

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board)

**HELD ON TUESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 2.00 PM
COUNCIL CHAMBER, CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL, BODICOTE
HOUSE, BODICOTE, BANBURY, OX15 4AA**

[Link to watch the meeting](#)

Present:

Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Dianne Hedges, (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Prof. Linda King, (Universities representative), Councillor Liz Leffman, (Oxfordshire County Council), Adrian Lockwood, (Oxfordshire Skills Board Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business representative - Bicester), Councillor Merylyn Davies, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City), Councillor David Rouane, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Emily Smith, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Catherine Turner, (Homes England) and Councillor Barry Wood, (Vice-Chair), (Cherwell District Council).

Officers: Richard Byard (OxLEP), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council CEX), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale Councils), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council CEX), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Owen Jenkins (Oxfordshire County Council), Archie Martin (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Megan McFarlane, (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team), Stefan Robinson (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Paul Staines, (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team), Phil Wadsworth, (Oxfordshire Plan 2050) and Kathy Wilcox, (Oxfordshire County Council)

Other councillors: Councillor Andrew Gant, (Chair – Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel)

39. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcement

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Dr David Chapman, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, (substituted by Dianne Hedges), Professor Alistair Fitt, Universities, (substituted by Professor Linda King) and Councillor Michele Mead, West Oxfordshire District Council, (substituted by Councillor Merylyn Davies).

There were no declarations of interest.

40. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

41. Public participation

At the start of the item, the Vice-Chair indicated that it was intended to give a common answer to questions two, three and four as it was considered there was a high degree of commonality between these questions. Full copies of the questions and responses would also be published on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership website within ten working days.

1. Helen Marshall asked a question on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire which referred to the decision of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel to support CPRE's concerns the public should be able to understand the decision-making process for the next steps of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and in particular how the number of homes to be built will be decided. It expressed concern that by the time of publication, the Regulation 19 consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be a fait accompli with growth options and spatial distribution selected and embedded. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked who was going to make the decisions on which direction the Plan should take, on what basis these decisions would be taken and how this process would be made transparent to the public?

At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, Giles Hughes, Chief Executive West Oxfordshire District Council, and senior responsible officer for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 responded to the question. He informed the Partnership that the decision on the policies to guide development as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be taken by the five local planning authorities (the City and the four district councils) with consideration of national planning policy. This would be taken through formal decisions when they approved the draft Oxfordshire Plan 2050 for consultation, which was planned for July 2022. The principal Oxfordshire Councils would work together to assess the options and to reach a common position through discussion ahead of those formal decisions. Any decision would be taken following Overview and Scrutiny Committee consideration at the Councils in the normal way. Decisions would be taken in accordance with all relevant access to information legislation, requiring, for example, forward notice of decisions to be published etc. The Vice-Chair added that there would also be opportunity for the public to make representations about the Plan to their local district or city council through the public engagement processes of those councils.

2. Ian Green asked a question on behalf of Oxford Civic Society which referred to the three growth projections originating from the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, (OGNA) set out as part of the recent Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation which could be used as the basis for assessing the scale of longer-term housing growth in Oxfordshire. The question expressed the view that there was widespread and deep public concern regarding the OGNA. This related to its methodology, length and what was considered to be an overly technical nature which had resulted in the document being inaccessible and opaque to the public, a concern shared by a number of groups and reflected in responses to the Regulation 18 consultation. The question asked that an independent review be commissioned of the OGNA and that ideally, there be input from local civic groups on the terms of reference of such a review?

3. David Young asked a question on behalf of Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainability which whilst welcoming the decision to produce a strategic plan for Oxfordshire expressed the view that many of the Plan's aspirations around climate action could not be achieved at the levels of growth currently envisaged. The question also expressed concerns that the OGNA had not met its brief, was inaccessible to non-planning experts and went on to express the view that a number of planning assumptions and national methodologies were changing, and would need to continue to change, if climate actions ambitions were to be achieved. The Partnership was asked to commission an independent peer review of the OGNA and that there be input from local civic groups on the terms of reference of such a review?

4. Ian Ashley asked a question on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire which also welcomed the decision by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel to request a peer review of the OGNA. The question expressed the opinion that any peer review would provide an opportunity for an assessment of the OGNA methodology and increase public transparency of the OGNA rather than generate a new set of housing number projections. In the view of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, an assessment of the OGNA would show that arbitrary choices had taken that increased the number of homes to built and that housing numbers alone would not solve the affordable housing crisis, increase pressure on local infrastructure and encourage high levels of in-migration. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked whether it would initiate a review of the OGNA and consider very carefully how the Oxon 2050 plan could deliver the housing that Oxfordshire actually needed whilst helping to achieve net zero?

At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, Giles Hughes responded to questions two, three and four with a common response. He informed the Partnership that recent consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan included a consultation on the draft Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA). It was stressed that this had been a draft document, on which the public's feedback had been sought. These documents outlined three different scenarios on the future housing need up to 2050. Officers were currently considering the responses to the recent consultation. To date 3,830 responses have been logged from 420 individuals and organisations.

The final selection of the housing target would be made through the formal decisions taken by the City and District Councils when they approve the draft Oxfordshire Plan for consultation. These decisions, which were planned for July 2022, would be taken following Scrutiny Committee consideration at the Councils. The principal Oxfordshire Councils would work together to assess the options and to reach a common position through discussion ahead of those formal decisions. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group will be an important forum for discussion.

Following analysis of the consultation responses, the different options will need to be assessed against the agreed Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, the objectives of the Oxfordshire Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework and through Sustainability Appraisal. This process will take some time and a conclusion is unlikely this year. It is important to recognise that the consultation covered many other important areas, such as addressing climate change, improving environmental quality, and creating jobs. We are very grateful for all of the responses that we have received on these and other topics.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership cannot itself commission a peer review of the OGNA, as decision making powers relating to the Oxfordshire Plan lie with the city and district

councils. Further, it is not appropriate to decide on this request at this moment as it is important that all of the comments made are properly considered before decisions are on an independent review were made.

5. Linda Ward had submitted a written question which expressed her concern that the OGNA was not fit for purpose and which stated the opinion that: 1) it was in the public interest to know the status and role of the two consultancy companies (Cambridge Economics and Iceni Projects) commissioned to prepare the OGNA; and 2) the Council's input to drafting and internal review process which resulted in the final approved version of the OGNA. Attempts to obtain this information through Freedom of Information requests had been rejected and a complaint about this was currently being considered by the Information Commissioner. The representatives of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership were asked to confirm their commitment to the spirit of Freedom Of Information around the OGNA by undertaking to investigate and to ask their FOI Officers to cooperate to provide the requested information and secondly, if they agreed with West Oxfordshire District Council's contention that the Councils' participation in drafting and approving the OGNA should be considered to be 'commercially sensitive' and potentially prejudicial to future council negotiations'. If so, on what grounds?

It was noted a written answer would be supplied, but in addition Giles Hughes commented that if Linda Ward remained concerned about the response, she had received from West Oxfordshire District Council in respect of her Freedom of Information request, she did have the opportunity to ask for a review of the response.

6. Suzanne McIvor, on behalf of Cherwell Development Watch Alliance asked a question which referred to the notes of the meeting of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group held on 14 October 2021 and which quoted an extract from the notes which set out a summary of the Advisory Group's discussion relating to the potential for a Green Belt review and officer advice that such a review could only be commissioned at a county level and not done individually by the district and city councils. The view was expressed by Suzanne McIvor that contrary to what was implied in the notes, the proposed policy option 10 as set out in the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation document, had not set out details of a potential Green Belt review and had instead concentrated on enhancements to the Green Belt. Any review would in any case be too late for existing planned development in the Green Belt and be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked to clarify:

- Would there be a Green Belt Review?
- Why there had been no explicit mention of this in the recent Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation?
- How could a Green Belt review be justified given the NPPF guidelines?
- How did the Partnership plan to ensure that any review of the Green Belt was done in a transparent way and was fully consulted on?

Giles Hughes responded that given the strategic nature of the Oxfordshire Plan, and its plan period up to 2050, Green Belt was an issue that needed to be looked at. The commissioning of a Green Belt study was being considered in order to make sure that the Plan had a comprehensive evidence base, and to help the Plan ensure that Green Belt boundaries remain appropriate up to 2050 and beyond. This would set an important context for subsequent Local Plan reviews.

Plans were supported by evidence and new evidence is frequently commissioned at each stage of their development. Any new studies would be published as part of the next consultation stage in the normal way. Any Green Belt study will need to be consistent with the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework.

42. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

The Vice-Chair invited Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel, to present the six recommendations arising from the Panel's meeting on 23 November 2021.

Councillor Gant highlighted that recommendation one had echoed many of the sentiments expressed in the first public question and whilst he acknowledged the response to that question, he did not think it had fully addressed the issue of how the text of the final consultation draft of the Oxfordshire Plan would be arrived at. There was reference to consideration of the draft by individual council overview and scrutiny committees, but Councillor Gant expressed concern that overview and scrutiny committees had only previously been able to express comments and not make recommendations to their cabinets, because of the sequencing of the approvals process across the respective councils.

The Panel's second recommendation asked that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership initiate a peer review of the OGNA, a request also made by a number of the public questioners. He noted the officer response to those requests but expressed the view that such a review would add value to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 going forward.

Recommendation three supported the establishment of a Green Belt review and recommendation four raised the important issue of taking into account gender specific dimensions as part of the planning and development of infrastructure projects.

Recommendation five related to the review of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme and the proposal that funding from the programme be reallocated from the A4095 Howes Lane re-alignment to the A34 Lodge Hill Interchange and to the Milton Heights Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge. The Panel noted and understood the reasons behind the proposals but asked that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership do all it could to support the identification of alternative funding to deliver the Howes Lane re-alignment scheme.

Finally, recommendation six highlighted the need to explore what retrofitting infrastructure was needed at a community level, for example access to communal ground source heating and also how the tension between the need to maintain cycleways and protect flora and fauna might be reduced.

The Vice-Chair thanked Councillor Gant for the Scrutiny Panel's work and provided the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's initial response to the recommendations. He commented that that recommendation had been largely accepted, but that the full written responses would be published on the Partnership's [website](#) in due course.

43. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Quarter 2, Year 4

The Partnership considered a report updating them with progress with the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of the second quarter, Year 4 (2021/2022).

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the progress as at Quarter 2, 2021/2022 towards the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Quarter 2, Year 4

The Partnership considered a report setting out an update of the financial position of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of the second quarter, Year 4 (2021/2022).

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the Quarter 2, 2021/2022 financial report.

(c) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme - Six Month Review and changes

The Partnership considered a report setting out the results of the latest six month review by Oxfordshire County Council of the cost and delivery profiles of schemes within the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme.

Owen Jenkins, Director of Growth and Economy at Oxfordshire County Council, highlighted that the A4095 Howes Lane scheme had been identified in previous monitoring reports with a red RAG risk rating because of a slowdown in the delivery of accelerated housing associated with the scheme and because of insufficient funding available to deliver it. It was proposed to re-allocate the funding currently allocated to the A4095 Howes Lane Scheme within the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme to the A34 Lodge Hill interchange scheme and the Milton Heights Pedestrian and Cycle bridge. As result of the changes, it was expected that there would be a net increase in the delivery of 200 homes accelerated by the provision of infrastructure.

Mr Jenkins commented that throughout the programme review process, relevant officers had worked closely with colleagues at Cherwell District Council about the A4095 Howes Lane scheme and that they would continue to do so in order to find alternative funding solutions and delivery routes to provide the scheme.

Councillor Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council commented that the County Council Cabinet would be formally considering the changes in due course, but that she fully understood the concerns felt within the Bicester community regarding the proposed removal of the Howes Lane scheme from the infrastructure programme and housing development in the area. However, given the time sensitive nature of funding for the Infrastructure Programme through the Deal and the need to make the most effective use of the funds, the Infrastructure Advisory Group had agreed that it was necessary to re-allocate the funding. The County Council would continue to look at alternative ways in which the strategic road network in Bicester could be supported.

Councillor Smith commented that she also understood and appreciated the concerns of the Bicester community regarding the removal of the Howes Lane scheme, but that given the pressures around the Lodge Hill interchange she supported the re-allocation of the

funds to that scheme. The issue did though highlight the strict conditionality around of use of funds within the Housing and Growth Deal.

The Vice-Chair supported these comments and added that the time sensitive nature of the parcels of funding to accelerate housing delivery though Deal meant that it was necessary to make a decision in order to ensure funding remained available for schemes within Oxfordshire as a whole. It was also important to understand that re-allocation of funding from the Deal away from the Howes Lane scheme did not mean a cancellation of the scheme and partners would continue to need to work together to deliver it.

Councillor Brown added that when members of the Housing Advisory Group had considered the housing implications of the proposed changes, they had expressed disappointment, but had acknowledged the changes were necessary to make the best use of available resources and keep funding within the county. This was consistent with the history of the councils' collaboration through Future Oxfordshire Partnership to reallocate funding between projects if necessary.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership endorse the proposed changes to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme as recommended by Oxfordshire County Council as follows:

1. the removal of further funding from a scheme currently within the H&GD – the A4095 [Howes Lane] re-alignment
2. re-allocating this funding, to introduce a scheme presently outside the H&GD – the A34 Lodge Hill interchange.
3. Increasing funding to Milton Heights Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge to cover a cost pressure.

(d) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

Councillor Leffman referred to the notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group meeting held on 1 November 2021.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

(e) Housing Advisory Group update

Councillor Brown referred to the notes of the Housing Advisory Group meeting held on 2 November 2021 and highlighted that the group had held an important discussion around the potential for Oxfordshire's councils to continue to work together to meet shared challenges around the affordability of housing across the county in the future. The group had also looked at lessons learnt in respect of the housing elements of the current Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal and had suggested a joint workshop with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 advisory group around affordable housing.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

(f) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

Councillor Smith referred to the notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group held on 14 October 2021 and also referred to the most recent meeting of the advisory group held on 18 November 2021. Councillor Smith highlighted that the advisory group had felt it was very important to maintain a good level of engagement with the Planning Inspectorate

and the new ministerial team at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 process moved towards the Regulation 19 stage so as to ensure the plan was developing in an acceptable technical manner.

At its most recent meeting the advisory group had considered an initial and interim high-level summary of themes starting to emerge from the analysis of the Regulation 18 consultation responses. The advisory group had discussed how the output from the consideration of the consultation responses might be made available publicly and it was expected that a report setting out further information would be available in the New Year with the intention that it be considered by the district and city council overview and scrutiny committees.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

(g) Environment Advisory Group update

Councillor Rouane referred to the notes of the Environment Advisory Group held on 23 September 2021 and paid tribute to Councillor Sue Cooper for her tenure as the previous Chair of the advisory group. He referred to the discussion held at the September meeting relating to transport and the tensions involved in addressing the dichotomy between the aspiration to reduce carbon usage and the provision of major road infrastructure.

The Partnership was informed that at its most recent meeting on 26 November 2021, the advisory group had considered a presentation around retrofitting challenges and had supported the development of a methodology focussing on the role of local authorities for the implementation of the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire, (PaZCO) report. It was fully recognised by all of the advisory group's members that the challenge was to move forward and turn the important discussions that had taken place into an action plan for change.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

44. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Name Change Update

The Partnership considered a report that summarised the steps taken since the Partnership's previous meeting to transition from the Oxfordshire Growth Board to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director indicated that the available feedback to date indicated that the name change had been implemented smoothly.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the update.

45. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Forward Plan be noted.

46. Appointment of Chair of the Environment Advisory Group

It was proposed by Councillor Susan Brown and seconded by Councillor Liz Leffman that Councillor David Rouane be appointed as Chair of the Environment Advisory Group for the remainder of the 2021/2022 year. There being no other nominations it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor David Rouane be appointed as Chair of the Environment Advisory Group for the remainder of the 2021/2022 year.

47. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director provided a verbal update. The Partnership was informed that announcements by HM Government in respect of the next steps around the establishment of an Oxford to Cambridge Arc Growth Body and an Arc spatial framework following its consultation on an Oxford to Cambridge Arc Vision were still awaited. The Vice-Chair added that it was possible that there might be more certainty following the publication of HM Government's Levelling Up White Paper, which was now expected in January 2022.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership note the update.

48. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

At the invitation of the Vice-Chair, Councillor Brown updated the Partnership that the project to expand Oxford railway station had taken an important step forward with the granting of a prior approval planning application to redevelop the west of the station. The granting of the application allowed Network Rail to submit a bid for additional funding from the Department for Transport. Once completed, the expansion would allow for a significant increase in the number of passengers that could use the station. The scheme would also allow for the provision of a new bridge over the Botley Road in Oxford.

Network Rail had also indicated that they had taken the next steps necessary in the re-opening of the Cowley branch line. This would be a significant infrastructure improvement for Oxford and Oxfordshire, reduce road use and unlock areas for housing and employment.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership note the update.

49. Dates of next meetings

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership noted the dates of future meetings as set out in the agenda.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm

Chairman

Date

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