

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group

HELD ON THURSDAY 2 MARCH 2023 AT 10.00 AM

Present:

Councillors: David Rouane (Chair), Andrea Powell, Andrew Prosser, Anna Railton, Dan Sames and Pete Sudbury

Officers: Becky Chesshyre (Oxfordshire Partnerships), Rose Dickinson (Oxford City Council), Jessie Fieth (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Sarah Gilbert (Oxfordshire County Council), Susan Harbour (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Alex Jeffery (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Hannah Kenyon (West Oxfordshire District Council), Dominic Lamb (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Suzanne Malcolm (Senior Responsible Officer), Ed Potter (Cherwell District Council), Mish Tullar (Oxford City Council), Phil Wadsworth (Oxfordshire County Council), Matt Whitney (Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership) and Rachel Wileman (Oxfordshire County Council).

66 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutes; declaration of interests; Chair's announcements

Apologies were received from Councillor Sally Povolotsky.

The Chair invited those present to introduce themselves for the benefit of the new member representing Oxford City Council, Councillor Anna Railton.

67 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes from the previous meeting on 12 December 2022 were agreed to be an accurate record of matters discussed.

Councillor Powell queried Project Leo 2.0 following Councillor Sudbury's offer to share information at the last meeting. Sarah Gilbert, Oxfordshire County Council, recommended that an agenda item already being presented to the FOP Infrastructure Advisory Group (IAG) could also be replicated for EAG members. This would include Project Leo learnings and news on Project Leo 2.0.

Action: Project Leo learnings and Project Leo 2.0 update to be added to EAG forward work programme for 20 April 2023.

On solar, the Chair advised members that the intention had been to collaborate with the FOP Planning Advisory Group (name to be confirmed) however as that group has not yet formed the Chair proposed that EAG, being clear in its support for PaZCO and more renewable energy, could commission a piece of work that outlines the positive criteria of having a solar farm, what makes a good allocation for a solar farm and other factors to consider in allocation. The Chair recommended that this would not be site specific and would address large scale sites. Members recommended that the limit on grid capacity should be included in the scope of report which may require collaboration with IAG as well as a realistic approach to capacity in terms of what can be produced in a city in a 'roofs first approach' versus a large solar farm.

Action: Councillor Sudbury to send papers already produced by National Farmers Union to Alex Jeffery to coordinate report through Officers group.

Action: EAG officer group to facilitate piece of work requested by members.

68 Environment Advisory Group forward work programme

The above-mentioned Project Leo lessons learned, and Project Leo 2.0 update are added to the forward work programme as well as the above-mentioned solar report.

Suzanne Malcolm, Senior Responsible Officer, recommended that PaZCO updates are likely to become a standing item after the update today. Suzanne advised the group that there would be something emerging on how we work with the OxLEP business sub-group for their insight on how we deliver the key actions in the PaZCO route map. The format of that work was not yet clear but would likely be report from officers or attendance from OxLEP at a future EAG meeting.

69 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership

Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP) Manager, gave the presentation to members updating them on the progress of the OLNP, including information on the OLNP's areas of focus but also set out details relating to the process for the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Councillor Powell opened questioning by asking whether there was any concern around the length of time taken to establish the OLNP? Matt Whitney suggested that there was some caution as the OLNP had not been successful on first outing but noted his confidence that the OLNP has been well established now.

OxLEP was noted as one of the partners working with the OLNP, prompting members to query whether there are other private sector organisations involved or is this only facilitated through OxLEP, noting that targeting the financial community could help to unlock challenges ahead? Matt Whitney responded noting that finance was a key need for the sector, so much so that the OLNP board does include a business representative. Matt advised members that although business interactions to date has been ad-hoc, the OLNP has a number of key players supporting and collaborating with them, including the North-East Cotswolds Farmer Cluster and the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery.

Members recommended a need to understand how we make nature more resilient to climate change and terms of biodiversity net gain, members stated there was a need to make sure there were strong financial incentives in place to encourage compliance by developers with bio-diversity net gain principles, for example through using taxation.

On land use, members recommended that as part of the earlier discussed solar report, there should be an understanding of the biodiversity impact of changing land use to solar, with members suggesting that there could be an improvement from an intensively farmed field for example. The use of greenfield versus brownfield sites for solar installations was also raised, with Councillor Sames recommending that whilst we should be utilising brownfield sites, there may be a greater negative impact on biodiversity than developing on a greenfield site.

During the presentation Matt Whitney highlighted the absence of a large-scale country park in Oxfordshire (or any accessible green space over five hundred hectares) and suggested this could be a strategic gap that the OLN tries to address. Members recommended that although this could have a large up-front cost, in the long term this might be cheaper to maintain than other more traditional health and wellbeing sources. Matt Whitney identified a learning opportunity from Worcestershire County Council on how to take this forward and also advised members of research underway by Oxford University on the distribution of accessible natural green space and overlaying that with indices of socio-economic deprivation to identify the area's most in need of such a resource.

Matt Whitney concluded the presentation by introducing an example of an ecosystem that could operate countywide to enable private money to be spent on improving environmental benefits we get from nature. The operator could match the buyers (who need credits) with the sellers (landowners) who are in a position to sell environmental benefits. Officers present at the meeting, on the topic of biodiversity net-gain off-sets, noted that this was an acute issue from some authorities, especially for Oxford City Council. Officers queried what the role of the LNP would be in seeking to move this forward? Matt Whitney responded that the OLN was not intending to set up a new entity but hoped to broker conversations between the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) and local authorities in order to understand barriers faced by the local authorities and so that TOE can prepare themselves in terms of governance in preparation for mandatory net-gain.

The Chair thanked Matt Whitney for his presentation.

70 Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan update

The Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan (PaZCO) was introduced to the Environment Advisory Group as the completion of the work and to seek thoughts from members on how to 'spring-board' from the report to standing up several workstreams across the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

The report proposed the five priority workstreams below as a first phase, as well as a proposal around where those workstreams might report and a first ask on funding which may be required to initiate those workstreams:

1. Buildings Decarbonisation
2. Net Zero Energy – Local Area Energy Planning

3. Electric Vehicle Infrastructure
4. Land-based Carbon sequestration offset model
5. Green Finance

Members recommended that because the PaZCO work had the most emphasis on production-based emissions, there was now a requirement as the work progresses to pick up the consequential consumption-based emissions arising from food strategies, land-use implications, and infrastructure. Sarah acknowledged there was more work to do, but the broader approach will take forward a circular economy strategy. Sarah advised members that there is a well-developed partnership working through groups such as the waste and resources partnership and Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership which we ought to reflect when moving into that programme.

Councillor Sudbury reminded members and officers of the importance to avoid duplication, flagging ZCOP as a project already progressing in this sphere. Sarah assured members that work was underway with Mish Tullar and Rose Dickinson (Oxford City Council) to look at mapping these workstreams across into ZCOP to avoid duplication and make best use of resources in this area.

Paragraph 22 of the cover report seeks input from EAG on how to spend a remaining £20,000 from the PaZCO roadmap development project. Councillor Powell recommended green finance, noting it was a key unlocking opportunity, and including both public and private finance in the whole programme is critical. Could this money be usefully spent commissioning a report? Sarah invited members thoughts on where they might see that finance prioritised and suggested a practical expansion on work already underway on in-setting as a potential spend area.

Councillor Railton with reference to action 1 recommended specifying that this action would include the private rented sector and private landlords and also queried the focus on rooftop solar for collective purchasing when this can also be done for heat pumps. Sarah agreed to the recommendations and agreed to consider the breadth of opportunities for collective buying, acknowledging that ZCOP have done some work on this already.

Councillor Prosser noted the absence of a food strategy as a priority workstream and queried how officers envisage to link in with work already underway with this? Sarah responded that whilst she could only speak on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, she believed the food strategy had been adopted by the county and districts, noting that OCC are looking at an action plan within OCC's levers. Sarah advised members that this strategy does present as a land use planning question but welcomed thoughts from members that priority workstreams should focus on areas where we can add value by doing something collectively. Sarah recommended that a conversation should take place between officers and Matt Whitney as there is clear cross-over into LNP work and it was important to communicate how the food strategy is going forwards if not within this work programme.

Action: EAG officer group to provide specific response to Councillor Prosser's query on the absence of a food strategy from the priority workstreams.

Action: EAG officer group to consider appropriate use for remaining £20,000 project funding.

Members noted that electric vehicle infrastructure projects are anticipated to be devolved to upper tier authorities, and queried whether this might happen in other project areas too? Officers recommended that this could be the case for retrofit projects but that the funding needed to be forthcoming at the same time.

Members thanked officers for their efforts in breaking down the City Science report into manageable and achievable actions deliverable by local authorities. The Chair reminded members of their collective responsibility to take this information back to their councils and climate-action 'type' committees to see where this fits with work each council is doing.

Members noted the recommendations.

71 Discussion on the requirement for renewable energy in Oxfordshire and the role of solar farms in this

This agenda item was covered under agenda item 2, notes of the previous meeting.

72 Chairs update from FOP

The Chair provided a brief summary of the last FOP meeting, noting the Growth Deal and FOP planning advisory group (name to be confirmed) as notable topics.

73 Dates of future meetings

All at 10am:

- 20 April 2023
- 06 July 2023

The meeting ended at 11:40.