

# Notes

## OF A MEETING OF THE



# The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group

HELD ON MONDAY 12 DECEMBER 2022 AT 10.00 AM

## Present:

**Councillors:** David Rouane (Chair), Sally Povolotsky, Andrea Powell, Andrew Prosser and Pete Sudbury.

**Officers:** Ian Boll (Corporate Director Communities, Cherwell District Council), Inga Doherty (Energy Insight Lead, Oxfordshire County Council), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council), Sarah Gilbert (Head of Climate Action, Oxfordshire County Council), Dale Hoyland (Oxfordshire Retrofit Lead, Oxfordshire County Council), Alex Jeffery (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Suzanne Malcolm (Senior Responsible Officer), Mish Tullar (Head of Corporate Strategy, Oxford City Council), Rachel Wileman (Director of Planning, Environment & Climate Change, Oxfordshire County Council) and Susannah Wintersgill (Director: Communications, Strategy and Insight, Oxfordshire County Council)

**Guests:** Laurence Oakes-Ash (City Science).

## 55 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutions; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Imogen Thomas.

## 56 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate record of matters discussed.

## 57 Environment Advisory Group work programme

The Chair proposed two dates to re-arrange the meeting from 12 January 2023: 19 January 2023 or 30 January 2023. 30 January 2023 at 10am-12pm was agreed by members as the date for the next meeting.

**Action: Alex Jeffery to update meeting invite to 30 January 2023.**

## **58 To consider and discuss how to take forward a dialogue on solar farms: issues to be considered and terms of reference.**

The Chair invited members to have an open discussion on how a piece of work on solar farms should be defined.

Councillor Prosser opened the discussion noting that this piece of work should be part of a wider natural capital land use analysis (wind, solar, land-use). Oxford University have begun work on this topic and as such there are multiple strands that could be pulled together. Members noted that land has multiple uses therefore land for solar farms and productive farmland can co-exist now that agrivoltaics is well established.

Mish Tullar (Oxford City Council officer) with regard to the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire action plan and route map, noted an importance of using the local plan frameworks to achieve alignment when discussing where solar development should be sited in Oxfordshire. Increasing public acceptance of solar farms is imperative as well as ensuring they are correctly sighted.

Councillor Povolotsky noted the importance of considering grid usage and grid capacity and suggested that wind turbines could be more efficient. Members were also reminded that Oxfordshire is the seat of nuclear research and development and to get to a zero-carbon perspective there will need to be a 'patchwork quilt' of energy. Councillor Povolotsky concluded by recommending, through local plans, that Councils should be considering solar on the built environment (brown space, car parks, roofs of buildings) before agricultural land is lost to accommodate solar farms.

Councillor Powell expressed a preference to compartmentalising the problem in order to prioritise the most important issues having regard for planning capabilities through the Local Plans.

Members queried the progress of Project LEO (Local Energy Oxfordshire) and Councillor Sudbury suggested the project was rolling into Project LEO II which would extend the range of options that are trialled. Councillor Sudbury will endeavour to get more information to circulate to Members of EAG.

The Chair summarised the discussion stating that this piece of work would need to go through planning colleagues and a common policy or shared approach considered. Prior to that, research would be required to see what is already in place.

Rachel Wileman (Oxfordshire County Council officer) suggested that joint work through the planning officers' group being facilitated by Andrew Down is most likely the correct mechanism that will set out the land-use and natural capital aspects but also build on the mapping work that was done through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 sub-group. In-put and feedback from that group to understand their progress to date could be a useful tool for the EAG.

**Action: Chair to discuss with Andrew Down the progress of their work and possibility of adding the matters discussed above.**

## **59 Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan**

## **60 Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan - briefing paper**

Inga Doherty (Oxfordshire County Council officer) introduced the agenda item. Recapping briefly on timeline and work to date, Inga explained that the work was commissioned in May 2022, focussing on delivering a route map and action plan which takes account of the 'Oxfordshire leading the way' scenario in the transition to Net Zero, accelerating work collaboratively that will enable us to move more quickly along that pathway.

## **61 Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan report**

Laurence Oakes-Ash (City Science) updated Members on the actions and events to date including a series of stakeholder workshops and focus groups during July to September 2022 to develop a Route Map and Action Plan. The baseline data and route maps together imply the events that need to occur in order to achieve net zero. This data and information then generated the action plan.

The focus group stage concluded with 16 actions which were presented for further feedback and updated accordingly. All of the work has been consolidated into the report in the agenda pack.

Laurence summarised by drawing attention to the route maps, which he noted are a useful reminder of what needs to happen by intermediate dates towards net zero. Laurence concluded that he hoped the route maps also encourage and engage others to rally around the actions and seek support to ensure they are successful whilst continuing to monitor progress.

Inga Doherty (Oxfordshire County Council officer) outlined the priority actions. Inga noted that some of the areas are broad and as such there would need to be a prioritisation exercise around resourcing. There is also recognition that funding will be a particular challenge therefore innovative ways of bringing finance into the County would need to be explored.

The Chair confirmed the 'asks' of the Environment Advisory Group as –

1. Consider the actions and endorse the thematic work areas and Priority Actions identified through stakeholder engagement
2. Agree further time to allow Officers to bring back a worked-up programme, to engage external stakeholders and to develop a monitoring, reporting and governance process.

Members agreed that exploring innovative funding is imperative and suggested whether one of the priority actions should be raising finances. On finances and funding, Councillor Sudbury noted a 'habit' of HM Government to bring up sums of money for such projects and it would put Oxfordshire in good stead to demonstrate a comprehensive county-wide plan ready to go when funding becomes available.

Members expressed a need for Councils to play a greater role in influencing the public through their communication capabilities, agreeing that once the actions are agreed a

communications piece should follow to “bring the public along”. Another priority piece of work raised by Members was a need to avoid duplication of time, effort, and finance by having a clear understanding of what is already underway in the City and Districts.

Councillor Prosser welcomed the inclusion of nature recovery and carbon sequestration in the priority actions noting there was also space for embodied carbon in infrastructure, which is the amount of carbon emitted during the construction of a building. Responding to Councillor Prosser, Inga confirmed that embodied carbon is encapsulated within the cross-cutting actions.

Members noted an importance that the narrative around this work explains that this framework is being used because it is an existing framework that fits with government data although it may not be the most up to date looking at consumption and science-based targets.

Officers present at the meeting noted the importance of avoiding duplication citing work already underway through Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) which could offer the opportunity include all Councils. Resourcing from an officer perspective was raised, with specific reference to where work is already underway, such as an Electric Vehicle cross-council working group. Officers noted the key role for this group to work with key strategic partners and as such stakeholder mapping would be a worthwhile piece of work. On finance, Officers noted that implicit in some of the actions was the enablement of those sums of capital finances that are set out in PaZCO, such as local area energy mapping. Specifically speaking to finance, officers noted that the next phase of this work should engage the treasury group. Existing skills and groups across FOP should be levered to embed this work with other ongoing workstreams.

The Chair summarised that finance was the main priority that emerged from the discussion followed closely by gaining an understanding of work already underway. Inga confirmed they were well sighted on work already taking place in the County and they were aiming to engage as wide as possible. An engaging communications piece was noted as a third priority emerging from the action plan and route map.

## **62 A retrofit strategy for Oxfordshire**

Dale Hoyland (Oxfordshire County Council officer) outlined the steps being taken to lead to accelerated delivery of retrofit installations in order to meet the mandate that by 2030 Oxfordshire would have retrofitted 16,000 properties to at least an EPC ‘B’ standard. The presentation also provided an update on domestic retrofit schemes already in progress.

Retrofit roundtables will bring together organisations with a strategic role in transforming retrofit provision to agree a shared understanding of current policy and the scale of change, exploring projects and funding already in place and also discussing barriers and solutions to reaching the agreed mandate.

Supply chain, demand versus supply, the intermittency of funding and the complexity of the customer journey were all highlighted as barriers to achieving the target. Solutions will be proposed through the delivery of the Retrofit Roundtable events however Dale did point out a report from Aspire Oxfordshire covering three key areas and provides recommendations for overcoming barriers. A link to the report was included in the accompanying meeting chat.

Dale provided funding figures from schemes that Oxfordshire County Council are delivering, the Local Authority Delivered funding (LAD3) and the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG1). Next steps include producing case studies to promote these schemes and assist with future funding opportunities, broadening the offer to include options and engagement with a wider audience and deliver the beforementioned Retrofit Roundtables. The Chair queried the role of OxLEP in promoting skills with Dale confirming that OxLEP would be leading the next Retrofit Roundtable on this matter.

Members queried whether information was available on how many properties had already been retrofitted by the 'able to pay' market? Although this information was not clear, Dale agreed that this would be a positive communications piece to demonstrate retrofitting is well underway in Oxfordshire. Members also expressed the need to move quickly on this, citing an opportunity now the new build housing market slowing down to engage residents and construction suppliers to move towards retrofit.

Officers present at the meeting suggested that consideration should be given to linking with the consultants already engaged on the ZCOP sub-group work for the Retrofit Roundtables as the learnings from the ZCOP work could be taken into the roundtable sessions. Officers highlighted the scale of the challenge and noted that big structural issues such as central government funding and planning constraints should not be underestimated. Officers present at the meeting reassured the group that Government had committed to funding, but the County must be the right place to apply and then deliver that.

A final suggestion from Officers was to link-in with the FOP Housing Advisory Group to identify targeted households where support could be directed to get maximum value and benefit from retrofit workstreams.

## **63 Verbal update on Climate Action Oxfordshire**

Susannah Wintersgill (Oxfordshire County Council officer) gave an update on the cross-county campaign, Climate Action Oxfordshire. To recap, the objectives of the campaign are five-fold, as detailed in the accompanying presentation, and the aims are broadly to raise awareness of climate action and clearly articulate the role of the individual in climate change.

The approach so far has focussed on taking small steps and asking people to do what they can by providing ways for people to overcome barriers to climate change and suggesting options which also have financial benefits, such as insulating their loft.

In terms of activity to date, a survey ran in April and May to capture awareness and attitudes amongst residents accompanied by a cross-county social media campaign. A website was launched over the summer which is a 'one stop shop' of practical advice for residents wanting to reduce their carbon footprint. The website was widely advertised through a radio campaign and outdoor advertising.

Next steps for the digital campaign include the expansion on the content of the website and the continued promotion of the website via marketing and PR.

Members noted an importance to 'champion' this campaign with their own authorities in order to secure funding and resourcing to extend the longevity of this campaign. Susannah will ensure that all Councils are aware of the funding asks for this programme. On resourcing, Mish Tullar (Oxford City Council officer) suggested there is an opportunity to

link this work more closely with that already ongoing, and this would be a good area to be more 'opensource' with what we are doing.

On messaging, the Chair asked whether the campaign was engaging with climate change sceptics? Susannah agreed it was a difficult topic and individual sources were not usually rebutted to avoid amplifying their message, but it is done when such dialogue edges into more mainstream channels.

## **64 Countywide Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy**

Sarah Gilbert (Oxfordshire County Council officer) gave the presentation which proposes a piece of work to bring together that already underway in the County (a review of evidence bases we currently hold and activity we are already doing) to develop an Oxfordshire climate adaptation and resilience evidence base.

In addition, the County Council has been in discussion with Exeter University as an initial step to identify measures that would support Oxfordshire stakeholders to develop more understanding about exposure to climate risk. Exeter University are developing a Local Climate Adaptation Toolkit (LCAT) and to support the LCAT tool, the County Council have been offered the opportunity to co-develop the stakeholder engagement for this work. Sarah invited representatives from both the District and City councils to be involved with (or recommend colleagues for) a series of workshops to co-develop a skills and knowledge resource with Exeter University, with the aim to build expertise amongst Oxfordshire's key decision makers on climate adaptation and resilience planning.

Sarah summarised the item by noting a synergy with work the Local Nature Partnership are undertaking in terms of providing resilience solutions but also danger to biodiversity in terms of changing climate. As such, Sarah noted that the County were engaging with Matt Whitney (Local Nature Partnership manager) on this.

Officers present at the meeting noted the importance of this piece work which links, in terms of the FOP strategic vision, to the member planning liaison group and how this informs Local Plans but also the FOP Housing and Infrastructure groups as there will be such implications that arise from this.

## **65 Future meetings**

The Chair noted the next meeting of the FOP Environment Advisory Group would be 30 January 2023 10am – 12pm.

The meeting closed at 11:45am.