

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH 2024 AT 2.00 PM

THE LONG ROOM, OXFORD CITY COUNCIL, TOWN HALL, ST ALDATE'S,
OXFORD, OX1 1BX

Present:

Members: Councillor Susan Brown (Chair), (Oxford City Council), Alex Betts, (OxLEP universities representative), Councillor Mark Coleman, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor Duncan Enright, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (OxLEP Chair), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business rep), Julia Krause, (Homes England), Councillor Liz Leffman, (Oxfordshire County Council), Dean Lusby-Gordan, (Environment Agency), Miranda Markham (OxLEP business representative), Councillor David Rouane, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Barry Wood (Cherwell District Council), and Chris Wright, (Bucks Oxfordshire and West Berks ICB).

Officers: Lorna Baxter (Oxfordshire County Council), Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Becky Chesshyre, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (Future Oxfordshire District Council), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire District Council), Babatunde Ogundele (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Martin Reeves (Oxfordshire County Council), Paul Staines (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Chloe Taylor, (Oxfordshire County Council) and David Yates, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership)

68. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Andy Graham, (substituted by Councillor Duncan Enright), Emma Hill, (substituted Dean Lusby-Gordon), Neil Hook, (substituted by Julia Krause), Dan Leveson, (substituted by Chris Wright), Peter Nolan and Professor Irene Tracey, (substituted by Professor Alex Betts).

Councillor Duncan Enright declared that he undertook work as an associate for CCP, a development communication agency, but that none of this work took place within Oxfordshire or was connected to Oxfordshire.

There were no Chair's announcements.

69. Minutes

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

70. Public participation

It was noted that there had not been any requests for public participation on this occasion.

71. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

Kevin Jacob, Senior Democratic Services Officer referred to the circulated feedback from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel made at its meeting on 11 March 2024. The Panel had not made any formal recommendations but had made a number of points in relation to:

- The view that there was a need to find alternative ways to fund currently unfunded projects within the Housing from the Infrastructure Programme.
- The view that there was need to engage all stakeholders including district councils and environmental groups in the development of proposals as part of Phase 2 of the OxLEP transition.
- The view that there was a need to consider opportunities to reduce road freight traffic that East West Rail could potentially offer and the electrification of the line.

72. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 3 2023/2024

The Partnership considered a report which provided an update of progress and spend for schemes included as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as at the end of Quarter 3 2023/2024 including the Housing from Infrastructure, (HfI) programme and the Net Capacity Fund. Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report and highlighted:

- Estimated spend for 2023/2024 was estimated to be £21.1m with a further £54.1m to be spent in 2024/2025.
- To maximise the use of grant funding against the overall programme, the programme was currently over profiled by £1.6m and the Partnership's attention was drawn to Section 6 of the report which set out how risks to the programme were to be managed.
- Since the previous update, construction had commenced on the Benson Relief Road, Wantage Eastern Link Road, Kidlington Roundabout and Banbury Road Bicester Roundabout.

RESOLVED: That the financial position of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as at end of December 2023 be noted.

73. Local Enterprise Partnership Functions: Transition Arrangements

The Partnership considered a paper which set out an overview of the planned approach to the transition of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP). Chloe Taylor, Head of Economy, Oxfordshire County Council presented the report.

- As of 1 April, central government funding for local enterprise partnerships would cease and the functions of OxLEP would transfer to the County Council.
- A revised governance model for OxLEP was to be put in place with the County Council taking a controlling interest following a decision by the OxLEP Board to amend their Articles of Association. This was intended to preserve engagement at Board level and the retention of expertise within the current organisation.
- The transition was to be split into three phases with the transfer of the controlling interest in April followed by further implementation work up to end of September 2024 and implementation of a new medium-term business plan, revised operating model, structure and final governance to come into place by 31 March 2025.
- There would be opportunities working alongside the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to review the local economic framework and it was intended to develop a Memorandum of Understanding, between the Partnership, OXLEP and the Oxfordshire local authorities that would guide the transition.

Professor Alistair Fitt as Chair of OxLEP confirmed the OxLEP Board had at its meeting on 12 March 2024 made the decision to amend its Articles of Association which had required a special resolution and formal governance changes required to enact this changed were in progress. He added that he and Nigel Tipple, OxLEP Chief Executive had spoken to all its employees to inform them of next steps, and he reported that there had been a positive mood.

In discussion, a number of members of the Partnership referred to the positive relationship their councils and organisations had enjoyed with OxLEP, particularly around strategic economic planning and economic development which they expected would continue under the revised governance arrangements and paid tribute to OxLEP staff for their service.

RESOLVED: That the approach to OxLEP transition be noted by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

74. Advisory Group updates

(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

Councillor Liz Leffman referred to the notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 17 January 2024 as circulated and verbally updated the Partnership in respect of the meeting held on 12 March 2024

Both meetings had included items about local area energy planning with support for the principle of establishing an Oxfordshire wide Local Area Energy Plan approach. Councillor Leffman referred to the recognised significant energy issues across the county related to electricity grid capacity which was delaying infrastructure such as solar farms and major housing sites from being delivered. It was expected that a formal item on local area energy planning would be brought to the Partnership's June meeting.

The Partnership was informed that Oxfordshire County Council had been successful in securing some £3.55m of funding towards the delivery of micro hubs for electric vehicle

charging across the county. A range of stakeholders including parish and town councils, district councils and voluntary sector organisations had been canvassed for them to express interest in such hubs and Councillor Leffman was please to report that there had been a good response. This would increase the number of charging points across the county.

Councillor Susan Brown commented that in her capacity as Chair of the Fast Growth Cities Group, there had been lobbying around lack of electricity grid capacity and connection as this was a common shared issue. The need for greater water resilience was another issue that was becoming apparent, and every effort was being made to raise both problems up the national political agenda given the impact on communities, housing, and the economy.

Councillor Duncan Enright referred to the impact of lack of grid connectivity within his own area and suggested that OxLEP could be an important voice for business. He also suggested that as many as possible of the electric vehicle hubs should be rapid chargers.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

(b) Planning Advisory Group update

Giles Hughes, Senior Responsible Officer for the Planning Advisory Group referred to the notes of the meeting held on 15 December 2023 and provided a verbal update on the Group's meeting on 15 March 2024.

The Partnership was informed that the advisory group's main focus of discussion had been around developer challenges on the grounds of economic viability which affected the role of all the local councils through Section 106 legal agreements, Community Infrastructure Levy and Local Plan review etc. This was relevant to the objectives of the councils individually and through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on issues such as affordable housing, infrastructure, and biodiversity net gain. The work has focused on how the councils might assist one another at an operational level by the sharing of best practice.

In addition the advisory group had been updated on the recent High Court judgement relating to the [Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan](#) which was felt to be positive generally in reaffirming that councils were not restricted to standards within national building regulations and had the decision making ability to set higher standards potentially open to them.

At the Group's next meeting in July 2024, it was intended to focus upon improving planning for future health Infrastructure so that councils in seeking to plan for health infrastructure were informed by most up to date models of care that the health sector felt would be operating so that the issue could be considered on full system basis. This recognised the significant challenges in delivering new health infrastructure where expansion of existing provision was not sufficient.

The Chair comment that improving the delivery of health estate infrastructure was an ongoing issue of concern and suggested that as well as including representatives of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Integrated Care Board, it might also be useful to invite representatives of the various Oxfordshire health care providers.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

(c) Environment Advisory Group update

Councillor David Rouane referred to the notes of the meeting of the Environmental Advisory Group held on 18 January 2024 and highlighted the discussion around the benefits to public health of access to green space.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

75. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan

Kevin Jacob, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Democratic Services Officer introduced the Forward Programme as set out in the agenda.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Programme be agreed.

76. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

No matters were raised under this heading.

77. Updates from key strategic partnerships supporting delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision

Oxford to Cambridge Arc Universities Group

Professor Alistair Fitt updated the meeting on the recent meetings, events and activities of the Arc Universities Group. He highlighted that an emerging theme was the level of coherence and vigour between organisations across the geography of the Arc including England's Economic Heartland, East West Rail, the Pan Regional Partnership, the Super Cluster Board, and the Arc Universities Group in seeking to move forward together. This was compatible with the understanding that the current government preferred working with the organisations collectively than as individual organisations.

Professor Fitt commented that government funding for the Pan Regional Partnership was currently due to end in the relative short term, but the next stage in his view would be for the five organisations listed to decide how their shared objectives could be taken forward together. The Chair referred to the overlap between the various bodies and the need to work together to produce the best results.

England's Economic Heartland

Councillor Liz Leffman provided an update on recent England's Economic Heartland, (EEH) meetings. It was highlighted that:

- England's Economic Heartland was a regional level body, but lots of its activities and areas of focus were linked to matters linked to Oxfordshire.
- Improvements to bus travel – following a bus symposium the EEH had undertaken further work about different delivery models including the feasibility of bringing buses into public ownership or establishing a different type of relationship with bus operators. This was work which the Partnership and Oxfordshire County Council could make full use of relating to improvements to services in rural locations.
- Mobility Hubs – work sponsored by EEH on how rail transport, Active Travel, bus transport etc could be brought together to offer alternatives to car use.

- Exploring the links between mobility hub work by EEH and East West Rail Door to Door Connectivity Strategy.
- Improvements to rail connectivity – a pilot service linking Oxford, Swindon and Bristol was due to start in September 2024. As this route intersected the area of the county known as the ‘Science Vale’ it was hoped that the opening of the route might help with other ongoing feasibility work to look at developing a station at Grove, the Cowley Branch Line and provision of mobility hubs. It was also hoped that eventually connectivity would be improved across the entire Oxford to Cambridge geography building on East West Rail.
- North Cotswold Line – this was now included within EEH’s considerations to see how that line might be developed.

In discussion, members of the Partnership commented that it was encouraging to hear of the work being done to improve rail connectivity, enhanced rail, and mobility hubs.

Local Nature Partnership

Councillor David Rouane provided an update on the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership. He highlighted that a key area of focus and consideration was the ongoing work being led by Oxfordshire County Council to develop a [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#). Partnership members were asked to do all they could to promote the public consultation on the draft strategy which was due to close at the end of March.

UKREiiF

The Chair referred to the [UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum](#) which was due to take place 21-23 May. The forum was a government sponsored event which several bodies connected to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership would be attending. It was expected that issues such as electricity grid constraints would be raised along with sessions on green finance and the placing of nature at the centre of master planning.

78. Dates of next meetings

RESOLVED: That the dates of the proposed meetings from June 2024 to June 2025 be noted.

The meeting closed at 2.45 pm