

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair), Councillor Brad Baines, Councillor Samantha Bowring, Councillor John Broad, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor Julian Cooper, Councillor Tiago Corais, Councillor Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Victoria Haval, Councillor Emily Kerr, Councillor David Turner and Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Becky Chesshyre	Partnerships Communications Lead
Emma Coles	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership
Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Alex Jeffery	Asst. Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Kevin Jacob	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Jeremy Long	Co-Chair, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership
Babatunde Ogundele	Asst. Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Matt Whitney	Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager
Beth Wilks	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager

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

Apologies were submitted from Councillor Nathan Boyd, Vale of White Horse District Council; Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Cherwell District Council; Councillor Richard Langridge, West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Liam Walker, Oxfordshire County Council; and Councillor Richard Webber, Oxfordshire County Council.

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

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

24. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2022 were agreed subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 12: clarification that Councillor John Broad had declared a non-pecuniary interest relating to the public speaking item on the grounds he was a member of the Transport Group of the Oxford Civic Society, one of the registered speakers, but not the Oxford Civic Society itself.
- Minute 15: correction of listed public speaker to Councillor Lawrence Fouweather.

25. Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Update

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership providing an update on the progress of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (ONLP). This not only included information on the ONLP's areas of focus, but also set out details relating to the process for the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager, gave a presentation (details of which can be found [here](#)) highlighting some of the key areas of focus within the report.

In discussion, the Panel noted that there appeared to be a deficit of national legislation and guidance relating to natural capital investment. Members expressed the view that the ONLP should be working with other local authorities and nature partnerships to ensure a consistent, evidence-based approach was being taken across the country. (Particular attention was drawn to the issue of carbon credits, where a lack of effective oversight and measurement had created several problems). The importance of cross boundary working was also emphasised in relation to the issue of nature routing arising from development.

Officers confirmed to the Panel that the ONLP were in regular contact with other local nature partnerships – in particular as part of the Southeast Nature Partnership group. They also stressed that Oxfordshire was well-placed in comparison to many other areas as it already had biodiversity net gain policies in place in advance of national requirements. In addition, it was mentioned that work is currently underway to develop a shared evidence base of data to support progress in relation to the issue of nature routing arising from development. While the national issues around carbon credits were also acknowledged by officers, they highlighted that there were good examples of best practice carbon credit schemes within Oxfordshire – including on the Blenheim Estate.

The Panel expressed concerns around the matrices and formulas used to assess biodiversity net gain. Members suggested that in some cases the independence of consultants commissioned by developers to provide site assessments were questionable and that, therefore, such evaluations should be engaged and undertaken by independent third parties. Officers accepted that the biodiversity net gain metrics were imperfect but emphasised that in Oxfordshire there was access to independent consultants.

The Panel was also informed that the national guidance made it clear that individual council local plans should both feed into and influence the drafting of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (and vice-versa).

Anxieties were expressed by some members of the Panel that the level of funding committed to the ONLP was not sufficient to support its ambitions. Officers made clear that, while additional resourcing would always be welcome, the primary role of the ONLP

was to facilitate, enable, champion and coordinate action in relation to nature-based activities – it was never intended to directly deliver projects.

The Chair commented on the importance of youth engagement as the work of the OLNP moved forward.

In conclusion, the Scrutiny Panel welcomed the update and supported the recommendations set out in the report.

RESOLVED: The Panel recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it ask the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership to take the following matters into account as the Partnership develops.

1. The need for continued joint working and coordination with organisations in neighbouring counties given the cross border nature of biodiversity corridors.
2. The need for the introduction of a performance matrix to set a base line by which to monitor and assess the natural economy effectiveness of the outcomes of the Local Nature Partnership.
3. That ways of leveraging in the involvement of youth organisations as part of the Local Nature Partnership's work be fully explored.
4. That it recognise the challenges around the independence of consultants commissioned to undertake Biodiversity Net Gain assessments.
5. The need for adequate funding to support the high level of aspiration of the Local Nature Partnership, whilst recognising the importance of not competing with partners for limited funds.

26. Public participation

It was noted that on this occasion no requests for public speaking had been received.

27. Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Update

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership updating them on the progress of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP). This included the development and launch of the OIEP Charter and associated pledges on 24 January 2023.

Emma Coles, OIEP Manager, and Jeremy Long OIEP Co-Chair gave a short introductory presentation (available [here](#)) and answered questions from members. The Panel was informed that although Oxfordshire was perceived to be generally affluent with many successful businesses, real inequalities did exist. The mission of the OIEP was, therefore, to create a more equal and sustainable county that provided opportunities and benefits for all. To help achieve this aspiration, the OIEP was working towards tackling some of Oxfordshire's biggest problems and, thereby, allow everybody to contribute and share in the county's success. The launch of the OIEP Charter represented a significant introductory step in its development. The Charter's purpose was to:

- Mobilise support for Oxfordshire inclusive economy and raise awareness of it.

- Publicly share commitments to inclusivity by individuals, businesses and organisations.
- Set and raise standards around inclusive economy.
- Encourage residents and businesses to work together to help protect Oxfordshire's economy with the aim to prevent money leaving the county.

In discussion, members of the Panel welcomed the aspirations of the OIEP and the launch of the Charter. They, nevertheless, highlighted some areas of concern and also made suggestions for the OIEP's consideration. Members also mentioned the need to ensure representation across all ages – in particular, from young people.

One member suggested that OIEP may be underestimating itself and what could be achieved in creating a more equitable and sustainable Oxfordshire. The view was expressed that ambitions of the OIEP (and the Charter pledges) were at quite a low level and relied primarily on voluntary actions. This meant that there was the possibility that an organisation or individual could benefit from the kudos of securing Charter pledge status without actually committing themselves to taking clear and definitive action. It was, therefore, suggested that the proposals should include greater detail on what the measurable output of the pledges could be. It was also proposed that there needed to be a greater focus on ownership structures – including both cooperative and community-owned models. Members of the Panel also referred to the link between inclusivity, sustainability and the procurement practices of local authorities and the broader public and private sectors.

The Panel was informed that the OIEP acknowledged many of these points/arguments and that it was their intention to grow and expand the Charter and its pledges after its credibility had been established. In relation to social procurement, the OIEP would welcome local authorities and other major procurers looking at their work as part of their social impact assessments. One of the aims of the OIEP's proposals was to highlight and build upon the momentum of the good inclusivity practices that many organisations and companies already had in place. It also hoped to shine a light on the valuable work being delivered by local charities.

After further discussion, it was proposed that once an organisation has signed up to the OIEP Charter and its associated pledges there should be an evaluation of their delivery on these commitments – support should also be provided (possibly through a 'buddy' system and advice. It was also suggested that the planning system might offer a potential mechanism to secure inclusivity net gain via development. However, it was acknowledged that the legalities of this would need to be carefully considered.

Outcomes would be reported to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in the future.

RESOLVED: The Panel recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that:

1. Future Oxfordshire Partnership members, (particularly local authorities and their sub-contractors) should be ambitious in their response to the OIEP and set measurable targets around its work, for instance around the promotion of inclusive ownership models such as co-operatives and the use of purchasing power through social procurement strategies.

2. It recognise the importance of improving work force diversity within the county by the encouragement of employers inside and outside the OIEP to set and disclose work force diversity targets.
3. Encourage the OIEP take steps to seek age diversity of the attendees at the launch event.

28. Delivering the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

The Panel considered a paper to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership updating them on the progress made to identify new opportunities for joint working and outlining next steps. Beth Wilks, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager, gave a presentation (available [here](#)) highlighting the main areas of the report, including the general alignment between the Strategic Vision outcomes and the priorities outlined in the corporate plans of Oxfordshire's local authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnership. Plans for stakeholder engagement on proposed areas for joint working – including with the Scrutiny Panel – were also outlined.

Members thanked officers for both the report and the opportunity for further engagement with the Panel as part of the proposed next steps. They, nevertheless, suggested in relation to the closeness of the alignment of the Strategic Vision outcomes with the corporate plans, that while there may be an apparent commonality of language this may be hiding differences of understanding of what actual terms mean. It was, therefore, felt that given the different characteristics and circumstances between the visions and priorities of Oxfordshire's local authorities, that more divergence might have been expected. Consequently, members expressed the importance of being transparent as possible about any discrepancies and areas of difference – they suggested that more specific deliverable targets could help in achieving this.

In response, Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, and Beth Wilks commented that all of Oxfordshire's local authorities had endorsed the Strategic Vision and, therefore, it was logical that their individual corporate plans did not conflict with it. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding these synergies, it was acknowledged that there were some differences. In terms of the detail, a large amount of work had been undertaken that supported the summary in the report – this would be shared in due course (the quantitative and qualitative data on performance in meeting the outcomes of the Vision would also be shared with the Partnership).

Members of the Panel commented that the report very clearly showed the cross-connections between various pieces of work being progressed across Oxfordshire. It also, however, showed that there were areas where there was additional scope for further joint working.

In discussion, an individual suggested that, while the sovereignty of local planning authorities was recognised, there had been a proliferation of planning applications related to solar farms and, therefore, this could be an area where there might be value in additional strategic joint working. Officers confirmed to the Panel that the issue of solar panel was something that was being carefully considered across the county, with the potential for it to be discussed at the Infrastructure Advisory Group.

After further debate, the Scrutiny Panel supported the recommendations set out in the report – in particular, the plans for further engagement session around identifying opportunities for joint working aligned to the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

RESOLVED: The Panel recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it:

1. Remain cognitive of the need for commonly agreed and understood definitions of the desired outcomes of the Strategic Vision across the Partnership, as a prerequisite to its success.
2. Consider the need to link the high-level outcomes of the Strategic Vision with more specific, deliverable outputs.
3. Monitor and evaluate the outputs via a results framework.

29. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Quarter 2, Year 5

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on the financial position for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of the end of Quarter 2, 2022/2023.

A question was raised by Councillor Julian Cooper as to whether the Barnard Gate A40 road scheme formed part of the Housing from Infrastructure (Hfi) programme schemes shown within Appendix 1 of the report. Officers undertook to provide a written answer.

It was confirmed by officers that discussions were continuing with HM Government in relation to the release of the final £30m Hfi programme payment and that this was reason to be cautiously optimistic – it, however, should be noted that further changes to the Hfi programme could not be ruled out. If there were any further updates, these could be presented to the Panel.

Councillor John Broad spoke regarding the Northwest Bicester A4095 Howes Lane realignment scheme and commented that there were now around six proposed developments in the vicinity of the road. It was explained that the £1.3m shown in the table against the scheme was not the total cost but rather was the amount that had been allocated from the Hfi budget for design and feasibility work. Officers undertook to provide further written clarification.

Councillor Andy Cooke expressed serious reservations about the delay in the provision of the Milton Heights pedestrian bridge scheme. Homes had occupied on nearby developments, and he was concerned for the safety of children using the existing junction when travelling to and from school. Officers stated that there had been no material change to the scheme since the previous update. It was still regarded as a worthwhile project and sources of alternative funding outside of the Hfi programme continued to be urgently explored.

The Chair asked officers to provide an update on the exploration of alternative funding sources for the Milton Heights scheme. She also referred back to a point raised at the Panel's previous meeting regarding the lack of funding for active travel projects where infrastructure had been delivered.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the report.

30. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Panel considered the response of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the recommendations arising from its meeting on 20 September 2022.

RESOLVED: That the response be noted.

31. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - November 2022

The Panel considered its work programme and log of outstanding actions as set out in the Agenda.

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

32. Advisory Group Updates

(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Scrutiny Panel considered the notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group meetings held on 5 September 2022 and 15 September 2022.

The Chair referred to the co-option of an external representative of the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum onto the advisory group and suggested that, in light of the Panel's previous discussions around the importance of active travel (and its links to infrastructure), there should also be a co-opted Active Travel member (potentially from Active Travel England). Officers indicated that this could be investigated.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update be noted.
2. That the Panel recommends to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it requests that the Infrastructure Advisory Group co-opts a representative from Active Travel England or a delegated nominee to the advisory group in order to provide active travel expertise to the group.

(b) Housing Advisory Group update

It was noted the Housing Advisory Group update would be provided to the next meeting of the Panel.

(c) Environment Advisory Group update

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

A query was raised in relation to a recent conference hosted by England's Economic Heartland (EEH) where reference had been made to the possibility of a new road between Milton Keynes and Oxford. Officers responded that EEH were currently undertaking a connectivity study of the Milton Keynes to Oxford corridor and that when this analysis was completed it should be expected that more formal options would then be presented.

However, it was important to bear in mind that EEH was neither a funding nor a delivery body and, therefore, it was not within its remit to make any substantive decisions.

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

33. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm