

Oxfordshire Growth Board review

About you

Q1. Are you responding as:

a business/organisation

Q2. What is the name of the business / organisation you are representing?

Need not Greed Oxfordshire

Your thoughts on the Growth Board

Q5. Please describe your current perception of the Growth Board in three words:

1. Unmandated
2. (Environmentally) unskilled
3. Evasive

Q6. Please describe how you think the Growth Board should be perceived in three words:

1. (Properly, Fully and Transparently) Mandated
2. (Environmentally) Knowledgeable
3. Transparent (in its discussions, evidence and decision making)

Q7. Thinking about the difference between your answers to the two previous questions, please explain what changes, if any, you would like to see implemented by the Growth Board.

MANDATE

o Representatives/Members of the Growth Board and its sub-bodies must have explicit mandate for each area on which they are making decisions on behalf of their organisations/authorities (and have the time to communicate with and get that mandate/consent built into the process). This applies equally to leaders and officers.

ENVIRONMENTAL SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

o The Growth Board and its sub-bodies (including officer/executive committees) must have representatives with meaningful environmental knowledge and skills as voting members, able to input to strategic debate and decision making. Currently, although there is access to important knowledge and toolkits via engagement of consultants etc, there is crucially an absence at strategic level to know what targets and success criteria should be being set and what questions they should be asking. This should be embedded with environmental "champions" at all levels of the process and not relegated solely to a separate workstream.

TRANSPARENCY

o Timescales that enable proper engagement with and debate by locally elected members and scrutiny panel(s), thus also enabling the mandate function mentioned above.

o Timely transparency of sub-body meetings (discussions and reports) and opportunity for public participation at such meetings.

o Transparency in how evidence, consultation responses and information is being used in decision making and how it has influenced and changed (or not) any outcomes.

o Early and timely transparency and communication on how external programmes and strategies (such as OxLIS, Arc, EEH etc) will constrain or influence Growth Board decision making or projects for which the Growth Board are responsible and therefore, effectively, predetermine the parameters for decision making by the Growth Board and/or the outcomes of its own projects and strategies.

Priorities and membership

Q8. The Growth Board's role is to facilitate joint working on economic development, strategic planning and good growth management. It seeks to strengthen partnership arrangements for joined-up working across Oxfordshire. You can read more on the Growth Board's website. Taking in to account the role of the Growth Board, what issues do you think the Growth Board should prioritise within these areas?

This is the wrong question to ask and predetermines the answers this consultation will get. NNGO thinks the Growth Board ought to revisit its Terms of Reference and the Statement of Common Ground in light of the consensus regarding the climate emergency and the government's commitment to the 25 Year Environment Plan, including biodiversity and carbon neutrality. As a result, although the Growth Board's role should continue to "seek to strengthen partnership arrangements for joined-up working across Oxfordshire", it should with urgency remove the current - sole - focus on "economic growth" and instead now use its partnership to "facilitate joint working on strategic planning which is optimised for social cohesion and well-being and long-term environmental sustainability." The role of economic prosperity in delivering these aims should be recognised as important, but not as an aim or success criterion in itself for the Growth Board, and certainly not with the pre-conception or epithet of "growth". The contribution made by natural ecosystems, the rural nature of the county and heritage should also be explicitly recognised.

Within this redefined role, NNGO would therefore suggest the priorities are:

- Social cohesion and well-being, to be delivered through:
 - o a recognition of local heritage, rural economy and culture, and the role the natural environment and landscape plays with this.
 - o the provision of the right sort of housing for local needs, influenced primarily through local engagement and reflecting and respecting neighbourhood and district planning and knowledge in setting scale and targets and which are based primarily on organic growth by those communities
 - o provision of infrastructure to meet local needs first before those of national economic priority
 - o provision of local economic prosperity which delivers opportunities for local people
- Environmental sustainability, to be delivered through:
 - o Zero carbon targets for housing, infrastructure and transport, recognising and including embodied carbon and full lifecycle analysis in any strategic decision making.
 - o Consistent definitions and interpretations of net environmental gain in all decision making, with knowledgeable personnel embedded and empowered in strategic decision making, as well as engaging specialists for specific research or assessment as necessary
 - o Intrinsic value of natural environment, as well as that which can be directly attributed to human wellbeing, to be part of equation and decision making
 - o Economic prosperity strategy to be constrained by carrying capacity of local natural systems and by net environmental gain success criteria, not vice versa as at present.

Q9. The Growth Board is currently made up of the leaders of each of the five Oxfordshire district/city councils (Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire) and Oxfordshire County Council as voting members. There are also representatives from the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, and one representative from the universities, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, the Environment Agency and Homes England. These are all non-voting board members. The Scrutiny Panel is tasked with reviewing the Growth Board's work and making recommendations. The Panel is made up of three councillors from each of the six councils (18 in total). Three Advisory sub-groups (Infrastructure, Affordable Housing and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050) also support the Growth Board and are made up of executive councillors from each council. You can read more about the Growth Board make up in our summary document. Please tick below whether you think that the membership for each is appropriate.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Growth Board		X	
Scrutiny Panel		X	
Advisory sub-groups		X	

Q10. Where you have answered no, please explain what changes you would like to see:

Growth Board:	(Non-Govtal) Environmental Champion, with relevant skills and knowledge, to sit on this Board and have full voting rights. (eg Oxfordshire Environment Board)
Scrutiny Panel:	Environmental Champion, with relevant skills and knowledge, to sit on this Panel and have full voting rights.
Advisory Groups:	Environmental Champions, with relevant skills and knowledge, to sit on each and every one of these groups/committees and have full voting rights.

Communication

Q11. Do you feel that you are getting sufficient information about the Growth Board?

No

If no, what can be done to make you feel sufficiently informed about the Growth Board?

• Timely communication and transparency of all subgroup meetings and minutes. • Sub group meetings to be open to the public and enable public participation. • Reports and decisions to include how consultations and evidence has been used and what impact they have had on the outcomes and why.

Q12. How have you previously received information about the Growth Board? Please tick all that apply (leave blank if not applicable).

Attending Growth Board meetings

Growth Board meeting minutes

Local organisations

Website

Other (please specify):

NNGO is particularly concerned that a lot of Growth Board information is only reaching local councillors via organisations such as ourselves. For example, local councillors were unaware of the content of the Joint Declaration about the Arc until contacted by NNGO and other organisations. Although not a Growth Board document per se, it was a document that the Growth Board membership were aware of and it is a strategy that will impact the workings of the Growth Board (and the local authorities working in that partnership). The communication between the Growth Board representatives and locally elected members must be addressed with urgency and the outcome be sustainable and meaningful. It has been challenged repeatedly over this last year by the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel and is still lacking. In turn, the timescales for such communication must allow for local members to canvas opinion and communicate with their wards as necessary for meaningful representation and local democracy.

Q13. Are there any other ways you would like to hear about the Growth Board?

Via local councils, possibly on their websites and – for key upcoming decisions that significantly affect the future of our county – from them in local press. For this to be meaningful, these must be timely and be able to dovetail with opportunities for communication to elected members/representatives and/or participation and presentation at meetings.

Growth Board meetings

Q14. Have you attended a Growth Board meeting before?

Yes

Q15. Are there any changes that you would like to see to the Growth Board meetings? Think about timing, location, how the meetings work etc.

- Scrutiny panel must be provided with information in a more timely manner to allow for meaningful consideration of evidence and debate. Meetings should not clash with local authority scrutiny panel meetings to enable local authorities to also input to the process as necessary.
- Scrutiny Panel must be provided with more powers/ability to call in decisions that have not been made with due process. More time should be allocated to Scrutiny Panel report and challenge at Growth Board meetings.
- Growth Board responses to public questions should be considered in a meaningful way. In the past, for example, questions about environmental sustainability from NNGO were not raised in advance with the Environment Agency representative on the Board for their view or input into the Board's response. This is unacceptable.
- Evidence and meeting notes from sub-bodies should be made available, even if as appendices to any main meeting pack.

Finally...

Q22. How did you hear about this survey? Tick all that apply

Email

Growth Board website

Via a campaign group

Word of mouth