

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



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

**HELD ON MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 6.30 PM
MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK**

Present:

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

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Stefan Robinson	Manager – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

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

Apologies were submitted from Councillor Derek Cotterill, West Oxfordshire District Council and Councillor Liam Walker, Oxfordshire County Council.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Samantha Bowring, Vale of White Horse District Council, to her first meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

The Chair proposed changing the order of the agenda to allow for the consideration of agenda item eight prior to item seven. This was agreed to by the Panel.

It was noted that the meeting was being livestreamed and that a recording of the meeting could be found by [clicking on this link](#).

26. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

27. Public participation

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

28. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair summarised the responses to the Panel's recommendations to The Future Oxfordshire Partnership from its meeting on 12 July 2021.

29. Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan Update

The Panel considered a report – and detailed appendix – setting out 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. Ahmed Goga, Director of Strategies & Programmes at OxLEP, highlighted that the report identified the need for a system wide approach to both the recovery and the co-ordination of resources amongst partners. This would help to maximise investment to support local communities and businesses.

The Chair stated his support for the points made within the report regarding the importance of joint working to support the economic recovery within Oxfordshire. He made clear that HM Government should consider and simplify the process for local authority funding to encourage such a system wide approach. These comments were endorsed by the Panel as a recommendation to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

In discussion, the Panel raised the following points in summary:

- The report indicated (in paragraph 17) that opportunities for apprenticeships in science remained low. It was felt by members that, in addition to growing the number of science related apprenticeships, it was also important to increase those available in manufacturing (and, thereby, promote careers in this sector). The Panel noted the presence of high-tech manufacturing and related industries within Oxfordshire – e.g., in the automotive sector (Formula 1) and the manufacturing of vaccines.
 - Unemployment amongst young people remained a particular concern. The Panel noted that, while unemployment amongst this cohort was generally falling, there was a significant challenge in relation to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Furthermore, although OxLEP was working with community organisations and education providers to help address the issues around NEETs through specialist projects, several of these initiatives were not yet funded.
 - The promotion of the job, training and skills opportunities for young people should be made available in a format that was both interesting and engaging. The Panel was informed that OxLEP had produced several short videos tailored and produced by
-

young people themselves. It was agreed by members that the details of these should be circulated.

- While a system wide approach to tackling the challenges arising from the pandemic was supported, it was suggested that, when monitoring and evaluating the projects within the ERP, data should be tracked in a disaggregated format.
- Several projects within the ERP, such as improvements to visitor coach arrivals, had the potential to contradict with wider environmental and carbon reduction objectives e.g., the promotion of Active Travel. It was also important to promote, where possible, the pedestrianisation of public spaces such as town squares.
- It was felt that the staff shortages and recruitment issues affecting the visitor economy were also impacting other sectors of the Oxfordshire economy e.g., logistics.
- It was agreed that officers would investigate what unemployment and ward level data was available and circulate it to the Panel.
- Members referred to the transport schemes referenced within the ERP appendix as 'Tran 1 to Tran 8'. They requested further information as to how they are broken down by district, with particular emphasis on what cycling schemes existed, or were planned, outside of Oxford City
- As provision of easily accessible and useable infrastructure was critical to the take up of electric vehicles, the Panel expressed concern that the Oxfordshire-wide Park and Charge Project was shown to be experiencing significant issues and delays. It was agreed that an update on its current status would be established.

RESOLVED: To recommend that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Request that HM Government consider ways to simplify and rationalise the process by which it considers local authority bids for funding through initiatives such as the Community Renewal Fund and Levelling Up Fund, so as to encourage a system wide approach.
2. Agree recommendation 2 of the ERP report around the need for partners to continue to undertake a whole system response to securing economic recovery and that specifically, this includes, but not be limited to, a system wide approach to town centre renewal and the promotion of manufacturing as a sector.
3. Provides feedback that the Economic Recovery Plan should draw on wider disaggregated data that helps to show how some sections of society may be disadvantaged through the economic recovery, particularly for young people who are not in education, employment, or training. This will be useful to inform targeted interventions.

30. Update on Local Nature Partnership Establishment

The Panel considered a report on the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in Oxfordshire. Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, told the Panel that the first meeting of the LNP Board would take place in either October or November rather than in September (as had been previously indicated).

The Chair welcomed the establishment of the LNP. He noted that Oxfordshire was currently the only county within the Arc that did not have such a Partnership in place.

RESOLVED: That the update on the establishment of an Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership be noted.

31. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, informed the Panel of developments within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

The Panel were informed that indications suggested that the Oxfordshire to Cambridge Arc remained a strategic priority for HM Government. It was currently looking to create some form of governance that would be based upon the building blocks of the existing growth boards, with the expectation being that each Board would have a seat in the new structure. The approach taken by HM Government to the development of the new governance body had so far been consultative with partners – which was welcomed.

Finally, it was expected that there could be some announcements relating to the Arc as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review on 27 October.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

32. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc Vision Consultation

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership setting out a proposed response to HM Government's consultation on its draft vision for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (the findings of which will be used to inform their ambitions for an Arc-wide spatial framework).

Members of the Panel welcomed the proposed response but suggested that it could be further strengthened in terms of the priority of environmental preservation and enhancements, digital connectivity and non-car connectivity between developments, electrification of East West Rail and recognition of particular deprivation within the county. It was also felt that in order to be defensible at a local level, there needed to be a stronger steer in the Vision that quantified which targets would be set in the future.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be requested to strengthen its draft response to HM Government's Oxford to Cambridge Arc Vision Consultation to emphasise:

1. The importance of environmental preservation and enhancement across all pillars of the proposed Vision and considerations for the future of the Arc.
 2. The importance of securing adequate provision of data centres in order to support greater digital connectivity.
 3. The need for full electrification of the East West Railway as a current, rather than future, priority.
 4. The need to reduce dependency on private cars within developments through good site connectivity and design.
 5. The need to ensure that matters of housing viability and affordability are not used as reasons to compromise or weaken environmental building standards.
 6. Quantifiable and defensible targets and numbers should be set in order to give the welcome aspirations within the Vision more credibility and robustness.
-

7. The need to recognise that inequality is not evenly distributed within Oxfordshire and that pockets of serious deprivation do exist within the county.

33. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

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

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which set out progress at Year 4, Quarter 1 with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, informed the Panel that figures on the housing delivery forecast trajectory linked to delivering housing from housing infrastructure could be broken down by local authority. He also highlighted that, due to an agreement with Homes England, the trajectory would be revised every six months – the position, however, remained as reported in the previous quarter.

It was also confirmed to the Panel that, in general, infrastructure programmes like Housing from Infrastructure (Hfi) were often backloaded – as delivery tends to take place towards the end of the programme when the heaviest costs are incurred. Under the terms of the Deal, funding for the Hfi programme was released by HM Government on an equal per annum basis, which, in practice, had not reflected the reality of delivery. The challenges that this had created represented a learning point.

In response to questions, Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, commented that the improvements to Junction 10 M40 had been included in the list of infrastructure schemes supported by the Deal. This was because they would help accelerate the delivery of housing within the county.

With regards to infrastructure projects in South Oxfordshire, while Mr Down noted that the number of schemes was comparatively few, several that might have been included in the Hfi programme had subsequently been funded through successful Housing Infrastructure Fund bids to HM Government.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership setting out an update on the financial position of the Housing and growth Deal as at Year 4, Quarter 1. This was introduced by Kathy Wilcox, Head of Financial Strategy, Oxfordshire County Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(c) Housing Advisory Group Update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Housing Advisory Group meeting held on 6 July 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

(d) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group Update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 meetings held on 15 July 2021 and 12 August 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

(e) Environment Advisory Group Update

The Panel noted the summary notes of the Environment Advisory Group meeting held on 3 August 2021.

RESOLVED: That the summary notes be noted.

34. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel - September 2021

The Panel's work programme – as set out in the Agenda – was noted.

Councillor Nell suggested a future item on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme reflecting on the potential lessons learnt from the delivery of the current deal. The Chair agreed to follow this up with officers and decide when would be the best time to consider such a report.

35. Draft Scrutiny Panel response to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation

The Chair reminded the Panel that they had agreed, at their previous meeting, to delegate authority to a smaller group of members to compile a proposed Panel draft response to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation. Following that decision, the Chair, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Nell and Councillor Haval had worked to produce the suggested draft response which has now been circulated to the Panel. The Chair paid tribute to his colleagues' hard work in putting the responses together, and to Kevin Jacob for collating them into one document.

The draft response had been written on the basis of providing comments on each of the five themes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation document. The Chair encouraged the Panel to discuss any amendments it wished to make, especially any matters that had been omitted or which members could not agree to.

A detailed discussion took place with comments made in the following areas for consideration for inclusion in the final Panel response:

- The need to promote Modern Methods of Construction, as provision of this type of housing needed to be stepped up significantly as a housing type.
 - The Green Belt had worked very well to preserve the historic city of Oxford, but this had increased growth pressure on rural areas. Infrastructure needed to be provided to help meet Oxford's unmet housing need and compensation was necessary to meet the cost of providing this infrastructure.
 - The Plan should take account of/include provision for the development of new technologies for sustainable energy generation and use, (electricity and transportation) based on 'mirror tech', 'high temperature plasma' technology and storage of energy in synthetic hydrocarbons, (clean petrol and diesel) – linked to an Oxford University sanctioned research study.
-

- The concept of the loss and damage relating to unchecked climate change did not feature strongly enough in the consultation document, for example the effects of increases in flooding across the UK and rest of Europe.
- The social dimensions/consequences of climate change were not drawn out in the draft consultation document. This needed to be flagged, as the most vulnerable groups in society would be the hardest hit by climate change.
- There needed to be a balance between preservation and reducing emissions in respect of listed buildings.
- Air quality – statements and words within the draft consultation document need to be strengthened. For instance, ‘*where possible* development will be expected to improve air quality’ – remove where possible as it was felt this weakened the intent of the statement.
- Residents needed viable alternatives to private motor cars, particularly in villages. Lack of segregated cycle ways or public transport removes choice, and these facilities needed to be designed into developments.
- Visitor economy – stronger wording needed to prevent coach drop of visitors in the Oxford city centre, ‘discourage’ did not go far enough.
- Specialist housing need – there are policies relating to official University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes accommodation, but nothing to address issues of students displacing potential local residents from local short-term housing – perhaps a cap was required on percentage of student housing.
- Water quality – there was a need to expand the draft response to include the importance of consideration of adequate sewage treatment and that Thames Water act to reduce controlled discharges into rivers.
- Long distance cycle routes between towns should be promoted alongside long-distance walking routes.
- Inclusive Parking – comments in the draft response on cargo bikes were welcomed. However, there should also be reference to inclusive parking within planning rules to ensure that where provision is made on developments for cycle parking this includes facilities for cargo bikes.
- Under environmental quality, nature recovery and biodiversity gain, the response could refer to recovery zones (including areas that are currently of low biodiversity value). If these areas are not also protected, it would be easier for developers to avoid their obligations.
- Biodiversity net gain – the response could be made stronger to ensure that developers comply with their requirements to ensure that a net gain is delivered on each site.
- Electric Vehicles – in order to encourage take up, it is imperative that charging infrastructure is not just accessible geographically, but also user-friendly.
- Electric Vehicles - to encourage electric vehicle take up charging infrastructure that was not just accessible geographically, but also easy to use is needed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Chair and Vice-Chair be delegated authority to develop a final Panel response to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation taking into account the comments made at the meeting.
2. That a copy of the response as submitted be circulated to members of the Panel.

36. Dates of next meetings

The Panel noted the dates of scheduled meeting as follows:

- ~~Monday 15 November 2021~~ (now 23 November 2021)
- Monday 17 January 2022
- Tuesday 15 March 2022
- Tuesday 31 May 2022
- Tuesday 19 July 2022

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm
