

Report on Oxfordshire Futures workshop for the Economic Partnership and business sector

**Tuesday 4th September 2007
Egrove Park, Oxford**

Introduction

During 2007 the Oxfordshire Partnership is developing its sustainable community strategy, the over-arching strategic vision for the county with key priorities for action.

Following the success of the three stakeholders workshops in July 2007 the Oxfordshire Partnership hosted a workshop in September specifically for business sector which had not been heavily represented at the earlier workshops. The workshop was well represented by a range of individuals from businesses based in Oxfordshire. A full list of participants can be found at Annex A.

The purpose of the workshop was to focus on the key trends and issues facing Oxfordshire in the next twenty to twenty five years and identify the priorities for the sustainable community strategy to address.

Prioritised issues

Participants contributed to a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) for Oxfordshire in the next 20-25 years. The long list of comments can be seen at Annex C. Following this initial exercise the areas of largest concern were identified and participants were asked to prioritise their three biggest concerns using sticky dots. The following list illustrates how participants prioritised the issues

Education and skills	25
Political leadership/planning vision	19
Public transport/road congestion	14
Housing/green belt infrastructure	14
Stronger communities	11
Growing knowledge economy and facing global competition	7
Environmentally friendly development	2
Self sufficiency/dealing with crises (flooding)	1
Migration	0

Recommendations for the strategy

Asked what the Sustainable Community Strategy could do to help address the prioritised issues the following themes emerged from the group and plenary sessions.

- Councils should focus on what they do well rather than diversify. They should manage people's expectations and be honest about what's affordable. An understanding of the national agenda is needed for people outside local government to understand what's possible.
- People need to understand the decision making process better
- Local authorities should assume an enabling role for others to be more effective. The 'Best talents' approach would mean that experienced and knowledgeable people are used effectively and best practice shared.
- Politicians rarely hear from businesses and wider interests in the community on issues such as housing only NIMBYs who are overwhelmingly negative. It is not surprising therefore that these are the interests that are represented. Politicians should actively engage with different views.
- Lobbying, conversation and debate should be encouraged and the involvement of business stakeholders should be sought and developed.
- Competing agendas and vested interests threaten the process. These need to be sorted out before we can move forward. We need to focus on the common interests. People need to understand what the 'deal'
- Strong and vibrant communities are characterised by passion at the local level. We need to generate and cultivate this in our communities and use local people to create local drive.
- The initial focus should be on what we want for which broad sign up is required. Following this the detail of the how we are going to do it and who can be agreed.
- Stronger communities should be seen as a good thing all round and the links should be made to education/skills
- The vision that is developed should be more strategic as it looks into the future rather focusing solving current problems and being tactical

Feedback

Feedback from the workshop was overwhelmingly positive. The most frequent comments included thanks for holding the event and the opportunity to be engaged and contribute to the process; comments about why there were no

representatives from other sectors most often where were the politicians; concern that this would effectively contribute to the strategy and that change would be visible; the call for strong leadership and decision making and feedback on the outcomes of the workshop. Further detail on feedback from participants is at Annex D.

Annex A: Participants

Keith Slater	Caprese Ltd
Martin Dare-Edwards	Infineum UK Ltd
Barry Wheatley	Oxfordshire Branch Federation of Small Businesses
Dave Waller	Oxfordshire County Council
Bob Langton	Anglo Cape and Business Link
Sue Priest	Emissions Strategy Solutions Ltd
Gilly Workman	Oxfordshire Sustainable Business Partnership
John Green	Leadbitter
Dr Evan Harris MP	Oxford West and Abingdon
Paul M Tate	Thames Valley Society of Chartered Accountants
Iraj Maghounaki	I.M. CAD Design Services Ltd.
Peter Cox	Grange Mews
Daniel Scharf	Morgan Cole
Robin Moxon	Goodman International Ltd
Angus Lachlan	Goodman International Ltd
Dr Anne Gwinnett	Oxford Brookes University
David Crossman	Owen Mumford
Keith Watson	North Oxfordshire Consortium
Jill Goddard	Learning and Skills Council – Thames Valley area
Sturge Taylor	Darbys Solicitors
Nick Hedges	Darbys Solicitors
Sheila Homer	James Cowper
Wendy Tindsley	Oxfordshire Enterprise Hub
Stuart Edlington	Cottsway Housing Association
Miranda Markham	Bicester Village
Lilian Bannister	Oxford Innovation
Andrew King	Richardsons
Bruce Hunt	Chair-IOD Oxfordshire
Steve Clarke	James Cowper
Shaun Jardine	Brethertons Solicitors LLP
Ben Jackson	President Bicester Chamber of Commerce

Annex B: Programme

Oxfordshire Futures

A workshop for the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership

Tuesday 4th September 2007

Egrove Park (formerly Templeton College)

7.30 am – 10.30 am

Purpose

The Sustainable Community Strategy will set out the vision for Oxfordshire for the next 25 years. This workshop aims to identify long term priorities for Oxfordshire and ways in which the Strategy could help support a world class and sustainable economy in Oxfordshire

7.30 Breakfast and registration

8.00 Welcome and introductions

Introduction to the Sustainable Community Strategy

Claire Evans, Oxfordshire Partnership Manager

Presentation of a summary of evidence demonstrating trends in Oxfordshire

Margaret Melling, Data Consultant

8.45 What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing business in Oxfordshire in the long term?

What is most important?

What are the top 3 ways in which the SCS could help address the prioritised issues (group discussions)

10.00 Review

Next Steps – *Claire Evans*

10.30 Close

The meeting will be facilitated by

Jeremy Spafford
jeremy@spafford.org.uk

Annex C: Issues identified through the SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location – central UK, good accessibility Environment • Good quality of life, affluence • Enterprise and innovation Strong research and knowledge based businesses, fusion experts Science and technology base Technical infrastructure and facilities • Top Higher Education establishments • Room for spatial development • Good urban/rural balance • Village Communities are strong • Natural conservatism • Diversity • Culture • International profile and brand • Strong tourism • Some good schools • High levels of graduates in the workforce • Spread of industrial sectors, range of employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State education poor, poor educational achievement • Lack of skills to levels 1 and 2, poor vocational training • Infrastructure -poor public transport, highways, congestion and A34 limits growth • Planning poor and restricting economic growth Lack of coherence or leadership for business development Strategic planning lacking for housing, jobs, transport, education Local authority structure Lack of political commitment across Oxfordshire • Affordability of housing - Earnings vs House prices • Reliance on carbon based energy sources Denial of climate change Flood risk and numbers of waterways • Low aspirations in young people Numbers of those not in education, employment or training • Complacency • High teenage pregnancy and associated problems • Low unemployment and labour availability • Areas of deprivation • Fear of crime and Thames Valley Police
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global reach, strengthen international links Raise the profile of Oxford outside the universities Tourism - explosion of Asian tourism • Existing diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor infrastructure planning and investment Poor public transport • Inadequate flood defences Climate change flood and drought Non self sufficiency of power needs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership in environmentally sensitive industry, fusion power Leading on climate change innovation, mitigate effects of climate change, Become expert in flood defense Development of sustainable building Invest in being energy self sufficient Eco-town (sustainable) Heyford • Growing the knowledge economy Oxford to Cambridge arc Strengthen links between industry and the university • Develop our entrepreneurs • Get young people involved • Fix education • Growth of IT and communication technology • Develop public transport, east-west rail, sort out A34 • Community involvement of older people • Increased housing including affordable housing Remove the green belt • Work together for solutions, strong vision and priorities • Migration • Competition • Retail development • Sectors/clusters can attract inward investment • Highly skilled work from home • Teach mandarin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to fix education • Availability of skilled workforce • Public/political hostility to migration, reliance on migration • Lack of vision Inertia Complacency in the face of global competition, insular thinking Lack of direction/ leadership, ambition • May be left behind due to old telecom infrastructure • Loss of Community • Decline of market towns Loss of town centres Rural areas cease to thrive Poor retail offer means shop elsewhere Internet shopping • Health and Safety • House prices price us out of the market • Lack of government investment South East focus on Thames Gateway, 2012 • Remove green belt NIMBYS • The unknown • Red tape Lack of action • Risk averse financial institutions • Brain drain by high tech businesses moving away • Consumer debt • Lack of fluent mandarin speakers
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Annex D: Feedback (22 responses)

What was good about the event?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitation• Representation• Presentations• Data and trends• Networking• Discussions• Range of views• Feeling of engagement• Timing• Being invited• Key issues agreed• Open forum to share ideas• Good opportunity to bring together work so far• Venue• Airing views across disciplines
What could have been better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More consideration of future• More bigger businesses• Acoustics• Mixed groups – councillors and business• Shorter presentation• More involvement of politicians – Cabinet in particular, Oxfordshire Partnership members, planners...• Gain agreement on priorities• Clear identification of the backgrounds of the ground• Product of the event needed to be clearer and possible influence• More focus on vision aspects and key objectives for next 25 years <p>Comfort breaks, more coffee</p>
Most important thing that those responsible for the strategy should consider?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus and priority setting• How to create the right environment for everyone else• Oxfordshire as a brand rather than Oxford only• Demonstrate the win/win for stakeholders• Improve education and skills• Concentrate on achieving thriving communities• Try to truly imagine 25 years ahead instead of trying to solve today's problems• Strong and dynamic leadership and direction• Don't try to solve everything• Set out achievable but ambitious objectives• Make some decisions• Identifying actions and incorporating some quick wins into the plan to encourage

broader engagement

- In 25 years must have better roads and not just say “we can’t”
 - Education and skills support for greater alignment with needs of Oxfordshire business
 - Leadership needs to be less complex and more accessible
 - How to get buy in from others
 - Better alignment of priorities and plans
 - Communicate with each other and the community
 - Solve the transport problem with blue sky ideas
 - Look at the issues important to Oxfordshire – transportation, housing and skills
 - Strong communities
 - Secondary and tertiary education for the two lower quartiles
- Helping to develop a deal

Anything else?

- More opportunity for structured debate between business people and local politicians
- Keep people informed of progress
- Feedback from the next round of workshops – impact of this event
- Frustrating trying to set a local strategy that is not achievable without power to implement it due to national or regional politics overriding
- How to sustain and grow this type of involvement of businesses in political prioritisation and planning?
- Breakdown some of the priorities e.g. educ+skills, transport – more detail below needed
- Good ‘sexy’ communication
- More elected member representation
- Bacon butties