

# Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



## **Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group**

**HELD ON TUESDAY 3 AUGUST 2021 AT 1.30 PM  
VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS**

### **Present:**

**Councillors:** Sue Cooper (Chair), David Harvey, Tom Hayes, Andrea Powell, Pete Sudbury and Catherine Webber

**Officers:** Kevin Jacob (Future Oxfordshire Partnership) and Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive - Place, South and Vale Councils)

### **6 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutions; declarations of interests and Chair's announcements**

No apologies for absence were received.

There were no declarations of interest or Chair's announcements.

### **7 Notes of the previous meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on 1 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

### **8 Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire**

The advisory group considered the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report which had been recently published by the Environmental Change Institute, (ECI) of the University of Oxford. It was noted that the study had been commissioned and funded through a cross section of Oxfordshire public and private sector partners.

The Chair commented that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board), had asked the advisory group to consider the report and also referred to the recommendations made by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel which the advisory group had been asked to consider. As requested at the previous meeting, Sam Hampton, and Nick Eyre from the ECI had kindly agreed to attend the meeting to assist the advisory group in discussing what the priorities should be for local authorities in seeking to progress the outcomes of the report, mindful of the constrained resources available to local authorities.

In summary, Sam Hampton and Nick Eyre informed the advisory group that:

- Oxfordshire had made good progress so far and was currently on track to meet the 2030 target for carbon reduction, with a significant amount of PV electricity generation already. However, most of the factors contributing to the expected fall in emissions had been led by factors outside of Oxfordshire, e.g. national targets for the decarbonisation of electricity generation, EU regulations on appliance energy consumption etc. Doing more would require more local action.
- Key priorities for Oxfordshire local authorities to further lower emissions included: - increased PV electricity generation capacity in the county via ground mounted solar parks and retrofitting of domestic and non-domestic properties, particularly the move from fossil fuel heating to more sustainable sources of heating such as air or ground source heating; transition to fossil free transport.
- There should not be a fixation on particular dates, but the overall target of 2050 should be adhered to.
- Local authorities should try to use their existing powers and power of influence around initiatives such as the promotion of Active Travel, public transport, planning requirements and air quality as a means to drive electrification. Where they do not currently have explicit powers, local authorities can use their influence to seek to persuade decision makers, e.g. work with partners to manage the increase in electricity generation capacity needed from phasing out fossil fuels.
- Access to centrally held funds to support net zero projects was likely to be via competition/bid processes.
- The options around future land use planning to achieve net zero all had implications and trade-offs and presented difficult decisions for local policy makers.

In discussion, members again focussed upon how the advisory group might add the most value in response to the report and the delivery of its suggested actions. The following points were made in summary:

- Internationally, there were potential opportunities to learn from best practice in innovative use of land for PV provision, (California) and energy efficient land use, (Holland)
- In tackling emissions generated directly within Oxfordshire it was important not to lose sight of the challenge presented by emissions generated from the import and transportation of goods produced internationally.
- Whilst best practice pilots were useful, it was crucially important to upscale and mainstream the clean technologies used within the next decade.
- The best value for money and carbon reduction impacts might come from investment in schemes outside of Oxfordshire such as offshore wind power.
- Continuous communications and engagement with residents including through schools was of crucial importance and would be central to influencing positive changes in behaviours, for example around changing patterns of electricity consumption to periods of peak zero emission electricity generation. It was felt that this was an area in which the advisory group and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership more widely could potentially play a leadership role in tackling misunderstandings around Net Zero.
- That as the UK emerged from Covid-19 restrictions there a decreasing window of opportunity in which to embed positive carbon reduction behavioural changes as part of building back to a new normal on issues such as home working and it was felt that home working should continue to be encouraged.

- Innovative models of financing zero carbon projects should be investigated, for instance the issuing of 'Green Bonds'.
- That in considering how green infrastructure projects such as PV solar electricity generation capacity and Low Carbon Hub projects might be upscaled in Oxfordshire, there were potential opportunities for local authorities to support such schemes as part of their own investment portfolios and local authority finance and property officers should be encouraged to share best practice in this area.
- Local decarbonisation strategies needed to be brought forward and implemented by local authorities within their areas which would include the identification of key employers on the basis of emissions.
- [The Net Zero Carbon Toolkit](#) produced by West Oxfordshire District Council, Cotswold District Council and Forest of Dean District Council was felt to be a best practice example which should be circulated to all members of the advisory group.
- It was felt that building on the excellent work of the Pathways report, there was a need for ongoing engagement with the ECI in providing expert advice to the advisory group and wider Future Oxfordshire Partnership and that this should be explored further through appropriate channels.
- There should be a joint and collaborative approach amongst the Oxfordshire local authorities in bidding for HM Government and other funding to achieve appropriate scale and maximise the attractiveness of any bid.

During the discussion, the advisory group took into the consideration the recommendations of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel regarding the report. Members supported the aspiration to prohibit the provision of fossil fuel boilers on new developments and noted that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership had agreed to write to HM Government about this. In the group's view it was felt that Partnership's lobbying of the HM Government on the issue should be extended to include the prohibition of gas mains on new residential and commercial developments. It was felt that sustainable alternatives would not be seriously prioritised and considered by developers at scale if gas heating remained as a cheaper alternative. Whilst the potential for non-fossil fuel gas heating was acknowledged, this was not considered to be a viable option in the immediate and medium term.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the advisory group note Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report.
2. That the advisory group note the recommendations of the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel.
3. That the advisory group recommend to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that in its letter to HM Government advocating the discontinuation of fossil fuel gas boilers it includes a request that this be extended to the prohibition of the connection of new residential and commercial developments to the gas grid.

## **9 Baseline Emissions Data held by Oxfordshire's Councils**

The advisory group considered a report which provided a summary of feedback provided by each local authority following the request by the group at the previous meeting to better understand baseline data held by each organisation with respect to carbon emissions.

The advisory group also received a presentation from Inga Doherty, Energy Insights Lead, Oxfordshire County Council on the work that the council was doing to develop a publicly

available interactive data story map to illustrate headlines from the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report across the county related to how and where energy was used.

Members of the advisory group noted the baseline data within the report as a useful contribution, commenting that it was important for officers to continue to share information and approaches to the collection and mapping of data with colleagues across the county. It was felt that the interactive data story map had the potential to be a very powerful tool in understanding energy use and in developing strategies to reduce emissions created. It was agreed that when available, the link to access the tool should be made available to members of the group.

## **10 Future work programme**

The advisory group noted the work programme as set out in the agenda, noting that the work programme was still developing.

Councillor Sudbury referred to work Oxfordshire County Council was considering to map the effects of severe weather on Oxfordshire in order to mitigate them. He suggested that this might be of interest to the advisory group once completed.

## **11 Dates of future meetings**

The dates for future meetings as set out in Agenda was noted.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm