

To: Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel)

Title of Report: Update on Local Nature Partnership Establishment

Date: 13 September 2021

Report of: Giles Hughes, Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council

Status: Open

Executive Summary and Purpose:

This report provides an update on the progress in establishing a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in Oxfordshire.

How this report contributes to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision Outcomes:

The establishment of a LNP will provide an important mechanism to help meet the Strategic Vision outcome for Oxfordshire's natural environment to be in a better state in 2050 than the state in which we found it.

Recommendation: That the Scrutiny Panel note the update.

Introduction

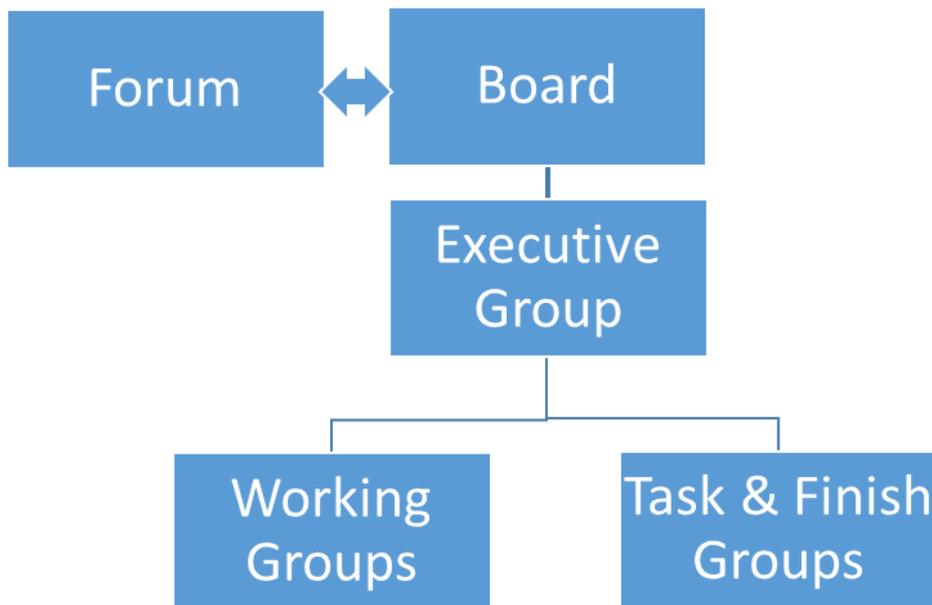
1. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership has previously expressed its support for establishing a LNP in Oxfordshire in order to guide work on nature recovery and to link in with wider regional discussions concerning the natural environment. Oxfordshire is one of the few areas not to have an LNP, and the only area not to have an LNP within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.
2. With Local Nature Recovery Strategies soon to be required for each county, Biodiversity Net Gain funds coming on-stream and unprecedented political and public support to restore nature, a new LNP for Oxfordshire will be the key vehicle to target new resources, establish new strategies, build new connections and champion nature. In a time of great change, there is the opportunity to pull together and form a leading organisation to radically enhance Oxfordshire's natural environment.
3. Following initial stakeholder engagement, workshops involving interested parties took place in December 2020 and March 2021. These workshops confirmed that there is widespread support for an Oxfordshire LNP from a wide range of stakeholders, and the workshops also allowed discussion on the potential purpose of the LNP, its structure and the composition of its board. After further

engagement in the spring final propositions have been developed on these matters.

Purpose

4. The agreed purpose is:
“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.”
5. The LNP will work towards this purpose by developing strategies and plans; influencing relevant local and national government policy and legislation; establishing voluntary working groups and task and finish groups as required; leveraging resources into the sector; and through LNP members and others using LNP outputs to guide their work and influence others.

Structure of the LNP



6. The LNP Board will provide strategic leadership for the LNP, and be responsible for the delivery of the LNP's purpose and work programme. It will also manage the finances of the LNP and report to the accountable body on this.
7. The board will include representatives from local authorities, universities, health, the Defra family, eNGOs, AONBs, farming, business and landowners. The board will have an independent chair and the local authority representative on the board will be Councillor Sue Cooper.
8. The wider expertise that exists throughout the county will influence the work of the LNP through the LNP Forum, a broad stakeholder group that will ensure the decisions of the board and actions of the LNP are fully informed by the views and experiences of LNP members. The Board will also be supported by the Executive Group, chaired by an LNP Manager and attended by the chairs of the working groups and task and finish groups, which will be formed around key

workstreams and bring together relevant experts from among the LNP membership.

Relationship with Environment Advisory Group and Future Oxfordshire Partnership

9. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership supported the establishment of an Environment Advisory Group at its meeting on 22nd March 2021 and this will involve representatives from all of the Councils. It was recognised that additional capacity is needed to help partners respond to the climate and ecological emergencies in a collective and partnership led way. Whilst an LNP will substantially increase capacity for nature's recovery, it will not cover all of the issues and topics under the environmental umbrella. The broad remit of the Environment Advisory Group will allow it to address wider environmental issues. The work programmes of the two bodies should be complementary.
10. The local authority representative on the LNP will be the chair of the Environment Advisory Group. This will help create an important linkage between the two. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership may also wish to consider at an appropriate time, when the LNP is formally established, whether the LNP Chair should sit on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Resources

11. It is planned that the LNP and its board will be supported by a full time LNP Manager. It is also anticipated there will be a separate Policy Officer, and secretariat support ideally linked with that supporting the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.
12. Further work on funding options is currently underway, but it appears likely that Councils may need to contribute to the core costs of the LNP in order for it to be established, but alternative funding sources are also being explored. This options work on LNP funding is being looked at as part of wider work on Future Oxfordshire Partnership resourcing. The core costs are expected to be in the region of £150k pa. In addition to the core costs, elements in the LNP's work programme may require separate funding. The LNP will provide an important vehicle to help the Councils meet the potential new obligations in the Environment Bill to prepare Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and funding should be available to meet these new obligations.
13. It is proposed that a local authority should act as the accountable body for the LNP.

Next Steps

14. The process to identify board members is nearing completion, and each of the various sectors has been asked to nominate members (local authorities, universities, health, the Defra family, eNGOs, AONBs, farming, business and landowners). A separate recruitment exercise for an independent chair will be undertaken.
15. A first board meeting is being planned for September, this will be ahead of the formal establishment of the LNP, so that it can guide the final stages of the setup and the LNP's future work programme.

Financial Implications

16. None directly from this report, but further work on the funding options for the LNP is underway.

Legal Implications

17. None directly from this report.

Other Implications

18. The establishment of a LNP for Oxfordshire will provide an important new body focussed on enhancing nature in the county.

Background Papers

19. None