

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON TUESDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair), Councillor Brad Baines, Councillor Nathan Boyd, Councillor John Broad, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor Julian Cooper, Councillor Tiago Corais, Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Councillor Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Victoria Haval, Councillor Emily Kerr, Councillor David Turner, Councillor Richard Webber, Councillor Catherine Webber and Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Alex Jeffery	Asst. Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Giles Hughes	Senior Responsible Officer, Oxfordshire Plan 2050
Kevin Jacob	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
John McLauchlan	Head of Service, Infrastructure Programme Office – Oxfordshire County Council
Babatunde Ogundele	Asst. Democratic Services Officer - Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal
Kathy Wilcox	Head of Financial Strategy – Oxfordshire County Council

Other councillors: Councillor Emily Smith, Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group

12. Apologies for absence, substitutes; declarations of interest, Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Samantha Bowring, Vale of White Horse District Council, (substituted by Councillor Catherine Webber), Councillor Richard

Langridge, West Oxfordshire District Council, and Councillor Liam Walker, Oxfordshire County Council.

Councillor Katherine Miles and Councillor John Broad both declared non-pecuniary interests in Item 3, on the grounds that they were members of the Oxford Civic Society. The Society had submitted a public question which neither Councillor Miles nor Councillor Broad had had any involvement with.

It was noted that the meeting was being livestreamed and that a recording would be available [here](#) for a period of 12 months.

13. Election of Vice-Chairman for the 2022/2023 year

Councillor Julian Cooper proposed, and Councillor Charlie Maynard seconded, Councillor Richard Langridge as Vice-Chair of the Panel. There being no other nominations, the choice was agreed after being put to a vote.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Richard Langridge be elected as Vice-Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel for the 2022/2023 year.

14. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2022 were approved as a correct record.

15. Public participation

The Scrutiny Panel considered two questions and one address from members of the public.

Ian Green, on behalf of the Oxford Civic Society, referred to the ending of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme. The Society's view was that a lot of good work had been undertaken before its cessation and that this now needed to be utilised/deployed within the Local Plans. The Panel was asked whether it agreed that a public discussion should be held by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on making the best use of the work developed to date as part of the creation of Local Plans.

In order to update the Local Plans, the Civic Society was of the opinion that the district and city councils would have to come to a mutually acceptable position on both growth rates and distribution if they were to achieve compliance with the statutory Duty to Cooperate. In order to achieve this each local authority would have to be clear on the levels of employment, housing growth and affordable housing it wanted. Mr Green enquired as to whether the Panel believed that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should continue to seek agreement across Oxfordshire on growth and also if the Partnership should – at a draft stage – look at the strategic infrastructure implications of all of the Local Plans.

The Society felt that some of the principles of the previous Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme could still be used, alongside links to other strategies, to assess the environmental and social implications of proposed levels of growth.

John Hill stated to the Panel that there was a continued need for full transparency around the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA). In his view, this remained, despite the end of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme, an extremely relevant document. Mr Hill

referred to answers that had previously been provided to him following questions that he had asked at the Future Oxfordshire Partnership meeting in June 2022. Those queries had related to the assumptions behind the employment forecasts/projections by seeking clarity about their reliability/validity in light of the changed economic circumstances (he had also sought an explanation about which items were forecasts and which were projections). The responses provided had not in his opinion adequately addressed the issues raised.

The Scrutiny Panel was asked to consider whether it thought that proper answers had been provided to Mr Hill's questions and to enquire as to whether the Partnership intended to rely on evidence gathered as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (and if so, why it had not adequately addressed the points he had raised in June).

Councillor John Fouweather, Oxford City Council, made an address to the Panel in reference to Agenda item 11 – the Review of the Housing from Infrastructure Programme (HfI) – which was due to be considered by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on 27 September. He commented that for bodies such as the Panel to perform their scrutiny function, papers needed to come before decisionmakers in good time and be publicly available. Councillor Fouweather highlighted the fact that although documents on the proposed changes outlined in the review had been considered by the Infrastructure Advisory Group on 15 September, nothing had been added to the Scrutiny Panel's agenda by morning of the meeting. This not only meant that members had not been afforded the opportunity to read the papers, but also that the public and other stakeholders had not had the time or chance to register to speak on this matter. In his view, this had prevented the Panel from effectively exercising its scrutiny function and removed the opportunity for democratic oversight prior to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership meeting.

Councillor Fouweather set out several detailed points in favour of the retention of both the Milton Heights pedestrian and cycle bridge scheme, the expansion of the Kidlington roundabout proposal and the retention of the original Woodstock Road project. He also laid out arguments for the removal of the Oxpens Bridge scheme from the HfL programme. Councillor Fouweather asked the Panel whether they agreed that the scrutiny of the HfL proposals had been inadequate and not in the spirit of collective decision making. He also enquired as to whether they thought that the case for the Osney Mead/Oxpens Road scheme had not been made.

At the conclusion of Councillor Fouweather's address, the Chair thanked him, Ian Green and John Hill for their attendance. She also welcomed their contributions and commented that these would be considered by the Panel as part of the wider agenda items they related to.

Following an invitation from the Chair to make an initial response to the questions from Ian Green and John Hill, Giles Hughes, Senior Responsible Officer for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, commented that the issues that they had raised were touched upon within the substantive agenda report – in particular, the principles around future joint working by the councils and the retention of evidence developed through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work. Mr Hughes also stated that OGNA (which had been a consultation draft and not agreed policy) was not, in light of the position reached with regards to housing need and the ending of the Plan, going to be taken forward. Instead, local councils would need to come to their own decision about the evidence base needed to support their Local Plans (they would, nevertheless, have to be mindful of the Duty to Cooperate).

In answer to enquiries from the Panel as to whether the demise of the OGNA meant a return to the previous Oxfordshire Strategic Market Assessment and the consultant who produced it, Mr Hughes clarified that each individual council would not only need to come to their own view on housing need and requirements, but also commission work to inform and evidence their conclusions.

16. Update on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Programme

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership providing an update on the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and the transition to a process focused on Local Plans. Giles Hughes, Senior Responsible Officer for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, introduced the paper and, alongside Councillor Emily Smith, Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group, answered the Panel's questions.

Mr Hughes highlighted the statement made by the leaders of the respective councils in August 2022 setting out the circumstances that had made it impossible for a consensus to be reached on a single approach to planning for housing. The report contained proposals on how alternative arrangements and principles could be put in place to retain the valuable work and evidence completed as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It also set out how the councils might put in place a new framework – potentially involving both the renaming of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group and the development of new terms of reference – to discuss spatial planning matters of mutual interest beyond the Duty to Cooperate. In 2021, all of Oxfordshire's councils had agreed a Strategic Vision which consisted of a series of high-level objectives – this Vision remains in place.

The Panel, while acknowledging the concerted efforts to reach a consensus on the issue of future housing need, regarded the ending of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme with deep regret and disappointment. It was, in their view, a regressive step which will negatively impact on the delivery of sustainable development in Oxfordshire. The Panel also noted the good work that had been achieved by the Oxfordshire 2050 programme and expressed their concerns that, unless the councils across Oxfordshire went beyond their legal obligations under the Duty to Cooperate, this was at risk of being lost.

The Panel strongly supported recommendations 2,3 and 4 as set out in the Update on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Programme report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. Furthermore, in the spirit of these proposals:

RESOLVED: That the Panel recommends to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it agree the principle that the districts, city and county council should continue to cooperate and collaborate on county wide future spatial planning matters related to the former Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme, with the support of a planning advisory group. In doing so, they should aspire to achieve policy coherence and coordination in respective local plans. These topics for collaboration should include, but are not limited to, the Green Belt, carbon reduction, nature recovery, housing density and proximity of housing to employment sites, and active travel infrastructure connecting housing to urban centres.

17. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair referred to the response of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the recommendations made by the Panel at its June meeting which was noted.

18. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - September 2022

The Panel considered its work programme as set out in the Agenda.

The Chair highlighted the Action Log. This included updates on previously agreed actions, including a full written response from officers to the Panel's request for data on whether occupants for new build housing originated from inside or outside of Oxfordshire. Attention was also drawn to the update regarding the Chair, Councillor Neil and Councillor Hicks liaising with OxLEP and the University of Oxford around innovation. It was recommended to the Panel that it close this action as OxLEP was leading on this area.

In relation to the schedule for future meetings, Councillor Cooke suggested that the large number of items on the Panel's agenda was making it difficult for them to effectively deliver in their role. As a consequence, there might be a need for additional meetings to accommodate the necessary business in sufficient depth. While the Chair commented that the large number of agenda items was primarily influenced by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's work programme, she did acknowledge the points made and stated that they would be considered in future agenda planning.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted its work programme and updated action log.

19. Update following the Joint Workshop between the Health & Wellbeing Board and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

The Panel considered a paper to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership providing an update on actions to address common areas of concern between the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board which had been highlighted at their joint workshop on 9 March 2022. Rosie Rowe, Healthy Place Shaping Lead, Oxfordshire County Council, introduced the report and answered questions from the Panel.

In discussion, members of referred to the update on retrofit in housing and the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire project (PaZCO). It was felt that this was an important area of activity – due to its links to multiple issues besides the cutting of greenhouse gas emissions e.g. the cost of living – and should be given a high priority. Ms Rowe responded that the significance of this issue was fully recognised, especially in relation to the county's existing housing stock. All of Oxfordshire's councils had contributed a total of £210,000 of additional funding for the Health and Care System Fund via the Better Health Service to provide telephone and home visits to people with housing issues. It was hoped that through this money, support could be provided to approximately 10.0 per cent of those living in fuel poverty within Oxfordshire over the next twelve months (it was, nevertheless, also recognised that more needed to be done). The service aims to maximise the income of its clients by both investigating options such as grant entitlements for retrofitting and analysing bills to identify changes that could save money. In addition, more broadly the link was also being made between housing, health and climate change. Ms Rowe agreed that a stretch target in this area could potentially be helpful and that this would be looked into.

Members also raised the issue of air quality and Air Quality Action Plans. While they welcomed the work already undertaken, they questioned the value of additional data gathering given that the locations/roads with poor air quality – and the underlying causes – were well known. They stated that significant investment and action was required to

reduce the level of traffic using these roads was required. The Panel was informed that the details of the actions being taken were set out within the individual council's Air Quality Action Plans. It was, however, recognised that many of these activities consisted of transport policy and highway infrastructure improvement (alongside behavioural changes such as the promotion of cycling and walking). The public health sector was, therefore, seeking to do all that it could to facilitate a joined-up approach between Oxfordshire's local authorities in addressing these issues (and to improve the alert system at times when air quality levels were poor). It was, though, recognised that this would be a difficult and long-term task.

The Panel referred to the need to consider the connectivity of new developments in the round when considering planning applications. This should not just be restricted to an assessment of the road safety of a proposed scheme but should also its cumulative effects on air quality. Members also reiterated their view that building standards needed to be strengthened. Ms Rowe confirmed that the Public Health Team did comment on the impact of major planning applications from a public health perspective and that around issues around connectivity formed part of this. She also mentioned that the rollout of Health Impact Assessments as part of the planning process would assist in this work.

Concerns were expressed by some members of the Panel that too much reliance was being placed on the transition to electric vehicles as a way of improving air quality. While this shift could help to reduce noxious gases, it was necessary to recognise that air particulates were probably more dangerous to public health. There also remained the issue of poor quality inside dwellings and public buildings, with the situation potentially being made worse by people cutting back on their heating due to the costs. The Panel were informed that new guidance was going to be issued and targeted campaign launched on this topic.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

20. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Year 5, Quarter 1, 2022/23

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership updating them on the progress of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal at the end of the first quarter of the fifth and final year (2022/23) – it also incorporated the position at the end of 2021/22.

In presenting, Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, highlighted that the two targets for the Housing from Infrastructure programme (Hfi) had not been achieved as of the end of the 2021/22 financial year when measured against the original five-year period of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The Panel was reminded that there was still the possibility of an extension to Hfi programme which, if confirmed, would allow for the measurement and inclusion of additional homes within the data. It would not, however, be possible to calculate what this might be at the present time.

Various members expressed their disappointment that the targets for the housing elements of the Deal had not been achieved. They highlighted that this would have significant consequences for individuals and families in need of housing. In response to a question regarding the potential reputational damage that the missing of targets would have with HM Government and future funding opportunities, the Panel was informed that while it was acknowledged that the position was disappointing, it needed to be considered

in the context of the pandemic and the economic slowdown. It was also emphasised that it was important to recognise the fact that even if a scheme was not completed within a specific time period, it did not mean that it would not be delivered at all – the overall ambition to for 100,000 homes to be built by 2031, as set out within the Local Plans, was also a pertinent background consideration.

In relation to how developers could be incentivised to deliver homes as quickly as possible on major sites, this was the function of the Hfl programme. Its aim was to facilitate housing delivery by funding the provision of strategic infrastructure designed to unlock major site delivery.

With regards to affordable housing, Councillor Cooke requested further information about the 936 affordable housing units referred to as delivered within the report. Officers were asked to clarify the definition of ‘affordable homes’ in this context, what the average price paid was for shared ownership homes and what were the interquartile ranges of prices – officers undertook to provide a written response.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report but expressed its disappointment that the Hfl targets had not been achieved to date.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Year 5, Quarter 1, 2022/23

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership setting out the financial position for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The report covered the period to the end of Q1 2022/23 – it also incorporated the position as at the end of 2021/22. Kathy Wilcox, Head of Financial Strategy, Oxfordshire County Council, highlighted the following points:

- As of 2021/22 financial year end, the spend from the Housing from Infrastructure fund (Hfl) was £110.5m.
- The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, (DLUHC) was reviewing the implications of the decision to end the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme along with the final £30m instalment of Hfl grant funding.
- It was expected that this would be the final reported update on the Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Programme financial position. This was because future funding streams would not be part of the Housing and Growth Deal and, therefore, not within the county council’s purview as the responsible authority.
- £1.8m remained within the Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Fund as of the end of the 2021/2022 financial year.

Members expressed their concerns – in light of the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme – regarding the uncertainty over the final instalment of £30m from HM Government and sought reassurance around what was likely to happen.

In response, Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, stated that a meeting was to be held with relevant civil servants later in that week. While it was recognised that owing to ministerial changes there had been some delay, the intention was to emphasise that – despite the ending of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 workstream – the district and city councils had delivered on their obligation to support the delivery of 100,000 new homes within Oxfordshire up to 2031 through their Local Plans. The Hfl was about putting in place the infrastructure to help make the delivery of this commitment a reality and, therefore, the

withholding of the final funding instalment by HM Government would be counterproductive. It was, however, stressed that it was impossible to give any guarantees.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the report.

(c) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the update from the Infrastructure Advisory Group and that an additional urgent item had been added to the Agenda regarding proposed changes to the Housing from Infrastructure (Hfl) programme.

(d) Housing Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the update as set out in the Agenda.

(e) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the update as set out in the Agenda.

(f) Environment Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the update as set out in the Agenda.

21. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

22. Review of Homes from Infrastructure Programme

The Panel considered a presentation setting out suggested changes to the Housing from Infrastructure programme (Hfl). The item had been urgently added to the agenda, as the Panel's views needed to be sought prior to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership considering the proposals on 27 September 2022.

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, apologised both for the lateness in the circulation of the presentation slides to members and for the item only being published earlier that day. Unfortunately, it had not been possible to circulate them any earlier due to the significant necessary work that had to be undertaken and the need to obtain the necessary approvals. It was, however, fully recognised that what had occurred was not best practice.

In relation to the proposals regarding Oxpens Bridge – and in light of the comments made about this scheme earlier in the meeting – Mr Down informed the Panel that it was his understanding that Oxford City Council saw the project as a priority because it would unlock the highest number of new homes.

John McLauchlan, Head of Service, Infrastructure Programme Office, Oxfordshire County Council, presented the review of the Hfl and answered questions from members of the Panel. He highlighted that:

- Total Capital allocation for Infrastructure £142.7m
- Present programme had £149.2m allocated against it
- This was a result of a short-term imbalance to the programme as endorsed by Future Oxfordshire Partnership on 13th June (including the additional £5m for the NOC)

Cassington scheme, and £1.495m for Benson). This had been since approved by Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet.

- Other scheme changes endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in June were paused (pending the wider Oxfordshire County Council Capital Review)
- To achieve a balanced programme an overall net reduction of £6.495m was needed to cover decision already implemented.

In discussion, members commented that while they understood and acknowledged the complex challenges involved in bringing this item forward, they were, nevertheless, very disappointed to receive the slides relating to the presentation/review at such late notice. The Panel stated that they regarded this as unacceptable and highlighted that it was incompatible with their role of reviewing and scrutinising plans, proposals and decision related to the discharge of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's functions and the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. It was also not conducive with general principles applicable to the relationship between scrutiny bodies and executives.

The Panel also requested that further information be provided on the methodology and criteria used in determining the revised Hfl programme. This would include how the criteria had been applied to specific schemes (in particular, a breakdown of the estimate of housing units that would be accelerated by the proposals in the revised programme compared to those that had been revised/scaled back as part of the review). In the absence of these details, the Panel did not feel that there was either sufficient information or time for it (and for that matter the Partnership) to come to an overall judgement on review of the Hfl programme – the Panel also requested specifics on who signed off on the proposed revisions and who will make the final decision on the list.

RESOLVED: That the Panel recommends to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it:

1. That the Partnership respond to the concerns of the Panel and requests for further information.
2. That in addition to the consideration of the housing units accelerated by a particular scheme within the period of the Housing and Growth deal, the Partnership give higher priority to consideration of Active Travel factors, as a theme to determine the revised Hal programme. This is to ensure in the absence of existing infrastructure, there is the creation of new safe walking and cycling infrastructure linking developments to nearby settlements.
3. That where a scheme is proposed to be removed from the Hfl programme and linked development has already taken place (e.g., Milton Heights), the Partnership reconsider its prioritisation weighting to include it in the Hfl programme or else do all it can to encourage.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm