Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group

HELD ON THURSDAY 24 MARCH 2022 AT 10.00 AM
VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Councillors: David Rouane (Chair), Andrea Powell, David Harvey, Dan Sames, Pete Sudbury and Catherine Webber

Officers: Michael Oatway, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Suzanne Malcolm, (Deputy Chief Executive - Place, South and Vale Councils), Mish Tullar, (Head of Corporate Strategy, Oxford City Council), Sarah Gilbert (Climate Action Team Leader, Oxfordshire County Council) Susannah Wintersgill, (Director: Communications, Strategy and Insight, Oxfordshire County Council) and Jamie Hartzell (Oxfordshire Treescape Project).

36   Apologies for absence and notification of substitutions; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements:

Apologies were submitted from Councillor Tom Hayes, Oxford City Council.

There were no declarations from Members.

The following announcements were made by the Chair:

- The Chair thanked Councillor Tom Hayes - Oxford City Council, for inviting him to Zero Carbon Oxford at BWM in Cowley. It was a highly informative talk about how a major manufacturing company is addressing Pathways to Zero. Cllr Rouane noted it would be good to reach out to another big business who are undertaking similar work in the county to address the Advisory Group.

The Chair provided an update on the work of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership. The partnership is still at the formation stage and there is currently much work being undertaken around stakeholder mapping. An advert is about to go out for a chair for this partnership. They are also looking for a businessperson to come onto the board of this group; both positions are voluntary and un - renumerated.

37   Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

38   Oxfordshire wide Climate action marketing and communications strategy and EAG communications - Update

The Advisory Group considered a report updating the group on the Climate Action and Communications Strategy.

Susannah Wintersgill, Director: Communications, Strategy, and Insight at Oxfordshire County Council, noted there was a cross council team and a steering group in place to focus on the communications strategy.

The current strategy had three main elements. The first was the launch of an online tool which help people understand their own carbon footprint. Susannah had sent round examples of visuals which will be included in the online tool. This tool will be launched in May after the local elections. The second is a public consultation which will commence at the start of April. This consultation will aim to gauge the public's understanding of the work being undertaken on The Climate Emergency. The third aspect is the release of several explainer videos on the climate strategy which are also hoped will better inform members of the public about the key terms around the Climate Emergency. There is also work underway way to build measures of success, so that the public and Members can understand if the strategy is delivering its stated aims.

Councillor Powell commended the branding in the examples visuals but requested a spreadsheet version to share with officers who are working on the campaigns. Councillor Powell also noted that this work would likely take up resource amongst the districts which was already stretched due to other items of workload. Susannah noted that the County Council are taking the lead on the key aspects of the campaigns to assist the districts.

Councillor Webber also noted the impact this work could have on the capacity of council comms officers.

39   Implementation of the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map work - Update

The Advisory Group received an update from Sarah Gilbert, Climate Action Team Leader, Oxfordshire County Council, on the Progress of Delivering a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan.

Sarah noted that contributions had been received from all stakeholders on the route map. A steering group has been set up and a tender has been developed to recruit a consultant to move forward with the next phase of the work. The tender has now closed and we have had a good range of responses. The aim is to appoint a contractor by the end of May.

Sarah stated the timetable for the route map was approximately one month behind schedule. The aim is by the June Advisory Group meeting to present a revised timetable for the milestones.

Councillor Powell noted that Localis (a think tank) had approached the councils through the District Council Network looking for a case study from local authorities on work they were doing to reach Net Zero. Suzanne Malcolm – Deputy Chief Executive, Place, at South Oxfordshire District Council & Vale of White Horse District Council, raised concerns

that this could interfere with the wider work officers were undertaking on PAZCO. The Chair recommended that the officer group continue to focus on the PAZCO route map work for the time being.

40   Ideas and Innovation

The Advisory Group considered the following items presented by Officers and guest speakers:

    1. <u>A presentation on the use of Solar Power:</u>

A draft paper was circulated to group members ahead of the meeting. The advice from officers has been that this paper is not yet finalised and therefore it was recommended to add this to the agenda for the next Advisory Group meeting for further discussion. Further work will be done in respect of the planning policy elements.

    2. <u>Oxtrees presentation:</u>

Jamie Hartzell, from the Oxfordshire Treescape Project (abbreviated to Oxtrees) provided a presentation around the work that Oxtrees are undertaking on the mapping of the nature recovery plan across Oxfordshire.

Oxtrees is a not-for-profit initiative, co-ordinated by Grow Green Carbon, and is a partnership supported by all six councils across Oxfordshire, OxLEP and several other external stakeholders. It aims to build a consensus on nature recovery across Oxfordshire and overcoming local challenges.

Jamie outlined how since World War Two, the primary aim of land use in the UK has been on maximising food production. This has resulted in 41% of species, 50% of hedgerows and 95% of grasslands having been lost. Considering the current trajectory of the Climate Emergency, a keyway of limiting the rise of global temperatures is nature recovery as trees play a big role in carbon reduction. Trees also have other benefits other than carbon reduction, as they can also improve farming systems as well as provide flood alleviation and help with air quality.

Oxfordshire currently has tree coverage of 9.1%, below the UK average of 13%. To comply with the targets set by the 2018 Climate Change Act, we should be aiming for 50,000 hectares of new trees per year. However, in 2020 - 2021, only 2,200 hectares were planted. It was recognised that there was clearly much work to do to reach the required numbers.

Oxtrees mapping work could help with this. Oxtrees currently have a website where several maps can be found which outline the best places to advance rewilding. Oxtrees have consulted widely on the current mapping work including with 50 parish councils and 30 landowners. Oxtrees can also produce a report on local areas where tree scaping could be effective and these are also being offered for free. Parish councils will produce their own nature recovery plans which will feed into their neighbourhood plans and therefore Parishes are good stakeholders to engage with.

However, landowners need to be brought on board with Oxtrees plans.
Oxtrees have mapped the major landowners in the county and there are 250,000 landowners in total, most of which own very small areas. However, 172 landowners own

over half the county and 26 own over a quarter of the county. If all these landowners could be persuaded to engage with Oxtrees work, then there could be a lot of progress. It is also important to identify owners of land that are not widely known and local knowledge could help with this.

The next steps for Oxtrees include working with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Local Authorities to build nature recovery into their plans, strengthen partner networks, working with farmer clusters, encouraging parish councils and landowners to work together, and developing a treescape champion's network.

Councillor Sudbury noted that the County Council was reworked its Tree policy which is going to its cabinet, as well as its verges, vegetation and footpaths policy and its climate policy.

Councillor Harvey thanked Jamie for the presentation. Councillor Harvey further noted that West Oxfordshire have a biodiversity officer and are trying to instil sustainability into the planning system as well, however Councillor Harvey queried what the most effective thing district councils could be doing? Jamie suggested doing an audit of the land that that councils own and then determine what can be done with nature recovery on the land that the council owns. The Chair noted he believed Oxtrees reports could be useful in identifying land ownership and that the districts and city council could play a role in outreach work with private landowners.

Councillor Powell noted the co-ordination role of district councils (with developers, residents etc.) is important. One idea suggested is if councils could encourage residents to replace fences with hedgerows, as this would support the aims of rewilding across the county. Jamie reiterated engagement with Parishes would help with the nature recovery process.

Councillor Webber noted that the Vale have just implemented a tree policy and 420 trees have now been planted.

Mish Tullar noted that Oxford City Council's position was a bit different and that they were looking at how we can support this. Oxtrees reporting has focused on Ward level rather than Parish level for the city. The best opportunity might be to persuade residents to plant trees in their gardens, which could be more cost effective and lead to a higher number of trees being planted. A communications programme would be key to this.

Jamie noted developing more tree nurseries could also be a good option to increase the supply of trees.

41   Work Programme

It was agreed the next meeting should include the following agenda items:

- A discussion around climate adaptation. Councillor Sudbury will ask officers at the County Council to do an initial piece of work on this
- To receive a presentation on the work of the OXLEP Clean Growth Sub – Group.
- A presentation on the work of Good Food Oxfordshire.
- A talk from a major business in Oxfordshire on work they are undertaking to implement Pathways to Zero carbon. The Chair agreed to speak to OXLEP on who a suitable speaker could be.

42   Future meetings

The advisory group noted the date of the next meeting as 21st June 2022.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am