

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON THURSDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair), Councillor Ron Batstone, Councillor John Broad, Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Councillor Yvonne Constance, Councillor Julian Cooper, Councillor Tiago Corais, Councillor Charlie Hicks, Councillor Lois Muddiman, Councillor Lynn Pratt, Councillor Leigh Rawlins, Councillor Judy Roberts, Councillor Emily Smith, Councillor David Turner and Councillor Sean Woodcock

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
Alex Jeffery	Asst Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Babatunde Ogundele	Asst Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Nigel Tipple	Chief Executive OxLEP

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

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Michael Brooker, West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Andy Cooke, Vale of White Horse District Council, (substituted by Councillor Ron Batstone), Councillor Jo Robb, South Oxfordshire District Council, (substituted by Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye), and Councillor Richard Webber, Oxfordshire County Council.

It was noted that Councillor David Turner, (South Oxfordshire District Council) and Councillor Sean Woodcock, (Cherwell District Council) had to leave the meeting at approximately 19:30.

The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Oxford Civic Society on the grounds that a representative of the Civic Society was making an address to the Panel under the public participation item.

The Chair commented that as at the previous meeting it was intended focus the majority of the time available for discussion on a number of key items where it was most required and invited Panel members to be as concise as possible in order so that all members who wished to speak had an opportunity to do so.

26. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

As a matter arising, a number of members referred to the suggestion by Suzanne McIvor in her statement to the Panel that it ask the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to request that the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership immediately publish the evidence supporting the refresh of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. The Chair indicated that the consideration of this issue could be dealt with as part of the Panel's discussion of the latest version of the Plan later in the meeting.

27. Public participation

It was noted that two written statements and questions had been submitted and circulated to the Panel in advance of the meeting. [Full copies of the statements and questions are available here.](#)

Deborah Glass-Woodin gave a statement on behalf of the Oxfordshire Doughnut Economics Collective, (ODEC). She commented that the latest version of the Strategic Economic Plan (v2), (which had been reviewed with only 24 hours' notice) failed to take account of concerns regarding its process and content raised by the Scrutiny Panel at its 18 July meeting, reported to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on 25 July 2023.

The view was expressed that whilst the current draft of the Strategic Economic Plan used the language of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision it continued to side-line social and environmental issues and maintained a focus on economic growth. It made no attempt to address or quantify a worsening social and environmental crisis and measurement was limited to labour supply. There was no robust framework or delivery plan and no evidence base was available of the independent economic review. The Strategic Economic Plan was not fit for purpose and the Panel was asked to request a pause so the ODEC's proposal to establish a new Strategic Economic Partnership for Oxfordshire could be looked into.

The Strategic Economic Partnership was a proposal to create a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder community partnership connecting the existing activity and networks in Oxfordshire into a partnership, with the purpose of generating an economic strategy that meets everyone's needs within the means of the Earth. The partnership would be inclusive, embraced the latest economic theory and would be able to unite organisations. It would not be just another networking group, but would bring existing groups and activity together which would challenge the process and narrative of the Strategic Economic Plan and apply [Doughnut Economics](#) as a holistic framework to balance the multiple complex issues in a way that is regenerative, redistributive and collaborative. The Panel was asked to refer to the [evidence for a different approach to Oxfordshire Economic Strategy](#) provided by attendees to the ODEC workshop: A better future for Oxfordshire, held on 8th September in the pre-workshop survey.

Ian Green had submitted a written statement on behalf of Oxford Civic Society that agreed with Panel's previous requests that the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership ensure that the Strategic Economic Plan include all the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development; and that equal focus is applied to them including wellbeing and the environment.

In the view of the Oxford Civic Society, Oxfordshire had a plethora of strategic plans and strategic planning processes continued to be constrained by the lack of an overall spatial plan for the distribution of employment and housing towards 2050. Although felt to be more of a horizon scanning document, the Strategic Economic Plan still needed to comment on the spatial implications of what was proposed without recommending a particular strategy and potentially be revised to accommodate social and/or environmental spatial requirements.

The capacity and development potential of existing infrastructure, and the strategic planning of county-wide or regional infrastructure was crucial to county-wide sustainable spatial planning as was infrastructure funding. The Panel was asked whether the refreshed Strategic Economic Plan discuss infrastructure investment requirements and funding availability for the refreshed Plan?

The public's responses to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 consultation had overall given a clear steer that there is an appetite for an approach that: was ambitious, radical, innovative and creative; is Oxfordshire-specific and reflective of local people's views; prioritises climate change, and focusses on social, economic and environmental wellbeing, and not solely on a narrow definition of growth. Public consultation on the Strategic Economic Plan had been inadequate.

The Panel was encouraged to continue to be bold in its recommendations.

The Chair thanked Deborah Glass-Woodin and Ian Green for their contributions and questions which she asked Panel members to reflect and consider during the Panel's consideration of the Strategic Economic Plan item.

28. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair referred to the responses of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the recommendations of the Panel at its July meeting.

29. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 1 2023/24

The Panel considered a report which set out an update on progress, spend and housing delivery for schemes included as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth deal as at the end of Quarter 1 2023/2024.

The Panel noted that as of Quarter 1, the Housing from Infrastructure, (HfI) programme was over profiled by £2.650m compared to available funding. Whilst acknowledging that a bid for additional funding had been made to Homes England's Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund in respect of the Lodge Hill scheme, the Panel was concerned about the possible budget shortfall and knock on negative effect on other schemes in the programme if the bid was not successful.

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director commented that the bid was an application for all the costs of the Lodge Hill scheme. If approved in its entirety this could mean there would not be a need to draw any funds from the Housing and Growth Deal Hfl budget for Lodge Hill, freeing up funds to support the delivery of the rest of the programme. The Panel was also informed that although it had to be recognised that risks to the delivery of all the schemes in the programme could not be completely ruled out, it was expected that enough would change over the remaining life of the programme to lead to a balanced position and delivery of the currently agreed programme.

Members of the Panel made the general point that it was important for what they considered to be commitments by Oxfordshire County Council to deliver specific schemes within the programme be honoured. The Panel was reminded that under the Partnership's revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding, the County Council was wholly responsible for the delivery of the programme and that discussions would be held between the County and any affected district councils if any changes to the programme were required.

Various members of the Panel also raised a number of locally specific points and concerns with regard to the delivery of individual schemes and allocation of funds listed in the current Hfl programme. This included the proposed schemes at Former RAF Upper Heyford/Junction 10 M40, the Benson Relief Road, Howes Lane/Lords Lane Bicester, and Banbury Road Roundabout Bicester. The point was made that in some cases, non-delivery of a Hfl project could have a significant adverse impact on the allocation of housing by the districts within their current and emerging individual Local Plans.

Members were encouraged to raise any concerns regarding specific schemes with officers within their authority so that they could contact the appropriate officers in the County Council.

After further discussion the Panel also felt that a 'lessons learnt' exercise should be completed at the conclusion of the programme.

RESOLVED: The Panel recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that:

1. The Partnership reiterate the continued importance of on-going discussions and communications between Oxfordshire County Council (the responsible authority for the Housing from Infrastructure Programme) and the districts about the status of the programme and any potential amendments as agreed in the Partnership's Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding.
2. That the Partnership commit to undertake a full 'lessons learnt' review of the Homes from Infrastructure Programme on its conclusion.

30. Refreshing the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan

The Panel considered a summary of the Strategic Economic Plan, (SEP) v1 as included in the original agenda and a full copy of the revised 2nd draft of the Plan and cover report circulated to the Panel and published on the 12 September. Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) introduced the draft plan and responded to questions from members.

The Chair clarified that the Strategic Economic Plan was an OxLEP document and the final decision on its agreement would be taken by the OxLEP board. The latest draft was being brought to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to note and for comment and the Panel had the opportunity to put forward its own comments and recommendations.

Nigel Tipple confirmed that the latest version of the draft Plan was being brought to the September Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (FOP) meeting cycle for comment not approval. He apologised that it had not been possible to make the draft available earlier but stressed that the Plan had been made available to all parties at the same point including the Board of OxLEP and was now in wide circulation. Points made to the Panel by way of introduction were in summary:

- An explanation was given of the Plan's development and approval timeline as set out in paragraph nine of the covering report. Feedback on the 2nd draft could be made to 6 October and OxLEP Board sign off the final version of the Plan and Action Plan was expected in December 2023.
- Comments made by the Scrutiny Panel and others previously had been carefully considered and despite the challenging deadlines for FOP reports, many of the comments had been taken on board and reflected in the revised draft.
- The Plan's evidence base was in the process of being collated into a single document which would be published on the OxLEP website and which accompany the next draft of the Plan.
- The Plan was looking to a ten year event horizon, but it fully recognised that there had been seismic changes over that last ten years and were likely to be further seismic changes over the next ten years and it would be necessary to monitor the impacts, refreshing the Plan over time.

At this point, the Chair invited members of the Panel to ask detailed questions of clarification followed by an exchange of views leading into a discussion of recommendations to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. Nigel Tipple indicated that further direct feedback from the Panel was welcomed and the Chair thanked him for the detail answers and clarifications he provided.

A detailed discussion followed around the following themes:

- Democratic oversight of the SEP process. Concerns were expressed by a number of members around what was felt to be a lack of democratic oversight, particularly in light of decision of HM Government to cease funding for local enterprise partnerships and to transfer functions to upper tier authorities from March 2024.
- Recognition of agriculture. The Panel felt that the draft document did not sufficiently reflect the importance of agriculture to the Oxfordshire's foundational economy.
- Performance monitoring. Measurements metrics and key performance indicators, (KPIs) within the document needed to be linked to and be consistent with the delivery of each of the nine Oxfordshire Strategic Vision objectives and defined within a range of possible outcomes to achieve truly system wide effects. There needed to a measure for each Strategic Vision priority.
- Sustainable economic development required inclusivity and therefore there was a need for the collection of disaggregated data based on gender, ethnicity, age, and disability status, to ensure inclusion of different groups of people.
- Achieving sustainability would require an element of adjustment that needed to be measured, for instance through a negative feedback monitoring feedback loop.

- Economic development. The Panel felt there was still an over focus within the Plan on fast growth which was felt to be unsustainable and that an approach consistent with the principles of Doughnut Economics should be reflected. In addition, models of the application of Doughnut Economic theory to economic strategy already existed.
- Productivity, housing, and employment projections. A range of different views were expressed by members of the Panel regarding how this should be considered within the Plan with some members advocating a Gross Value Added, (GVA) per capita approach to existing jobs rather than through new jobs growth.
- The wider need for a balance between the location of employment and homes, perhaps on the basis of a ratio although it was acknowledged that this was a matter for local authorities to specifically determine through Local Plans and not a Strategic Economic Plan matter.
- Infrastructure. The Panel felt that the Plan did not show how the effect of economic growth on infrastructure including electricity, education, health, and water supplied would be measured and mitigated. It was felt that any plan arising would need to address these issues which were already underfunded and impacted on Oxfordshire's communities.
- There was a need for a review of terminology within the Plan to ensure it was consistent and did not inadvertently give the impression that the Plan was encroaching on matters within the remit of local authorities.
- The view was expressed that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should definitely indicate whether it agreed or disagreed with the Plan and that the Partnership should suggest that the local authorities should consider it individually. This would incentivise OxLEP to draft a document that represented a consensus position.

Nigel Tiple indicated he would speak to relevant organisations and local authorities about how they had applied the principles of Doughnut Economics. He also indicated he remained open to a discussion with Kate Raworth and the Doughnut Economics Action Lab which he would also follow up.

The Panel also wished to place on record that it had welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Economic Plan, (SEP) draft v2. However, whilst acknowledging the timetabling constraints faced by OxLEP, the Panel had been disappointed to have received the draft only approximately two days before the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be recommended to not endorse or note the Strategic Economic Plan document, recognising that it is an OxLEP document not one with local authority ownership.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership include the following feedback to OxLEP if it is minded to note the draft Strategic Economic Plan:
 - a. Measurements metrics and key performance indicators, (KPIs) within the document need to be linked to and be consistent with the delivery of the nine Oxfordshire Strategic Vision objectives and defined within a range of possible outcomes to achieve truly system wide effects. There is also the need for the collection of disaggregated data where relevant based on gender, ethnicity, age and disability status, to ensure inclusion of different groups of people.

- b. That the Strategic Economic Plan should prioritise sustainable growth, the environment and the health and wellbeing of residents. The metrics and measures the SEP uses to determine its own success should broadly reflect these areas. In practice this lends itself to a wider set of measurements than are currently represented in the current draft.
- c. That the document needs to strike a balance between job creation and provision of homes in a way that is environmentally sustainable.
- d. That communication about the plan needs to be framed in the context of economic growth that is sustainable. This could be linked to an approach based on the principles of Doughnut Economics.
- e. That the language within the document be double checked to ensure that it is consistent, (use of 'we' defined etc) and to ensure it does not give the impression that the Plan was encroaching on matters within the purview of the democratically determined Local Plan process or matters within the scope of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

31. Advisory Group Updates

32. Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Panel received the notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 3 July 2023. It was noted that there was a minor typo within minute 79 about the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan – Area Travel Plan update which officers indicated would be corrected,

(a) Housing Advisory Group update

The Panel received the notes of the Housing Advisory Group held on 11 July 2023.

(b) Environment Advisory Group update

The Panel received the notes of the Environment Advisory Group held on 7 July 2023.

(c) Planning Advisory Group update

It was noted that these notes had not been included in the supplementary agenda as planned and would therefore be circulated as part of the next Panel agenda.

33. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - September 2023

The Chair referred to the Panel's work programme and action log as set out in the agenda.

The Panel was informed that it intended to have an item at the November meeting on the County Council's Vision Zero initiative. This was on the basis that it was an enabler of sustainable development and that the implementation of the Vision Zero commitment initiative had specific work and responsibilities for district councils which would require coordination at countywide level which it was felt was within the wider remit of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

The Panel was also informed that there had been a request from the Vice-Chair to add an item to the work programme for a briefing on Oxfordshire County Council's 'Decide and Provide' approach to requirements for transport assessments as set out in the Local

Transport and Connectivity Plan Policy 36. A briefing on the policy and the implications of this approach to infrastructure planning had been given by county council officers to Oxfordshire County Council councillors in September and as a first step it was hoped to be able to share a copy of a recording and supporting information to members of the Panel. Consideration would then be given to examining whether Decide and Provide fell within the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's and Panel's scope and remit.

Members of the Panel were reminded that if they wished to receive an update from a particular chair of a Partnership advisory group, they should let the Chair know.

Councillor John Broad commented that the work programme included a briefing on Doughnut Economics, but that it was shown as unscheduled. He also referred to the public statement submitted by the Oxfordshire Doughnut Economic Collective to the Panel about the draft Strategic Economic Plan which also referred to and advocated a Doughnut Economics approach to economic planning. At the request of the Chair, Andrew Down advised the Panel that it should take a cautious approach to engagement around Doughnut Economics which maintained the need for the Panel to be seen as impartial and which was mindful of the limit of the Panel's remit. Unlike a statutory scrutiny committee, the Panel did not for instance have the power to commission specific pieces of work. Whilst it was not an issue to have a briefing on the subject, he was not convinced that the Panel was the appropriate route to provide it. It was agreed that advice from the Partnership's Monitoring Officer would be sought on the issue including on whether the Panel might recommend to the Partnership that it receive its own briefing.

At the request of the Chair, Susan Harbour provided an update on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's Focus and Delivery Workshop to be held on 26 September. The Panel Chair and Vice-Chair had been invited to attend the event along with council leaders, advisory group members and other key stakeholders. It was intended to consider ideas suggested for joint working between the councils in support of the delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision so that further work could be undertaken to develop project plans.

Councillor Julian Cooper commented that he felt there was a need to undertake a review of Green Belt policy and suggested that this a potential work programme item.

34. Dates of next meetings

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

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm