education and skills attainment to support future economic growth opportunities

A number of businesses and large employers have partnered with schools in the city to provide links and support – these include Unipart and Oxford Academy; Sharp Laboratories of Europe and Oxford Spires; Oxford City Council and Cherwell School; Wiley & Sons and Cheney; and Nominet and Matthew Arnold School.

The educational attainment work is being driven by the Oxford Strategic Partnership's Stronger Communities Group and a working group has been set up specifically to drive forward this work. The primary focus is on the following areas:

- The county council proposals for working with schools and academies
- Sharing best practice and teaching skills.
- Teach First
- Shared Equity Housing Scheme
- Blackbird Leys
- School Governors and Governance arrangements
- Philanthropy and the Use of Volunteers

The Skills Strategy developed by the LEP's Skills Board is being delivered with particular progress and developments around apprenticeships and schools based work (through Opportunities to Inspire (O2i)).

The additional funding through the European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF) provides opportunities that City partners will bid into. EGSG will need to retain a continued active interest in this area as it relates to bringing business and education closer together.

#### 7. Increasing the annual rate of housing development in locations which are easily accessible to the city centre and other main employment areas by cycle, bus, and rail

Since the OEGS was adopted, several strategic alignments have taken place:

- an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment, commissioned by the five planning authorities, has indicated housing targets linked to economic growth;
- The Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) has been agreed;
- City Deal and Growth Deal bids have been successful and the Oxfordshire Growth Board has been established as a Statutory Joint Committee;
- District Councils are at various stages in implementing new and revised Local Plans;
- Oxfordshire County Council has been consulting on a new Local Transport Plan with ambitions to change the shape of travel in the region;

In addition, the Oxford Civic Society (OCS) has produced the Oxford Futures report and the Wolfson Prize winning Uxcester Garden City, based on Oxford, has been published. The OSP, LEP and OCS are co-sponsoring an event in June targeted at local businesses, large employers and key officers and politicians from all local authorities to explore the housing and transport issues facing Oxford and sustainable solutions.

#### 8. Ensuring on-going investment in broadband infrastructure

The Oxford Super Connected City project has successfully delivered free wireless on all buses operating in the Oxford Smart Zone and free wireless in free to enter public buildings across the city. The wireless concession project (providing wireless in public spaces across the city) is due to be delivered by the end of the year.

The Broadband voucher scheme for SMEs has been extended for a further year to March 2016, re-negotiated to cover the whole county, and is being administered by the City Council with marketing support from the LEP and district councils.

Since the adoption of the Economic Growth Strategy and Action Plan, our focus has naturally evolved and extended to wider Smart City initiatives of which the Oxford Super Connected City is one. A Partnership Project Board (City and County councils, the Universities, LEP and Nominet) has developed a Smart Oxford vision and strategy that has been adopted by the OSP and the Oxfordshire LEP. Some elements are progressing quickly particularly around transport and mobility (MobOx Project) with strong private / public partnerships in place.

Given the above, this element needs to be refocused onto our Smart City ambitions and plans which are cross cutting many of the other elements – transport, retail, tourism, energy and environmental sustainability etc. Understanding 3G and 4G investment plans for the area will also be instructive in terms of our evolving infrastructure focus.

## 9. Addressing the environmental challenges and opportunities presented by economic growth

Since the adoption of the Economic Growth Strategy and Action Plan the Oxfordshire Low Carbon Economy report commissioned by Low Carbon Oxford with support from the Environmental Change Institute has been published. This report concludes that developing Oxfordshire's low carbon economy requires a three-pronged approach:

- I. Supporting innovation, building effective clusters of innovation that link research and development to early stage deployment in key potential low carbon growth sectors – alternative fuels and low carbon vehicles, building technologies, low carbon energy and supporting service sectors.
- II. Enabling infrastructure, through public policy and planning to provide the framework for business growth and living laboratories for new technologies and business models.
- III. Coordinating the many potential sources of investment in innovation, business development and infrastructure.

Work is taking place across the city, led by Low Carbon Oxford, its Pathfinders and the Low Carbon Hub - delivering a range of projects. Strong links exist with the Smart Oxford in this field particularly around energy and environmental sustainability and these will be drawn together as we progress both strands of work.

## 10. Investing in the physical and transport infrastructure to enable economic growth

The County Council has launched and consulted on the Local Transport Plan (LTP4) and the Oxford Transport Strategy in the last six months. The Economic Growth Steering Group has supported the consultation and led on a number of business focused consultation events.

The OSP, LEP and OCS are co-sponsoring an event targeted at local businesses, large employers and key officers and politicians from all local authorities to explore the housing and transport issues facing Oxford and sustainable solutions in June (see above).

The focus for the Action Plan is on LPT4 and the Oxford Transport Strategy and future proposals particularly linked to major projects such as Westgate, Oxpens, Northern Gateway and Station redevelopment. In addition, there are strong links to the Smart City work focussed on transport and mobility particularly the MobOx project.

#### 11. Securing an effective partnership for implementation and 'single team' delivery for Oxford

A more collaborative approach is being taken to business support, apprenticeships and Inward Investment by the LEP, County, City and District Councils. Smart Oxford is another example of closer working between strategic partners and both Universities have a key coordinating role here.

Whilst still challenging areas, closer working on the key areas of housing and transport is also in evidence, as highlighted above.

The 'single team' approach has not arisen as originally envisaged in the OEGS. However, closer working is evident across a number of key themes. The growing focus on devolution to cities needs close inspection, to both understand and optimise the potential opportunities for our area.

With this in mind, it is recommended that an annual review of the OEGS action plan considers on-going partnership structures and delivery arrangements, as they relate to elements of the Action Plan. These might include the Smart Oxford Project Board and its working groups or the emerging partnership incorporating Economic Development Officers, Invest in Oxfordshire and Network navigators.

#### **Recommendation**

The OEGS's over-arching ten-year strategy is still wholly relevant. Yet, the annual review of the action plan allows an opportunity for flexibility, evolution of our priorities and a clear focus for the year ahead. This needs to recognise on-going progress, changing partnership arrangements, the need to align with the new national Government's economic priorities and emerging policy framework together with the city's own economic needs.

As such, this report recommends the EGSG re-aligns the action plan to reflect the above report on our shared priorities.

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