

Dear Oxfordshire MP

Context

I am writing to you on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) about the Growth Deal and Joint Strategic Spatial Plan (JSSP) coming into place in Oxfordshire and which will as you know potentially have the most significant effect on your constituency of any strategy for the next three decades.

NNGO is a coalition of 35 groups from across the county, together representing thousands of community members. In principle, we agree that the JSSP strategy could deliver benefit to the county as a whole as well as to specific constituencies. **However, we also believe there are a number of significant implications that need to be appreciated and would welcome your locally elected voice to influence the positive development of the project.**

Challenges and Opportunities

Local councillors on the Oxfordshire Growth Board, its Scrutiny and the Sub Advisory Groups, along with officers from each district, are obviously providing valuable representation of their own district's values and needs and how these can contribute positively to the spatial strategy for the whole of Oxfordshire.

However, NNGO continues to be concerned that the challenging timescales, and the need to integrate with and deliver on other strategies such as the OxCam expressway and Local Industrial Strategy, will mean that the JSSP will not be able to consider either the wider definition of growth needed for a sustainable outcome nor be able to introduce success criteria that are based on what Oxfordshire needs, and instead will be forced to follow a very rapid growth agenda that is set without mandate and representation from locally elected voice.

Additionally, issues particularly important to your constituency, such as rural community needs and the rural economy, heritage and the environment are not currently explicit in the scope of the project. The ability for the JSSP to deliver an outcome that sufficiently considers and integrates these will therefore be limited, whatever the good intentions of the individual Growth Board members and officers.

I note that DEFRA presented a number of the same concerns and issues as NNGO at the last Growth Board meeting and particularly highlighted the lack of explicit reference to the 25 Year Environment Plan.

The Expressway specifically presents additional challenges on timescales for the JSSP strategy and is itself subject to legal and other challenges. **Any opportunities you may have to press for an extension to the JSSP project deadlines, such that valuable public resources are not wasted whilst second-guessing the scale and specific requirements of the Expressway plan would be a welcome step.**

An important additional benefit could arise from this. The Growth Board would have the space and capacity to develop public confidence in the engagement process and refocus the JSSP project to include social and environmental success criteria and thus identify the growth targets it believes the communities in the county actually need and for which it has the natural and other resources to deliver sustainably. This would not only provide the essential evidence that the Expressway and other strategies need from Oxfordshire, but also a more robust framework by which the Growth Board can in turn evaluate what benefits and risks other strategies and plans offer to the county and its own JSSP strategy.

NNGO also suggests that DEFRA, AONB boards and other informed stakeholders could add value in bringing evidence and issues for consideration that are pertinent to this broader sustainability agenda for Oxfordshire actively into the decision-making processes. Growth Board members and officers have indicated they are actively considering how this could happen within the project structure and NNGO looks forward to hearing if and how it might be included as we believe we could contribute valuable voice and appropriate insights about rural community needs and the rural economy. As an additional note, it is a little surprising that local MPs have not been more included or provided opportunities to be briefed to date given the integration of national and subnational strategies with the JSSP (see relationship diagram attached) and we would welcome MPs having greater awareness of the strategy as it develops.

Summary

NNGO believes the JSSP potentially could provide a valuable strategic framework that delivers growth at a scale and type that provides for local needs whilst properly evaluating the cumulative impact on the county as a whole. Specifically, NNGO believes that there are three key principles that must be meaningfully delivered in the strategy if it is to produce an outcome that is both sustainable and beneficial for the communities we represent:

- A restoration of planning principles, with a proper balancing of economic, environmental and social considerations.
- Local democracy, with planning control in the hands of locally elected and accountable representatives.
- Environment and rural sustainability, ensuring that our landscape, nature and rural communities are at the heart of decision-making.

I hope that some of the issues NNGO are raising are interesting to you and would be grateful for your consideration of these in any engagement you have with the JSSP and related strategies and plans.

Any positive influence you may also have in government regarding our concerns about the challenges of producing a coherent outcome given the timescales and/or uncertainty arising from other strategies, such as the OxCam Arc, and any influence you may feel able to add to the call to put environmental success criteria and the 25 year environment plan explicitly at the heart of the project, would be very welcome.

A final suggestion would be whether, given the speed of the projects involved and the scale of impact the JSSP will have on the county as a whole, is there a benefit in seeking a joint briefing for Oxfordshire MPs from the JSSP team?

I hope this is helpful and would be happy to meet to discuss should you wish.

Kind regards,

Sue Haywood

Vice Chair Responsible Planning in Burford
Member of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire

Relationship between JSSP & Other Plans – extract from p.3 of Draft Statement of Community Involvement (Growth Board documentation)

Lack of clarity for OxCam corridor introduces risk to timescales and coherent outcome

No reference to any environmental input. Defra 25 Year Environment Plan should surely feature.

Local Industrial Strategy will not currently be subject to public consultation - risk of pre-judging JSSP outcomes, leading to public concern?

Diagram evidences top-down planning with little/no say for local communities

