

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON TUESDAY 18 JULY 2023 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair), Councillor John Broad, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor David Cooper, Councillor Tiago Corais, Councillor Charlie Hicks, Councillor Lois Muddiman, Councillor Lynn Pratt, Councillor Leigh Rawlins, Councillor Jo Robb, Councillor Judy Roberts, Councillor Emily Smith, Councillor David Turner and Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Alex Jefferies	Asst Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Babatunde Ogundele	Asst Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Robin Rogers	Programme Director, (Partnerships and Delivery), Oxfordshire County Council
Nigel Tipple	Chief Executive, OxLEP
Matt Whitney	Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager

Other councillors: Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council and Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Infrastructure Advisory Group.

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

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Michael Brooker, West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Julian Cooper, West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Liam Walker, Oxfordshire County Council and Councillor Richard Webber, Oxfordshire County Council.

Councillor Emily Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, Refreshing the Strategic Economic Plan June 2023 update on the basis that she had attended a number

of public engagement workshops held about the Plan in a professional capacity related to her employment. She remained in the meeting for the course of the discussion.

The Chair commented that a trial approach had been taken with the framing of the agenda with the objective of focussing discussion and the available time on a number of key topics where the Panel was asked to consider draft recommendations to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and to note information only items, unless members had specific questions or issues they wished to raise.

15. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

16. Public participation

It was noted that two written public questions had been submitted and circulated to the Panel in advance of the meeting. [Full copies of the questions are available here.](#)

George Curtis on behalf of Bioabundance asked two questions relating to the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan in the context that temperatures across the North Atlantic were at record levels and that the climate emergency could not be ignored. He along with other members of Bioabundance and members of Need Not Greed had attended some of the Plan workshops organised by OxLEP and although the Links to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision principle GP1 to reverse the impacts of climate change were noted, it was felt this priority had not been reflected in the Plan scenarios put forward by the OxLEP team.

Concern was expressed that the Plan was not ready for consideration by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, that it did not recognise the impact of Scope Three emissions arising from the building of market value housing to increase GDP and that there was a lack of focus towards 'affordable' housing.

The Panel was asked to:

1. Consider whether the scenarios put forward by the OxLEP Team were ready to be considered by the FOP without the impact of the consequent scope three carbon emissions being made available to the decision makers in the County?
2. Consider whether the scenarios put forward by the OxLEP Team adequately addressed the shortage of social housing and housing genuinely affordable by first time buyers?

Suzanne McIvor on behalf of Need Not Greed asked the Panel to make the following recommendations to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership relating to Agenda Item 6, the Strategic Economic Plan.

That the Scrutiny Panel welcomes the update on progress with the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan but believes that there are still fundamental gaps in the work and asks the FOP to ensure these are addressed prior to any endorsement of the Plan.

In particular, the Scrutiny Panel would wish to see a detailed justification behind the prioritisation of particular outcomes (ref Slide 13 of the Ag Item 6 PowerPoint presentation)

which relegates to “2nd tier” critical issues such as achieving carbon neutrality, improving the natural environment and having a happier and healthier population.

In addition, the Scrutiny Panel was asked to request that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership secure:

- Immediate publication of the supporting evidence base which has so far not been made available for broader stakeholder or public comment.
- An assessment of the degree to which stakeholder engagement has achieved an appropriately broad social reach, including currently disadvantaged communities that should stand to gain most benefit from a robust SEP.
- A report which highlights clearly what changes, if any, have been made to the emerging SEP as a result of any stakeholder input.
- Clarity on the situation with regards to the brief/outcome for the proposed (or already undertaken?) Independent Economic Review.
- Clarity on the timetable which, as currently outlined, suggests that the OxLEP Board will sign off the SEP in September but it will not come to the FOP for consideration until November, which the Scrutiny Panel would consider to be inappropriate in terms of democracy and transparency.

The Chair indicated that the questions were noted and that they would be taken into account and considered as part of the discussion of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan agenda item.

17. Update from Councillor Liz Leffman on the work of the Infrastructure Advisory Group

The Chair welcomed Councillor Liz Leffman, Chair of the FOP Infrastructure Advisory Group and Leader of Oxfordshire County Council to the meeting. The Chair commented that Councillor Leffman had been invited to give a verbal general update on the activities of the Infrastructure Advisory Group, (IAG) in the context of Vision Zero, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, (OxIS) and Active Travel.

Councillor Leffman set out the IAG’s role in monitoring the infrastructure elements of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal on a quarterly basis with a focus on the Homes from Infrastructure Programme. Other areas of activity had included the OxIS, the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study, the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, (LTCP) and the Bus Service Improvement Plan. As the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal was completed in 2025, the focus of the group in the future would include the refresh of the OxIS in light of the fifth iteration of the LTCP and other appropriate policy initiatives including Vision Zero and the strategic Active Travel network.

The advisory group has also been looking at local area energy planning which is important in the context of the growing number of solar farm applications. This was relevant to individual councils, but also the wider Future Oxfordshire Partnership because of the constraints on the local electricity distribution grid and the work to deliver a transition to green energy through the Net Zero Route Map and Acton Plan. Other initiatives linked to the delivery of net zero commitments including electric vehicle infrastructure and Project LEON.

Councillor Leffman acknowledged the high degree of interaction and connectivity between plans such as the LTCP and OxIS which were the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council but which it was accepted had significant impacts across the county and on the

role of districts and city councils. It was expected that an item on the refresh of the OxIS would be brought to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership later in 2023.

Susan Harbour spoke to process being applied to update the OxIS which would include the identification of gaps to ensure wider infrastructure needs, not just highways and transport related issues, but also issues such as electricity grid infrastructure constraints. A multi-criteria assessment had been developed for this purpose which was already in use by some by some Future Oxfordshire Partnership partners and details of the assessment could be circulated to the Panel.

In detailed discussion, the Panel welcomed the comprehensive verbal update from Cllr Leffman. Specifically, the panel had requested information on the relationship between the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS), to the Strategic Active Travel Network (SATN), Vision Zero, and the county's Local Connectivity and Transport Plan (LCTP). The Panel welcomed the acknowledgement of the interlinkage between these items, and the indication of the imminent refresh of the OxIS bringing together these different strands of policy within an updated version including indicative timelines.

RESOLVED: Arising from the discussion between the Panel and Councillor Leffman and the Panel, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked to:

1. Request that Oxfordshire County Council produce a map or visually based infographic to summarise the relationships between key Oxfordshire wide strategies, plans and policies which relate to infrastructure, (both directly and indirectly), including, but not limited to, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS), the Strategic Active Travel Network, (SATN), the County's Local Connectivity and Transport Plan (LCTP) including its supporting Active Travel Strategy, Oxfordshire's Vision Zero commitments, the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and Oxfordshire County Council's policy for future generations.
2. Request that Oxfordshire County Council apply the traffic user hierarchy within the LCTP, a future generations lens, Net Zero Carbon and Vision Zero considerations within any future prioritisation of infrastructure within the OxIS update.
3. That following the conclusion of the current District and City Local Plan review process and building on the refresh of OxIS, Oxfordshire County Council consider the development of an Active Travel 'Toolkit' which District and City councils could use if they wished to assist in considering the active travel implications of major developments. It is suggested that the [Cambridgeshire Active Travel Design Guide](#) is one example of such a document.
4. To bring forward a paper setting out potential options for the use of alternative and innovative sources of infrastructure funding to expediate the delivery of the prioritises within the updated OxIS outside of HM Government, Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 sources.
5. To encourage the use by all the District and City councils of the current OxIS multi-criteria assessment tool as well as supporting the OxIS refresh.

18. Developing a Place Narrative for Oxfordshire

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which set out the opportunity to develop a new place narrative for Oxfordshire and further information on the project and its purpose. It was noted that the Partnership was asked to support the intention to create a place narrative and to authorise the Partnership's Executive Officer Group and other relevant officer to work with Oxfordshire County Council to develop plans and an approach. Robin Rogers, Programme Director, (Partnerships and Delivery), Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report and responded to member questions and feedback. It was highlighted that:

- A key rationale behind the development of an Oxfordshire Place narrative was to be able to enhance Oxfordshire's reputation by putting together a piece of work and set of materials that would coherently express the county's key messages and story to HM Government and business.
- It was felt that as a county, there was a strong offer to make. This included those matters arising from initiatives such as the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and the priorities within it relating to nature and the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan.
- The opportunity and challenge was to highlight these central messages and get them noticed by national and international audiences.
- The initiative was not about setting policy or duplicating the work already undertaken through other strategies such as OxIS, or District and City council Local Plans. Rather it was intended to set out a joint story of the partners involved and would focus on areas of common agreement.
- A place narrative would provide a visible and tangible tool for a range of sectors and different types of organisations to use in acting as ambassadors for the county, not just local authorities. It would provide a sense of ownership that could be used across a diverse range of matters such as alternative forms of financing, regulatory change, essential infrastructure etc.

A detailed discussion took place with a wide range of members views expressed. A number of member expressed serious concerns including the need and added value of developing a place narrative in addition to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, the risk of diluting the Vision, the potential costs in officer time to individual councils, democratic oversight and scrutiny of the proposals within Oxfordshire County Council, that it could reintroduce a narrative about economic growth that was not supported by all councils and the legal weight of the Place Narrative to planning applications and Local Plans. Whilst it was noted that a Place Narrative might contribute towards attracting new and innovative forms of investment, it was also felt important to be mindful of the advantages and disadvantages of any sources of funding as well as any terms.

After further discussion, there was a lack of unanimity within the Panel on whether or not to recommend that the Partnership support the intention to create a place narrative. Other members whilst sharing of some of the above concerns felt that whilst further detail was needed, a Place Narrative could be a significant positive opportunity as a communications tool for the county and in seeking to attract external investment. The current decision for the Partnership was around support for exploring a narrative, not setting the detail of the content of that narrative.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be recommended to seek further clarification on the following matters below to satisfy the concerns raised by the Panel:

- a) That further information is needed of the purpose and added value of the narrative and that it will not duplicate, replace, or contradict the Oxfordshire Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development.
 - b) That the FOP note that each local planning authority may wish to seek its own advice to verify the statement in the report that there are no legal implications arising from it.
 - c) That further information on the resource implications for the Districts and City Council of participation in the development of the narrative is required.
 - d) That in the future, if any narrative is developed then it considers drawing on the doughnut economic framework to support framing communications about sustainable economic development.
- 2) That FOP request that Oxfordshire County Council sets out the different types and source of investments that the place narrative is intended to be used to attract, and the pros and cons of these different types of finance.

Note: Councillor Sean Woodcock requested that it be recorded that he could not support a recommendation to the Partnership that development of a place narrative not be supported.

19. Refreshing the Strategic Economic Plan - June 2023 update

The Panel considered a pre-circulated presentation which provided an update as of June 2023, on work to refresh the Strategic Economic Plan. Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive, of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) in introducing the slides highlighted the following areas:

- Phase One of the work had commenced in February 2023 with an initial scoping phase informed by information already available about the economic challenges facing the county post Covid-19 and Brexit.
- Phase Two had included extensive evidence gathering phase through April to June which had included a variety of face to face workshops, interview processes and opportunities for stakeholders to submit written representations and open calls for evidence.
- Phase Two had included examination of four deep dive areas around enabling inclusive growth, advancing Net Zero and sustainability, the foundational economy and the acceleration of innovation and diffusion recognising Oxfordshire's strengths.
- The early stages of Phase Three had commenced to develop a strategy framework.
- The nine themes set out within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and 11 priorities had been consistently applied and considered as a guide to Oxfordshire's agreed vision and ambition for place. All priorities were important, but for the purposes of the development of the Plan there had been a particular focus around ensuring Oxfordshire had a thriving economy and an environment in which communities and businesses could thrive. This had been balanced as against needs for greater inclusivity and sustainability.

The Chair referred to the submitted public participation submissions which both expressed the opinion that despite the statements given, the development of the draft Plan was not following an approach that was consistent with the outcome areas of the Oxfordshire

Strategic Vision as there was no hierarchy amongst the Vision priorities in favour of economic growth. Rather future sustainable development required an equal focus on all of the priorities. It was also felt that biodiversity and ecosystem considerations did not appear to be sufficiently recognised.

A detailed discussion took place with a range of views expressed by different members of the Panel. It was recognised that the slides presented regarding the Plan presented a narrative update on the progress of the development of the Plan and not the final formalised document. They also noted the clarification that although a slide may have inadvertently implied a hierarchy of priorities in favour of economic growth this was not the case.

Nevertheless, a number of members expressed significant concerns regarding the Plan's current direction based on the information available to them, related to the theoretical framing which in their view currently excluded a broader focus on wellbeing and the environment despite the Panel's view that they are of critical importance for a sustainable economy. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding development process of the Plan to date, including democratic oversight by districts councils of the Plan and the independence of the evidence base used to inform the Plan's content. Finally, it felt that the economy was dependent on natural capital and ecosystem services and that nature restoration was needed to support the economy over the long term.

Although minded because of the significance of its concerns to recommend to the FOP that the Plan be referred back to OxLEP and to individual council scrutiny committees, the Panel acknowledged that it was not within the remit and powers of the FOP to do so. However, it was noted that a number of individual council scrutiny committees were due to or had already considered the Plan and it was felt that the addition of the consideration of the SEP was a matter individual members of the Panel might wish to raise with their respective scrutiny chairs as a potential addition to their work programmes.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be asked to:

1. Request that that OxLEP ensure that: the policy framework underpinning the SEP include all of the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development; and equal focus is applied to them including wellbeing and the environment.
2. That the SEP acknowledge and take account of the foundational economy, food security, infrastructure and architecture, small and medium businesses and the concepts of equitable redistribution of the economic growth across the country through the principles of 'levelling up.'

20. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Programme

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Programme be noted.

21. Other Future Oxfordshire Partnership Agenda items

The Chair proposed that as suggested earlier in the meeting the remaining reports to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be noted subject to any specific comments by members on individual items.

(a) Oxfordshire Skills Policy Landscape

Councillor Rawlins commented that given the direction of technology including the growth of artificial intelligence there would be an increasing need for retraining and the development of adult skills. He expressed concern that the training funding breakdown shown within the report appeared to show a low level of funding for adult and other training. Whilst funding for 16-19 was important, so was adult training in light of expected needs of workers to move from one set of job roles to another. It also highlighted the importance of mapping future growth and tailoring a response to the workforce needs to support it.

Councillor Broad also referred to the importance of skills funding for those with disabilities.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted subject to the comments above.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 4 2022/23

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(c) Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Update - Annual Report and Nature Finance Strategy

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which gave an overview of the activities of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership since its establishment and a proposed Oxfordshire Nature Finance Strategy which the Partnership had been recommended to endorse. Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Partnership Manager introduced the report and gave a short presentation which highlighted key areas of the proposed Nature Strategy.

In summary, the following points and suggestions were made by members of the Panel in its discussion of the report and proposed strategy.

- There was a need to project forward 20-30 years to consider the adaptations required to mitigate climate change, for example provision of shade and water retention measures to reduce the impact of wildfires. Areas for wildlife also needed to be mapped and set aside.
- There was a need to preserve corridors for nature rather than relying on bio-diversity net gain schemes from housing developments which were insufficient and of poor quality. Checks needed to be in place to ensure the quality of bio-diversity net gain and carbon offsetting schemes.
- As more nature recovery projects came online there was a need to learn from previous projects and unintended consequences. For example, the reintroduction of Red Kites had been so successful that numbers had now grown to the point that insufficient naturally occurring food was available, leading to negative behaviours such as the predation of ducklings.
- With regard to the 'Our Vison' segment of the proposed Nature Finance Strategy it was suggested that there be overt reference to the benefits of communities' land as well 'health, water and the environment' as this was significant natural asset providing eco-systems services.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity of which the UK was a signatory had a global gender action plan associated with it. It was suggested that gender lens investing was a growth area within the innovation financing space that could be linked into the Nature Strategy along with the global action plan framework.

In response, the Panel was informed that many of the points made relating to mapping and species reintroduction related to elements of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, (LNRS) and that this strategy document produced by Oxfordshire County Council would set out a vision for nature recovery across the county. The object of the Nature Finance Strategy was to contribute towards the funding required to deliver LNRS objectives. Spatial prioritisation would be key to ensuring off site bio-diversity net gain and off site carbon schemes were correctly located where it was needed.

With regard to bio-diversity net gain (BNP), the Nature Partnership had a subgroup which had developed a set of best practice guidelines it was hoped local planning authorities would adopt.

RESOLVED:

1. The Panel strongly supported the recommendations to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership as set out in the report including the endorsement by the FOP of the Nature Finance Strategy.
2. That the detailed comments and suggestions made by the Panel relating to matters within the remit of the vision of the Nature Finance strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy be fed back and taken into account in the development of both strategies.

(d) Update on Homes England Strategic Plan 2023 to 2028

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

22. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair referred to the responses of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the recommendations of the Panel at its June meeting.

23. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - July 2023

It was noted the draft work programme and action log had unfortunately been omitted from the agenda pack.

Councillor Smith commented that she felt that the focus of the Panel's time on specific agenda items had worked quite well, but suggested that when speakers attended, they were asked to provide a brief summary report which could help prompt questions and support the Panel's discussion.

The Chair invited members to submit any additional comments regarding the organisation of the meeting to her and Kevin Jacob. Members were also asked to consider additional ideas for future agenda items.

24. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings as set out in the Agenda were noted.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm