

# Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

# Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group



HELD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021 AT 2.30 PM  
VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS

## Present:

Councillors Sue Cooper (Chair), Tom Hayes, Norman Macrae, Andrea Powell, Dan Sames, Pete Sudbury and Catherine Webber

**Officers:** Amanda Ford, (Oxford City Council), Sarah Gilbert, (Oxfordshire County Council), Ed Potter, (Cherwell District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Suzanne Malcolm (South and Vale Councils) and Stefan Robinson (Oxfordshire Growth Board), Vanessa Scott, (West Oxfordshire District Council) and Rachel Wileman, (Oxfordshire County Council)

## 1 Introductions and welcomes; Apologies for absence; notifications of substitutions; declaration of interests and Chair's announcements

Apologies were received from Councillor David Harvey, West Oxfordshire District Council, (substituted by Councillor Norman Macrae).

As Chair, Councillor Sue Cooper welcomed all present to the first meeting of the Environment Advisory Group and introductions were made.

## 2 Oxfordshire's Strategic Environmental Context: A horizon scanning report

The advisory group considered a horizon scanning report which summarised the current environmental context in Oxfordshire to help inform the work planning process of the group. In introducing the report, Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager commented that the Growth Board's Executive Officer Group and council environment officers had been involved in contributing to the report and it set out an overview of key targets, existing and emerging strategies, and wider local and national developments that might impact on Oxfordshire's ambitions for enhanced environmental quality. Key areas set out within the report included, but were not limited to:

- Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire - An authoritative and credible assessment of the pathway options and challenges facing Oxfordshire in reaching net zero by 2050.

- The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – the vision agreed by all Oxfordshire principal local authorities in April 2021 set out an overarching pathway for long term change towards a more sustainable future.
- Oxfordshire Plan 2050 –a strategic once in a generation spatial development plan for Oxfordshire.
- Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, (OxIS) –a strategic document which was under review setting out the priority infrastructure investment need to support a sustainable future for Oxfordshire.
- Friend of the Earth Council Survey which provided recommendations for Councils in respect environmental actions.
- Committee on Climate Change 6<sup>th</sup> Carbon budget – this report was on the role that local authorities had in delivering the UK’s net zero ambition.

The report was welcomed as a very useful reference document with links to more detailed reading and it was agreed that this should be sent separately to advisory group members for onward circulation within their councils. In discussion, a number of members commented on the urgency of taking action to stop climate change, particularly with regard to net zero, which was felt to be a priority objective on which the other Strategic Vision outcomes were interlinked to and were dependent on. There was an immediate need to move towards identifying and mapping specific actions for Oxfordshire to achieve net zero based on an assessment of needs. It was also felt clear that the role of local government in achieving environmental ambitions would increase inevitably over time, but these ambitions could not be realised unless local authorities had the powers and resources to deliver them. HM Government would need to be lobbied to provide these.

It was **agreed** that the advisory group note the report and its hyperlinked background reading list, as a key source of information informing its work plan.

### **3 Advisory Group Operating Arrangements and Work Plan**

The Advisory Group considered a report which set out its role and function and provided a shortlist of potential work plan items for 2021/2022, based on a cross-local authority workshop held in with partners in April 2021. The Chair commented on the importance of delivery of real change but stressed that this would involve a range of actions from all sections of society, including at a governmental and individual level. In her view the Advisory Group could have an important communication and lobbying role at all levels which would require professional support from officers.

A detailed discussion took place around the options for the group’s work programme for 2021/2022, considering the shortlist of items suggested by officers and those put forwards by members of the group.

Members commented that they were extremely mindful of the roles and remit of the existing advisory groups. Whilst it was accepted there would be areas of appropriate common interest, it was important the Environment Advisory Group did not duplicate their work or that of the emerging Local Nature Partnership and added its own value.

In discussion, the following points were made in summary:

- Achievement of net zero was a critical objective which underpinned and could be considered to be a prerequisite for other environment and climate change objectives.

- In order to provide focus and targeted actions for the group there was a need to understand the data around local emissions better.
- It was acknowledged that work had been undertaken or was in progress by individual Oxfordshire authorities and other organisations on emissions, but this needed to be collated, aligned and shared. It was also suggested that an Oxfordshire wide piece of research on emissions might be necessary to provide a local baseline.
- It was clear the demand for electricity would substantially increase in the future and the implications of this needed to be taken into consideration.
- Understanding the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire: Environment Change Institute, (ECI) Report and its implications for Oxfordshire was a key area of focus and priority for the Advisory Group, particularly around moving to net zero. The group requested that the ECI be approached as to their suggestions and steer for the Advisory Group's work programme.
- The group recognised the importance of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy as strategic documents with significant environmental implications but felt that it should initially prioritise areas of work linked to the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire within its emerging work programme.
- Access to open spaces and green infrastructure was of high importance in the post-Covid work and an area where it was felt that the advisory group could add value.
- Residential retrofitting was important, but problematic in terms of the costs involved.
- The upcoming COP26 conference provided a stimulus for the Growth Board to consider a response which the advisory group could have a potential role in formulating.
- The Committee on Climate Change's regular reporting on the role of local authorities in delivering the UK's net zero ambitions should inform the advisory group's role and operation.
- Citizen Assemblies provided one potential model for engagement with the public to socialise important issues and present options for future actions that might be potentially challenging or controversial to deliver.
- Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, (LTCP) – it was felt that it would be useful for the advisory group to consider an update on the development of the new LTCP in due course, but that it should not be a priority for the group's next meeting.

The advisory group also discussed initial thoughts on stakeholder engagement, considering a list of non-exhaustive suggestions made by officers. Whilst a final view was not reached, it was felt by members of the group that they wished as a principle to engage as much as possible with external stakeholders, particularly in respect of sources of expert external advice and perspectives on specific subjects.

It was **agreed** that:

1. The advisory group note its Terms of Reference (Appendix 2)
2. Officers be requested to undertake further work to develop an ongoing 2021/2022 work programme and agenda items for the 3 August meeting and beyond including, but not limited to:
  - a. Consideration and collation of available studies and data around carbon emissions within Oxfordshire that might inform the advisory group's work with a view to establishing a baseline and identification of gaps.
  - b. Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report.
  - c. Access to green spaces and green infrastructure.
  - d. Local Transport and Connectivity Plan
  - e. Retrofitting to residential properties.

## **4 Discussion on external engagement**

The advisory group continued its discussion on external stakeholder engagement, noting the opportunities open to it within its Terms of Reference and the steer provided by the Growth Board that it develops a robust arrangement for stakeholder engagement. It was agreed to revisit the issue in the near future.

The importance of communications and engagement with the public about the advisory groups work was again stressed and officers agreed to look at this further, considering available resources. The lobbying role of the group was discussed.

## **5 Date and times of future meetings**

The advisory group noted the indicative dates for meetings set out in the agenda as follows, noting that later dates could be subject to change:

- 03/08/2021 - 13:30-15:30
- 23/09/2021 – 10:00-12:00
- 26/11/2021 – 10:00-12:00
- 28/01/2022 – 10:00-12:00
- 24/03/2022 – 10:00-12:00

The meeting closed at 4.30 pm