

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON TUESDAY 7 JUNE 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair), Councillor Brad Baines, Councillor Samantha Bowring, Councillor Nathan Boyd, Councillor John Broad, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor Julian Cooper, Councillor Tiago Corais, Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Councillor Victoria Haval, Councillor Emily Kerr, Councillor Richard Langridge, Councillor Jo Robb, Councillor David Turner, Councillor Liam Walker, Councillor Richard Webber and Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Alex Jeffery	Asst. Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Clayton Lavallin	Principal Regeneration Officer, Oxford City Council
John McLauchlan	Head of Service, Infrastructure Programme Office – Oxfordshire County Council
Babatunde Ogundele	Asst. Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal
Nigel Tipple	Chief Executive – Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Panel for 2022/2023

Councillor Andy Cooke proposed and Councillor David Turner seconded Councillor Katherine Miles as Chair of the Panel. There being no other nominations, the nomination was agreed after being put to a vote.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Katherine Miles be elected as Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/2023 year.

There being no nominations for position of Vice-Chair, it was noted that this item would be carried forward to the next Agenda.

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Peter Dragonetti, South Oxfordshire District Council, (substituted by Councillor Jo Robb).

Councillor Katherine Mills declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 6a: Review of Homes from Infrastructure Programme on the grounds that her ward included the Banbury Road and Woodstock Road Corridor, Oxford.

It was noted the meeting was being live streamed and that a recording of the meeting could be found [here](#).

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2022 were approved as a correct record.

4. Public participation

The Scrutiny Panel considered two public questions.

Suzanne McIvor on behalf of the Cherwell Development Watch Alliance referred to the view that the submitted question highlighted the imbalance in resources between those who would benefit financially from growth in Oxfordshire and the many residents who believed that continuing high levels of growth were not compatible with wider objectives including the achievement of Net Zero Carbon emissions and the reversal of bio-diversity decline. Responding to statutory consultations on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was not a level playing field. There were too many documents and documents were too technical for the majority of the public to respond to. There had been only 422 individual responses to the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation. A response of a community group representing the views of all its members was treated in the same manner as a single response irrespective of the number of people it represented. The Panel was asked for its support in finding a mechanism whereby responses from community groups could be given more weight. Whilst this was recognised to be unconventional and challenging it was felt to be possible.

In the Panel's discussion of the question, a range of views were expressed for and against the principle that Oxfordshire Plan 2050 public consultations responses from resident and community groups on behalf of their members, could and should, be given additional weighting based related to the size of their membership and not be counted or considered as a single response.

The Panel in acknowledging the requirements to follow appropriate legislation and guidance (including the NPPF), in the analysis of consultation responses, was concerned that the analysis of Oxfordshire Plan 2050 responses fully take account of both quantitative and qualitative factors and that the contributions of community groups, individuals or developers and others all be considered equally on their merits.

In addition, whilst acknowledging the need for the use of technical and legal language within plan consultation documents, Panel members also highlighted the need for documents to also be available that were aimed at the general public, such as abridged or plain English version and as well as being accessible on-line, documents should also be available in hard copy.

RESOLVED to recommend:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in its presentation of consultation responses include both qualitative and quantitative data as 'not everything that matters can be measured'. This includes:
 - a. The total number of responses to a particular question.
 - b. The number of members an organization represents.
 - c. Verbatim quotes extracted from consultation feedback received.
 - d. A summary of the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.
 - e. Acknowledgement in the analysis that there may be variations of opinion within groups, and that points made by small numbers of respondents are not of lower value.
2. That in order to make Oxfordshire Plan 2050 formal consultation documents more accessible to the general public, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership also ensure the provision of documents in formats which are abridged and/or expressed in as much non-technical terms as possible.
3. That in order to reach as wide a cross section of society, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership also ensure the availability of non online mechanism for the public to engage with and respond to future Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultations.

David Young on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, (NNGO) referred to the view of the NNGO that the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel should have a vital role in making the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 as good as it could be, but that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership was hindering the Panel's work by avoiding or ignoring reasonable recommendations from it. The response given by the Partnership to the Panel's first recommendation from its March 2022 meeting was considered to be a good example of this as in the view of NNGO, it ignored the overarching function of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in the Local Plan making process across Oxfordshire and seemed to imply that the Partnership itself was not an appropriate Forum for asking about the progress of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

Whilst NNGO wished to engage constructively, much work was being undertaken behind closed doors and greater transparency was needed, not least with regard to decisions relating to housing numbers, the outcomes of meetings between the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group and Leaders of Councils and the 'six step process' for securing consensus referred to in the notes of the advisory group. The Panel was asked to make clear to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that the responses given to the Panel's Recommendation 1 from the last meeting were unsatisfactory, ask for more detailed responses and ask for more details regarding the nature and output of the joint workshops referred to in the notes of the Oxfordshire Plan Advisory Group.

After seeking Member and Officer views on the remarks, the Chair commented that the Panel noted the specific points made by NNGO in their question, and that it was also noted that as the Oxfordshire Plan progressed, consultation responses would be

incorporated into and help shape the final document. The role of the Panel in asking for an appropriate level of information of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in relation to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was also acknowledged.

(The full text of the submitted questions can be found [here](#))

5. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair referred to the formal written responses of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the recommendations made by the Panel at its previous meeting as set out in the Agenda.

Councillor John Broad referred to the response of the Partnership in relation to Recommendation 1.c that requested a peer review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, (OGNA) which in part stated that formal decisions on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be taken openly in meetings of the City and District Councils. He expressed the view that this had not been successful at Cherwell when there had been an attempt to do so. In response the Chair comment that it was fully acknowledged that the Panel would need to continue to monitor the development of the Plan including the OGNA closely.

6. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Review of Homes from Infrastructure (Hfi) Programme

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which set out the results of a review of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, (OHGD) Homes from Infrastructure Programme, (Hfi). The report also proposed that the Partnership endorse the removal of the Woodstock Road Corridor and Banbury Road Corridor schemes from the Hfi Programme and reallocation of their funding to other schemes within the programme that were facing cost pressures.

John McLauchlan, Head of Service, Infrastructure Programme Office, Oxfordshire County Council presented the report to the Panel and answered members' questions. He highlighted that:

- The Hfi Programme was entering its key delivery phase within the five year programme period.
- A number of schemes were scheduled to enter construction imminently, but since the formulation of the programme and budget allocation circumstances had changed significantly including the impacts of issues such the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit.
- Latest estimates indicated that a number of Hfi schemes faced significant cost pressures if they were to be fully deliverable. As the total budget for the Hfi was fixed it had been necessary to investigate options to reallocate funding and as a result of this exercise it was proposed to reallocate funding from the Woodstock Road Corridor and Banbury Road Corridor to other schemes as set out in the report.
- In considering which schemes to reallocate funding from the rationale had been to select schemes where removal of funding would have the least impact on the acceleration of the delivery of housing and the least impact on the delivery of infrastructure by March 2023.
- It was important from a reputational perspective to demonstrate to HM Government that Oxfordshire continued to be a reliable deliver partner for accelerated housing and infrastructure.

In discussion, the Panel whilst acknowledging the need to review the Hfl Programme within the limited confines of the terms of the Housing and Growth Deal, was extremely concerned with the proposals to remove funding from the creation of segregated cycling infrastructure on the Woodstock Road Corridor and Banbury Road Schemes. This was on the basis that reallocation of funding away from these schemes to those schemes that are focused on improving road infrastructure for cars would be contrary to the Oxfordshire County Council's strategic priorities to address the climate emergency and promote active travel. The Panel felt that reallocating the funding away from these schemes would negatively impact the councils' reputation as a delivery partner for future transportation infrastructure funding in the context of climate change. It was noted that the Woodstock Road cycling infrastructure was an essential to nearby proposed major developments in Oxford North.

A number of members also referred to the need to promote modular housing and it was agreed that Officers would recirculate an information paper on Modern Methods of Construction.

RESOLVED to recommend:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be strongly requested not to endorse the proposal to the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet for the removal of further funding from two schemes currently within the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Homes from Infrastructure programme – Woodstock Road Corridor and Banbury Road Corridor.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be requested not to endorse the proposal to Oxfordshire County Council for the re-allocation of the remaining funding from Woodstock Road Corridor and Banbury Road Corridor across a number of car-orientated infrastructure schemes in the Housing from Infrastructure programme which are projecting cost pressures.
3. That the Future Oxford Partnership acknowledge that BSIP funding does not change the urgent demand and need for segregated cycling infrastructure on the Woodstock and Banbury road corridors.
4. That if the proposed changes are regrettably agreed by Oxfordshire County Council, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership support accelerated efforts to identify and secure alternative funding for the Woodstock Road Corridor and Banbury Road Corridor schemes.
5. That if the proposed changes are regrettably agreed by Oxfordshire County Council, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership urgently support the provision of temporary segregated cycle lanes on the Woodstock Road e.g., through an e-Traffic Regulation Orders.
6. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership lobby HM Government to increase funding for the Homes from Infrastructure Programme given the unprecedented impact of inflationary cost pressures on all capital projects.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, Homes from Infrastructure (Hfl) Programme- Lessons Learned

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership of the findings of a recent lessons learnt review of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Homes from Infrastructure programme which had been a request of the Panel.

In presenting the report, Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme highlighted that:

- The final findings of the report had been consistent with expectations in that the feedback provided had not been a surprise reflecting as it did, the view of partners.
- The findings of the review represented the first part of a lessons learnt review as the findings were inevitably focussed on narrative around what might have been done differently and that if there were to be a new Housing and Growth Deal with HM Government, how it could be improved upon.
- The current Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal had been negotiated successfully over a period of only a few months and it was important to cognisant of that, acknowledging the Partnership's achievement. Whilst there were things which on reflection, might have been done differently, it had been a success and Oxfordshire as a county was delivering the Deal in accordance with the set targets.
- The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal was the only Deal negotiated at the time that was still active.

In discussion, members of the Panel queried whether the issues that had been identified with the Deal were essentially a consequence of the terms negotiated with HM Government and therefore not of partner councils' choosing. Paul Staines responded that in many respects the limitations of the Deal had been established at the outset by HM Government, for example, the Deal was always limited to a five year programme, when generally the view of infrastructure providers was that such programmes take longer than this to deliver, and the selection of accelerated housing as the key criteria of measurable benefit from the infrastructure schemes was another. However, notwithstanding those limited parameters, Oxfordshire local authorities at the time had still seen the value in the Deal, which was felt to be the correct decision.

In response to another question, the Panel was informed that under the current Deal the circumstances of the short mobilisation period faced by those involved had meant that there had been a need to learn and adapt as the programme developed, but it was felt that Oxfordshire County Council as the delivery partner for the Hfl programme and the other partners had risen successfully and quickly to the scale of the challenge of delivering it. Members of the Panel commented that Officers should be congratulated for all their hard work in delivering the programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(c) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the substantive matters in this item had been discussed earlier in the agenda and noted the summary notes of the advisory group.

(d) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the substantive matters in this item had been discussed earlier in the agenda and noted the summary notes of the advisory group.

(e) Environment Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the advisory group.

7. Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan

The Panel considered a report and supporting monitoring plan to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which provided an update on the progress of the Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan and the headline performance of the Oxfordshire economy as it recovered from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also proposed an Oxfordshire 'system wide' approach to HM Government's 'Levelling Up' and 'UK Shared Prosperity' programmes. Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) presented the report to the Panel.

In discussion, it was noted and welcomed that Oxfordshire's level of unemployment was below the national average. However, it was acknowledged that a significant proportion of jobs were based in the visitor economy which was felt to be still struggling. The question was raised whether the visitor economy had rebounded to pre-pandemic levels of employment or whether different forms of employment taken over for former visitor economy workers. Nigel Tipple responded that a combination of factors was at play, but that a key factor was that much of the visitor economy was seasonal and many of that workforce cohort were from outside the UK and had not returned to the UK following the opening up of the visitor economy post pandemic. In addition, many workers employed within the hospitality sector had moved to other forms of retail opportunities and had not returned to it post pandemic. The labour market was very tight with more vacancies than those seeking employment, with jobs outside of the visitor economy being perceived to offer higher levels of job security and terms and conditions. In addition, jobs in technical areas were difficult to fill and it was felt that it was necessary to explore opportunities to restructure the Oxfordshire economy by a combination of helping school leavers to understand better the potential career paths open to them, to look at the balance between vocational training and support for young people and to also support older people returning to the workforce. This was set out in more detail within the Oxfordshire Social Contract.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report and acknowledged the work undertaken through the Economic Recovery Plan.

8. Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Update

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which set out an update on progress of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, (OIEP) in the year up to May 2022 and attached draft OIEP Charter. In presenting the report and draft Charter, Clayton Lavallin, Principal Regeneration and Economic Development Officer, Oxford City Council, commented that the OIEP brought together key stakeholders from across the county and from within various sectors including the public sector, private and voluntary/community sectors. As the OIEP reported to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, the report before the Panel; represented the first of what would be regular updates. It was highlighted to the Panel that the OIEP had enjoyed a successful year which had included a launch event held at the Ashmolean Museum and that working groups focussed on the headings of Education, Employers, Social Value and Procurement and Place were shortly to be established. Each strand was designed to counter specific areas of inequality within the county as detailed in the report.

The Panel strongly welcomed the establishment of the OIEP and proposed Inclusive Economy Charter, but asked that in the finalisation of the draft Charter, the following matters be considered for inclusion by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

RESOLVED:

1. The need to ensure due emphasis within the opening statement of the Charter relate to inequalities within the whole county of Oxfordshire and not only within the city of Oxford.
2. The importance of the development of technical skills through apprenticeships, including in manufacturing and engineering.
3. Recognition within the text of the Charter of the contribution of all employer types to addressing inequality, including a specific mention of:
 - a. the positive contribution of social enterprise and co-operative employers.
 - b. Women and minority owned businesses.

9. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, provided a verbal update on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The Panel was informed that discussions were currently taking place between local authorities along the Arc as to whether to establish a locally led collaboration such as a pan regional partnership rather than a centrally imposed top-down form of governance.

Members requested a summary briefing covering the history and current position with regard to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc given the turnover in members of the Panel. Andrew Down responded that it was expected to be appropriate to produce a written report on the Arc later in June once the position was clearer.

10. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel

The Panel considered its work programme as set out in the Agenda.

Councillor Cooper suggested a potential future item related to the future of the Oxford Green Belt. Andrew Down updated the Panel that it was his understanding that the work to develop the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 had identified the possibility of a review of the Oxford Green Belt. It was stressed that no formal commitment to undertake a review had been given, but it was a matter being considered by the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Team of officers and further clarity was expected on the issue in the near future. Members were reminded that even if a commitment was subsequently made to undertake a Green Belt review, this did not necessarily imply that any changes to the current Green Belt would be proposed and appropriate due process would be followed.

The Chair encouraged members to consider the submission of future potential work programme items.

Councillor Dalmore asked for an update on the previous decision of the Panel to delegate authority to Cllr Nell and Cllr Hicks to engage with OxLEP and the University of Oxford to identify and communicate specific innovations that local authorities should be aware of that specifically linked to the remit of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. It was agreed that this should be brought to the next meeting.

11. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

It was suggested that a later meeting start time might be more convenient for members, particularly those with childcare responsibilities and officers agreed to canvass members on this outside of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chairman

Date