

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON TUESDAY 15 MARCH 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Andrew Gant (Chair), Councillor Samantha Bowring, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor Victoria Haval, Councillor Charlie Hicks, Councillor Katherine Miles, Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley, Councillor Adam Nell, Councillor Lucy Pegg, Councillor David Turner and Councillor Liam Walker

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Richard Byard	Director of Business Development, OxLEP
Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Dave Harrison	Principal Public Transport Planner - Oxfordshire County Council
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Babatunde Ogundele	Assistant Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

Other councillors: Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader Oxfordshire County Council

Guests: Professor Chas Bountra, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Professor of Translational Medicine, University of Oxford and Dr Phil Clare, Director of Innovation & Engagement, Research Services at the University of Oxford.

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

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Brad Baines, Oxfordshire County Council, (substituted by Councillor Charlie Hicks), Derek Cotterill, West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor David Hughes, Cherwell District Council, Councillor Dan Levy, West Oxfordshire District Council, (substituted by Councillor Andy Graham), Councillor Alex

Postan, West Oxfordshire District Council) and Councillor Sean Woodcock, Cherwell District Council.

There were no declarations of interest. The Chair noted that Stefan Robinson, had moved on from his position as Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager to a position with another local authority and paid tribute to him for his support to the Panel, wishing him well for the future.

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

61. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 January 2022 were approved as a correct record.

62. Public participation

The Scrutiny Panel considered one public question.

Suzanne McIvor on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, (NNGO) referred to the request made by NNGO along with the Oxford Civic Society and other high profile civic groups in November 2021 to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it commission an independent review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, (OGNA), commenting that no response had been received. In addition, it was the view of NNGO that it was not possible for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 to proceed to a Regulation 19 consultation at the current time. The Panel was requested to ask the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to provide:

- an explanation why in the view of NNGO, the Oxfordshire Plan appeared to have stalled.
- For a decision on a peer review of the OGNA
- How key decisions would be made, e.g. on the number of houses – NNGO wanted to see these decisions made by Councillors in an open and transparent way.
- For a detailed timetable.
- To support NNGO's call for a further Regulation 18 consultation.

(The full text of the question can be found [here](#))

In discussion, a range of views were expressed by Panel members on whether the requests made by NNGO should be supported. Some members felt that the request for support by the Panel did raise valid points which needed to be followed up, whilst others though sympathetic to the energy and effort behind the question and requests, felt that the question alluded to procedural concerns regarding the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 process which were misplaced. Concerns were also expressed regarding the impact of lengthening the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timeline on the review of several of the district council's Local Plans.

In response to several questions of clarification, Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director commented that whilst it was possible that some of the specific suggestions made by NNGO could have merit, it also had to be recognised that they would

if implemented, have an impact on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 timeline that would be estimated to be a minimum of several months, possibly longer.

After further discussion and having been put to a vote, it was decided by majority that the requests made in the question should be supported as follows:

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

1. undertake a further Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 consultation.
2. provide a detailed update on the timetable for the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.
3. initiate a peer review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment.
4. set out how decisions relating to future housing numbers within the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will be taken in an open and transparent way.

63. Oxfordshire's Innovation Ecosystem Update

The Panel received a verbal presentation from Professor Chas Bountra, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Professor of Translational Medicine, University of Oxford and Dr Phil Clare, Director of Innovation & Engagement, Research Services at the University of Oxford. concerning the opportunities presented by Oxfordshire's Innovation Ecosystem.

Prof Bountra and Dr Clare set out how the University of Oxford had worked with colleagues within industry, HM Government, regulators, and others to develop and bring to market a number of important innovations in recent years, including the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine. Oxfordshire as a county already has a strong innovation ecosystem, through the University of Oxford itself, but also Oxford Brookes University, its hospitals, local companies. The University of Oxford and other partners such as the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) were looking to help meet the wider challenges faced by the world and society in general by engaging and working with both local, national, and international partners and stakeholders. As part of this innovation process, the contribution made by Oxfordshire's local authorities and other stakeholders to supporting innovation was valued and recognised, and the University of Oxford wished to further engage and work with local authorities to develop the opportunities offered.

Richard Byard, Director of Business Development, OxLEP referred to the work being undertaken around the innovation eco-system which linked into the direction of travel of the Oxfordshire economy and the objectives of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership around the global competitiveness of Oxfordshire and productivity.

Members of the Panel commented that they strongly supported the work being undertaken to support innovation within Oxfordshire by the University of Oxford and others. As representatives of local authorities, they felt that the links between the academic sector and local authorities could be strengthened as their perception was that there was currently not a great deal of direct engagement. It was suggested that a list of practical level asks where local authorities could assist the universities would be a useful step forward.

Other members of the Panel commented that it was important that engagement by the University of Oxford around innovation was undertaken in a way that was inclusive, taking account of the needs of women as well as men, for example through the use of disaggregated data, so as to encourage more women to contribute to the solutions. In response, Prof Bountra referred the Panel to the University of Oxford's Increasing Diversity in Enterprising Activities, (IDEA) programme which aimed to address inequalities in entrepreneurship.

Members of the Panel also referred to the need for innovation to have a wider context that included place-shaping and infrastructure. It was noted that as well as commercial innovation enterprises, the University of Oxford was also part of a number of social enterprises.

After further discussion it was suggested that it could be useful for a number of members of the Panel to be delegated authority to further engage with Prof Bountra, Dr Clare and Richard Byard to seek to identify and communicate specific innovations that local authorities should be aware of that specifically linked to the remit of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:
 - a. liaise with Oxfordshire's universities to promote innovation.
 - b. support the need for gender inclusivity in innovation and STEM.
2. That Cllrs Neil, Miles and Hicks be delegated authority on behalf of the Scrutiny Panel to engage and liaise with OxLEP and the University of Oxford in order to report back to a future Scrutiny Panel meeting on how the engagement and communication between the university and local authorities can be facilitated.

64. Enhanced partnership with local bus operators

The Panel considered a presentation included within the agenda which set out an update to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on the activities of the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum, a partnership of private sector transport companies, local authorities, and national bodies. The presentation included areas on which the Forum wished to work with the Partnership and the Infrastructure Advisory Group on in the future and current strategic items currently under discussion by the Forum.

Dave Harrison, Principal Public Transport Planner, Oxfordshire County Council in presenting the slides referred to the Bus Service Improvement Plan, (BSIP) which had been developed by the County Council and submitted to HM Government for consideration in October 2021. The BSIP set out Oxfordshire's plans and asks of HM Government for a mixture of capital and revenue schemes aimed at improving bus services which as well as improvements in actual provision, also included proposals to improve operation of bus services, for instance through bus prioritisation schemes, bus ticketing and real time passenger information systems. The future approach of the County Council to the provision of bus services would be shaped by the outcome of HM Government's decision

on the proposed schemes within the Plan and the Plan also formed an important part of the wider Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. A decision from HM Government was expected soon. The Panel was also updated on plans to establish a bus Enhanced Partnership of local bus operators and the background to this.

In discussion, a number of members commented although real time passenger information tended to be provided in more urban locations, it was actually most needed by residents in more rural locations given the comparative infrequency of rural routes. Bus interchanges were also needed to help improve the convenience and attractiveness of bus travel for users switching between modes of transport. It was also felt that the majority of bus routes started and finished within the City of Oxford and that provision was significantly lower in the district areas. In these areas, 'bookable bus services' were being established as an alternative to traditional scheduled bus service provision and it was felt that consideration should be given to the representation from these operators on the bus Enhanced Partnership and a similar point was expressed with regard to providers of school bus services.

Concern was expressed with regard to the drop in bus passenger numbers post the Covid-19 pandemic which it was noted from the slides was averaging at 75% of pre-pandemic levels and which if not addressed had the potential to affect the commercial viability of many services. A discussion took place about the reasons for the drop in numbers which it was felt was linked to some continued concern regarding the Covid-19 safety of public transport and more long-term issues relating to potential shifts to home working. It was felt that more work needed to be done collectively to improve the attractiveness of bus travel to encourage modal shift away from the private car.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council and Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Group addressed the Panel. Councillor Leffman stressed that HM Government's decision on what parts of the BSIP it would fund was still awaited and therefore it was uncertain which schemes could be progressed, but regardless of the outcome of the BSIP process consideration was being given to next steps and priorities. Oxfordshire County Council did want to ensure that there was involvement from all the districts, as well as Oxford City Council in discussions around bus infrastructure.

Councillor Leffman commented that the view of the Panel that bus travel needed to be made a more attractive option for travellers was fully recognised and amount of passenger traffic increased. There were challenges around funding and the commercial viability of some services given the expected termination of HM Government financial support for bus services put in place to support bus services through the pandemic. However, it was important to continue to encourage and sustain bus services and ways to do this were being looked at.

After further discussion it was,

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be requested to:

1. support the planning and delivery of real time passenger information system on an Oxfordshire wide basis, taking into account the difference in needs between rural and urban bus users and bus frequency.

2. Investigate the potential of bus interchanges in encouraging greater use of buses, particularly off peak.
3. support the acknowledgement within the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership of the comparative lack of scheduled bus provision within the districts to the City of Oxford.
4. support the involvement of school bus providers within the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership.

65. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

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

66. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Year 4, Quarter 3

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which reported on the progress of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of the end of Quarter Three, Year Four. The report and the accompanying financial monitoring report at Agenda item 7.b were divided into separate sections covering three strands of the Deal: Homes from Infrastructure Programme, the Affordable Housing Programme and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It was noted that Productivity, the four strand of the Deal was reported to the Board of OxLEP separately. The report was presented by Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme.

Councillor David Turner asked whether any research has been undertaken on where people moving into new build housing in Oxfordshire were originating from, for example existing locations within the county or from outside the county? Councillor Turner commented that the perception expressed to him was that that many people were moving into new build housing in areas like Thame from outside of the county, particularly the London area and who then commuted back to the capital. It was felt that this information might assist in the strategic planning of future housing. Paul Staines responded that for affordable housing, (including shared ownership/First Homes) this kind of data was collected. In respect of private house sales, it was possible that individual developers collected this type of data, but this was not an area that it was thought had been investigated previously by Oxfordshire local authorities. However, this line to enquiry could be pursued to see what information was available.

In response to a question from the Chair, Paul Staines and Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director informed the Panel that analysis of the responses to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Part consultation was largely complete, but further work was in process to finalise and present the results in a public format. Reports had been presented previously to individual Oxfordshire local authority scrutiny committees giving a summary and detailed list of consultation responses. The next stage was processing the consultation responses into useful information that could be used to inform the next stage of the development of Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

The Chair referred to the Panel's previously expressed strong support for the involvement of the individual Oxfordshire overview and scrutiny committees in the shaping of the final text of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report - Year 4, Quarter 3

The Panel noted the report.

(c) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

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

(d) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

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

(e) Environment Advisory Group update

The Panel noted the report.

67. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, provided a verbal update on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The Panel was informed that formal clarity as to HM Government's intentions regarding the Arc was still expected from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but the informal indications from civil servants were that HM Government still had an interest in the Arc's future. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leadership Group had agreed to continue working on the Arc for a further six months pending HM Government clarifying its position.

Members of Panel commented that it was their understanding from reports published by local authorities within the Arc that its future development would now be entirely limited to local initiative and funds that could be raised locally. It was confirmed to the Panel that it was expected that the future direction of the Arc would be set through local leadership rather than the implementation of a top down model from HM Government, in tune with the overall approach of the current Secretary of State. With regard to funding, the informal indications were that potentially there could continue to be central funding available in supporting work within the Arc, but that it was probably not realistic to expect significant funding, for instance on major capital projects in the current circumstances.

In response to a query regarding the future of East West Rail, the Panel was informed that it was understood there had been challenges raised to the project's business case, linked to the deletion of HM Government's target of house building for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, but that the business case overall remained strong.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

68. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - March 2022

Kevin Jacob, Future Oxfordshire Democratic Services Officer, referred the Panel to the work programme as set out in the agenda. He also highlighted the attached briefing note

on Modern Methods of Construction which set out an update by district and city council area.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report.

69. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The Chair noted it was the last meeting in the current municipal year and thanked councillors, officers and guests for their attendance and contribution to the work of the Panel over the previous year.

The meeting closed at 8.28 pm