

## **Strategy, Infrastructure and Planning Response to the Draft SEP Refresh**

1. The original Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) has proved an influential tool in coordinating aspirations and demonstrating to funding partners Oxfordshire's seriousness of purpose.
2. We can now demonstrate delivery of the economic and infrastructure priorities set out in the original SEP and as such, the County Council welcomes this opportunity to renew the document to help guide our next phase of development.
3. In conjunction with its Growth Board partners, the County Council is bringing forward an Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy that will set out an agreed approach to the identification and prioritisation of the critical infrastructure that is required by and funded through the economic growth set out in the SEP. As such the SEP makes up a key element of the economic case for infrastructure investment and we therefore continue to consider this an important strategic document for the county.

### **Vision & Profile**

4. We welcome the restatement of the Vision and indeed we would wish to emphasise that we are in fact some way towards realisation: that we are a county that is vibrant, world leading and innovative and that can demonstrate research excellence. However the focus now must be on suitability and inclusivity and we would encourage the SEP to be more specific on what we mean in each of these areas.
5. For example, we welcome specific actions such as support for an energy masterplan for Oxfordshire but would encourage other specific approaches to be detailed to illustrate both sustainability and inclusivity. For example, it would be useful to draw out major actions agreed within the SEEIP such as the development of the proposed Sustainability and Environment Sub-Group and a new central environmental investment fund. Equally, we would highlight the role and importance of business in driving forward innovation in sustainability and encourage the SEP to address the role of the LEP in encouraging business to fully understand and mitigate their impact on the natural environment, exploiting opportunities available within the knowledge economy and new approaches such as the circular economy and natural capital accounting.
6. It is important that the SEP and associated delivery plans contain clear delivery milestones set out in a realistic timeframe. However, reflecting the delivery timescales of some major planned and potential strategic infrastructure improvements, the planned Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy will look forward to 2040. In that context, we question whether 2030 is too short a window to look at for some of the longer term ambitions of the SEP.

7. The draft well describes the spatial context and the Oxford *functional economic area*. Given that the Knowledge Spine is a very relevant spatial reference it would make sense in this section to link the economic function and status of Oxford to the Knowledge Spine and describe the quantum of jobs, homes and connectivity and accessibility investment planned in the corridor. (p10)
8. In identifying the challenges to delivering the SEP (p10), we would highlight the disparity between the delivery of houses anticipated in the SHMA (~5,000 completions PA) and the real delivery that has been achieved in recent times as noted in the infographic on page 11.
9. We agree that the particular spatial characteristics of Oxfordshire including and especially its environmental assets need to be protected. The County Council also maintains that a strong and defensible greenbelt must continue to form an important element of planning policy. However, it should be recognised that the greenbelt in its current form may not offer the best long term and sustainable route to achieving this goal and that to achieve coherent development in the knowledge spine that enhances the environmental position overall, the specific boundaries of the greenbelt may need to change. (p12)
10. Any change in this area is for local planning processes but as with housing completions, we would caution that the SEP should not give the impression that development particularly of the knowledge spine can be achieved without impact on the environment and the greenbelt, albeit in our opinion an ultimately positive one, if planned and delivered well.

## People

11. We acknowledge the importance of Community Employment Plans (CEPs) where relevant to developments and we welcome the case study. However, it is not clear in this section the strategy of the SEP as related to CEPs: what is the strategy and what are the plans seeking to achieve? (p20)

## Place

12. The delivery of the infrastructure that supports and drives growth is a key platform and ambition of the SEP. We would therefore be more explicit that infrastructure planning, funding and delivery is a priority of the SEP in itself and not as a subsidiary example within the first priority stated. (p23)
13. Further, in May 2016, the Growth Board agreed a brief for the development of a new strategy to bring together infrastructure priorities into a single overarching Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy which incorporates green infrastructure. Reflecting the central position of this work with respect to delivery of the SEP, either under Place or Connectivity, there should be a priority bullet which states: *“Delivery by the Oxfordshire authorities of an Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy by Spring 2017.”*

14. We very much support the point made under “sustainability” (p25) that “Innovative place...plans simultaneously for both jobs and housing growth – and puts in place the infrastructure required for both.” We feel that this point is fundamental to the purpose of the SEP and would encourage that it be reiterated with a higher status within the Place and People sections and the overall introduction.
15. We agree that Oxfordshire is facing significant environmental resource constraints. (p22) However, we would emphasise that there are also considerable opportunities for businesses in resource management, including the circular economy, energy and broader sustainability sectors. Oxfordshire is well placed to drive innovation in these sectors, leading to new jobs and financial savings, as well as potentially tackling some of these key sustainability issues.
16. A design guide is an interesting proposition. However, such an approach would more naturally fit into Local Plans than the SEP suite of supporting documents. Further discussions with planning authorities and the Growth Board would be required to identify status and purpose and agree who would be taking forward and owning such an approach. (p23)
17. Smart Oxford is a core partnership programme and giving it support should be listed as a priority in this section.

## **Enterprise**

18. The SEP notes support for rural businesses via LEADER and EAFRD. Many rural businesses are part of the high tech knowledge based economy anyway, and are therefore fully encompassed by the strategy. In addition, it would be helpful for the SEP to acknowledge the multiple roles of some rural businesses, for example by adding to the priority “ensuring there is also support for enterprise not linked to the research infrastructure” an additional example: “...and by understanding and valuing the diversity and impact of rural enterprises.”

## **Connectivity**

19. We agree that further improvements to increase road and rail capacity are required. However, we would also note here and within the priorities section that congestion problems will also be relieved by getting better use out of existing road capacity through use of innovation technology and by encouraging change to more sustainable travel modes – see also note on Smart Oxford above. (p30)

## **Governance Arrangements**

20. We note that OCC also has statutory responsibility for education infrastructure in addition to our transport authority role.

## **Overall Presentation and Context**

21. At the conclusion of each programme section, a set of priorities is listed. It would be helpful for partner and public understanding to state who is responsible for delivery and for the more tangible ambitions, when delivery is expected. Where the expectation is that the LEP itself jointly owns the priority we should consider in each case whether this is a realistic given the programme infrastructure in place.
22. Overall the refreshed SEP is a more strategic document. We are comfortable with this approach. However, it would be helpful in that context to review how the SEP signposts where detail for specific growth centres such as Bicester, Banbury, etc. can be found.
23. We think that the SEP should be a usable and used document and would encourage the development of an interactive pdf or “micro-site” version that links together the SEP with the local and national plans and policies it relates to, helping to contextualise the document and keep it relevant into the future.
24. We welcome Annex C which describes the relationship between the SEP and development planning and fig. 6 which shows OxLEP in relationship to its principle partners.
25. To further set the SEP in context and to aid understanding, it would be helpful to include a simplified graphic early in the document setting out the relationship between the SEP and its subsidiary documents and the strategies and plan that drive it. This would also allow an early commentary on the relationship between the LEP and the Growth Board.

Bev Hindle  
31 May 2016