

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



## **Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board)**

HELD ON MONDAY 19 JULY 2021 AT 2.00 PM

COUNCIL CHAMBER OF 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), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Councillor Liz Leffman, (Oxfordshire County Council), Adrian Lockwood, (Oxfordshire Skills Board Chair), 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:** Andrew Down (Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director), Daisy Gladstone, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Ahmed Goga (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council CEX), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale Councils), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Yvonne Rees (Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council CEX), Stefan Robinson (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Paul Staines (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team) and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership CEX)

**Other councillors:** None.

### **14. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Jeremy Long, Miranda Markham, Angus Horner and Dr Kiren Collison. There were no declarations of interest.

### **15. Minutes**

The minutes were confirmed as a correct and accurate record.

## **16. Public participation**

The Chair explained that two questions had been received from members of the public – these were available on the Growth Board’s website. The first was from David Young on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, and the second from Helen Marshall on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire. Both referred to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. In the absence of public speakers at the meeting, and to expedite proceedings, the Chair explained that written responses to these questions would be published online.

## **17. Growth Board Scrutiny Panel update**

Stefan Robinson, Oxfordshire Growth Board Manager, provided a summary of the eight recommendations received from the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 12 July 2021.

The first two recommendations covered the issues of ensuring that the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report received good visibility and debate at a full council level, and the need to ensure a fast, but fair, transition to net zero.

Recommendations three and four concerned advocating for the discontinuation of gas boilers and the promotion of land use for solar energy generation. The Panel specifically asked for the Board to write to HM Government asking for the discontinuation of gas boilers as soon as possible.

Recommendation five covered the issue of exploring opportunities to pilot ground source heating schemes within Oxfordshire. The final two recommendations covered the integration of zero carbon building standards into the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and a request to engage local councillors and community groups to identify the most effective locations to distribute physical consultation documents.

The Chair provided the Growth Board’s response to each of the eight recommendations, which would be published on the Growth Board’s website after the meeting. In summary, the Chair confirmed that:

- The Growth Board’s Environment Advisory Group would be reviewing the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report. Each council representative could then give consideration as to how the report might be used to drive action within their own organisation. In addition, the Group would be asked to consider how action can be taken to ensure that Oxfordshire transitions to net zero without negatively impacting disadvantaged communities.
- The notes of that meeting would be reported back to the Scrutiny Panel.
- Recommendations relating to individual Local Planning Authorities’ Local Plans were matters best discussed by those authorities rather than the Growth Board.
- The Board would write to HM Government offering support for the discontinuation of fossil fuelled gas boilers as soon as possible – while noting that there were ambitions at a national level to do this. The letter would, however, (by building on the evidence base set out in the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report) reference the need for stronger legislation to improve the energy efficiency of new and existing homes
- With respect to ground source heating initiatives, the Board itself did not have the resources available to undertake such a project.
- The Board agreed that opportunities to lock in zero carbon building standards should be explored through the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Decisions on such

matters would, however, be reserved for individual local authorities and be subject to consultation.

- Given the imminent need to publish and deliver materials, there was not sufficient time remaining in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation programme to reassess material drop locations.

## **18. Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report**

The Chair invited Stefan Robinson, Oxfordshire Growth Board Manager, to introduce this item. Mr Robinson explained that while the summary document was included in the agenda, a hyperlink to the full report could be found in both the agenda pack and online. The Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report had been commissioned by 12 public, private and community organisations – including the six Oxfordshire councils – and been developed by the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford. It built upon a 2014 report concerning the low carbon economy.

All of Oxfordshire's councils had either declared or acknowledged a climate change emergency and the recently agreed Oxfordshire Strategic Visions had contained a range of environmental commitments. The Pathways Report was considered a comprehensive and independent evidence base that would become central to climate change policy thinking and delivery. It was, therefore, important that it gained a high profile among partner organisations.

Sam Hampton, Lead Author of the Pathways report from the Environmental Change Institute, explained that the 2014 Low Carbon Economy report highlighted opportunities to grow the sector and the competitive advantage that Oxfordshire has in this area. However, the context was now very different, and carbon reduction innovations are no longer a subset of the wider economy, but central to it. Oxfordshire is on track to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. Solar energy is the most promising renewable asset available to Oxfordshire, and the report covers the need to ensure that land is allocated specifically for this purpose.

While progress has been made, the pathway to net zero will become increasingly difficult. Therefore, there needs to be a step change in the deployment of solar panels on rooftops and in fields. Moreover, the use of heat pumps must be scaled up significantly to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels for heating – these can, however, only work effectively if they are installed in energy efficient properties.

Sam explained that the report identified three pathways to net zero. The first focussed on social, behavioural, and cultural change, where residents are highly engaged in the process. The second has a technological focus, relying on innovations in areas such as hydrogen power. And the third is Oxfordshire Leading the Way, leading nationally on low carbon innovation and going faster than elsewhere to reduce emissions.

Myth busting was an important issue to consider, and the report brings clarity to the public discourse. For example, achieving net zero by 2050 was said to be very difficult, and achieving it well before then will be even more so. There may be opportunities to align targets and work collectively in this area to support delivery.

Local Authority members of the Board offered their thanks and support for the report, which was expressed to be excellent, timely and thought provoking. Members were of the

view that there must be joined up working in carbon reduction across councils and partner organisation if targets are to be met, and there is already some excellent work underway across Oxfordshire, including with the universities.

Some members emphasised the importance of setting aside land specifically for solar energy production, and the significant scale and cost associated with retrofitting the existing housing stock to improve energy efficiency, including in public buildings. The report brought some needed clarity to these issues which would be helpful in informing the next stages of council work. However, there was a need for strong support from HM Government to deliver fully in this area, such as through more effective regulations. It was confirmed that the report would be presented to the Environment Advisory Group meeting on 3 August 2021, where it could be considered in more detail, with the aim of developing some practical areas of action that can be taken forward.

Peter Nolan, OxLEP Business Representative, explained that heat pumps and PV Solar Panels were considered expensive. The cost of these items must come down to increase uptake. The emphasis on local innovation in the report was welcomed, but he highlighted the need to stimulate a competitive UK market to make use of the commercial opportunities created by retrofitting programmes.

In response to the comments made, Dr Hampton explained that newly built homes would, for the most part, be compatible with heat pumps. The significant challenge in this area would be their efficiency in relation to existing homes. With regards to the use of hydrogen as a source of energy for transport, he suggested that this may not be deployable until the late 2030s. Therefore, there remained scope to increase electric vehicle take up in the medium term.

In concluding, Dr Hampton said that a further report in five years would provide a good opportunity to review progress and reassess the context of this work. He also offered support for the use of UK based companies which can provide energy saving products and innovations.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

1. Welcomes the report as an authoritative evidence base for informing strategic planning in Oxfordshire with respect to local zero carbon ambitions.
2. Requests that the emerging Growth Board Environment Advisory Group consider the outcomes of the report at a future meeting.
3. Requests that each Growth Board member use the report to drive action at pace within their own organisations in the short and long term.

## **19. Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation**

Giles Hughes, Chief Executive of West Oxfordshire District Council, after giving thanks to the hard work of the team and partner councils, introduced the report. He explained that the development of a county wide spatial plan was an important step forward that was notable in a national context. The unique timeframe of the Plan also could help the county in meeting the long-term challenges that Oxfordshire faces.

Mr Hughes stated that Oxfordshire had received funding from HM Government to develop the Plan and were pleased to show good progress. It had been determined that it was now

an opportune moment to gather widespread feedback on the options document presented for consultation. He stressed that this exercise would be very important in informing the next steps in the progression of the project and, therefore, encouraged everybody to both respond to and promote the consultation. Mr Hughes emphasised that through this Plan, Oxfordshire could show what it wanted for the county's future and that this would feed into the wider context of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

Adrian Colwell, Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Strategic Advisor, highlighted three main sections within the papers. The context and introduction set out the Plan's relationship with the Arc. This was followed by a policy section organised into five themes with 32 proposed policy options. Finally, there was five potential spatial options as to where future growth up to 2050 could be located in Oxfordshire. The Plan not only provided the opportunity to set out a long-term strategy for the county but could also be more ambitious than Local Plans in regard to issues such as climate change, healthy place shaping and zero carbon transport.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is closely aligned to both the ongoing work to refresh the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and the development of a new Local Transport and Connectivity plan for Oxfordshire. It also builds upon the work the Local Industrial Strategy. The consultation will run from 30 July 2021 to 8 October 2021 and will primarily be web-based. In addition, there will be physical deposit locations across the county where people can access consultation materials and a series of both district-based and specialist workshops will also be held.

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, in addition to thanking the team for producing the consultation materials, encouraged all partners to use their networks to promote the consultation as widely as possible.

Councillor Smith, Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group, also gave thanks to officers and members for their work to date. She said that it was an innovative document which had the issues of the environment and climate change at its heart. Furthermore, this was a genuine consultation presenting a series of options and it was, therefore, important that a wide range of people provided a response.

Catherine Turner, Homes England, explained that she was pleased to see this work come forward and would continue to support Oxfordshire in their work. Homes England were due to speak with Oxfordshire colleagues to discuss any pre-submission support that could be offered and looked forward to seeing the Regulation 19 document come forward in due course.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions. She highlighted that the recommendation under consideration was for the Growth Board to note and endorse the consultation document. It would be a decision for partner district councils to approve the draft plan for consultation later in July.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board note and endorse the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation Document and ask partner district councils to approve the draft plan for consultation.

## **20. Renaming the Growth Board**

The Chair invited Andrew Down, Growth Board Director, to introduce the report. He explained that during the review of the Growth Board – undertaken in 2019/20 – several

suggestions were made about the Board changing its name. This issue resurfaced at the June 2021 Board meeting and it was requested that it be added to the agenda for this meeting. Officers had since consulted with members and the renaming option that had received the most support was the *Future Oxfordshire Partnership*. Mr Down confirmed that the Growth Board had the ability to change its own name and that it did not necessarily need to be the one suggested in the report.

Councillor Smith said that she advocated for changing the name as it did not accurately reflect the Board's role. As a body it made very few decisions and, therefore, the word Board was inaccurate. She argued that Partnership would be a much more suitable title. In addition, changing the name would show that the Board was listening and also that it was trying to be more open and transparent about its work. Nevertheless, it would have to be made clear to both HM Government and the public that a change in name did not mean an alteration to our terms of reference.

Councillor Leffman agreed. She explained that there had been a shift in emphasis in recent years away from economic growth and housing towards climate change and the environment. She stated that the Board needed to have a broader approach to planning for the future and that the proposed name change reflected that.

Councillor Brown explained that she supported using the word Partnership. She said that decisions at the Board were rare but that the name (and the perceptions of what it does) had caused challenges for communication. Moreover, since its creation the emphasis of the Board's work had changed. There was now an increased focus on working partnership. Councillor Brown did, however, highlight the need for the Board to not lose focus on addressing the big challenges, such as affordable housing and creating an inclusive economy, facing Oxfordshire.

Councillor Wood also mentioned the continued misapprehension about the role of the Board. He stated that although votes were rarely held, the perception was that they made numerous important decisions regarding the future of the county. He made clear that if the Board could continue to support progress on key issues around housing, the economy and climate change, then he was not concerned what name it used.

Alistair Fitt, Universities Representative, commented that the Growth Board was positively recognised by HM Government and that there was the potential to lose this if the name was changed. He also suggested that may be scope to reassess the name of the Board in conjunction with HM Government's potential review of the title of the emerging Arc Growth Body.

Adrian Lockwood, Skills Board Chair, supported Professor Fitt's comments. He expressed concerns about the potential to lose identity traction with HM Government.

Andrew Down commented that it was his belief that the name change could be managed with HM Government and would have a limited impact

Councillor Cooper supported many of the comments already made. She said that as the change in name was a communications exercise it was important to manage this with stakeholders. Further, as the alteration was for the benefit of local residents, she was happy to support it.

Although several members agreed that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership would not be everyone's first choice, it did, nevertheless, provide a better articulation of the role that the Board undertakes. The Chair noted the support for a name change and asked that for a short period the new name should be caveated with the phrase "formerly known as the Growth Board" in order to avoid confusion.

**RESOLVED:** That the Growth Board:

1. Be renamed as the Future Oxfordshire partnership, and authorises the Growth Board Director to make consequent changes to the Terms of Reference.
2. Notes that an implementation period will be required to update all relevant webpages, documents, and templates, before going live with the new name.

*Note: the name change will take effect hereafter in these minutes.*

## **21. Housing and Growth Deal Reports**

### **(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Quarter 4, Year 3**

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, introduced the report. He explained that it presented a positive picture of progress and that, therefore, Oxfordshire remained on target. Similar advances were also being made with both the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy refresh and the productivity strand of the Housing and Growth Deal. The infrastructure spend target for this year had been achieved and the Housing from Infrastructure trajectory remained on target (despite the challenges presented by the pandemic). The Affordable Housing Programme has entered its final year and it is possible that the full allocated amount will also be spent.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the progress as at Quarter 4, 2020/21 towards the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

### **(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Quarter 4, Year 3**

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the 2020/21 Quarter 4 financial report

### **(c) Infrastructure Advisory Group update**

Councillor Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council and Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Group, highlighted that the OxIS consultation would be launched on 19 July 2021. She emphasised that volatility within the construction supply chain was having an impact on work and that this would need to be monitored going forward.

Councillor Leffman also thanked the Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group for their work on private investment in public infrastructure projects and supported their recommendation for inviting the UK Infrastructure Bank to attend a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Notes the update.

2. Co-opts a representative of the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum as a non-voting member of the Infrastructure Advisory Group for the 2021/2022 Growth Board year.

**(d) Housing Advisory Group update**

Councillor Brown passed, on behalf of the Advisory Group, her thanks to Councillor John Donaldson for his contributions to their work.

While she noted that many of the key items discussed had already been covered within this meeting, she could update them that the Group was looking into community-led housing. The key barriers to progressing this work were the need to establish a housing association and the high price of development in Oxfordshire. An update on HM Government's discounted market tenure was scheduled for the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

**(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update**

Councillor Smith explained that at the previous meeting discussion had focussed on how to reach the maximum number of people through the consultation process. She also noted that the Advisory Group would be meeting as the consultation was ongoing to consider progress and to undertake more detailed post-consultation work planning.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

**(f) Environment Advisory Group update**

Councillor Cooper explained that the Group's first meeting had been primarily focussed on organising and prioritising their work for the year. It had been agreed to concentrate upon climate change rather than nature recovery. This was designed to avoid any potential duplication between the work of the Advisory Group and that of the emerging Local Nature Partnership. This did not, however, mean that the issue of nature recovery would not be considered.

The Advisory Group, as part of their work programme, would next consider both the data available across the county to baseline carbon emissions and the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report. It was also hoped that communications support would be offered to the Group in the future.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

## **22. Growth Board Forward Plan**

Stefan Robinson sought agreement for an update on the emerging Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) to be added to the Forward Plan for the September 2021 meeting. This would be brought forward by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

**RESOLVED:** That an update on the emerging Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan be added to the agenda for the next meeting in September 2021.

## **23. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership**

There were no updates.

## 24. Local Nature Partnership Update

Giles Hughes, Chief Executive of West Oxfordshire District Council, explained that several stakeholder events had been held to inform the development of a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) for Oxfordshire. Significant progress had been made in the last few months, leading to the development of a clear structure and composition of the Partnership with a broad range of representatives. The agreed purpose of the LNP was “to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire an exemplar county for people and nature to thrive.” Councillor Cooper would be the local authority representative on the LNP.

Councillor Leffman asked whether funding for the establishment of the LNP might be provided by Thames Water – for example, through a corporate social responsibility programme. Mr Hughes said it would be worth asking, as well as exploring other potential funding avenues.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

## 25. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, explained that a consultation would shortly be launched concerning the establishment of a vision for the Arc Spatial Framework. This would be an important stage in its shaping. Both Mr Down and Councillor Wood encouraged wide participation in the process.

In relation to HM Government’s ambitions for an Arc-wide Growth Body (which may be retitled/renamed), it was anticipated that Growth Boards from across the area would be important building blocks. Professor Fitt, the Universities Representative, added that suggestions were very welcome for potential candidates to chair the proposed Growth Body.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

## 26. Dates of next meetings

That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership noted the dates of its next meetings.

- 20 September 2021
- 23 November 2021
- 25 January 2022
- 22 March 2022
- 7 June 2022
- 26 July 2022

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm

Chairman

Date

--	--