

England's Economic Heartland Board

24 September 2026

Item 4: Maintaining momentum in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Welcomes the new Government's continued support for the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, including the appointment of Lord Vallance as Chair**
- b) Agrees to write a letter to Government, outlining the risks of 'two-speed' devolution in progressing infrastructure the Corridor requires**
- c) Notes EEH's continued convening role in the region, including our continued support for the Oxford-Cambridge pavilion at UKREiiF and provides a steer on whether the Board would like to become a full co-sponsor for the Oxford to Cambridge Corridor Pavillion in 2027.**

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. To consider how momentum behind the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor can be maintained under the new Government, particularly in the context of unequal devolution arrangements in the next few years.

2. Key points to note

- 2.1. The new Chancellor has recognised the importance of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.
- 2.2. There is a risk that variable devolution arrangements in the Corridor create a 'two-speed' region which impacts the ability to deliver transformational growth.
- 2.3. The Board is asked to consider a letter to Government outlining these concerns, particularly in the context of progressing mass transit.
- 2.4. In its recognised convening role, EEH is currently planning its level of support for UKREiiF next year, alongside working towards the launch of a Parliamentary Group and delivery of its second Regional Leaders' Summit.
- 2.5. Work on a regional vision for quality of life is progressing well, with the consultants due to commence scoping phase shortly.

3. Context

- 3.1. Since being announced as a major economic initiative by then-Chancellor Rachel Reeves in January 2025, the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor has achieved significant momentum.

- 3.2. This includes the appointment of Lord Patrick Vallance as ministerial champion and the establishment of a dedicated civil service unit. Progress has also been announced on a range of infrastructure projects, including East West Rail, Cowley Branch Line and the Ellison Institute of Technology, Cambridge South, Universal Studios, potential new towns, and London Luton Airport expansion, alongside funding for the Oxford Growth Commission and the establishment and funding of the Greater Cambridgeshire Development Corporation.
- 3.3. There have also been a number of important events, which highlighted growing partnerships across the region. These include the Regional Leaders' Summit organised by EEH, and the Science Supercluster conference held by the Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster. In June, the Supercluster published a vision for the region to become a global top ten innovation cluster – an ambition that was endorsed by local leaders.
- 3.4. Lord Vallance resigned his role as science minister in July. However, the new Government has now announced he will serve as Chair of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor, which it described as 'an ambitious partnership with local government, business, and academia to drive innovation and remove the constraints that are holding back good growth'. Details of Lord Vallance's appointment are set out in Annex 1.
- 3.5. In his 'Growth Speech' on 7 September new Chancellor John Healey said if 'our city-regions could emulate the success of those in France or Germany, growth in our country would be transformed'. Crucially, he added: "In Britain, we also have our growth corridors – the Oxford-Cambridge Growth and the Northern Growth Corridor."
- 3.6. Devolution is a key policy driver of new Prime Minister Andy Burnham. In his first speech as Prime Minister, made on the steps of Downing Street, he said: "We will take power out of here and carry it into every postcode in the land so that they can do more."

4. Two-speed devolution

- 4.1. Currently, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is the only devolved authority within the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor (taken as covering the entirety of the EEH geography – as illustrated in the Supercluster's recent vision report).
- 4.2. There is no set timeline for if or when other places in the region will have strategic/ mayoral authorities in place. It is unlikely that any areas will be part of the 'first wave' of new devolution deals. Meanwhile, local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire has also been paused and put under review.
- 4.3. Therefore, large parts of the Corridor are not currently part of the shaping and decision making phase for deeper devolution, the Prime Minister's commitment to 're-wiring the state', nor able to provide input in the same way into Government investment and decision making.
- 4.4. There is a risk, in the immediate term, that a patchwork of devolution deals and powers risks creating a two-tier geography, as Government focuses its time and resources working primarily with established strategic authorities.
- 4.5. The issue is particularly acute in a high-growth region such as ours, when critical decisions are needed to ensure the Corridor can maintain the pace of delivery required to realise its economic potential.
- 4.6. Mass transit provides an excellent example of how 'waiting for devolution' could delay progress on much-needed projects.

- 4.7. Greater devolution could accelerate mass transit development, including greater responsibility for scheme development, promotion and investment prioritisation to capable regional and democratically-accountable authorities or partnerships. However, of the places where mass transit solutions are being investigated (Oxford, Milton Keynes, Hertfordshire and Cambridge) only Cambridge is currently within a devolved authority.
- 4.8. Yet, growth pressure timelines (for example, in association with new towns and homes, economic development and Universal Studios) cannot wait until any new devolved authorities are established and at operational maturity.
- 4.9. It is proposed that the Board raises these concerns directly with Government (see draft letter in annex 2 below).

5. Maintaining momentum on Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor

- 5.1. As whenever there is a change to key members of Government, it is important to re-communicate the value of our region to the UK and ensure momentum is maintained.
- 5.2. EEH carries out an important convening role on behalf of the region – one recognised by members, regional partners and Government. Indeed, in the new Prime Minister's opening speech to Parliament, he referred to "*developing the triple helix approach to economic development by entwining business, academia and government behind the plan*". Through our partnership with the Science Supercluster and the Arc Universities Group, this is exactly the model that EEH has built over the past five years. It is a model for the Corridor that is well recognised and celebrated within Government.
- 5.3. There is a need to continue to maintain momentum, particularly during the transition phase of 'two-speed devolution'. With the Board's support, EEH will continue to maintain a keen focus on this important role. Alongside regular activity, we will maintain focus on key opportunities through the year:
 - **Regional Leaders Summits** – we understand from Number 10 North that there was strong recognition of the benefit of the Regional Leaders Summits and there is support for them to continue. EEH held its inaugural Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Regional Leaders' Summit in London in February, which was attended by both Lord Vallance and Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook. A date is being confirmed for a second summit in late October (subject to Ministerial diaries).
 - **MP engagement** - it was through this Board that there was a recognised need to convene a cross-party MPs group in support of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor. Plans are well underway, with strong support from MPs who have been engaged to date. We expect the first meeting to take place following the Conference Recess period. EEH has also been invited to work with the charity "Create Streets" on a fringe event titled 'On the right track: how to deliver the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor' in Liverpool during Labour Party Conference. The event is outside of the secure area (and therefore open to all) with panel representation from Cllr Susan Brown and MPs Chris Curtis and Daniel Zeichner.
 - **UK REiiF** – EEH also supports the Oxford-Cambridge pavilion at the UKREiiF property and infrastructure event in Leeds. The 2026 event in May was the most well-attended so far, demonstrating the huge interest in the corridor across the private and public sectors. Preparations for next year's event are already underway.

EEH is working with its region partners in the region, including Government, Supercluster Board and East West Rail, to plan for the 2027 pavilion.

For 2027, rather than being a contributor, EEH (on behalf of its local partners) has been invited to become a full co-sponsor. In doing so, we would be more able to ensure local places across the region are embedded in the thematic focus of individual sessions. The costs of becoming a full sponsor are higher but there remains a small amount of residual funding from the old Pan-Regional Partnership that was ringfenced for convening and advocacy activity. Depending on Board feedback, an officer subgroup could be formed to help shape input into UKREiif.

6. Quality of life

- 6.1. Local leaders agreed the shared economic vision for the corridor to become a globally significant innovation ecosystem and one of the world's top ten innovation clusters.
- 6.2. It became clear during discussions around the economic vision that it would be greatly strengthened by the development of a corresponding Quality of Life vision.
- 6.3. The economic vision therefore contains the following paragraph: 'At each stage of growth, there is a responsibility to local communities, particularly recognising the potential for adverse impacts. This vision comes with a commitment to mitigating these effects and maximising shared value, ensuring that the benefits of growth are realised early, distributed fairly, and accessible to local people and businesses. Achieving this vision will require partnership at every level'.
- 6.4. England's Economic Heartland has been asked to lead the quality of life work on behalf of the Board, government, the Science Supercluster, the Universities and key infrastructure providers, including East West Rail.
- 6.5. A consultant has been appointed. The first phase is scoping work so that any vision meets expectations. This work is now underway. It is expected that an update and emerging ideas will be shared at the next Regional Leaders' Summit.

Naomi Green
Managing Director
September 2026

ANNEX 2 – Details of the Ministerial Appointment of a new Chair for the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor

Appointing minister - Prime Minister

Time commitment - 4 hour(s) per week

Remuneration - Unremunerated

Start date - 1 September 2026

Length of term - 2 years

Lord Vallance has been appointed as Chair of the Oxford-Cambridge Corridor.

The Chair will provide strategic leadership to support good growth in the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor, bringing together local leaders, communities, businesses, academia and government departments to better coordinate decision-making and delivery.

The postholder will be responsible for:

- Providing strategic leadership to the Government's work on the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor and advising the Prime Minister on relevant matters.
- Supporting the identification and prioritisation of key policies and deliverables to drive innovation and growth in the Corridor.
- Supporting collaboration across government departments, local government, industry, academia and other external partners where appropriate.
- Providing independent judgement and challenge on delivery risks, implementation barriers and opportunities.

The Chair will report directly to the Prime Minister.

The Chair will also advise the First Secretary of State, the Chancellor, and the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, as well as other Ministers and Permanent Secretaries across government as needed.

No10 North will provide policy and operational support for the Chair. This support and resourcing will be proportionate to the Chair's time commitment and reviewed against wider Government priorities.

The Chair role is advisory and is not a decision-making role. It will inform cross-departmental working, without altering the responsibilities of Ministers or departments. Ministers will remain accountable to Parliament for decisions taken by Government.



ANNEX 1: Draft letter regarding 'two-speed' devolution

Dear Exchequer Secretary,

Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor: avoiding a two-speed approach to devolution and infrastructure delivery

On behalf of the Board of England's Economic Heartland, I am writing to welcome the continued commitment shown by Government towards the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and to highlight an emerging risk that could undermine its successful delivery.

Over the last eighteen months, the Growth Corridor has established significant momentum. Government has rightly recognised the national importance of this region through investment and policy support.

The appointment of Lord Vallance as both ministerial champion and now Chair of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor has further strengthened confidence that Government intends to move from vision to delivery.

We particularly welcomed the Chancellor's recent recognition of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor as one of Britain's key economic geographies.

However, we are increasingly concerned that current arrangements for English devolution risk creating a two-speed Growth Corridor, with significant implications for the delivery of infrastructure which is required to unlock the region's potential.

Our Board strongly supports the principle of further devolution. We believe greater powers and funding certainty at a strategic level would accelerate infrastructure delivery and improve outcomes for communities.

The challenge is that, at present, only Cambridgeshire and Peterborough benefits from an established mayoral combined authority within the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. Large parts of the region remain without equivalent powers, funding mechanisms or governance arrangements, and there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the timing of future devolution agreements (and in Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, there is also uncertainty about local government reorganisation).

This creates a real risk that Government attention, resources and delivery mechanisms become increasingly focused on places with established or emerging devolution settlements, while other areas facing urgent growth pressures are required to wait.

For a region experiencing some of the fastest rates of housing, employment and innovation growth in the country, this presents a significant risk.

A clear example is mass transit.

Across the Growth Corridor, local authorities and partners are developing mass transit solutions in Oxford, Milton Keynes, Hertfordshire and Cambridge. These are crucial projects required to unlock housing and economic growth, and connect nationally important innovation clusters.

Yet only Cambridge currently sits within a devolved authority with access to mayoral transport powers and associated funding flexibilities.

The delivery timelines associated with new towns, major housing developments, East West Rail, the Oxford-Cambridge innovation ecosystem and the arrival of Universal Studios in Bedford will not wait for future governance reforms. Decisions on transport investment, route protection, scheme development and funding pathways are needed now.

The Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor represents one of the UK's greatest opportunities for transformational economic growth. We must ensure that governance transitions do not inadvertently become barriers to delivery.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you and your officials.

