

# Notes

## OF A MEETING OF THE



# The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Planning Advisory Group

HELD ON FRIDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 10.00 AM  
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MS TEAMS

## Present:

**Members:** Councillor Andy Graham (Chair), Councillor Duncan Enright, Councillor Neil Fawcett, Peter Redman, Councillor Carl Rylett, Councillor Dan Sames, Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson and Councillor Louise Upton

**Officers:** David Butler, (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale Councils), Chris Hargraves, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Lucy Murfett, (South and Vale Councils), David Peckford, (Cherwell District Council), Nick Perrins, (Oxfordshire County Council) and David Yates, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership).

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

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

## 10 Notes of previous meetings

The notes of the meeting of the advisory group held on 21 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

## 11 Opportunities for Joint Working

The advisory group held a discussion on potential opportunities for joint working between the local authorities within the planning space.

Giles Hughes, Chief Executive of West Oxfordshire District Council and Senior Responsible Officer for the Planning Advisory Group introduced the item commenting that it was intended to set out the ideas for potential joint working in each of the four advisory group remits and to discuss the prioritisation of these ideas. There was a need to focus on

areas where working together under the umbrella of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership could add value and there was widespread support amongst partners.

The advisory group was updated on the plans for the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Focus and Delivery Workshop scheduled for 26 September 2023. This was intended to cover all aspects of the potential work programme and to also discuss the theme of the economy.

It was suggested that the impacts of the First Homes initiative on the viability of development would more appropriately sit within the remit of the Planning rather than Housing Advisory Group and that energy infrastructure provision including solar farm provision also linked to planning policy. Officers explained that it was understood and accepted that there should be cross-fertilisation of the ideas across the remits of the different advisory groups, but for governance a sponsor advisory group needed to be assigned to each idea. This did not prevent joint working between the groups.

With regard to the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, (OxIS) and local area energy planning this was considered to be most closely aligned to the remit of the Infrastructure Advisory Group, but this would be kept under review and the links to planning policy were recognised.

An Energy Planning Executive Steering Board reporting into the Infrastructure Advisory Group chaired by Andrew Down, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director was also being established.

It was noted that National Grid were due to host a number of in person virtual workshops around local energy planning and it was **agreed** that details of the workshops should be circulated to advisory group members.

### **Opportunities for joint working in the planning space**

Giles Hughes introduced X suggestions for joint working in the planning space. These suggestions were the result of discussions at officer level from across all of the councils:

- Opportunities for a joint approach around developer challenges to viability assessments.
- Opportunities for a joint approach to challenges to Bio-Diversity Net Gain.
- Opportunities for a joint approach to modern methods of construction, (MMC).

### **Viability**

The advisory group was informed that securing contributions from developers as part of the S106 process was an important area of common interest for all the councils and cut across the issues of affordable housing, infrastructure, and biodiversity net gain delivery. Challenges by developers to requested contributions on the grounds of economic viability, both on specific planning applications and as part of the Local Plan process were felt to be becoming more common and it was felt there could be collective strength in the councils working together. This would not replicate existing work by individual councils but help support that work.

In discussion, members commented that they felt that there was value in the proposal on the grounds that it would help in not unnecessarily duplicating work and in sharing best

practice around responding to viability challenges as long as there was also recognition of the need not to overstep into the role of individual local authority Local Plans. There was also concern that local councils might have to make difficult decisions around seeking to secure contributions in one area instead of another,

### **Biodiversity net gain**

It was noted that from January 2024, all planning permissions, (with a few exceptions) would have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain and that in preparation of this new requirement there was felt to be value in working together on the issue to set up arrangements that were effective across Oxfordshire. By way of example, this might include looking at increasing the number of sites for offsite mitigation.

It was recognised that individual councils would be responsible for setting biodiversity policy in their areas through the Local Plan process.

In response to a question, the advisory group was informed that the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership was looking at the issue and developing policy suggestions and had suggested that the planning aspects of biodiversity be considered by the advisory group.

### **Modern methods of construction**

The objective of this suggestion was to improve the quality and speed of delivery of housing using modern methods of construction through collaboration, sharing research and knowledge and in encouraging developers to adopt this construction method which also assist in improving environmental standards.

In discussion, the Chair and members of the advisory group commented that they felt that the greater use of modern methods of construction would assist in reducing carbon emissions. It was also suggested that there was a need for the councils to be more proactive about raising the awareness of local residents about heat pumps and other green technology and in training to provide the skills base within the local economy to deliver it. It was noted that skills was one of the issues that OxLEP was considering as part of its Strategic Economic Plan.

It was **agreed** that officers should further break down the three suggested ideas discussed to assist the attendees at the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Focus and Delivery Workshop.

The advisory group then discussed other potential work programme areas for joint working and the planning of future health needs was suggested. Members commented that when major planning applications were considered a lack of access to GP and other healthcare services were often raised by residents as significant concerns. Although it was recognised that the issues around this were complex, it was felt there should be an effective mechanism to secure the provision of health sites from developers.

It was suggested that Oxfordshire County Council would have a formal role in this process, but that the nature of this was unclear.

Peter Redman, representing the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Integrated Care Board indicated that it would be possible to produce a briefing note to the advisory group setting out the challenges and issues involved in delivering health projects.

It was **agreed** that an item should be added to the advisory group's work programme on planning for health infrastructure and that officers also be asked to establish the role of the County Council as part of that process.

## **12 Update on Local Plan Progress**

Each member presented an update on the progress of their council's Local Plan.

## **13 Future Oxfordshire Partnership Advisory Group Meeting notes for information**

The notes of meetings of the Environment, Infrastructure and Housing Advisory Groups were noted. Members' attention was drawn to Environment Advisory Group notes from 7 July 2023 which had included consideration of an item on Solar Farm best practice.

## **14 Work Programme**

It was noted that that it was currently intended to bring two items to the 15 December meeting:

- An item on planning for health infrastructure, (as discussed above)
- An update on the Oxfordshire County Council Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and the link between this and the districts and city council Local Plans.

Members were encouraged to submit ideas for future agenda items.

## **15 Dates of future meetings**

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

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm