

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel)

**HELD ON MONDAY 12 JULY 2021 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK**

Present:

Councillors Andrew Gant (Chair), Brad Baines, Andy Cooke, Victoria Haval, David Hughes, Dan Levy, Jabu Nala-Hartley, Adam Nell, Lucy Pegg, Alex Postan, David Turner, Elizabeth Wade and Sean Woodcock, (Vice-Chair)

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Adrian Colwell	Strategic Advisor to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050
Andrew Down	Growth Board Director
Giles Hughes	Chief Executive - West Oxfordshire District Council
Ahmed Goga	Director of Strategy and Partnerships - OxLEP
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager - South and Vale District Councils
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Stefan Robinson	Growth Board Manager – Oxfordshire Growth Board
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

14. Apologies for absence, substitutes; declarations of interest, Chair's announcements

Apologies were submitted from Councillor Matthew Barber, Vale of White Horse District Council; Councillor Derek Cotterill, West Oxfordshire District Council; Councillor Peter Dragonetti, South Oxfordshire District Council; Councillor Katherine Miles, Oxford City Council (substituted by Councillor Liz Wade); and Councillor Liam Walker, Oxfordshire County Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair commented that Amit Alva, the Panel's Scrutiny Officer had left to undertake a new role as a Scrutiny Officer at the London Borough of Southwark. He, and other members of the Panel, thanked Amit for all of his support and wished him well for the future.

15. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2021 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

16. Public participation

It was noted that there had been no requests for public participation on this occasion.

17. Growth Board response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair summarised the responses to the Panel's recommendations to the Growth Board from 1 June 2021.

18. Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report

The Panel considered a paper to the Growth Board which drew attention to the recent publication of the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report by the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford. It was presented by Ahmed Goga, Director of Strategies & Programmes, OxLEP; and Sam Hampton, Environmental Change Institute.

While the Chair supported the paper's recommendation that each member of the Growth Board use the report to drive action within their respective organisations, he considered it of such significance that it should be debated at the full council meetings of each of Oxfordshire's principal local authorities.

Several members of the Panel referred to the pivotal role to be played by HM Government in setting minimum mandatory national planning and building standards. Whilst aspirational requirements could be set locally, it was generally difficult for local planning authorities to defend local policies against challenges from site developers unless they were supported by national statutory requirements.

The Panel was particularly mindful of the need and challenge faced in reducing emissions from heating. They felt that the Growth Board should lobby HM Government to advocate the discontinuation of fossil fuel burning gas boilers in favour of more sustainable alternatives. In addition, partner authorities should also seek to prohibit these boilers through their Local Plans.

With regard to ground source heating, it was felt that the Growth Board could potentially have a role in exploring opportunities for shared access schemes, possibly through town and parish councils.

In discussion, members of the Panel were cognisant of the scale and number of challenges that would need to be overcome if Oxfordshire's aspirations and targets for a zero carbon county were to be achieved. It was felt that it was important, given the limited resources available, to prioritise the recommendations contained within the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report on the basis of both value for money and their impact on reducing carbon emissions.

Members also argued that local authorities, when delivering carbon reduction projects, should take account of the different approaches and nuances needed in supporting

projects aimed at behavioural change in their communities compared to those initiated and funded directly from their own resources.

Although some concerns were expressed in relation to both the current efficiency of photovoltaic (PV) cells and the storage of the electricity they produce, the Panel strongly supported the report's conclusion that there was significant potential to expand PV electricity generation within Oxfordshire. Members, therefore, agreed that the Growth Board should request that each partner council should promote the use of land for PV electricity generation within their Local Plans.

Concerns were expressed that disadvantaged groups should not be disproportionately affected or left behind as Oxfordshire transitioned to net zero. It was, therefore, important that each partner council took this into account when developing their plans.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Growth Board:

1. That the Growth Board request that each partner council considers the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report at a meeting of their full council, to give it visibility and prompt debate and action against the recommendations within the report
 2. That the Growth Board requests that partner councils, in their consideration of the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report:
 - a. Consider prioritisation of projects given the limited resources available based on the marginal cost of abatement of carbon dioxide emissions.
 - b. Take account of the differences of approach required between local authorities regulating activity in their communities to encourage carbon reduction and the development of zero carbon projects initiated by local authorities using their own financial resources.
 3. That the Growth Board requests that each partner council gives consideration in future iterations of their Local Plans:
 - a. to the banning of natural gas central heating boilers, in order to mitigate emissions from new developments.
 - b. to the ambition of promoting land use for solar electricity generation.
 4. That the Growth Board write to HM Government advocating for the discontinuation of gas boilers in new residential and commercial developments as soon as possible, in favour of more sustainable alternative heating methods.
 5. That the Growth Board explore opportunities in the future to assess whether some communities can pilot a shared access approach to ground source heating, possibly managed through parish or town councils.
 6. That the Growth Board requests that each partner council give consideration as to how they will manage the transition to a low carbon society so as not to disproportionately impact disadvantaged communities. It is suggested that this should be tackled through specific, tangible support and incentives.
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19. Oxfordshire Plan 2050- Endorsement of Regulation 18 Part two Plan for consultation

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which provided a summary of the arrangements for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part Two consultation (it was noted that the draft Regulation 18 Part Two consultation document – and supporting information – had been published as a supplementary agenda pack for the meeting). The Board, at their meeting on 19 July, would be asked to note and endorse the consultation document for consideration and approval by partner district councils.

Giles Hughes, West Oxfordshire District Council Chief Executive, informed the Panel that the decision on whether to proceed with the consultation represented a significant milestone in the Plan's programme. He paid tribute to all the officers that had been involved in the process. Once the consultation on the options presented had been completed, the responses would be considered, and a final Plan put together and consulted upon as part of the Regulation 19 process.

The Chair stressed that at this stage in the process, the Growth Board's endorsement was being sought to commence the consultation on the Plan document and it was, therefore, on this specific issue that the Panel's recommendations and views were sought. There would be the opportunity to comment on the Plan if the partner district councils approved the consultation document.

The Chair suggested that the Panel should submit a formal consultation response. This would be prepared by a group consisting of himself, the Vice-Chair and any other members who wished to contribute. The draft submission would then be considered at the Panel's meeting on 13 September. The Chair's proposal received the endorsement of members.

Adrian Colwell, Strategic Advisor to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, introduced the draft consultation document to the Panel. He emphasised that it presented different options for the county's future and contained themes consistent with the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

Councillor Emily Smith, Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group, paid tribute to officers for their work in progressing the Plan to the point of Regulation 18 consultation. She stressed that its publication would mark the start of a genuine consultation around the options facing the county. It was, therefore, important that as many people as possible took part in the consultation. Consequently, members were asked to raise awareness within their own communities.

In discussion, the Panel raised the importance of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 incorporating strong policies and standards to lock in progress towards net zero carbon. They also highlighted that policies designed to address inequalities needed to cover the full range of social outcomes rather than being narrowly focused on health.

Members asked how the consultation would be undertaken. They commented that it was important to seek to engage with as representative group of the population as possible. In response, it was emphasised to the Panel that particular care had been taken around messaging to make the Plan and the consultation as relevant and accessible as possible for all ages.

Members were informed that the consultation would run for ten weeks, primarily on-line via the Oxfordshire Open Thought website, and be supplemented by a series of locality and themed based public webinars and a social media campaign. In addition, hard copies of the Plan consultation document and supporting information would be made available via libraries.

While the Panel was supportive of this approach, they stressed the importance of full engagement with Town and Parish Councils over and above their formal consultation responses. They highlighted the opportunities that this would provide to utilise local knowledge to further raise awareness and engagement with the consultation.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Growth Board that:

1. the Growth Board ensures that the Oxfordshire Plan builds in zero carbon building standards to lock in long term progress towards net zero.
2. the Growth Board asks officers to liaise with Parish and Town Councils, Neighbourhood Forums, and elected members to identify suitable community buildings in their localities where copies of the Plan can be made available and visible to the community, especially in locations such as a library, and in areas where digital access might not be universal.

RESOLVED:

3. That a draft formal response to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation on behalf of the Panel be coordinated by the Chair and presented at the 13 September meeting.

20. Renaming the Growth Board

The Panel considered a report which summarised the necessary steps that needed to be undertaken if the Growth Board wished to change its name. Andrew Down, Growth Board Director, in introducing the report commented that the suggestion to reconsider the name followed on from the earlier Growth Board review and the aspiration to better reflect the body's purpose. The previous Growth Board meeting had agreed to progress the consideration of a name change and after consultation 'The Future Oxfordshire Partnership' had emerged as a leading option.

Members of the Panel supported the principle behind the proposed change, while acknowledging the difficulties around choosing a name that encapsulated the breadth of the Board's Terms of Reference. They also highlighted the importance of communicating this change to the wider public given the current low levels of public awareness of the Growth Board and its activities.

RESOLVED: That a change of name for the Oxfordshire Growth Board be supported.

21. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report -Quarter 4, Year 3

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which set out progress at Quarter 4, Year 3 with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

The Chair referred to the three strands of the report and drew attention to the challenges relating to Affordable Housing Programme. He reminded Members that while some of the target dates within the Housing and Growth Deal had been extended because of the pandemic, others had not – therefore, having implications for the timing and delivery of the overall deal.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Quarter 4, Year 3

The Panel considered a report to the Growth Board which set out an update on the financial position of the Housing and Growth Deal as at Quarter 4, Year3.

In response to a question, Andrew Down, Growth Board Director, commented that the full £90m of the Infrastructure Fund for the first three years of the programme had been committed to (including a pre-payment to Highways England). Not all of this money, however, had so far been spent and, therefore, the total reported spend stood at £72.1m.

Although the Thame to Haddenham Cycleway had initially been included within the Infrastructure Fund programme, as the scheme was developed it became apparent that it would not contribute to the objective of the acceleration of the delivery of housing within the time period of the Deal. Consequently, the decision was taken to remove the cycleway from the programme – it is still, however, a worthwhile scheme which will be reconsidered as future funding opportunities arise.

With regards to the profile of spend against delivery, it was acknowledged that there had been challenges in the delivery of the Affordable Housing Programme. Nevertheless, the programme was still on track to meet the annual target number of additional affordable homes (which included some contingency for the drop out of particular projects).

The Panel was also reminded that the time period of the Affordable Housing Programme had been extended to four years. Homes England had also agreed to an additional fifth year limited to the completion of particular schemes which had significantly commenced in Year 4, but which had not completed in that year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(c) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group meetings held on 26 May 2021 and 28 June 2021.

In response to a question relating to the status of the Oxpens Bridge project, Andrew Down, Growth Board Director, clarified that the scheme remained funded but that it was being monitored to ensure that there was an acceleration of housing delivery within the timescale of the Housing and Growth Deal.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

(d) Housing Advisory Group update

Although the Panel was advised that the summary notes of the meeting on 6 July 2021 were not yet available, they were informed that the advisory group had primarily discussed the progress of the housing element of the Housing and Growth Deal.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

The Panel noted that the summary notes of the meetings held on 3 June 2021 and 17 June 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

(f) Environment Advisory Group update

The Panel noted and welcomed the summary notes of the first meeting of the Environment Advisory Group held on 1 July 2021.

The Chair referred to the advisory group's statement that the role of local government in achieving environmental ambitions would inevitably increase over time, but that these ambitions could not be realised until HM Government granted local authorities the powers and resources to deliver them. He commented that this was a sentiment that the Panel would wish to echo and support by way of a recommendation to the Growth Board.

RESOLVED: That the Growth Board be requested to lobby HM Government to recognise that the role of local government in achieving environmental ambitions would increase inevitably over time, but that these ambitions could not be realised unless local authorities had the powers and resources to deliver them.

22. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Growth Board Director, informed the Panel of developments within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. He told them that no further substantive information had been made available in respect of HM Government's plans for the proposed Arc 'Growth Body' following the Arc Leadership Plenary Group meeting on 4 June 2021. He was, therefore, not in a position to update the Panel – as had been indicated at a previous meeting. Nevertheless, Mr Down did comment that additional details – and a consultation process – were expected in relation to the suggested 'Growth Body'. The timing and format of this would, however, be driven by HM Government.

The Panel was also advised that the engagement strategy and public consultation on the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Spatial Framework would commence in the near future. While it was expected that the framework would be a formal HM Government planning document, it would fulfil a similar function to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

23. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel - July 2021

The Panel's work programme – as set out in the Agenda – was noted. Councillor Postan suggested a possible Task and Finish Group review into the potential of communal heating sources.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

24. Dates of next meetings

The Panel noted the dates of scheduled meetings as follows:

- Monday 13 September 2021
- Monday 15 November 2021
- Monday 17 January 2022
- Tuesday 15 March 2022
- Tuesday 31 May 2022
- Tuesday 19 July 2022

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm
