

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



## The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON MONDAY 20 MARCH 2023 AT 2.00 PM  
COUNCIL CHAMBER, CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL, BODICOTE  
HOUSE, BODICOTE, BANBURY, OX15 4AA

### Present:

**Members:** Councillor Barry Wood (Chair), (Cherwell District Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (OxLEP Chair), Councillor Andy Graham, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Councillor Liz Leffman, (Oxfordshire County Council), Daniel Leveson, (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire ICB), Councillor David Rouane, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Bethia Thomas, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Professor Irene Tracey (Universities' representative) and Catherine Turner, (Homes England)

**Officers:** Lorna Baxter, (Oxfordshire County Council), Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Emma Coles, (Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership), Becky Chesshyre, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Sarah Gilbert, (Oxfordshire County Council), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Alex Jeffery, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Suzanne Malcolm, (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Babatunde Ogundele (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Yvonne Rees (Cherwell District Council Chief Executive), Martin Reeves, (Oxfordshire County Council), Robin Rogers, (Oxfordshire County Council), Paul Staines (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team), Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership), Matt Whitney, (Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership), Kathy Wilcox (Oxfordshire County Council) and Beth Wilks (Future Oxfordshire Partnership)

**Other councillors:** Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

**Guest:** Jeremy Long, Co-Chair, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

### 53. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcement

Apologies for absence were submitted from Iain Littlejohn, Chair of the Oxfordshire Skills Board and Miranda Markham, OxLEP business representative – Bicester.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair stated that with the Partnership's permission it was intended to alter the order of the Agenda so as to take item six – Arrangements for Managing the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal and item seven – Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report immediately after item four.

It was stated that the meeting was being livestreamed and that a [recording would be available here](#) a period of 12 months.

## 54. Minutes

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership held on 23 January 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

## 55. Public participation

[The full text and final written responses to the questions below can be found here.](#)

**Councillor Dr Sue Roberts** referred to the refusal by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (DEFRA) to grant Water Bathing Status at Wallingford Beach without an explanation and expressed concern that in her view, there would be no protections in place for the people swimming there. The River Thames was the lifeblood of Wallingford as a historic market town and in addition to bathers, was used by Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University rowing squads. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked to write to the Secretaries of State for DEFRA and the Department for Culture Media and Sport, to deplore what was considered to be a retrograde decision to keep Wallingford mired in excrement.

In response the Chair indicated that a written response would be provided but invited Councillor David Rouane as Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council to comment. Councillor Rouane added that the council was itself seeking more information on the reasons for refusal of the Bathing Water Status application and without this information it was not possible to comment further.

**Professor Richard Harding on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire** asked a question which referred to the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Joint Action Plan and Route Map. In particular, the proposal for a Local Area Energy Plan for Oxfordshire and a commitment to strategic planning of energy generation was welcomed. It was highlighted that although the Action Plan set out ambitious targets for solar renewables these would require only a small proportion of Oxfordshire's land.

In the CPRE's view priority should be given to the use of rooftops and brownfield sites for solar and local authorities should be selective about any greenfield allocations particularly avoiding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, wildlife sites and nature recovery areas, and good agricultural land. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked:

1. Which 'stakeholders' would be involved in the formulation of the Local Area Energy Plan?
2. Would the Plan be subject to full public consultation?

3. How would the Plan take into account other potentially competing uses for land, such as biodiversity and food production, possibly moving towards a broader comprehensive land use plan for Oxfordshire?
4. And when will local authorities be in a position to turn down any building applications (domestic or commercial) that do not make adequate provision for renewable energy, especially solar?

The Chair indicated that a written answer would be provided and that members of the Partnership would be aware of the points made when they considered the Agenda item.

**Suzanne McIvor on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire** asked a question which referred to the process for the drafting of the Strategic Economic Plan, (SEP) and the phasing of the Plan through scoping, evidence gathering analysis, and production of an action plan all by the end of June 2023. She expressed concern that although headlines around the SEP talked about a ‘new, constructive and creative county-wide conversation about Oxfordshire’s economic future’ there was no evidence of how the public and groups such as Need Not Greed could be involved in this conversation and that there was nowhere in the Plan’s programme to allow for everyone to have the opportunity to have their say. It was also unclear as to whether the SEP would be agreed by each council or simply announced as agreed by HM Government. The Future Oxfordshire was asked to:

1. Carry out a full public consultation on the SEP, and
2. Ensure that the SEP goes through an appropriate scrutiny and approval process by each Local Authority?

The Chair indicated that a written answer would be provided and that members of the Partnership would be aware of the points made when they considered the Agenda item.

**George Curtis on behalf of Bioabundance** asked two questions related to the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan 2023 and Pathways to Zero Carbon Route Map and Action Plan Final Report Agenda items. In quoting directly from the Pathways to a Zero Carbon report he commented that “the size of the challenge to achieve net zero carbon by 2050 at latest will require a considerable step change in activity. We need to embed climate change into decision making across Oxfordshire’s local authorities.”

Concern was expressed that the proposed iteration of the Net Zero Action Plan and Route Map did not include Scope Three emissions. He commented that from other points made in the Scrutiny Panel meeting, the net zero imperative was to be considered in many of the FOP sponsored workstreams and the net zero imperative applied to all FOP activities. It was Bioabundance’s contention that the Scope 3 emission information from the housing and road developments are crucial elements in the Future Oxfordshire Partnership’s decision-making to embrace the net zero strategy. It was considered that the Zero Carbon Route Map and Action Plan could not be considered fit for purpose until it was extended to include Scope Three emissions.

It was suggested that the Partnership agree to the Scrutiny Panel’s recommendation that it ask Kate Raworth to present the Doughnut Economics model to manage sustainable growth within ecological targets whilst ensuring wellbeing and that as in other parts of the country, for instance the WFG (Wales) Act, the well-being of future generations is

acquiring greater significance than in the now outdated quest for GDP growth at any cost. Mr Curtis expressed the view that the number of houses in the Oxford City Housing & Economic Needs Assessment, produced by Cambridge Economics had been based on a 1930s economic concept of GDP driven growth without regard to the environment. He stressed that Net Zero called for a step change in thinking.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was asked:

1. Could the Net Zero Plan be reworked to include the Scope 3 emissions before it can be accepted?
2. Could the Economic Strategy include the use of Doughnut Economics to measure and present plans for enabling wellbeing whilst minimising environmental harm?

The Chair indicated that a written answer would be provided and that members of the Partnership would be aware of the points made when they considered the Agenda item.

## **56. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update**

The Chair invited Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel, to present the recommendations from the Panel's meeting held on 13 March 2023.

Councillor Miles summarised the recommendations and commented that the themes of the climate and biodiversity emergency had cut across the Panel's discussions and recommendations and which had also been touched upon by the previous public speakers. These included the need to reduce transport related carbon emissions, the promotion of Active Travel and a focus on the green energy transition.

The Panel recommendation that the Infrastructure Advisory Group accept the general offer of support by Active Travel England to help Oxfordshire to improve its Active Travel capability rating was highlighted along with the recommendation that a separate briefing be held for Partnership and Partnership Scrutiny Panel members on the potential contribution of the 'Doughnut' economic model.

The Panel had strongly welcomed the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Joint Action Plan and Route Map but had made a number of recommendations relating to what the Panel considered to be areas of omission, particularly that Scope Three emissions should be included within the scope of the Action Plan and Route Map, there should be more focus on measures to reduce car use and green energy generation using roof tops and previously developed land.

Other recommendations related to the need to ensure sufficient contingency had been built into the Housing from Infrastructure Programme and that with regard to the Visitor Economy coach parking and communication around green travel options for tourists.

The Chair thanked Councillor Miles for her summary and stated [that the Partnership's full response to the recommendations would be given in writing.](#) He also paid tribute to the Panel's contribution and its feedback over the previous year.

In response to a question from Councillor Liz Leffman, Councillor Miles agreed that the distinction between bicycles equipped with additional electric power and electrically

powered 'motorbikes' was becoming increasingly blurred. It was clarified that the reference to 'motorbikes' in Panel recommendation 2.f. related to petrol motorbikes.

Councillor Susan Brown referred to and drew a distinction between those electric bicycles which are generally well looked after and ridden vs the problem of electric bicycles which had been illegally modified. These were an increasing safety problem within Oxford and national legislation had yet to catch up with the issue.

## **57. Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Joint Action Plan**

The Partnership considered a report and attached Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan which set out:

- The emission reductions necessary to achieve net zero by 2050
- The key milestones in 2025, 2030 and 2040.
- Carbon budgets of maximum emissions that could be emitted to maintain this pathway (including the provision of data at a scale available to districts)
- Key Performance Indicators to track progress
- Recommended areas for Partnership members to work on jointly to accelerate action.

The report, route map and action plan was presented by Suzanne Malcolm, Deputy Chief Executive for Place, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and Senior Responsible Officer for the Environment Advisory Group and Sarah Gilbert, Head of Climate, Oxfordshire County Council. A presentation was given setting out the main points of the action plan and route map [here](#).

Councillor David Rouane as Chair of the Environment Advisory Group thanked the members of the group for their input into the development of the Route Map and Action Plan. He stressed that it was about tackling priority actions given the breadth of what could be done to tackle climate change, particularly if areas such as Scope Three emissions were included as suggested by the Scrutiny Panel. It was important not to be distracted by areas where as individual organisations and as a group, the Partnership did not have a direct impact. Rather the proposed actions were framed with a focus of maximum impact as quickly as possible. Councillor Liz Leffman agreed with these sentiments, commenting that from the list of actions there was a limit to what councils and partners could do, but more could be achieved through partnership and this would be very important.

Councillor Leffman referred to the question of green finance which had been allocated within the document to the Environment Advisory Group and suggested that this should also be considered by the Infrastructure Advisory Group as there were a number of infrastructure projects that would require finance in the future and it was important to consider how that might be achieved. Councillor Leffman commented that this should be added to the Infrastructure Advisory Group's forward plan.

Councillor Bethia Thomas welcomed the Plan, noting the comment of officers in that it was felt to be one of the most ambitious and comprehensive such plans put together on behalf of local authorities. She commented that she hoped that comments made by the public speakers would be taken into account and questions regarding stakeholder and consultation as the route map and action plan remained in the early stages.

Councillor Brown referred to the mapping of all the work already underway and the importance of avoiding duplications. As Chair of Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership, (ZCOP)

she was happy to share details of its workstreams so there could be shared learning. She commented that on attending the launch of the Project LEO report was the degree to which a lot of the required actions concerning local area energy planning could only be delivered locally, even at a street by street level. Overall learning could be shared widely, but some of the work had to be done at extremely local level. Therefore, it was important to get the balance right, with local engagement to determine what would work for particular streets, neighbourhoods and the high level negotiating with energy suppliers etc.

Angus Horner, OxLEP Business representative for the Science Vale also paid tribute to the level of detail within the report. His observation was that a budget for communications was required to maintain a constant rhythm of information flow. With regard to some of the existing climate action themed web portals he suggested that they could present concise and clear information tailored towards non-expert readers setting out the scale of the required challenge and the quantum of expected investment required. He referred to the example of the need for private sector investment in retrofitting homes and transport and the need for residents to understand the need and advantages to be gained by working together within groups. It was suggested that if a review of previous investments were undertaken the conclusions would be difficult.

Susan Harbour, Partnerships Manager at South and Vale Councils responded that the Partnership did have a Communications Officer who was looking at website communications and procuring new websites including for the Local Nature Partnership and Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

1. Note the report and attached Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan
2. Review and endorse the proposed joint actions and recommended prioritisation to form a programme of work reporting to the Partnership.
3. Review the governance and reporting proposals set out in the report and suggest any proposed changes as required.

## **58. Arrangements for Managing the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal**

The Partnership considered a report which provided an update on the arrangements for managing the schemes funded through the Housing for Infrastructure, (HfI) Scheme following the receipt of a letter from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in December 2022 setting out the conditions for the release of the remaining £30 million Housing for Infrastructure grant funding. The report had been prepared by Lorna Baxter, the Director of Finance for Oxfordshire County Council in the capacity of Section 151 Officer of the Accountable Body for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal who presented it to the meeting.

The Partnership's attention was drawn to para 3.1 which set out the terms and conditions of the agreement including:

- arrangements for the use of re-cycled funding
- changes to housing delivery profile and spend delivery in quarterly instalments up 2025.

- No additional HM Government funding would be available beyond the 2024/2025 financial year and local authorities would need to cover expenditure beyond that date or reconsider which projects to prioritise if necessary.
- As part of the quarterly monitoring, Oxfordshire authorities to provide an update on Local Plan progress and housing information.
- Discussions and dialogue had taken place with officers from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Homes England and it was expected that subject to the agreement of the reporting arrangements it would be possible to submit a return at the end of March 2023.

In the discussion that followed, Councillor Susan Brown stressed the importance of not moving away from the principle of trust established as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal that decisions about spend be made collectively by the Partnership with all councils having equal input. It was acknowledged that under the terms of the agreement, there was a separate responsibility for the Oxfordshire County Council Section 151 officer. Councillor Liz Leffman responded that there would continue to be regular contact and liaison between officers from County Council and district/city colleagues and addition reporting and discussion via the Infrastructure Advisory Group as there was a joint responsibility to take the Hfl programme forward. Oxfordshire County Council was formally responsible for the programme as the accountable body and it was important to be cognizant that funding would not be available beyond the 2024/2025 financial year. Therefore, there were constraints that had to be worked within.

Caroline Green, Chief Executive of Oxford City Council drew the Partnership's attention to the recognition with the report that the Partnership's existing Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding would require updating in light of the new arrangements. These amendments would need to be agreed by the Partnership itself, but also each individual local authority and as part of this work Chief Executives would be looking to formulate a form of words which encapsulated the points raised by Councillor Brown. Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive of Cherwell echoed these remarks and reassured the Partnership that this matter would be looked at closely to ensure the revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding delivered both against the expectations of the agreement with HM Government, but also held true to the existing partnership work approach.

Councillor Bethia Thomas commented that she welcomed the report and looked forward to the discussions between officers from the councils, recognising the County Council's formal responsibilities.

Catherine Turner, as the representative of Homes England on the Partnership stated that she welcomed the recommendations which provided clarity. Homes England would alongside colleagues at DLUHC, Oxfordshire County Council and its partners to finalise the detail of the arrangements. It was important not to lose momentum in the delivery of the Hfl programme and to move with as much pace as possible. Councillor Leffman thanked Catherine Turner for her assistance in progressing the proposed arrangements and highlighted that the purpose of the infrastructure schemes comprised within the Hfl programme was ultimately to deliver housing including affordable housing.

Councillor Andy Graham also emphasised the need for all the partners to move forward in the delivery of the programme as part of a trusting relationship. He also asked that officers in developing the programme set out a timeline as to date only a limited timeline had been set out in his opinion.

The Chair commented that the delivery of housing at market rates accelerated through the Hfl programme was also necessary to deliver affordable housing.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

1. Request that the Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council write to DLUHC to formally accept the terms of the letter from DHLUC to Oxfordshire Leaders and OCC Chief Executive dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2022.
2. Agree that in accepting the terms of the letter referred to in Recommendation 1, Oxfordshire County Council will, as accountable body and in consultation with the relevant District or City Council regarding the impact on accelerated housing numbers, take responsibility for decisions necessary to manage the programme in accordance with the updated conditions set out by DLUHC.
3. Note that it will be necessary to agree revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding to reflect the change in responsibility as set out in recommendation 2, and ask officers to bring these forward as soon as possible, recognising these will only take effect following approval by each local authority.

## **59. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report: Update at end of Quarter 3 2022/2033**

The Partnership considered a report which provided an update on the financial position of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Housing from Infrastructure and Growth Deal Capacity funding streams as of the end of Quarter Three, 2022/2023. Lorna Baxter, Section 151 Officer of Oxfordshire County Council presented the report.

It was highlighted that:

- Hfl expenditure to the end of March was £110m. Forecast spend for 2022/2023 was £36m with actuals of £18.9m as of December 2022.
- Growth Deal Capacity Fund balance as of March 2023 of £1.3m.
- The next report would be updated to reflect the reprofiling of the Hfl programme in light of the revised reporting requirements.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership note the financial position as at the end of December 2022.

## **60. Oxfordshire's Visitor Economy**

The Partnership considered a report that provided information on, and progress related to the Visitor Economy Renaissance Programme, (VERP) managed by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) and also an update on the future landscape of Oxfordshire's Visitor Economy reflecting national changes as a response to the independent review of destination management organisations (DMOs) in England and the proposal to create Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs). The report was presented by Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP.



The Partnership's attention was drawn to:

- Para 12. As part of the VERP workstream, 78 applications under the Visitor Economy Grant scheme amounting to a total of £1.4m had been submitted and the scheme oversubscribed. A total of £660,621 had been allocated across a wide range of visitor related business organisations. Every effort would be made to repurpose any grant underspend later in the year.
- A key element of the grant scheme had been to provide visitor business with assistance in transitioning to E-Commerce and digital skills.
- A five year Destination Management Plan, (DMP) had been commissioned as a whole Oxfordshire system piece and would include consideration of issues around management of place in the context of tourism including journeys. In response to the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations relating to the impact of tourism and importance of green tourist travel it was stressed that the document would include how tourism was managed and curated as well as promoted and marketed.
- Oxfordshire interacted with three Destination Management Organisations, (DMO) and to date two had submitted formal expressions of interest to become LVEPS under the appropriate process. Letters of support would be provided from the Oxfordshire system to both applications.

Giles Hughes, Chief Executive of West Oxfordshire District Council emphasised the importance of the quality of the county's built and natural environments in driving the attractiveness of its tourist destinations. It was important to preserve and enhance these, with the work to produce a DMP a key part of this.

In discussion, Councillor Bethia Thomas echoed the comments of the Scrutiny Panel regarding the importance of sustainability and the green environment in the tourist economy and the Chair referred to the significant contribution of the visitor economy and how central it was to Oxfordshire's overall economy. It was therefore important to enhance and protect it.

Councillor Andy Graham suggested that a factor which should be considered in the future was the value placed within the region on the value of cultural heritage and the link between that cultural heritage and quality of life. To protect quality of life it was necessary to protect cultural heritage by finding new ways to encourage it and it was important to not become complacent as consumer fashions and habits changed within the tourism market.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

1. notes the emerging changes to the Destination Management Organisation landscape including the potential for two Local Visitor Economy Partnerships being formed.
2. notes the forthcoming Local Visitor Economy Partnerships Vision and Destination Management Plan for Oxfordshire as a shared statement of intent to manage Oxfordshire as a destination over the next 5 years.
3. notes the significant impact of the Visitor Economy Renaissance Programme which is being delivered by OxLEP on behalf of the 'whole system'.

## **61. Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan 2023**

The Partnership received a briefing presentation from Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP on the development of a new Oxfordshire Strategic Plan building upon the 2016 Plan, 2017 Local Industrial Strategy and 2020 Economic Recovery Plan.

It was noted that:

- It had been collectively agreed by OxLEP and its partners on a system wide basis to refresh the economic plan in light of the seismic changes that had occurred within the national and Oxfordshire economy over recent years and secondly because of the resetting by local authorities of their economic trajectories through their Local Plan processes in terms of housing, employment, and growth need. The alignment of the Plan's development alongside those Local Plans process meant that a creation of a duplicate layer of economic projections could be avoided.
- The development process of the Plan would recognise the criticality of good growth, Net Zero, equality, diversity and inclusion in a way that had not been possible to do before and although a full public consultation exercise was not being undertaken, the Plan development process would seek to involve more and different voices. A programme of engagement workshops had been devised and open call for evidence issued.
- It was intended to seek to define a clear picture of Oxfordshire's foundational economy.
- It was expected that the final draft of the new Plan would be considered by OxLEP in September 2023.

Professor Irene Tracey, on behalf of Oxfordshire's universities commented on the importance of university involvement in the discussions on the development and furthering of economic opportunity for the county's population. It was important to connect this to work the universities were doing to think more strategically about opportunities arising from some of their innovation and science parks to ensure synergy and that those parks were benefiting local people as well as the meeting discovery research and translation goals. Professor Tracey informed the Partnership that she would be taking part in HM Government work on the role of UK universities in assisting innovation and business spinouts arising from research. She looked forward to working with other stakeholders within the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

Councillor Susan Brown stated that 'spin out' business arising from innovation and research was an important part of the Oxfordshire economy. It was important as part of any engagement that any such business were strongly represented because it was necessary to understand the experiences and needs of such businesses. It was important for Oxfordshire to be a leader in sustainable industry and as part of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership and to think about the skills required in order to deliver the type of sustainable industry required. The technical skills needed to support electric vehicles was one example of this.

Councillor Brown commented that there were many strands to be considered as part of the drafting of the SEP and as many voices as possible should be heard, particularly from the research and innovation spaces. All the various inputs then had to be balanced out as part of planning for the future, because if that was not done it would lead to what she felt was the current situation where there was an inadequate amount of housing across the county and problems with transport infrastructure.

In conclusion, Nigel Tipple responded to the comments made by commenting that both universities were already playing an active part in the SEP's drafting and groups representing a wide range of business interests and networks including research and innovation were being reached out to with the assistance of the economic development teams in each council.

**RESOLVED:** That the presentation be noted.

## **62. Advisory Group updates**

### **(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update**

Councillor Liz Leffman referred to the written notes of the 7 January meeting of the Infrastructure Advisory Group as included in the Agenda and provided a verbal update of the meeting held on 27 February.

It was highlighted that the advisory group had received a useful presentation on the delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision related to the group's infrastructure remit and the potential opportunities for joint working between the councils. As the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal came to an end, one of the points arising from the discussion was that it could be useful to think of what was meant by infrastructure in wider terms than focussing on infrastructure to support the delivery of housing as had been the case historically. This might include how to further green infrastructure, digital connectivity, innovative technology, and consideration of energy requirements across the county.

Councillor Leffman also advised the Partnership wished to look at the water strategy for the County and in particular the proposed reservoir in Vale of White Horse District in light of its potential impact on the infrastructure of the county as a whole. The advisory group also wished to widen its understanding of how infrastructure might be delivered in the future, for example by receiving presentations from England's Economic Heartland and the connectivity studies it had been undertaking including the Oxford to Swindon study.

The Chair commented that the definition of infrastructure varied significantly between individuals, but that in his view health infrastructure would be significant in the future given the challenges of an aging population and other demographic changes. The Partnership and the district/city councils needed to consider the most effective way to engage with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board, (BOB ICB) about the placemaking agenda. He suggested that health placemaking might potentially be an area considered by the Partnership. Councillor Leffman agreed that given a rising population within the county, access to the healthcare was of high importance and formed part of the work the district and city councils were doing as part of their Local Plan formation. New technology and greater digital connectivity had the potential to have a positive impact on the issue.

Dan Leveson, as the BOB ICB representative on the Partnership responded that the NHS sector did engage closely with council colleagues around health infrastructure needs and was looking at the application of new technology and its impact on the future health estate and more widely, social care strategy.

**RESOLVED:** That the update be noted.

### **(b) Housing Advisory Group update**

Councillor Susan Brown provided a verbal update of the Housing Advisory Group meeting held on 28 February 2023. Councillor Brown highlighted that there had been a presentation on community led housing that had focussed on the practical issues around this form of housing and that the group had considered a briefing paper around Housing Revenue Accounts, (HRAs). The paper had considered the question of whether it would be possible for the district councils in Oxfordshire to establish HRAs if they wished to do so.

Unfortunately, it appeared that this would be very difficult to achieve given that the formal mechanisms to do so were not present and it was hard to achieve viability, in contrast to the situation for a council that wished to abolish its HRA where the legislative and regulatory environment was clear. Given the need to find solutions to the need to provide more affordable housing, advisory group members had felt that this was an issue which should be raised with national policy makers.

The Partnership was informed that the members of the advisory group would be undertaking a site visit to the Graven Hill custom and self-build housing site located near Bicester in July.

**RESOLVED:** That the update be noted.

### **63. Environment Advisory Group update**

**RESOLVED:** That the update be noted.

### **64. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan**

Beth Wilks, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager referred to the Forward Programme as set out in the Agenda and informed the meeting that it was intended to add an additional item to provide an update on activity relating to energy.

Councillor Liz Leffman commented that Vision Zero and its application across Oxfordshire was an issue that the Infrastructure Advisory Group wish to suggest the Partnership look at either directly at a Partnership meeting or via the Infrastructure Advisory Group first.

Beth Wilks informed the Partnership that this suggestion was listed as on the Forward Programme as a potential future agenda item but it had not yet been attributed to a particular meeting.

### **65. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership**

Beth Wilks, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager provided a verbal summary of recent developments related to energy infrastructure within the county in advance of the presentation of a more detailed written report at the Partnership's June meeting.

The Partnership was reminded that a letter had been sent on its behalf to the three Distribution Network Operators, (DNOs) with responsibility for Oxfordshire, SSEN, UK Power Networks and National Grid Electricity Distribution. The letter had set out a number of requests related to:

- Obtaining a better understanding of the Oxfordshire energy network and any barriers to the energy infrastructure coming forward

- Current reinforcement plans
- How the Future Oxfordshire Partnership could work with the DNOs to unlock barriers to infrastructure delivery by moving from a reactive to proactive energy planning system.

All three DNO's had responded promptly and had indicated that they were keen to take forward proactive engagement with the Partnership. A meeting was scheduled to take place in April between OxLEP, council leaders, chief executives and the DNOs to help explore and understand the issues.

The recent Local Area Energy Planning Workshop was also brought to the Partnership's attention. Officers from the respective councils and OxLEP had held initial discussions around what local area energy planning in Oxfordshire might involve and what such an approach might look like in terms of scope and potential benefits. A number of guest speakers had also set out a number of best practice examples. At the conclusion of the event, it had been agreed to establish a multi-agency steering group comprising council officers, DNO representatives and other to progress the issue. The topic of local area energy planning linked into the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan endorsed by the Partnership earlier in the meeting.

The Partnership was informed that the findings from the Local Energy Oxfordshire project had recently been published. This had included data mapping information which would be of benefit to local area energy planning and other learning related to decentralised heat networks.

Finally, the officer group supporting the Environment Advisory Group had undertaken mapping work to understand the different programmes, strategies and partnerships operating within the environmental agenda space and specifically relating to energy, so as to ensure pieces of work were joined up and not duplicated.

## **66. Verbal reports from key strategic partnerships supporting delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

Councillor Liz Leffman reported back from meetings of England's Economic Heartland, (EEH). A key topic of discussion had been the management of bus networks in the future and it had been decided to convene a workshop of the various authorities across the EEH region.

Councillor Leffman expressed the observation that significant resources were being allocated to metropolitan areas within combined authorities with elected Mayors in order for those authorities to manage their own bus services and although perhaps unfair, it was felt that this was intended to act as an incentive for elected mayors. Whilst such a route might not be considered acceptable or beneficial within Oxfordshire it was felt that there was a common desire to have a greater degree of control over bus networks within the county and working with partners across the EEH was one potential way of achieving this.

A discussion had also been held regarding Mobility hubs and the EEH was working with East West Rail around this which locally the Partnership could learn from, for instance around provision of secure bike storage.

With the regard to the progression of the East West Rail project, some concerns had been expressed at the eastern end of the line near Cambridge around the impact of the project

on local communities and a public engagement process was to be put in place in response. In terms of the Oxfordshire stretch of the line, the Bicester to Oxford part of the project was dependent on the completion of the upgrade of Oxford station which was intended to be completed by the end of 2024. Discussions had also taken place around eventual electrification of the line and train battery technology.

Councillor Leffman next commented on the redevelopment of Oxford station, bridge replacement works on Botley Road and track upgrades. It was noted that the Botley Road would be closed in April for an initial six month period after which there would be a six month gap followed by a further closure in March 2024 to October 2024. Whilst the new facilities when completed would be a significant improvement, it was fully recognised that it was necessary to go through a period of significant disruption whilst Botley Road was closed. Members of the Partnership were referred to an extensive press release regarding the works which had recently been released and everything possible was being done to reduce disruption. Discussions were also taking place with local train operators around providing additional free parking at local stations to seek to make it easier not to travel into Oxford City by car.

Councillor Susan Brown commented that the works were significant for the City of Oxford and Oxford City Council was working closely with both Network Rail and Oxfordshire County Council. An example of this was the enablement by city officers of a visit of the site by groups representing people with various disabilities so that they could understand what was being proposed and so they could feedback on potential improvements to help those they represented. Councillor Brown also echoed the recognition that the works would be disruptive and it was intended to put in place as many mitigation measures as possible to seek to keep traffic flowing whilst encouraging travel to and within the City by other means.

Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, (LNP) Manager provided a verbal update on the activities of the LNP prior to the consideration of written impact report later in the year. The LNP which was jointly funded by all the local authorities in Oxfordshire had the remit to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on the climate and the priority of making Oxfordshire a place where people and nature thrived. The work of the LNP covered three workstreams – nature recovery, natural capital investment and people and nature.

In addition, work was underway to develop a land based carbon sequestration offset model and funding and resource to support it was being investigated. This was felt to be an innovative area with opportunities deliver multiple outputs from single interventions.

A number of points raised by various speakers in the meeting relating to destination management and the comments of the Scrutiny Panel were welcomed. The LNP was also engaging with OxLEP regarding the development of the Strategic Economic Plan. Finally, an offer was made to attend the meetings of individual council climate action committees if this felt to be helpful to the understand of the LNP role and work.

Emma Coles, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Manger and Jeremy Long, Co-Chair gave a verbal update on the work of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, (OIEP). The OIEP which was also funded by all the Oxfordshire local councils was a county wide organisation that aimed to bring together the business community, community groups and local authorities to share knowledge, expertise, and resources to create a more equal, inclusive, and sustainable region. The Partnership had four action focussed

working groups, educational attainment, inclusive employment, social value and procurement, and place shaping.

Project proposals for action to across Oxfordshire to deliver the OIEP's vision in all these areas had been agreed at the OIEP's steering group meeting in December 2022 and the partnership would be supporting these projects whilst establishing a repository of case studies and best practice. A delivery plan was being developed setting out how the OIEP would be operating over the next year and a strategy was also being considered as it was recognised that delivery of its goals would require a longer term focus. Funding would be required and a strategy to seek this was being developed.

The OIEP had established a Charter which was a way for employers to demonstrate their support for and commitment to improving all aspects of social mobility and increasing prosperity in order to make Oxfordshire a fairer and more inclusive county. This required action from the organisation via sign up pledges. The Charter had been successfully launched on 25 January 2023 with a number of key speakers. Jeremy Long emphasised that there had been very good uptake for the Charter and pledged and requested that everyone through their own networks do all they could to encourage organisations they had links with to consider signing up to the Charter.

Following the conclusion of the item, the Chair paid tribute on behalf of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to Jeremy Long for his service and contribution to as Chair of OxLEP until earlier that month.

## **67. Dates of next meetings**

**RESOLVED:** That the dates of proposed meetings from June 2023 to March 2024 be noted.

On the occasion of it being the last Partnership meeting of the municipal year the Chair thanked members and supporting officers for all their contributions.

The meeting closed at 16:23