

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON TUESDAY 25 JULY 2023 AT 2.00 PM
THE LONG ROOM, OXFORD CITY COUNCIL, TOWN HALL, ST ALDATE'S,
OXFORD, OX1 1BX

Present:

Members: Councillor Susan Brown (Chair), (Oxford City Council), Alex Betts, Professor Alistair Fitt, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor Liz Leffman, Daniel Leveson, Miranda Markham, Councillor Helen Pighills, Councillor David Rouane, Catherine Turner and Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council)

Officers: Lorna Baxter, (Oxfordshire County Council), Ian Boll, (Cherwell District Council), Richard Byard, (OxLEP), Sian Carter, (Homes England), Becky Chesshyre, Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, Babatunde Ogundele (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Martin Reeves (Oxfordshire County Council CEX) and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)

Guest: Richard Benwell, Chair Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership

Other councillors: Councillor Katherine Miles, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel Chair).

18. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted from Emma Hill, Environment Agency, (substituted by Dean Lusby-Gordon), Angus Horner, OxLEP business representative, Peter Nolan, OxLEP business representative, Professor Irene Tracy, OxLEP universities' representative, (substituted by Professor Alex Betts), and Councillor Bethia Thomas, Vale of White Horse District Council, (substituted by Councillor Helen Pighills).

There were no declarations of interest.

[It was noted that the meeting was being livestreamed and that a recording would be available for a period of 12 months.](#)

19. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

20. Public participation

[The full text and written response to the question asked in absence below can be found here.](#)

Ian Ashley on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire asked the Partnership to recommend a pause to the drafting of the Strategic Economic Plan in light of the significant concerns of NNGO and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel and a full review of its process and approach.

Concerns were expressed that council leaders were, as members of the OxLEP Board, obliged to vote in interests of OxLEP, not necessarily the best interests of their councils which was felt to a conflict of interest and anti-democratic. In addition, the Partnership was asked whether OxLEP alone could agree the Plan even though in the view of NNGO the Strategic Economic Plan would go on to have a significant influence on council Local Plans. The Partnership was asked whether this was why the Strategic Economic Plan was due to be considered by OxLEP in September and only presented to the Partnership in November and asked to explain the exact decision-making process and timetable for the Plan and explain where the democratic scrutiny was to take place.

The Chair commented that a written response would be provided.

21. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

The Chair invited Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel, to present the recommendations from the Panel's meeting held on 18 July 2023.

Councillor Miles summarised the Panel recommendations and the discussion held by the Panel that had informed them.

It was highlighted that the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, (OxIS) and Vision Zero had been subjects which the Panel had felt important to raise and discuss with Councillor Leffman arising from the update she had provided on the work of the Infrastructure Advisory Group. The relationship between the OxIS and other strategics such as Vision Zero and the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan had been apparent to Panel and it had felt that a map setting out the linkages visually would be helpful. The need to find new alternative and innovative sources of funding was also raised.

Arising from the update provided to it the Panel had expressed significant concerns regarding the direction of the Strategic Economic Plan principally that there should not be any hierarchy of Oxfordshire Strategic Vision outcomes areas within the Plan as all the outcome areas should be equally applied. Concerns that had also informed the recommendations around the Plan included biodiversity and ecosystem issues and democratic oversight and scrutiny of the Plan.

It had not been possible for the Panel to reach a consensus view on whether to recommend that the Partnership support the development of a place based narrative for Oxfordshire and therefore the Partnership had been requested to seek a number of clarifications before proceeding. A number of members had expressed significant doubts around the added value of producing a narrative in addition to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision; that there might be an adverse impact from a narrative on local planning functions; that there were resource implications for local councils, and that the Doughnut Economics model should be taken into consideration. Conversely, other Panel members had felt that a place based narrative could potentially provide a useful tool to attract external investment and should be developed further.

Finally, the Panel had welcomed the update report on the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and strongly supported the endorsement of the draft Local Nature Finance Strategy.

In response, the Chair indicated that a formal written response would be provided in due course but summarized the key points as follows:

- That it was for Oxfordshire County Council to consider recommendations 1a to 1d specifically.
- That it was acknowledged that there were some similarities between recommendations 1a and 1d to suggestions previously made by the Panel.
- That the Partnership already encouraged the appropriate use of the OxIS multi-criteria assessment tool, and continued to do so.
- That an amended and updated presentation of the development of the Strategic Economic Plan was to be given at the meeting which reflected changes since the presentation was first prepared and to seek to address points made the Scrutiny Panel. The equal importance of all nine Oxfordshire Strategic Vision priority outcomes was recognised and OxLEP did recognise the important of strong foundational economy.
- The concerns and comments expressed by the Panel about the development of a Place Narrative were noted and the Partnership would ask that Oxfordshire County Council consider them in the development of the Narrative. In addition, it was noted that amended recommendations to the Partnership would be proposed when the item was considered later in the meeting.
- The Panel's recognition and support of the work being undertaken by the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership was welcomed and its recommendations noted.

22. Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Update - Annual Report and Nature Finance Strategy

The Partnership considered the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, (OLNP) Annual report which gave an overview of the OLNP's activity and highlighted progress to date including work undertaken to create a framework for natural finance in the county; support provided to local authorities in preparing for mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain; and establishment of six focussed working groups that enabled partners to support one another delivering aspects of the OLNP's aim and purpose. In addition, the Partnership was presented with Oxfordshire Nature Strategy which it was asked to endorse.

Richard Benwell, Chair of the OLNP presented the report and strategy to the meeting. He highlighted the importance of nature as an asset for Oxfordshire and the work undertaken in partnership with the University of Oxford to establish a value to Oxfordshire which was

estimated to be around £500m of added value. However, this was still likely to be an underestimate of the impact of nature in supporting the county's residents' health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, Oxfordshire's natural environment was currently in decline in common with other counties. It was positive, therefore, that a local nature partnership had been established for Oxfordshire and the OLNP was grateful for the support it received from Oxfordshire local authorities and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership itself.

The OLNP was focussing on three key priorities to seek to ensure Oxfordshire was one of the foremost counties in reversing the decline of nature in England:

- That a plan was in place for local nature recovery, (LNRS) by assisting Oxfordshire County Council as the responsible body for the strategy and in encouraging the County Council to go beyond the minimum baseline and that the LNRS was applied across local authorities in Oxfordshire.
- To map areas with poor access to nature in light of the link between health and wellbeing and the future of nature. This was in light of the growth of non-communicable disease and ill health which touched upon issues such as access to nature, safe drinking water etc.
- Finding innovative, but robust and ethical ways for leveraging in additional private sector investment in nature to supplement public funds in reversing nature's decline. It was estimated that there was approximately a £800m deficit in funding to reverse the decline of nature in Oxfordshire alone over the next two years. The Local Nature Strategy had been designed as vehicle for high integrity investment and to provide a pipeline of bankable investable projects. Oxfordshire's local authorities could play a helpful role in helping to leverage in funds by offering seed finance and sharing some of the risk to make Oxfordshire one of the premier counties in accessing natural capital.

The Chair welcomed the update and clarified that although the Partnership could endorse the Local Nature Finance Strategy it could not make decisions on its adoption for the individual councils who would wish to consider and discuss the financial and other implications for themselves.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the progress described in the annual report.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the importance of continuing to support the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, which is aligned to several outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
3. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership endorses the Nature Finance Strategy subject to noting that it is for individual councils to take decisions about its adoption.
4. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership considers how it can support delivery of the Nature Finance Strategy.

23. Update on Homes England Strategic Plan 2023 to 2028

Catherine Turner, Head, Markets Partners and Places – South at Homes England and Sian Carter, Oxfordshire Lead at Homes England gave a presentation on Homes England's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 as set out within the Agenda. It was highlighted that

the Strategy set out Homes England's vision as HM Government's housing and delivery agency to create high quality homes and thriving places across England.

The Chair welcomed the presentation and invited members of the Partnership to make comments and ask questions.

Councillor Andy Graham spoke of the need to build a long term sustainable relationship between Homes England and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that went beyond 2028 given the Partnership's ambitions which extended to 2040 and beyond. He also commented that there were around 675,000 unlet properties which could be unlocked to provide additional small, rented accommodation. As a country, he felt the United Kingdom could learn from the private rent sector approaches and practices of countries such as Sweden and Germany.

The Chair spoke of the need for the provision of affordable homes, such as those at affordable rents as well as those built for private ownership, or shared ownership as home ownership in these forms was out of reach of many people within Oxfordshire. She sought clarification that there had not been a shift in emphasis within Homes England towards homes for ownership.

In response to these points, Catherine Tuner commented that the policy points made about unlet private rented sector were well made and that as a delivery agency Home England could take these points back by for discussion with the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities. With regard to the provision of affordable homes for rent there had not been a change in emphasis and Homes England's objective was to seek to deliver the right kind of housing tenure in the right places.

Councillor Liz Leffman referred to the provision of key infrastructure to unlock housing development. A number of housing sites coming forward within Oxfordshire were very car dependent and she questioned whether other types of infrastructure might become available to reduce car dependency and increase connectivity to public transport. Mobility hubs within developments were also a possible measure. Health infrastructure was another connected issue.

Nigel Tipple referred to investment strategy and the extent to which Oxfordshire through collaboration might engage in a conversation with Homes England around how Homes England investment might potentially sit alongside other investments, (for example via pension funds) to drive a programme of social rented and share ownership housing stock. In addition, was there a current opportunity to think about land and property assembly in the private rented sector.

Councillor David Rouane welcomed Homes England's focus on regeneration and referred to the joint project between Homes England and South Oxfordshire District Council to redevelop land opposite Didcot railway station that was already in progress.

Catherine Turner informed the meeting that Homes England was still reflecting on the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' speech on the 24 July in which he had made a number of announcements which related to HM Government's priorities and approach to housing and regeneration. This had included a new Brownfield infrastructure and land programme and how this might fit with the type of infrastructure that Councillor Leffman had outlined could be explored further.

Homes England was open to looking into working with local funding partners to develop joint local housing schemes by looking at where equity and match funding could potentially be applied through joint funds to support local priorities around different forms of tenure.

With regard to strategic acquisition, Homes England had done this in some places, for example, Blackpool. This was resource intensive and to be able to progress this type of activity within Oxfordshire it would be necessary to establish that local partners were fully committed to housing, economic growth and infrastructure delivery through a strong collaborative partnership.

Councillor Barry Wood referred to the need for continued strong leadership and engagement with Homes England. Despite the slight refocussing of some of the agency's priorities, its core business and priorities remained unchanged. In his view Oxfordshire had been able to demonstrate strong leadership and a commitment to partnership working and this should continue.

It was important to understand the provision of extra homes alone was not enough as sustainable communities were also required. This meant getting the setting of homes right with regard to access to open spaces and social infrastructure as well as physical infrastructure. It was a significant responsibility to get these challenges right. There was an absolute need for partnership working between developers and local planning authorities and between the Partnership and Home England.

The Chair concluded the discussion by suggesting that it was important not to overly focus on arriving on definitions such as 'key workers' as the pandemic had demonstrated how difficult it was to do so. The important point was there should be as wide a range of housing tenures available as possible so as to ensure there was a diverse mix of people able to live in a given area. In her view there was value in looking at affordable rent models and in lobbying HM Government with regard to issues within the short term letting market.

RESOVED: That the presentation be noted.

24. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 4 2022/23

The Partnership considered a report which updated the progress spend and housing delivery for schemes included a part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal for Quarter Four, 2022/23. Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Oxfordshire County Council presented the report. The report covered the Housing from Infrastructure (Hfl) and Growth Deal Capacity Fund workstreams.

RESOLVED: That the financial position as of the end of March 2023 be noted.

25. Developing a Place Narrative for Oxfordshire

The Partnership considered a second report that set out a more detailed view of the project to develop a place narrative for Oxfordshire. Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire County Council presented the report and drew the meeting's attention to proposed revised recommendations. He highlighted that the place narrative had been subject to significant discussions with partners and the helpful comments made by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel. The emphasis, as the County Council moved forward to commission work and begin engagement, would be to provide a more

detailed written response to the Panel and to consider the concerns and queries raised so that these legitimate points could be built into the early design of the engagement about the narrative.

The Chair set out the revised recommendations as follows.

Recommendations:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the intention of the County Council to develop a place narrative for Oxfordshire, reflecting the shared Strategic Vision.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the FOP Scrutiny Panel comments and asks that these are considered in development of the work.
3. That the County Council will engage with the Executive Officer group and other relevant officers and partnerships as it seeks to develop the plans and approach.

Upon being put to the meeting these were agreed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the intention of the County Council to develop a place narrative for Oxfordshire, reflecting the shared Strategic Vision.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the FOP Scrutiny Panel comments and asks that these are considered in development of the work.
3. That the County Council will engage with the Executive Officer group and other relevant officers and partnerships as it seeks to develop the plans and approach.

26. Refreshing the Strategic Economic Plan - June 2023 update

Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) gave a detailed presentation setting out progress on the development of framework that would be used to build a new Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire following an engagement process which had first begin in February.

It was noted that an updated version of the presentation had been circulated and published in advance of meeting which sought to reflect and respond to many of the comments and challenges made by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

The Partnership was informed of the timetable for finalising the Plan which now included consideration of a draft final Plan document by the OxLEP Board on 19 September for endorsement, prior to consideration of the draft document by the Partnership at its meeting on 26 September. It was expected that the OxLEP Board would be asked to approve the Plan via a meeting in October or via procedures for written decisions.

In discussion, various members of the Partnership thanked Nigel Tipple for the revised presentation which they felt did set out a pragmatic way forward with regard the development of the Plan and which had responded to the concerns expressed by the

Scrutiny Panel. The OxLEP team were thanked for the significant work undertaken in developing the Strategic Economic Plan to its current point and comment was also made as to the value of Local Enterprise Partnerships more generally.

Reference was also made to the importance of growth to be inclusive and it was noted the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership was actively operating within this space.

The Chair commented that the Plan needed to consider that currently many journeys were undertaken into and out of the county via un environmentally friendly forms of transport when ideally people would both live and work within it. The lower levels of productivity within Oxfordshire compared with the national average also needed to be carefully explored as the reasons for this were not yet fully understood.

In response to the various points raised, Nigel Tipple commented that lower rates of productivity within Oxfordshire was partly linked to the economic mix within the county and the balance of the economy in terms of how productive certain sectors were over others. Technological adoption and transformative change were also influencing factors. Considerations around productivity were informing the development of the Plan.

It was also stressed to the meeting that although three of the nine Oxfordshire Strategic Vision priorities had been identified as having a particular reference to economy, it had been made clear throughout the engagement process that this did not imply a second order of priorities and that it was recognised that all the Strategic Vision priorities were of equal value. It was accepted that there needed to be better articulation of the intended actions linked to the other priorities as well as those with specific economic focus. The Strategic Plan was one a suite of strategies and plans that would be critically important in the delivery of the overarching Strategic Vision and all would need to be robust. Finally, past experience demonstrated that having plans in place put Oxfordshire in a more positive position to attract HM Government funding if such opportunities arose.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the amended presentation and update be noted.
- 2) That the draft Strategic Economic Plan be added to the Partnerships forward programme for 26 September 2023.

27. Oxfordshire Skills Policy Landscape

The Partnership considered a report which provided a high-level overview of the skills landscape within Oxfordshire with a primary focus on post 16 technical and vocational learning deliver primarily further education colleges and other providers drawing funding from the Department for Education. Richard Byard, Director of Business Development presented and went through the key points of the report in detail highlighting that skills development was a key priority for Oxfordshire and aligned with the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, the Strategic Economic Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and individual council corporate plans.

During the discussion of the report, Councillor Andy Graham referred to the funding model breakdown table set out on Agenda page 99 queried whether data was available yet for 2021/2022 so that it would be possible to see if previous trends were continuing. In addition, he asked whether the data was available broken down into local authority area.

Richard Byard responded that the data shown was the latest centrally available data and unfortunately only produced at an Oxfordshire level. As and when the data was updated this could be brought back to the Partnership.

The Chair commended the work being undertaken in respect of Community Employment Plans. These had been used in Oxford and were important because they created a direct link between new developments and a local community. This provided a mechanism for communities to feel they were genuinely engaged in whatever was being developed. This might be through opportunities for employment during and after the construction phase so residents could see the benefits of a particular development and that employment was sustainable.

28. Advisory Group updates

(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

Councillor Liz Leffman provided a verbal update on the meeting of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 3 July 2023.

It was highlighted that the meeting had received an update on Area Travel Plans, (ATPs) in the context of new Local Plans which were expected to incorporate ATPs. Specific plans had so far been drafted covering Abingdon, Bicester, and Witney with plans to extend this to Banbury and Woodstock.

A presentation had also been given by England's Economic Heartland on the connectivity studies pertinent to Oxfordshire including the published Oxford to Milton Keynes Connectivity Study and a draft consultation on the Swindon, Didcot and Oxford Connectivity Study. This covered a number of areas including rail and as part of that the Cowley branch line and proposals relating to the stations at Culham and Grove.

Other matters discussed including Active Travel and the decarbonisation of travel through infrastructure provision and the Freight Strategy.

(b) Housing Advisory Group update

Councillor Barry Wood provided a verbal update on the meeting of the Housing Advisory Group on 11 July which had included a visit to the Graven Hill self-build and custom-build housing site in order to see innovative forms of housing provision at first hand. He commented that the visit reflected a potential change in emphasis of the group away from the monitoring of the delivery of housing elements of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal towards a wider role for the advisory group.

(c) Environment Advisory Group update

It was noted that as the Councillor Rouane was not present at the meeting of the Environment Advisory Group held on 7 July an update would be presented to the next meeting.

(d) Planning Advisory Group

Councillor Andy Graham referred to the first meeting of the Planning Advisory Group held on 21 July. The meeting had included an item that explored the potential opportunities for future collaboration and partnership working within the planning space and also an item that provided an opportunity for lead members from across the authorities to update one another on the progress of their individual Local Plan updates. This item had been particularly useful because although it was clear that different council's Local Plans were

at different stages, there had been consideration of how the councils might work collaboratively above the minimum requirements of the Duty to Cooperate. This accepted and respected the position that the councils would have different priorities, but which also recognised that many issues were cross boundary and common in nature.

Subject to the scheduled Partnership workshop in September, the members of the advisory group would be setting its work programme in due course.

29. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan

Kevin Jacob, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Senior Democratic Services Officer referred to the Forward Programme as set out in the Agenda subject to the addition of an additional item to consider the Strategic Economic Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Programme be agreed subject to the addition of an item relating to the Strategic Economic Plan.

30. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

No matters were raised under this heading.

31. Updates from key strategic partnerships supporting delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

Councillor Barry Wood updated the meeting on the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership. The following appointment had been made:

- Managing Director: Dr Richard Hutchins
- Independent Chair: Dipesh J Shah OBE
- Business Non-Executive Director - Dr Barbara Ghinelli, Director, Innovation Clusters and Harwell Campus, UKRI-Science and Technologies Facilities Council.
- Business Non-Executive Director- Professor Lynette Ryals OBE, Chief Executive of Milton Keynes University and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Cranfield University.

The above members of the Pan Regional Partnership Board were already establishing contacts with its members and stakeholders. A news bulletin had also recently been produced.

The Chair commented that she would be making future update reports from the Pan Regional Partnership in her capacity as the representative of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

Councillor Liz Leffman reported back from a recent meeting of England's Economic Heartland which had taken place at Milton Park and had featured an opportunity to travel on an autonomous bus. Other items included:

- A presentation from Laura Peacock on I-Hubs and work being carried out on projects within Oxfordshire.
- The National Highways Future of Road Study which was considering how to decarbonise the road network and the challenges to achieving this such as electric vehicle infrastructure.

- An update on Strategic Rail Programmes which had included a proposal to establish a wider Southeast England Rail Partnership to support greater connectivity between areas and sharing of best practice.

32. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings as set out in the Agenda were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.42 pm