

## **Draft note of the Oxford Economic Growth Strategy Steering Group Meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

### **Attendees:**

Cllr. Bob Price, Leader of Oxford City Council (Chair)

Michael Crofton-Briggs, Head of City Development (Oxford City Council)

Dr. Tom Flanagan, Oxfordshire County Council

Robert Hetherington, Economic Development Manager (Oxford City Council)

Tom Morris, Economic Development Team (Oxford City Council)

Dave Waller, Oxfordshire County Council

Ian Francis, City of Oxford College

Richard Rosser, The In Oxford Group B4

Simon Cox, Centrica

Nigel Tipple, Director of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Richard Venables, ProOxford Group and VSL and Partners

Giles Ingram, Experience Oxfordshire

Helen Payne, Shared Intelligence

Christopher Rock, Shared Intelligence

### **Apologies:**

David Edwards, Director of Regeneration and Housing, Oxford City Council

Mark Jaggard, Spatial and Economic Development Manager, Oxford City Council

Dr. Phil Clare, Head of Research and Development, University of Oxford

Sebastian Johnson, Economic Development Team, Oxford City Council

## **1. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November were agreed. Whilst some matters were directly raised from the minutes a number were already on the agenda. So the discussion has been summarised as part of the next item reporting on the progress of the Action Plan.

## 2. Action Plan

**Starter Unit Review:** it was reported that a launch would take place to coincide with a tenant being agreed at the Town Hall, which would then be jointly publicised through an article in Oxford Times. The Economic Development Team will prepare a business model which would be used to explore other opportunities within the City to directly influence the provision of additional starter-unit accommodation, a report will be brought to a future meeting.

**Broadband project** an update was provided by RH to confirm that all parties are now signed up to the project, but we are still formal signing from the Bus Companies. Mott MacDonald have been appointed as Technical Consultants and a Project Manager is now in place to co-ordinate the work. The project will provide free Wi-Fi coverage in the City centre and in all public buildings, which it is hoped will include Oxford University buildings. Bob Price wished to be assured that free Wi Fi would also be linked into the new Westgate development. The voucher scheme has now been officially launched which can be purchased at a cost of £3,000 towards the capital costs, there is however scope for businesses to club together. It was suggested that future growing place funding should be used to ensure that areas immediately adjacent to the city boundaries, such as Botley, Wheatley and Kidlington should be able to link to and benefit from the City's Broadband project.

**Skills and Training:** RH reported on the work he has been doing jointly with Anna Wright to improve the offer of skills and training options by working with the schools to better understand the existing barriers and proposed potential solutions. In summary it did appear that young people at school were not getting the career advice they needed and or work placements to improve their knowledge and understanding of the opportunities available. There also appeared to be some weaknesses in the school timetable for career advice and a lack of awareness of the 'softer' skills required for the workplace. These findings appeared to fit well with the pilot scheme being developed as part of the 'Business in the community project'.

**Overview on labour market:** Bob considered there was a need to understand how the broad proposals put forward in the City Deal on skills development would in practise be delivered. The key to this through discussion appeared to be a recognition of the importance of improving the links between schools and employers and create a genuine two-way channel of communication. Dave Waller confirmed that Margaret Melling as part of the Invest in Oxfordshire Team had produced a useful piece of background work profiling the structure of the labour market in the Oxfordshire economy, which he agreed to circulate within the group, although with the recognition that it was not in a finished form. Giles Ingram considered that there was an appetite within the tourist industry to create a new group of established businesses to provide a voice for the

sector, which he would be willing to try to bring together. Nigel Tipple confirmed that the role and focus of the Skills Board is currently being reviewed, but there is a considerable resource through the Skills Team that can be used to take forward future skills and apprenticeship programmes. Bob Price emphasised the need to properly link the work of the Skills Board with the members of the Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) this would have the potential to bring the greatest benefits to the City. Simon Cox (Centrica) confirmed that their company had been instrumental in setting up a customer service apprenticeship scheme and were happy to share their experiences.

### **3. Business Engagement Update**

**Feedback from Leaders Dinner:** Bob reported back on the event, which had been well attended and from the feedback so far had proved to be a very useful forum for discussion. There were a number of key subjects discussed which included issues around skills and recruitment; transport; flooding and economic growth of the City.

In relation to skills issues Centrica confirmed the problems they had experienced in recruiting local people for the customer service jobs. Richard Venables said that a key issue raised about transport was made by NHS Trust about the urgent requirement for a review to take forward the Headington Transport Strategy. In relation to flooding, representatives from the NHS and Newsquest confirmed that it had not significantly impacted on the running of their business. Economic Growth and employment land, there was a discussion about the major projects coming forward, such as the Northern Gateway; and the developments around the Station site, which could also result in bringing forward the old branch line in Cowley. RV said that in practise business does not respond directly to administrative boundaries but more to economic boundaries, so it is always important to consider Oxford in the context of its immediate neighbouring settlements and the businesses within them.

Finally there was a desire to develop better links with the LEP and maybe to set up a bi-annual forum. Nigel Tipple (LEP) said that through the work of consultants SQW in their recent report on the Oxfordshire Engine for Growth the existing working group would seek to widen their engagement with the business community. There was a need to avoid duplication and ensure that events are properly joined up, which should also include those already well established, such as Venturefest. Clearly innovation will be an important area of work for the City Deal and the LEP going forward.

**1:1 Meetings :** Bob explained that these meetings had now commenced flowing from the initial contacts made through the recent Leaders Dinner. The 1:1 meetings offered the opportunity to discuss with individual companies their own particular issues and how the City Council could support their business. Two recent meetings to date include Centrica and Kingerlee.

**Business in Oxford B4 Event:** Richard Rosser reported that the planning for this event was now well advanced and emails had already been sent out to 1,000 businesses. To date some 150 tickets have been sold, with the limit being 300, so on target. However any assistance in terms of publicising the event would be gratefully received, please contact Richard direct.

**LGA Growth Advisers Programme:** Tom provided a brief overview on the nature of this project, which is to build on the work already undertaken to develop a comprehensive engagement strategy. The purpose of the project is to implement one of the key recommendations in the Oxford Economic Growth Strategy, which seeks to actively support existing businesses within the city. This project, sponsored by the LGA, provides assistance from a chosen consultant, Shared Intelligence, who were present at the meeting to listen to the work already undertaken and obtain at first hand ideas to develop the project.

Part of the background behind this project is to engage with a range of businesses in Oxford to better understand how they operate and their needs, which can then be used amongst other things to encourage companies to work in partnership with the City Council on key projects and programmes for the benefit of Oxford as a whole. The wishes of Oxford Businesses could then be articulated through an 'Oxford Voice' to highlight some of the common concerns that companies experience in the City.

#### **4. City Deal, SEP, ESIF Update**

**City Deal:** It was reported that the City Deal for Oxford and Oxfordshire had recently been formally signed, with the result that some £55.5m will be made available from Government to spend on key projects. The vision is to promote the 'knowledge spine', which runs from the main strategic growth areas comprising Bicester to the north; Oxford and Science Vale. The City Deal aims to develop key innovation hubs including the Bioescalator (Churchill Oxford); Begbroke (North of Oxford); Culham (South of Oxford) and Harwell (Science Vale. Future spending will be focused on these key innovation projects and improving the connectivity between these centres, through an Oxford Science Transit System.

In addition there will be specific funding (£1.5m) of the total sum that will be used to provide support for skills, which will be delivered through associated programmes developed with skills providers; partners and business. It is important however as part of this process to be able to aggregate the needs of business in particular sectors, to ensure programmes have an economy of scale and transferable within these sectors.

There will be further infrastructure projects that need to be developed and costed to deliver economic growth and innovation. This will comprise a range of projects, such as improvements to the A34; Northern Gateway; and Science Transit. These projects will

emerge over the next 12 months, and will help to lever other funding / match funding from the private sector to drive the projects forward.

**Strategic Economic Plan:** Overall there are some 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) in the country, which will be making bids to Government for a portion of the £2bn Growth Fund. This will be very competitive and therefore the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) needs to present the best case possible for Oxford and Oxfordshire. The SEP has been through a number of revisions but needs to be agreed and present to Government by the end of March. There is then a review undertaken in April, with outcomes expected in June / July. The deadline for delivery is tight and evidence needs to be show that projects are underway by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

**The European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF)** has been through the first sieving process. This allows Oxford and Oxfordshire to bid for some European funding, which would be in the region of some \$20m; but the majority would need to spent on major infrastructure projects. There will however be a smaller amount that does need to be spent on social / environmental projects, such as those associated with the City Council's current Low Carbon Oxford programme of works.

## 5. Short updates on key development sites and projects

**Westgate:** The planning application for the redevelopment of this shopping centre was taken for determination to the West Area Committee and was approved in principle.

**Oxpens:** Masterplanning has been undertaken on this site and developed into a Supplementary Planning Document, which will be used as a planning tool to inform the future mix of uses on this site. Discussions are currently taking place to agree a developer who will take forward the redevelopment of the site, which is principally owned by City Council and British Rail Residuary Board.

**Station site:** Consultants appointed by Network Rail, City and County Council's have completed some master planning for this site. The options for development are currently been tested for their affordability, to ensure schemes are viable.

**Barton:** This major housing site (800 houses) now has planning permission and is being developed through the Joint Venture comprising Grosvenor Estates and the City Council known as the LLP.

**East West Rail:** Work is actively being taken forward for the section between Oxford and Bicester, to ensure any issues around crossings are resolved. Some still outstanding but considerable progress made. The new station to the north of Oxford, known as Oxford Parkway is programmed to be completed by 2015. Transport modelling is being carried out at the moment.

**Oxford City College:** New buildings have now been completed on their City centre site, which will serve to improve existing facilities and allow a greater range of courses to be offered to students. Proposals are also in hand to redevelop the Blackbird Leys Campus, which in total will cost some £8m. Funding for the first phase is now largely in place with work to be completed by 2015, followed by a second phase in 2016. This will build on the existing courses available, such as Construction, but allow for a greater range of skills to include management as well.

**Experience Oxfordshire:** The organisation developed out of Visit Oxford and Oxford Inspires, now has a new strategy and spokesman in Graham Upton. This now places Experience Oxfordshire at the heart of tourism growth. There are three key areas of work that provide the focus at present, these include promoting the visitor experience (Infrastructure, Skills and Transport); Communication (building on the Oxford Brand but being clear what it means for tourism); and revising the ‘business model’. The impact of the floods has been felt by the tourism industry in Oxfordshire with a significant lack of visitors to the centre in Oxford. New initiatives being promoted include the Oxford Wine Festival linked to the Food Festival.

**City Centre Management:** Michael Crofton-Briggs reported that a new proposal has been developed to fill the gap left by Gordon Reid’s recent departure. The post will be advertised shortly.

#### **Future Actions:**

- **Starter Units:** A new business case model will be brought to a future meeting for discussion. (TM and RH)
- **Broadband:** An update to be provided on the progress with demand stimulation for the voucher scheme and take-up rate together with any Growing Place Funds available to link to neighbouring areas; and progress on Free Wi-Fi programme. (SJ)
- **Skills and Training:** Progress made in developing the ideas suggested as part of the ‘business in the community’ programme, and any examples of how the Skills Board has engaged with business to work with schools, and generate apprenticeships and work placements. (NT)
- **Labour market:** background information on the Oxfordshire Labour market to be circulated (DW)
- **B4 Event:** Summary report on the event in April highlighting areas of success and opportunities for future events.
- **Business engagement strategy:** Report on the key findings from the project and the next steps.
- **Strategic Update:** Progress on the response from Government on Strategic Economic Plan (NT)