

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON MONDAY 17 JANUARY 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Andrew Gant (Chair), Councillor Brad Baines, Councillor Samantha Bowring, Councillor Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Victoria Haval, Councillor David Hughes, Councillor Dan Levy, Councillor Katherine Miles, Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley, Councillor Adam Nell, Councillor Lucy Pegg, Councillor Alex Postan, Councillor David Turner and Councillor Sean Woodcock, (Vice-Chair).

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

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| John Disley | Infrastructure Strategy & Policy Manager -Oxfordshire County Council |
| Andrew Down | Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director |
| James Gagg | Principal Infrastructure Planner - Oxfordshire County Council |
| Susan Harbour | Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils |
| Kevin Jacob | Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership |
| Claire Mahoney | Industry Programme Director, Greater Oxfordshire Area - Network Rail. |
| Stefan Robinson | Manager – Future Oxfordshire Partnership |
| Paul Staines | Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal |

Other councillors: Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council and Chair of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group

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

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Andy Cooke, Vale of White Horse District Council, (substituted by Councillor Andy Foulsham), Councillor Derek Cotterill, West Oxfordshire District Council and Councillor Liam Walker, Oxfordshire County Council.

There were no declarations of interest. The Chair informed the Panel that he had invited Councillor Emily Smith, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's Oxfordshire Plan

2050 Advisory Group, to attend the meeting as they were considering several items linked to the Plan.

It was noted that the meeting was being livestreamed and that a recording of the meeting could be found by [clicking here](#).

48. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2021 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting subject to the correction of a number of minor typographical errors.

49. Public participation

The Scrutiny Panel received one representation and one question from two public speakers.

George Curtis on behalf of the Bioabundance Community Interest Company – and as an Oxfordshire resident – expressed the view that the process towards the completion of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 should be revised to await the completion of the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan. He commented that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 should also incorporate HM Government's recently announced sustainability policies. In addition, he highlighted that, to date, the Plan had failed to take into account residents' realisation that any proposals for growth should be consistent with both the protection of the environment and the achievement of zero carbon by 2050.

Mr Curtis also stressed that the majority of new dwellings in Oxfordshire should be affordable and that the associated infrastructure should be in place prior to their occupation. In his opinion, the Housing and Growth Deal was out of date and, therefore, needed to be revisited/re-negotiated to ensure that it had an explicitly stated environmental focus. Furthermore, in light of the increasing frequency of severe weather events, adequate contingency planning and infrastructure provision needed to put in place.

In response, the Chair invited comments from the Panel. Members expressed support for the need for contingency planning to be undertaken to mitigate the negative impacts of extreme weather events. It was suggested that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage should be taken into consideration within the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It was agreed that a recommendation should be made to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in this regard.

While the Panel also expressed sympathy with many of the other points raised by Mr Curtis, they did not feel that it was either reasonable or practical to delay work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Members, nevertheless, argued that local net zero carbon ambitions should be factored firmly and prominently into its next draft – they would, therefore, recommend this to the Partnership.

Suzanne McIvor from Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) added to her written questions. She referred to a letter sent by NNGO on 13 December 2021 to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on several issues relating to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. In particular, NNGO had sought clarity on how the number of proposed homes to be included within the Plan would be decided. Despite receiving a written response from the

Partnership, the process by which housing numbers would be determined remained unclear.

In addition, there remained ambiguity about when any decision on housing numbers would be taken. Ms McIvor, therefore, asked whether a formal decision would be taken by the individual council cabinets in March 2022? If so, would they also be considering whether to review the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) at the same time?

NNGO's understanding was that any decision on a review of OGNA would be taken after the results of the Regulation 18 consultation had been evaluated (and that any reassessment of the OGNA would not be commissioned by the Partnership). It had, however, been previously stated in the Regulation 18 consultation that a decision on housing numbers would be taken in December 2021 but this had not occurred. As the overall housing number formed the foundation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, it would have to be agreed to openly by each of the city and district councils through their usual democratic processes. As there would be little point in a local authority objecting to the housing number after they were made aware of the Regulation 19 draft of the Plan, decisions would have to be made very soon. The Panel was, therefore, asked to support NNGO's view that the only way decisions could be taken was openly and by each council in turn. It could not be made by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Emily Smith responded to Ms McIvor. She informed the meeting that although the process was complex and the work programme tight – having already been extended once by HM Government – the importance of scrutiny by as many members of the partner councils as possible was recognised.

Councillor Smith also commented that a final decision on the consultation version of the Regulation 19 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 document would be made by the district and city councils but not until the summer – officers were currently working on the exact work programmes and timings. Considering these parameters, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group had devoted a significant amount of time to maximising the opportunities for scrutinising the development of the Plan (especially given the pre-election period). A report would shortly be taken to partner council's scrutiny committees and cabinets setting out the responses from the Regulation 18 consultation and next steps. In scheduling this engagement, time had been allocated between the scrutiny and cabinet phases to maximise the opportunity for considering feedback.

Councillor Smith agreed that prior to the summer Regulation 19 stage there was a need for a steer around levels of growth. She, nevertheless, stressed that no decisions had been made and that work, including within the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group, was still ongoing.

After further discussion, it was

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Ensures that the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 includes provision for contingency planning for extreme weather events linked to climate change, considering the principles of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.

2. Ensures that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 has local net zero carbon ambitions factored firmly and prominently into the next draft of the Plan.
3. Provides any further information that may now be available concerning two previous recommendations from this panel:
 - a) Whether a review of the OGNA can be initiated
 - b) When and how the decision concerning the next steps for the Oxfordshire Plan will be taken.

50. Oxfordshire Connect Rail Programme

The Panel received a presentation from Claire Mahoney, Industry Programme Director, Greater Oxfordshire Area, Network Rail. This set out an update on the Oxfordshire Connect rail programme and included references to East West Rail and the reopening of the Cowley branch line for passenger traffic. John Disley, Infrastructure Strategy & Policy Manager at Oxfordshire County Council, highlighted the importance that was being given to the future connectivity of the Cowley branch line project and how Oxford Housing and Growth Deal funding was helping to support it.

Members welcomed the presentation and the work being undertaken to seek to improve rail infrastructure and services within the county. In discussion, reference was made of the need to integrate stations on the Cowley branch line with local bus routes and cycling infrastructure. The Panel felt that all of Oxfordshire's councils ought to take an active role in the East West Mainline Partnership – they also argued that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should continue to lobby HM Government for the electrification of the East West Rail Line. In addition, the importance of good communications with the public, especially as the Connect programme moved from planning to delivery, was raised by members.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Encourage its constituent councils to engage closely with the East West Mainline Partnership.
2. Continue to lobby HM Government for the electrification of the East West Rail line.

51. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair summarised the responses of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the recommendations made at its November meeting.

He highlighted that in relation to recommendation 6.a, and the tension between the maintenance of cycleways and flora and fauna, it was accepted that appropriate safety work, such as the removal of fallen trees, would be necessary.

52. Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)- Stage 1

The Panel considered a report – and supporting appendices – summarising the completed first stage of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS).

James Gagg, Principal Infrastructure Planner, Oxfordshire County Council, and Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme, in presenting highlighted that at the core of the strategy was an appraisal framework for infrastructure based upon a scoring assessment linked to the five OxIS themes. The assessment process undertaken as part of the update differed from that undertaken as part of the development of the previous version of the OxIS in 2018. The current multi-criteria process disaggregated the prioritisation that arose from the consideration of the OxIS themes from scoring linked to planned growth (although this remained an important consideration). This different approach allowed for the process to be more holistic and sophisticated.

It was highlighted to members that the current phase of the OxIS was, in effect, a rescoring of previously submitted schemes which had already been determined necessary to support planned growth within local plans. It was not an assessment of a new suite of suggested infrastructure. If there was, however, the ambition to examine and prioritise different kinds of infrastructure then that could potentially be considered within later stages of the OxIS.

The issue of electricity infrastructure within the county, as mapped within the OxIS full technical report was raised. It was felt that this had omitted showing provision with the Banbury area. In response, officers stated that this would be corrected.

The Panel welcomed the update to the first stage of OxIS. They did, however, despite the clarifications given by officers around the multi-criteria process, remain concerned it was not compatible enough with the goal of achieving net zero. They also considered it important to safeguard against the development of new gas infrastructure.

Members suggested that there was an over-prioritisation within the OxIS to supporting economic growth. They felt that it was important to consider this issue in a more holistic manner, which placed a much greater emphasis on specifically supporting sustainable, green growth. Support was also expressed for a place shaping approach that prioritised the provision of low emissions infrastructure as part of the wider Active Travel programme. Similarly, it was felt important to support infrastructure that increased access to outdoor green space.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Ensure that the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy safeguards against the development of any new gas network infrastructure.
2. Ensure that the framing and terminology of growth within the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy clarifies that economic growth should not be at the expense of environmental quality and improvement. The scoring criteria may need to be adjusted to reflect:
 - a. A holistic consideration of the consequences of growth which priorities green growth.
 - b. The crossing cutting nature of green infrastructure themes and priorities.

53. Delivering a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan Proposal

The Panel considered a report setting out proposals to scope out the work required to develop a multi-stakeholder route map and implementation plan to deliver the outcomes of the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PaZCO) report.

Members of the Panel enthusiastically backed further work being undertaken to develop the proposals and were supportive of councils contributing financially to help fund this. In addition, the Chair endorsed the objective – articulated in the report – of ensuring that Oxfordshire was well-positioned to lobby HM Government regarding investment and policy in order to accelerate decarbonisation.

The Panel also highlighted the need to develop a communications campaign to encourage behavioural change in society. It was noted that work in this area was to be considered by the Environment Advisory Group.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. Support the approach outlined in paragraph seven of the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map report, ensuring that Oxfordshire is well positioned to make any 'asks' of HM Government to enable local delivery against the route map.
2. Note the Scrutiny Panel's support for local authorities in funding the next steps of the PaZCO work.

54. Feedback from Joint meeting with the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board

The Scrutiny Panel considered a report that summarised the discussion and feedback gathered from the recent joint workshop held between the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. Stefan Robinson, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager, commented that the event demonstrated how the Partnership was engaging with other stakeholders. Further joint workshops were being planned, and the feedback from these would also be presented to Panel.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the report.

55. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

The Scrutiny Panel noted that the substantive matters in this item were discussed earlier in the agenda.

(b) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

The Scrutiny Panel considered the notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group held on 18 November 2021.

In discussion, members raised the issue of the continued growth of the world's population and the impacts that this would/could have on climate change and international relations.

The need for the UK to develop its own domestic food supplies was also highlighted (including the potential of hydroponic food production).

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Smith responded that the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group was not currently considering this issue. She, nevertheless, stated that future food security was a matter that would have to be considered at both a county and national level – especially in terms of the balance of land use. Consideration of this issue could also feed into the spatial and local plan process.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the report.

(c) Environment Advisory Group update

The Scrutiny Panel noted that the substantive matters in this item were discussed earlier in the agenda.

56. Partnerships network

The Panel considered a report which provided an update on activities linked to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. A diagram illustrating partnership links was attached.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

57. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, provided a verbal report on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The Panel was informed that there had been no significant recent developments and, therefore, clarity on HM Government's policy agenda was still awaited. The expectation was for the Levelling Up White Paper to be published in either January or February. It was anticipated that further announcements relating to the Arc Spatial Framework would follow afterwards. All the indications, however, suggested that HM Government still held the Arc within its considerations.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

58. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - January 2022

Kevin Jacob, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Democratic Services Officers, referred the Panel to the work programme as set out in the agenda. He also highlighted the attached responses to questions asked at the Panel's previous meeting in relation to the delivery of affordable housing through the Housing and Growth Deal.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

59. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings up to and including July 2023 were noted.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm