

Supplementary Papers

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

held in the Virtual meeting viewable by weblink
on Tuesday, 25 January 2022 at 2.00 pm

3. **Public participation** (Pages 101 - 103)
Final written responses to public questions asked at the 25 January 2022 meeting.

5. **Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update** (Pages 104 - 106)
Final written responses to the recommendations made by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 17 January 2022.

Public speakers

25 January 2022

1. Michael Tyce, on behalf of CPRE, Oxfordshire

On December 15th SODC Planning Committee in a narrow decision relying on the Chairman's casting vote permitted a 123 hectare solar farm on productive agricultural land in the Green Belt, highly visible on the slope of the Oxford Heights, overlooking the City and clearly within its setting. If a site like this is considered appropriate, then nowhere is protected. The officer had said that the very special circumstance needed to outweigh Green Belt constraints was that the council has declared a climate emergency with a target to be a carbon neutral district by 2030. As the Climate Action Officer put it, to meet zero carbon we need to reach South Oxfordshire's full potential for renewable energy, that is in effect to approve every application.

The officer noted that the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (SOLP 2035) does not identify suitable (or therefore unsuitable) areas or specific sites for renewable or low carbon energy projects. Neither do the plans of any of the other Districts and nor does the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan apparently intend to do so. It should because the scale of what is in store on present policies is overwhelming.

We do not pretend to be experts, but the 123 hectare site in question was said to be capable of providing the requirements of 11,700 homes. Efficiency of solar farms varies, so let's round that to one hectare powering a hundred homes for simplicity. There were 280,000 homes in Oxfordshire in 2021, with another 100,000 in the pipeline. Providing solar electricity for those would require 3800 hectares of land. Only 15% of electricity goes to households, the rest to industry and commerce. Carbon neutrality for Oxfordshire would therefore require 23,000 hectares. Oxfordshire has 260,000 hectares overall, so that would be 9% of the whole county covered in solar panels. And that is before we come to the growth in electricity usage planned as we switch to electric cars and heat-pumps.

Moreover, these solar farms would be concentrated in areas where there were good connections to the grid. The Green Belt – because it surrounds our major City – is one of these, as are the smaller towns and the powerlines connecting them. Potential land use on this scale – at least 9% of the whole County covered in solar panels to achieve carbon neutrality on present consumption, rising exponentially as cars and domestic heating became electric, **urgently needs a proper plan with figures, a spatial strategy, appropriate policies**, not just to make sure these solar farms are sensitively sited but to avoid undue loss of valuable agricultural land and amenity. Furthermore, it has to be a pan-Oxfordshire Plan as the opportunities and constraints will be very different from one District to another.

Although all the Local Plans reference general climate change and net zero ambitions, albeit with different target dates, none quantify the outcome or a spatial strategy to meet it. Neither does the 2050 consultation document, which will inform the next round of Local Plans. If we carry on piecemeal without a proper quantified structure and spatial plan the County – and particularly the Green Belt - will be overwhelmed. Meeting renewable energy targets overall cannot mean that every opportunity must be seized willy-nilly, wherever it arises at landowner

or developer whim, which was effectively the rationale for the very special reason which permitted a Green Belt agricultural site halfway up the Oxford Heights in the setting of the City.

A spatial and quantitative strategy for renewable energy – in Oxfordshire’s case essentially solar – would mean considering both the physical constraints – the location of the grid – as well as the heritage and environmental constraints –productive agricultural land, the Green Belt, open landscape. That would help not only understanding of the magnitude of the task but also the parameters within which the development would be undertaken.

Will the Future Oxfordshire Partnership therefore commit to producing a county-wide spatial and quantitative strategy for renewable energy?

Answer: The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy was launched by the Local Enterprise Partnership in 2019 and sets out an ambitious framework to enable the county to be at the forefront of clean energy innovation and is overseen by the Board’s Clean Growth Sub-Group. There is a clear need to increase the proportion of renewable electricity generated within the county to achieve net zero. The Oxfordshire Plan will need to consider future infrastructure needs for renewable energy generation capacity, to set a framework for delivery as part of a sustainable spatial strategy for Oxfordshire. There is a strand of work within the plan which will look at these issues and we would welcome comments on this at the Regulation 19 consultation stage. A focus on this work may also arise from the emerging zero carbon Oxfordshire work, though that is still in development, and it can be raised with the Environment Advisory Group.

2.Linda Ward, Cherwell Development Watch Alliance

At the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel meeting on 17th January 2022 Need Not Greed Oxon asked for clarity around the decision making and scrutiny of two key decisions: (1) the number of homes to be planned for in the 2050 Oxfordshire Plan and (2) whether there would be a review of the OGNA. This can be summarised as: who decides; how do they decide; and when do they decide?

We are encouraged that the verbal answer to the question agreed with the principles of openness and scrutiny. However, the lack of a detailed timetable at this late stage in the plan process is alarming.

The timeline on the OP2050 website is already out of date and early 2022 poses the challenges of the Purdah period. We cannot see how it will be possible to make these key decisions on the Oxfordshire Plan, with full and meaningful scrutiny, within this timeframe. After so many years and so many delays it would be very wrong to rush the last and most important part of this plan.

We ask the following:

1. For an explanation of why there is no detailed up to date timetable?
2. When will a detailed timetable be available?
3. Is the Future Oxfordshire Partnership prepared to seek a further extension to the timetable if necessary?
4. We continue to work on the OGNA and our concerns, rather than diminishing are escalating. Can we have an assurance that the calls from a number of high-level interested groups for a review of the OGNA will not be rejected purely because the current timetable does not allow it?

Answer: Thank you for your question. Officers are currently reviewing the work programme and timeline for the Oxfordshire Plan in the context of the recent consultation and the responses made. This work also includes considering the inter-relationships between the

Oxfordshire Plan and Local Plan Reviews, and we aim to conclude that review soon. That detail must be worked through to help inform the next stages of the process including our timetable, and we will need to engage will engage with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities when that work is complete. Decisions on whether to commission further evidence, such as the requested review of OGNA, will be based on the technical requirements of ensuring that the Plan is found sound at the examination.

Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board) response to recommendations of the Partnership Scrutiny Panel made on 17 January 2022

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership is requested to provide a response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel for decision at its meeting on 25 January.

Page 104

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
<p>1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership ensures that the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 include provision for contingency planning for extreme weather events linked to Climate Change, considering the principles of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.</p>	<p>In part</p>	<p>Climate change is the most significant challenge facing our future, with the threat of increased flood risk, severe drought and more extreme weather patterns resulting from greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. It is essential that climate change considerations run through the Oxfordshire Plan strategy, to support the integrity and resilience of the natural environment and Oxfordshire’s communities. Climate change is expected to be central to each of the Oxfordshire Plan themes and policies. To properly address climate change, a coherent, joined-up approach encompassing development standards, transport and infrastructure and healthy ecosystems is required. However, we would comment that Civil Contingency planning for emergency events extends beyond the scope of the Oxfordshire Plan, and these are managed through other routes.</p>
<p>2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership ensure that the Oxfordshire Plan has local net zero carbon ambitions factored firmly and prominently into the next draft of the Plan.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Whilst we understand that consultation responses are still being considered, we would anticipate that net zero will continue to be a key area of focus within the Plan, as expressed in the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation materials, and guided by the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development.</p>

<p>3. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership provide any further information that may now be available concerning two previous recommendations from this panel:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Whether a review of the OGNA can be initiated b. When and how the decision concerning the next steps for the Oxfordshire Plan will be taken. 	Yes	<p>Officers are currently reviewing the work programme and timeline for the Oxfordshire Plan in the context of the recent consultation and the responses made. That detail must be worked through to help inform the next stages of the process including our timetable. Decisions on whether to commission further evidence, such as the requested review of OGNA, will be based on the technical requirements of ensuring that the Plan is found sound at the examination. Decisions on any such review or timetable change would need to be made by the individual local authorities.</p>
<p>4. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership encourage its constituent councils to engage closely with the East West Mainline Partnership (formerly the East West Rail Consortium).</p>	Yes	<p>Where it would be helpful to local councils to engage with the East West Mainline Partnership, the FOP would support councils in doing so. We note that East-West Rail is now launching a series of “Local Representatives’ Groups” and that a number of our councillors have been invited to attend.</p>
<p>5. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership continue to lobby HM Government for the electrification of the East West Rail line.</p>	Yes	<p>In March 2021, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership wrote to HM Government advocating for the electrification of the East West Rail line, and their response indicated that the case was being considered. The Partnership can request an update from HM Government on progress. The East West Main Line Partnership (formerly the East West Rail Consortium) has electrification as one of its key priorities, and we will support that through the membership that our local authorities hold.</p>
<p>6. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership ensure that the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy safeguards against the development of any new gas network infrastructure</p>	No	<p>The Future Oxfordshire Partnership supports a reduction in dependence on fossil fuels and has previously expressed agreement with the government plans to cease the future installation of gas boilers in domestic premises. However, the gas network falls outside the remit of the local councils, and the FOP therefore has no powers to prevent the development of new infrastructure.</p> <p>We hope that the Scrutiny Panel is reassured that OxIS clearly states that ‘Oxfordshire’s reliance on petroleum products and gas must reduce at a fast rate to meet national 2030 targets and clean energy goals’, and that the three schemes put forward by the gas network providers have all been scored appropriately against the OxIS criteria, with negative scores for their impact on the environment.</p>

<p>7. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership ensure that the framing and terminology of growth within the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy clarifies that economic growth should not be at the expense of environmental quality and improvement. The scoring criteria may need to be adjusted to reflect:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A holistic consideration of the consequences of growth which prioritises green growth b. The crossing cutting nature of green infrastructure themes and priorities 	In part	<p>The Partnership agrees that economic growth should not come at the expense of environmental quality and improvement. The scoring mechanism offers a useful guide at a moment in time, but OxIS will not itself determine future decisions on funding and investment. The OxIS multi-criteria assessment is in two parts. The first is a needs-based assessment that scores schemes against the agreed 5 themes of OxIS. The second separate score assesses how well any proposed infrastructure scheme aligns with planned housing and/or employment from existing local plans. These scores are set out separately so it is possible to understand which particular schemes score well against each of the themes, as well as alignment with growth. This therefore means that we can see, for any one scheme how it affects or enhances the environment and understand its impact.</p> <p>Going forward, it is intended that the OxIS multi-criteria assessment will be able to be used in a flexible way with weighting enhanced for any one theme, recognising it may need to be used to support a specific policy or a specific funding opportunity. Should there be a wish to focus on how particular schemes perform against one of the core themes- such as environment -this can easily be adjusted.</p>
<p>8. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership support the approach outlined in paragraph seven of the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map report, ensuring that Oxfordshire is well positioned to make any 'asks' of HM Government to enable local delivery against the route map.</p>	Yes	<p>The Future Oxfordshire Partnership would be happy to consider any potential asks that could be made of HM Government arising from this important work.</p>
<p>9. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership note the Scrutiny Panel's support for local authorities in funding the next steps of the PAZCO work.</p>	Yes	<p>The Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes this support while recognising that funding decisions are the preserve of individual councils, and that budgets are constrained.</p>