

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board)

**HELD ON MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 3.00 PM
COUNCIL CHAMBER, CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL, BODICOTE
HOUSE, BODICOTE, BANBURY, OX15 4AA**

[Link to watch the meeting](#)

Present:

Councillor Michele Mead (Chair), (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Councillor Sue Cooper, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities representative), Louise Guy, (Environment Agency), Dianne Hedges, (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Councillor Liz Leffman, (Oxfordshire County Council), Adrian Lockwood, (Oxfordshire Skills Board Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business representative - Bicester), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City), Councillor Emily Smith, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Catherine Turner, (Homes England) and Councillor Barry Wood, (Vice-Chair), (Cherwell District Council).

Officers: Lorna Baxter, (Oxfordshire County Council), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director), Daisy Gladstone (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council CEX), Susan Harbour (South and Vale Councils), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Stefan Robinson (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Paul Staines (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team) and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership CEX)

Other councillors: Councillor Andrew Gant, (Chair - Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel)

27. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcement

Members of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership began the meeting by holding a moment of reflection in remembrance of the victims from a shooting in Perm, Russia, which is a twin city of Oxford. The Partnership's condolences were extended to Perm and all its residents.

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Emma Hill, Environment Agency, (substituted by Louise Guy) and Dr David Chapman, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, (substituted by Diane Hedges).

There were no declarations of interest.

28. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

29. Public participation

It was noted that on this occasion no public requests to speak had been submitted.

30. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

The Chair invited Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel, to present the four recommendations arising from the Panel's meeting on 13 September 2021.

Councillor Gant explained that the first two recommendations referred to the Panel's consideration of the report on Oxfordshire's Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and related to the need to adopt a system wide approach in these matters. The Panel requested that HM Government be asked to simplify their bidding processes to encourage this method of working – especially around the issues of town centre renewal and the promotion of manufacturing.

The Panel's third recommendation concerned the provision of disaggregated data and targets within the Economic Recovery Plan. The presentation of information in this way would make it easier to see if particular sections of society (e.g. the young) were disadvantaged during the economic recovery.

Recommendation four was a detailed set of suggestions relating to the Partnership's draft response to HM Government's consultation on its proposed Oxford to Cambridge Arc Vision. This included the importance of: environmental concerns; the provision of data centres; East West Rail electrification; reducing dependency on private cars; housing viability; quantifiable, defensible targets and addressing inequalities across the county.

Councillor Gant referred to the Panel's consideration of the creation of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire, which had been warmly welcomed, and their response to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation. In so doing, he remarked that the Panel had been unclear as to the extent to which respondents to the Plan consultation were being asked to express views on levels of planned growth. While these concerns had not formed the basis of a formal recommendation to the Partnership, Councillor Gant, nevertheless, sought clarification on that issue.

The Chair provided the Future Oxfordshire's initial response to each of the recommendations – these would also be published in final form on the Partnership's website after the meeting.

In summary, the Chair confirmed that:

- The Future Oxfordshire Partnership agreed that rationalising the process by which local authorities and businesses can bid for HM Government funding would be beneficial. It did not, however, wish to submit any formal letters while existing bid processes were still ongoing. The Partnership would, nevertheless, request that the Executive Officer Group identify the best approach for delivering upon this recommendation and then report back.
- While recognising the sovereignty of councils to take a tailored approach to recovery, the Partnership agreed that there was a need, through the Economic Task Group, for a continued whole system response to the challenges facing Oxfordshire. It was anticipated that the Partnership would receive a report later in the year on the condition of the visitor economy, town centre renewal and system wide approaches to support it. With respect to the promotion of manufacturing, the Partnership noted that this formed a central tenet of the Local Industrial Strategy. They also drew attention to the fact that there is a specific project in the ERP report appendix which focusses on manufacturing and supply chain resilience – it did, however, need to secure funding before it could commence.
- It was understood that the Economic Recovery Task Group would work with national agencies and government departments to provide and make use of disaggregated data wherever it is available.
- The Future Oxfordshire Partnership would delegate responsibility for incorporating the Panel's suggested amendments to its draft response to the HM Government's Oxford to Cambridge Arc Vision consultation.

Councillor Cooper suggested that in relation to the setting of quantifiable and defensible targets for the Arc Vision, the Partnership should explain to the Panel that its strong preference was for these to be an amalgamation of those decided by local authorities.

Councillor Smith confirmed that responses about future levels of growth were very much encouraged as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Part 2 Regulation consultation.

31. Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan Update

The Partnership considered a report setting out both an update on the progress of the Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and the headline performance of the county's economy as it emerged from the challenges of the pandemic. This was presented by Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP.

Mr Tipple explained that the report and ERP had three broad areas of focus:

1. Activities where funding had been secured and OxLEP was working flexibly or in partnership to deliver them.
2. Activities where funding has been allocated via various HM Government support schemes.
3. Projects which had been worked up to implementation stage, but which were not yet funded.

It was stressed that a whole system, non-vertical approach was required so that where resources were available these could be targeted most effectively.

Although the levels of unemployment within Oxfordshire were broadly positive, significant pockets of unemployment existed within some urban areas. It, therefore, remained necessary to press and explore potential funding opportunities, especially those that support young people, with HM Government. Young people not in education, employment, or training, (NEETs) were a key priority and there had been a rise in the numbers of this cohort.

As the number of apprenticeship opportunities started to recover following the pandemic, the focus was upon supporting those sectors which hoped to recruit. In addition, action was being taken to promote apprenticeships in a manner accessible to young people. This was to ensure that they were aware of the opportunities that exist in their local area.

The visitor sector is a significant part of Oxfordshire's economy. It employs around 40,000 people and is the largest employer of women in the county. The sector was, however, currently experiencing significant challenges – including the closure of HM Government's furlough scheme. As a result, more capacity and support would be put in place working through the ERP.

Mr Tipple informed that Panel that, while every effort would be made to adopt a whole system approach and to pivot funding to meet the challenges facing Oxfordshire's economy, there were a substantial number of prioritised ERP interventions that were not currently funded. It was, therefore, of critical importance to continue conversations with HM Government about the support it could provide.

Jeremy Long, Chair of OxLEP, highlighted references within the ERP to Oxfordshire's Inclusive Economic Partnership (IEP). He informed members that a strong interest had been shown in this by a range of expert stakeholders with knowledge relevant to the issues affecting the county. It was, in his opinion, gaining momentum and several of its working groups had reported back on important matters. Mr Long argued that for the IEP to move forward as an Oxfordshire wide partnership, and to take advantage of the opportunities offered, a complete system approach was required. This would involve the provision of an appropriate level of project resource.

Councillor Brown supported Mr Long's remarks. She commented that the importance of the work of the IEP was demonstrated by issues such as the recruitment problems being experienced by many employers in Oxfordshire – exacerbated by a combination of relatively low wages and a lack of affordable housing.

Councillor Brown also highlighted the significance of the investment being undertaken through the Low Carbon Hub to develop alternative energy markets for the county. She argued that the need for this had been shown by the recent sudden increases in energy costs.

Councillor Brown also stressed the importance of developing workforce skills in order for people to take advantage of new employment opportunities.

Mr Tipple, in response to a question from Councillor Leffman, said that the expectation was that any relaxation of restrictions on entry to the UK would assist the recovery of the visitor economy, but that any material change in numbers should not be expected until mid-2022.

Miranda Markham, OxLEP Business Representative for Bicester, commented that a full recovery in visitors, particularly from long-haul destinations, might not be realised until 2024. It was, therefore, important not to become complacent about the challenge.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Notes the progress being made in delivering the Economic Recovery Plan and the key issues facing the economy.
2. Endorses the need for continued whole-system responses, through the Economic Task Group, to the economic challenges faced in Oxfordshire and the co-ordination of resources across partners to drive delivery and secure further investment to support businesses and local communities.

32. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Quarter 1, Year 4

The Partnership considered a report updating them on progress with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of first quarter, Year 4 (2021/2022). It was presented Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme.

Mr Staines explained that reviews of the Deal were now conducted on a biannual basis. This, therefore, meant that the figures in the document around affordable housing delivery were unchanged from the previous report. A more detailed update on delivery figures and projected trajectory would, however, be presented at the next meeting of the Partnership.

Councillor Leffman referred to figures for housing delivery forecast vs target graph (as set out on page 43 of the agenda). She noted that if a 20% optimism bias was not included, delivery would appear to be below the planned target by 2022/2023. Councillor Leffman asked whether the explanation for this was related to issues, such as a lack of materials and labour, which were affecting the construction industry. She also inquired as to what action the Partnership might take to bring delivery back to target.

Members were informed that the construction industry – like many others – had been disrupted by the pandemic. This had impacted upon the delivery of a number of homes that would have otherwise been expected. Due to the structure of the Deal, the delivery of delayed homes outside of the agreement's allotted time period could not be considered towards the original trajectory.

The construction industry was experiencing national labour and material shortages, and these represented emerging risks to the programme which would continue to be monitored. In recognition of these impacts, Homes England had agreed to an extension of the Deal to allow additional time for delivery of the agreed original five year target trajectory. It was currently estimated that some 2,000 additional units would be delivered in Year 6 of the Deal. This would compensate for some of the reductions earlier in the programme.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the progress as at Quarter 1, 2021/22 towards the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Quarter 1, Year 4

The Partnership considered a report setting out an update of the financial position of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of the first quarter, Year 4 (2021/2022). This was presented by Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, Oxfordshire County Council, and highlighted that:

- The fourth annual contribution of £30m had been received from HM Government in respect of the five year homes from infrastructure programme.
- While it was expected to spend £24.9m during the 2021/2022 financial year on infrastructure programme projects, the full £150m of the programme had now been committed as set out in Appendix 1.
- It was expected that the £5m Deal capacity fund would be fully utilised by 2024 as set out in Appendix 2.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the Quarter 1, 2021/2022 financial report.

(c) Housing Advisory Group update

Councillor Brown referred to the notes of the meeting of the Housing Advisory Group held on 1 September 2021. She highlighted that the Group had held a useful discussion on reflections arising from the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme to date.

This had covered the success from the delivery of the programme but also some of the challenges that had arisen (including some aspects which had not been originally identified). Members of the Group had reflected that the work of the programme had been important. They also highlighted the fact that there remained an ongoing need for affordable housing within Oxfordshire. In their deliberations, the Group felt that some consideration should be given to a new request for investment in affordable housing – taking into account the lessons learnt from this experience. Councillor Brown suggested that local authority members of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should consider this possibility further within their own councils.

Councillor Cooper expressed regret that it had not been possible to deliver affordable units within South Oxfordshire under the current Deal and reiterated the need for genuinely affordable homes to be provided across the whole of the county. In response, Councillor Brown stated that the Housing Advisory Group had discussed not only why South Oxfordshire had been unable to utilise the current Deal's affordable housing opportunities, but also what more might be done to ensure that all parts of Oxfordshire could benefit from any future arrangement.

Members agreed that the national definition of 'affordable housing' was simply not working for many of Oxfordshire's residents and, therefore, excluding them from the housing market. Consequently, the Partnership decided that further action was required with social rent being the form of tenure provision most needed – although other forms of tenure each had their own place within a range of options.

Councillor Leffman stated it was particularly important for social housing to be built to high environmental standards as doing so would reduce future energy running costs for residents in addition to reducing carbon emissions.

Councillor Wood remarked that although the provision of affordable housing was very important in its own right, it was also vital to consider the social infrastructure (schools, doctors' surgeries etc) which was often required to unlock development. Moreover, it should also be borne in mind that affordable housing formed only a subset/proportion of the total homes delivered by a developer.

Catherine Turner welcomed the discussion and commented that, on behalf of Homes England, she looked forward to collaborating with Councillor Brown on the points arising from both the work undertaken by the Housing Advisory Group and the current Partnership discussion.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

(d) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group update

Councillor Smith referred to the notes of the meetings of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group held on 15 July 2021 and 12 August 2021. She also commented verbally on their most recent gathering on 16 September 2021.

In her update, Councillor Smith highlighted that the Regulation 18 Part 2 public consultation period would run until 8 October 2021. Several different stakeholder events had been held including a series of webinars and the contributions made had been very positive. She thanked everyone that had engaged with the process so far.

The Group was now focussing upon preparations leading into the formal Regulation 19 consultation expected in May 2022. It was recognised that developing the next iteration of the Plan would be a significant and different piece of work (especially within the timetable and with the need to secure approval from each local council). Consideration was, therefore, being given to early engagement with local authority members – via the overview and scrutiny process – and wider stakeholders.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

(e) Environment Advisory Group update

Councillor Cooper explained that, while the Group was still establishing itself, it had, nevertheless, discussed the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report at its previous meeting. The Group was scheduled to consider the Local Transport and connectivity Plan and a report on its own professional officer support during their meeting in September.

Councillor Cooper also emphasised that environmental issues linked to housing (especially retrofitting) remained the priority. She commented that communication with residents over these issues would be a key task for the Future Oxfordshire Partnership as a whole. The importance of providing a consistent message regarding the role that everyone had to play in reducing carbon emissions was also stressed.

Councillor Brown commented that it was important to realise that some 80% of Oxfordshire's housing in 2030 had already been built. Consequently, it was important not to underestimate the scale of the funding challenge presented by the retrofitting of both domestic and commercial property. In addition, particular challenges would be posed by the historic buildings within both Oxford and the wider county. The crucial issue of retrofitting should, therefore, be borne in mind during the debate on environmental standards for new housing.

Councillor Brown also highlighted the good work on the issue of retrofitting existing homes being undertaken by the Low Carbon Trust and Cosy Homes Oxfordshire and suggested that their advice and examples of best practice should be promoted and shared more widely.

Finally, investment in retrofitting at a national level would be required if the timetable for carbon emission reductions were to be achieved.

Councillor Leffman stated that Oxfordshire County Council had recently joined the County Council Network's UK 100 initiative, where county councils committed to reducing their carbon footprint. Part of the commitment included being able to demonstrate a reduction in carbon emissions. The work of the Environment Advisory Group around baseline data for carbon emissions was, therefore, very important.

Responding, Councillor Cooper stated that members of the Environment Advisory Group had agreed to work together around establishing baseline carbon emission data. In addition, Nigel Tipple, OxLEP Chief Executive, referred to the publication of the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report which contained a significant amount of data and analysis. While he recognised that it did not represent a full baseline, it provided a good evidence base which could be developed further.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

33. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, provided a verbal update. The Partnership was informed that the outcomes of HM Government's Comprehensive Review were expected on 27 October 2021. Although it was not expected that there would be significant capital sums allocated to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, it was felt that there would be continued support for collaboration from HM Government. There were also suggestions that further details might be provided on how the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Arc Growth Body might be established.

Councillor Wood informed the Partnership that he had written, on behalf of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders Group, to the Secretary of State in support of existing subregional partnerships. In this letter, he had highlighted the important role that each level of governance within the Arc, from local authorities to central government, would have to play if successful outcomes were to be achieved (the principle of subsidiarity). It had also expressed the view of the Leaders Group that HM Government should establish an Arc Investment Fund to help the project achieve its aspirations.

Professor Alistair Fitt also updated the Partnership that he had written, on behalf of the Oxford to Cambridge Universities' Group, to suggest ways in which they could support HM Government in meeting its policy objectives. The letter explained that the Group currently had three main areas of support focus: life sciences, sustainable aviation and space.

Professor Fitt also informed the Panel that the Universities' Group was looking at reviewing its overall strategy and at its next meeting it would have representation from a broad range of economic sectors.

Jeremy Long, Chair, OxLEP, spoke in support of Councillor Wood's comments regarding the importance of subsidiarity in the approach HM Government took to the Arc. In his view,

they did recognise how successful the Oxfordshire Growth Board had been in building knowledge, cooperation and common understanding. It was, therefore, important to continue this success in joint working through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. Furthermore, if there was the potential to access a collective mechanism for funding at the Arc level, it was vitally important that Oxfordshire began work on establishing its priorities. This would give them the greatest opportunity to develop a compelling case to put before HM Government.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

34. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc Vision Consultation

The Partnership considered a report – presented by Stefan Robinson, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager and Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director – summarising HM Government’s consultation on a draft Vision for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (an engagement exercise which would be used to help inform future ambitions for an Arc wide Spatial Framework). Appendix 1 of the document contained a draft response to the consultation.

It was highlighted to the Partnership that this was a high-level strategic response designed to complement any individual responses from members. The recommendations made by the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel were also flagged for consideration.

In discussion, the following summary points were made in summary for consideration in finalising the final response prior to submission:

- The focus within the draft response on the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision was the correct approach.
- There should be a specific request for building regulations to be updated in respect of the Environment section of the response and achievement of zero carbon.
- There should be reference to the need to for a better definition of ‘affordable housing’ within the Economy section which would more accurately reflect the reality of Oxfordshire’s circumstances, (notwithstanding it was acknowledged that there were challenges in arriving at such a definition across the county and difference in approach).
- Oxfordshire had higher rates of private car ownership and journeys than the national average in respect of achieving zero carbon.
- A way was needed to consistently measure the impact of the Arc Spatial Framework in terms of the contribution or impact made by its provisions on the climate and carbon emissions and it would be useful if the same measures could be used in Oxfordshire.
- That the importance of Local Planning Authorities retaining the ability to set local housing targets rather than them being set centrally or via the Arc should be highlighted in the response as this was consistent with the approach adopted by the Partnership in the development of its own Strategic Vision.
- Oxfordshire was fortunate to benefit from a number of world leading hospitals and the work being undertaken within Oxfordshire communities around place shaping could be emphasised.

Members of the Partnership also discussed how issues around the affordability of housing were considered within Oxfordshire. Councillor Leffman suggested that this issue might be a potential subject for discussion at the Joint Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board Workshop planned for October.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Approve the submission of the draft response at Appendix 1, and;
2. Delegate responsibility to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, in consultation with the Chair, to make any amendments as agreed at this meeting, prior to submission.

35. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager, set out the published Partnership Forward Programme. He commented that there were no specific proposed amendments.

Councillor Cooper, referring to the expiration of the temporary legislation enabling remote meetings, made the case that there should be discretion for councils and joint committees to determine the most appropriate form of assembling and that this should be dependent on their specific circumstances. She highlighted the fact that the continuation of virtual meetings would help support the Partnership's climate change objectives by reducing the need for members to travel long distances across Oxfordshire. The Chair supported Councillor Cooper's suggestion that the Partnership should write to the Secretary of State expressing these points.

Councillor Smith asked for an item updating members on the implementation of the name change from the Oxfordshire Growth Board to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Agree the forward programme with the addition of a report to provide an update on the roll out of the implementation of the name change from the Oxfordshire Growth Board to The Future Oxfordshire Partnership.
2. Write to the Secretary of State in support of the introduction of permanent legislation to extend discretion to local authorities to allow for the holding of remote meetings.

36. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, informed members of the Partnership's intention – at the request of Network Rail – to contact HM Government reiterating their support for investment in the rail infrastructure identified as part of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study. Particular emphasis would be placed upon the upgrade of Oxford Station, increases in line capacity and the delivery of a fully electrified East West Rail.

37. Appointment to England's Economic Heartland Strategic Leadership Group

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, clarified that, following a technical change in the governance structure of England's Economic Heartland (EEH), it was necessary to reappoint the Partnership's non-voting representative to the EEH Strategic

Leadership Board. It had previously been resolved that the Chair of the Partnership should take this role and that it should rotate on an annual basis – Oxfordshire County Council, as a highways authority, already sit as a voting member of the Board.

RESOLVED:

1. That as Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, Councillor Michele Mead be appointed as the Partnership’s representative to England’s Economic Heartland Strategic Leadership Board for the 2021/2022 year.
2. That the appointment of the Partnership’s representative to England’s Economic Heartland Strategic Leadership Board rotate on an annual basis with the Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

38. Dates of next meetings

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership considered the dates of future meetings, noting that it was intended to reschedule the date of the meeting originally planned for 23 November 2021.

- ~~23 November 2021~~ (subsequently rescheduled to 30 November 2021)
- 25 January 2022
- 22 March 2022
- 7 June 2022
- 26 July 2022

The meeting closed at 4.45 pm

Chairman

Date

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