

MINUTES OF THE WEST LONDON ECONOMIC PROSPERITY BOARD
Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Tuesday 25 February 2025
at 11.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor Muhammed Butt (Brent Council - Chair) and Councillor Stephen Cowan (Hammersmith & Fulham Council) & Councillor Shital Manro (Ealing Council).

Also present: Councillor Barry Rawlings (Barnet Council) & Councillor Paul Osborn (Harrow Council) - as online participants.

Other Attendees:

Luke Ward (Director Housing, Economy & Placemaking – Barnet Council)
Connor McDonagh (Assistant Director, Regeneration, Economy & Skills - Ealing Council)
David Pack (Strategic Head, Economic Growth - Hammersmith & Fulham Council) – as an online participant
David Glover (Head of Planning & Development Services - Brent Council) – as an online participant
David Francis (Director, West London Alliance) – as an online participant
Majeed Neki (Assistant Director Economy, West London Alliance)
James Kinsella (Governance & Scrutiny Manager, Brent Council)

John Anderson (Chief Investment Officer – Imperial College London)
Katy Ingleby (Public Affairs Officer – Imperial College London)
Neil McCullough (Director of Cities Consultancy, Oxford Economics)
Hugo Bessis (Oxford Economics)

1. Apologies for Absence and Notification of any Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Shantanu Rajawat (Hounslow Council) and Councillor Peter Mason (Ealing Council). It was noted that Councillor Shital Manro would be formally substituting for Councillor Peter Mason (Ealing Council).

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made during the meeting.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting of the West London Economic Prosperity Board held on Thursday 19 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

4. WestTech Innovation Corridor

Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Chair) welcomed John Anderson (Chief Investment Officer – Imperial College London) & Katy Ingleby (Public Affairs Officer – Imperial College London) to the meeting and invited them to provide a short presentation updating the Board on development of the WestTech Innovation Corridor vision and concept ahead of publication of the London Growth Plan.

The following key issues were highlighted as part of the presentation:

- The background and context to the involvement of Imperial College London in development of the WestTech Innovation Corridor.
- The vision for the Corridor based on use of research universities (such as Imperial College) as a catalyst for driving investment, jobs and growth across West London.
- The development of the Imperial College London strategy “Science for Humanity” as a basis for the work being undertaken to create the WestTech Corridor as a world leading hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and technological advancement in West London. In seeking to build from a science and innovation base to amplify investment and impact, reference was made to:
 - Albertopolis (as one of the original Innovation Clusters);
 - Paddington Life Sciences (focussed on the rapidly growing life science cluster located around St Mary’s Hospital, the Digital Collaboration space and Paddington as one of North West London’s major transport termini);
 - White City Deep Tech Campus & Innovation District including a thriving ecosystem of co-located incubators, startups and industry partnerships;
 - Old Oak & Park Royal as one of the UK’s largest opportunity areas.
- Growth trends to date and potential for the future:
 - In the previous five years the number of deep tech businesses in the White City area had increased by 76% to 102 companies with the number of employees having increased by 219% to just over 4000 people;
 - Companies within the cluster had collectively secured over £1bn of investment funding over this period (representing six times the level of funding secured by other deep tech businesses across the UK on a per firm basis);
 - Based on an indicative analysis, the Board was advised that if these growth rates were to be replicated across the wider WestTech Corridor over the next five years the number of employees working in deep tech would increase by 142,000 or 7.4% (not including wider supply chain effects) with investment across new and existing deep tech businesses having the potential to reach £30bn.
- The outline of key hubs across the Imperial WestTech Corridor including the Imperial College London campuses, Imperial NHS Hospital sites, Future innovation Clusters and major transport links supported by development of a collective strategy designed to bring together a wide range of partners

including the public, Not for Profit and Stakeholder Equity sectors to attract and drive investment.

- The support of the Board and local authorities as a welcome and key factor in the future success of the Corridor.

The Board noted the importance of the collaborative approach being undertaken involving engagement between local authorities, universities and businesses with the Chair taking the opportunity to thank John Anderson for the outline provided in relation to the concept and vision for the WestTech Corridor and its impact across West London.

Comments were then sought from the Board, with the following issues highlighted:

- Having noted the close engagement of Hammersmith and Fulham in the development of the concept supporting development of the WestTech Corridor, Councillor Cowan was invited to open the comments and began by outlining what he felt were the significant opportunities to develop an alternative, more devolved approach towards the delivery of place-based economic growth and ecosystems anchored by academic and innovation institutions.
- In support of the model identified, the opportunity to partner with other Institutions and Innovation Districts across Europe was highlighted as a means of sharing best practice and learning. For example, Councillor Cowan cited partnerships already established with institutions in Barcelona; work being undertaken with the health sector to build ecosystems focussed around life sciences; and wider links being established, supported by the Mayor for London, through the London Growth Plan.
- As another authority closely engaged with development of the WestTech concept and vision, Councillor Manro (representing Ealing Council) was also invited to comment. He highlighted the focus required on seeking to ensure that the necessary infrastructure was available to support a polycentric approach to growth and investment not only in terms of the economic sites themselves, but also the supporting facilities (including housing and wider leisure and cultural provision) that would be required to attract investment and support wider economic growth. The Board recognised the key role local authorities would have as key delivery partners in supporting this process.
- In expressing support for the approach identified and work undertaken to date, being led through Imperial College, the Board also noted the opportunities identified to broaden the approach including the potential to engage other West London universities and the wider business community through West London business representative organisations. Members were also keen to ensure that future plans for the Corridor included consideration of how opportunities presented through West London Orbital, HS2 and the potential expansion of Heathrow could be utilised in a coordinated and joined up way to further support development of the vision and concept.

In response, John Anderson advised that the model presented had been designed to support a broad range of organisations seeking to locate and scale across West London as a region, with Imperial College and other research institutions able to serve as a beacon and anchor to focus wider collaboration. It was, however, recognised that the nature, scale and pace of growth being delivered across West London would need to be matters determined by those with the necessary democratic accountability.

- In recognising the appetite to scale and continue the development of innovation districts across the region reference was made, as further examples, to the inclusion of Sheffield Hallam University within the Brent Cross Town regeneration scheme as well as Brunel University's interest and track record as a research intensive anchor institution, and the use of existing hubs to support expansion on a more organic basis.
- Members also highlighted the potential in relation to development of the AI sector, which was recognised as a key area of technological innovation, alongside the need to address energy distribution and supply issues to avoid adverse impact on the ability to bring forward housing and regeneration development across the region.

The Chair once again thanked John Anderson for his presentation and members for their comments.

In noting the timeliness of the discussion given the upcoming publication of the London Growth Plan, the Board welcomed the progress and potential opportunities identified. It was **RESOLVED** to continue supporting the work being undertaken in relation to development of the WestTech Corridor, including the need for ongoing engagement with boroughs across the West London Alliance and other key partners such as West London's full range of universities, to maximise the value of growth corridors and clusters to West London's communities and businesses and wider UK London economy.

5. **West London's economy - evidence base**

Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Chair) introduced the item, reminding members that Oxford Economics had been commissioned (following a need identified at the West London Alliance Leaders Board) to improve the evidence base relating to the West London economy. The Board was advised that the first phase of the analysis had now been completed.

The Chair then welcomed Neil McCullough (Director Cities Consultancy – Oxford Economics) and Hugo Bessis (Oxford Economics) to the meeting, who had been invited to provide a brief presentation on the initial findings from the research. The following key issues were highlighted as part of the presentation:

- The outline of the main research objectives, along with initial analysis of the strong fundamentals identified in relation to the size and strength of the West London economy, based on population, location, skills and earnings with strong specialisation identified in relation to strategic sectors such as life sciences, logistics & aviation, creative industries and digital activities.

- Despite the strong foundations identified, the analysis had also shown West London performing behind other regions (such as East London, Oxford Cambridge Arc, London and the UK as a whole) in terms of economic output by Gross Value Added (GVA), which in 2024 had been 16.4% lower than in 2019. With the economy in West London still recognised as recovering from the pandemic, this decline was partly attributed to the fact that some sectors had taken longer to recover (such as aviation) along with West London having a lower share of highly productive sectors (particularly professional services). However, it was also evident that some of West London's sectors had tended to be less productive than the London average. As a result, the baseline forecast for West London within the initial analysis had remained relatively modest compared to London overall and the rest of the UK.
- Although the initial baseline forecast had been modest, the analysis had identified the potential for significant productivity growth in the West London economy with the ability to contribute an additional £7bn per year in GVA if each of West London's sectors was as productive as the London sector average. In noting that the London economy had been slowing and gaps between regions was narrowing, West London's position within London was also identified as key, given the sub region's ability to attract skilled workforce, its international links and its proven ability to deliver quick returns in relation to infrastructure and skills and employment support investment.
- Oxford Economics had identified five key sectors to explore in more detail:
 - Life sciences: recognised as a well-established sector (Imperial College, Brunel University, various pharmaceutical groups), with significant growth opportunities, and supportive Government policies.
 - Advanced manufacturing: recognising West London as the manufacturing hub of London with activity focussed mainly on food, drink and basic pharmaceuticals. Opportunities for linkages with other sectors (e.g. life sciences) were a key area of future potential, if land availability and cost constraints could be addressed through successful regeneration.
 - Logistics and aviation: identified as key sectors due to the presence of Heathrow Airport, Park Royal and other key sites. The expected growth of exports and passenger travel provided clear opportunities but it was also recognised that the sector remained susceptible to disruption as a result of sustainability issues, congestion and global instabilities.
 - Creative, digital and tech: it was noted that West London historically had a strong specialisation in screen production now supported by a fast growing digital and tech sector although challenges remained in relation to the adaption of new technologies, skills shortages and global competition.
 - Clean energy: recognised as a rapidly growing sector in the UK and globally, clean energy was also felt to have implications for West London relating to the aviation sector. It was felt that West London's challenges in relation to constrained electricity capacity and distribution may also give rise to opportunities for the development of clean energy solutions.
- In recognising the barriers to the growth of strategic sectors across West London, the analysis had also outlined where it was felt targeted intervention

could help to overcome the barriers and transform these into enablers for expansion. These included:

- Energy Infrastructure – energy demand was felt likely to increase across West London as the economy and population continued to grow. It was recognised that positive progress had started to be made on addressing the current energy constraints but that more work was required to ensure developments were able to progress, including proactive investment in grid capacity.
- Digital Infrastructure – recognising that one of WLAs growth priorities was to enhance West London as a global innovation gateway, it was noted that West London already benefitted from strong connectivity. Further improvements in the digital infrastructure could release additional economic gains for West London not only in terms of investment opportunities for tech, digital and manufacturing businesses but also in terms of encouraging new industries and uses such as data centres and Internet-of-Things applications. Opportunities to encourage more inclusive growth were also identified, with West London Alliance boroughs already investing together in digital connectivity and working on digital infrastructure improvement projects through the Digital West London programme.
- R&D and innovation – West London was identified as already performing well in terms of innovation, with Imperial College and Brunel University in particular already recognised as supporting a growing innovation ecosystem, and scope for better cooperation between businesses focused through development of the WestTech Corridor.
- Access to finance and inward investment – West London had already been identified as performing well in relation to the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) particularly in terms of manufacturing and Information & Communication, but there was felt to be scope to increase this further in areas such as life sciences with the potential positive impacts on employment, wages, productivity, export and knowledge diffusion.
- Skills – whilst West London was home to a large pool of skilled residents, the analysis identified that a large proportion commute elsewhere for better paid employment. A key challenge was therefore to support the creation of higher value-added jobs that would be able to retain skilled residents. The region also included a significant cohort of residents with fewer qualifications and in lower-paid jobs and supporting these residents to upskill and find work was cited as a key lever to support economic growth and help raise productivity.
- Transport accessibility – whilst acknowledged as being well connected to Central London and internationally, West London was also recognised as suffering from traffic congestion, a lack of North South links, and various connectivity gaps. The potential offered through improved transport accessibility and transport schemes such as the West London Orbital and next phase of the Superloop was seen as key to unlocking increased productivity, social inclusion, reducing congestion and pollution as well as supporting housing and wider regeneration opportunities.
- Housing – recognising that housing affordability in London had deteriorated substantially over the past 20 years, with the house price to earnings ratio in West London amongst the highest, it was felt that a

focus on efforts to improve affordability would support better matching of workers to jobs and provide the means to support more inclusive growth through social housing development. The challenges in this respect were also recognised, given the competition for land in West London and tension between the efforts to increase housing whilst also providing business space and industrial land.

- Health & Wellbeing – whilst West London had been identified as having a relatively healthy population, challenges were recognised in terms of the number of inactive working age residents, pockets of health deprivation and poverty and increase in health-related issues for those aged 65+ with significant impacts on both the formal health and care system and on unpaid care. Efforts being made to reduce inequalities in health and access to healthcare would support both economic growth and quality of life, though this was a challenging area to address given the range of factors involved including housing, poverty, social cohesion, safety, employment and skills and the environment.
- As final conclusions, the initial analysis had identified that West London had the assets, industries, and strategic position to grow and contribute even more to the UK's economic output, with clear opportunities in relation to fast-growing sectors such as life sciences, creative industries, tech and advanced manufacturing. This would require overcoming or mitigating a number of barriers which were limiting current growth potential.

The Chair thanked Neil McCullough for the presentation and then sought comments from the Board, with the following areas highlighted:

- In welcoming the analysis, members supported the focus on growth enablers given concerns and challenges highlighted in relation to the impact of poverty, skills and training, housing and energy infrastructure in constraining potential opportunities for growth across West London. Within West London's shared growth priorities on transport, energy, skills, housing and global innovation, the role of individual local authorities and their individual growth plans and strategies were also identified as key.
- The Board recognised the key relationship between the research undertaken and the launch of the London Growth Plan, which included strong principles around polycentric and inclusive growth.
- Speaking on behalf of West London Business, Andrew Dakers highlighted what he felt were the significant opportunities for growth across West London based on the type and level of businesses already being attracted, but identified the need for this to be delivered in a structured way. Reflecting on the recent launch of the research on polycentric growth commissioned from the Centre for London by Ealing Council, supported by the West London Alliance and Imperial College (which the Board had helped shape as its previous meeting in November 2024) he highlighted land cost and availability (including office space) and transport links as key issues from a business perspective.

- Whilst recognising the challenges outlined (particularly in relation to housing affordability, land use, energy infrastructure, skills and training) members also welcomed the focus on the opportunities identified for growth across West London given the existing infrastructure, diverse nature of the population and work already being undertaken to focus on place shaping and the development of local innovation sectors.

In terms of next steps, the Board's view was sought on plans for the next phase of research focussed around more detailed assessment of the impact in being able to overcome the identifiable barriers to growth and delivering on the enablers of growth.

In welcoming presentation of the initial research findings, the Board **RESOLVED** as a way forward and in recognising the ongoing work being undertaken:

- (1) To note the update provided on the emerging findings and key themes in relation to the research commissioned from Oxford Economics.
- (2) In support of the efforts being made to continue building a broader insight into West London's economy and develop the supporting evidence base, to endorse plans for the next phase of research, on which further updates would continue to be provided.

6. **West London Orbital**

As the final item on the agenda, the Board received a verbal update from David Francis (Director - West London Alliance) on progress in developing and promoting the West London Orbital Rail (WLO) scheme, with the following issues highlighted:

- Having completed the latest stage of feasibility design work, TfL had now initiated further work to stress test the modelling and economic appraisal of the scheme in order to ensure the benefits had been accurately captured prior to the next stage of design work. This work would be likely to see
 - An increase in forecast journey time savings, modal shift and passenger demand for the scheme.
 - Additional work being undertaken by TfL and WLA on the economic growth case and narrative for the scheme ahead of the Government Spending Review.
- The scheme remained one of the Mayor for London's top three priorities for next generation transport infrastructure investment, with further technical design work due to commence in Summer 2025, subject to funding.

Given the limited time available for the remainder of the meeting, the Board noted the update provided at the meeting without further comment and it was **RESOLVED** that regular progress updates continue to be provided at future meetings.

7. **Any Other Business**

No items were raised at the meeting.

8. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Board noted the following programme of dates for meetings during 2025:

- Tuesday 3 June 25 – 11am Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre
- Tuesday 16 Sept 25 – 11am Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre

The meeting closed at 12.23 pm

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT (Brent Council)
Chair