

# Minutes

## OF A MEETING OF THE



# The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON TUESDAY 30 JULY 2024 AT 2.00 PM

MEETING ROOMS 2-3, COUNTY HALL, NEW ROAD, OXFORD, OX1 1ND

### Present:

**Members:** Councillor Liz Leffman (Chair), (Oxfordshire County Council), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (OxLEP Chair), Councillor Andy Graham, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor David Hingley, (Cherwell District Council), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business rep), Julia Krause, (Homes England), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business rep), Councillor David Rouane, (South Oxfordshire District Council), and Councillor Bethia Thomas, (Vale of White Horse District Council).

**Officers:** Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Becky Chesshyre, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Chloe Edwards, (Oxfordshire County Council), Sarah Gilbert, (Oxfordshire County Council), Susan Harbour, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, Future Oxfordshire Partnership, Amber Lyford (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Babatunde Ogundele (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Martin Reeves (Oxfordshire County Council), Mark Saunders, (Oxfordshire County Council), Paul Staines (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Nigel Tipple (OxLEP), Mish Tullar (Oxford City Council), Matt Whitney, (Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership) and Kathy Wilcox, (Oxfordshire County Council)

**Other councillors:** Councillor Barry Wood, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

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

## 1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for the 2024/2025 year

Kevin Jacob, Senior Democratic Services Officer for the Future Oxfordshire Partnership opened the meeting and welcomed those present before calling for nominations for the office of Chair.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed Councillor Liz Leffman as Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership for the year 2024/2025 and this was seconded by Councillor Susan Brown. There being no other nominations, this was confirmed by the voting members of the Partnership.

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Liz Leffman be elected as Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership for the 2024/2025 year.

Councillor Leffman took the Chair at this point and proposed that Councillor David Rouane be elected as Vice-Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership for the 2024/2025 year, and this was seconded by Councillor Bethia Thomas. There being no other nominations, this was confirmed by the voting members of the Partnership.

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor David Rouane be elected as Vice-Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership for the 2024/2025 year.

Councillor Leffman paid tribute to Councillor Susan Brown for her chairing of the Partnership over the previous year.

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

Apologies for absence were submitted from Professor Alex Betts.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair referred to the tragic events that had taken place in Southport the previous day and the loss of life of three girls. Members of the Partnership joined with the Chair in expressing their deepest condolences to all those involved.

The Chair added that she wished to alter the order of the agenda to consider Item 15: Oxfordshire Local Area Energy Plan – Outline Business Case after Item 5: Report of the Scrutiny Panel. This was agreed.

## **3. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting subject to noting that Professor Alex Betts was representing the University of Oxford individually and was not representing both the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University. It was agreed that this should be corrected on future agendas and minutes.

## **4. Public participation**

It was noted that no requests for public speaking had been received by the deadline for requests, but that an email to Kevin Jacob and various elected members from Councillor Parker, Chairman of Shirburn Parish Council had been received shortly before meeting. This related to the Watlington Relief Road scheme within the Housing from Infrastructure Programme referred to in item 8: Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update as at the end of Quarter 4 2023/2024 and a question asked by Shirburn Parish Council to the Scrutiny Panel on 23 July 2024.

It was agreed that the letter should be referred to when the substantive agenda item was discussed.

## 5. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

Councillor Barry Wood, Chair of the Scrutiny Panel presented [the Panel's report to the Partnership as circulated.](#)

## 6. Oxfordshire Local Area Energy Plan - Outline business case

The Partnership considered a report which referenced the final version of the Oxfordshire Local Area Energy Plan, (OxLAEP) Programme Scope and which presented the OxLAEP Outline Business Case, (OBC). Mark Saunders, Energy Systems and Investment Manager, Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report and gave a [presentation summarising key points.](#)

It was noted that the FOP was being asked to consider four possible options with Option Four as detailed on agenda page 59 the recommended decision. This was for full development of the OxLAEP programme and ongoing LAEP function including the suggested mitigations related to district council resource requirements and approval by the FOP of an addition £450,000 of funding in addition to the £150,000 previously approved.

Councillor David Rouane and Councillor Bethia Thomas commented that local area energy planning was a very useful and important piece of work, but it was right that the proposals within the report had recognised the resourcing issues faced by district councils in supporting the LAEP which could potentially occur at the same time as the Local Plan inspection process in the case of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. In this context the ability for district councils to take a staged approach was welcomed and it acknowledged that the development of the proposals had been a collaborative process.

Councillor David Hingley commented on the importance of energy planning to all the district councils in Oxfordshire and that he had been pleased to see the level of thought given to seeking to address the issue within the report. He supported the previous comments that from a district council perspective it was important to avoid a situation where costs of taking part outweighed the benefits. It was positive that additional sources of external funding to support the LAEP continued to be explored.

Nigel Tipple commented that on behalf of the Oxfordshire system, OxLEP was shortly to begin commissioning of a piece of work to look at green investment opportunities which could potentially align with timing of the wider LAEP process.

The Chair referred to the discussion of the proposals at the Infrastructure Advisory Group and involvement of a wide group of members and to the issues facing some developments in accessing electricity grid connections which would continue to need to be raised with HM Government. The proposals were an important part of moving to Net Zero.

In response to a question from Councillor Andy Graham, Andrew Down Future Oxfordshire Director confirmed that if agreed by the Partnership, the additional £450,000 requested would be funded from the Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Fund.

Councillor Graham also queried whether consideration had been given to the impact of the districts undertaking their Local Plan processes at different dates and stages on the overall LAEP process given the limited resources of the districts. In response, Mark Saunders indicated that it was felt to be possible for a stage gated process to be followed by the

district councils in the development of the LAEP, but that this would be tested as part of the consultant procurement process. It was also confirmed that it was necessary to seek approval for the release of the full £450,000 now rather than instalments.

Councillor Susan Brown referred ongoing issues with the electricity grid and capacity within Oxfordshire which acted as a constraint on the County's ability to grow. The cost of energy to domestic users was another important issue and therefore anything that could be done as part of the LAEP process to mitigate costs for users was to be welcomed.

In response to a question, Mark Saunders comment that creation of a LAEP would create a baseline around energy in the county based on current information and plans in place, but it would also look at future plans. LAEP sat alongside local spatial planning policy and both the LAEP and Local Plan processed would inform the other over different iterations.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That Option Four of the LAEP Outline Business Case be approved including the suggested mitigations related to district council resource requirements.
2. That £450,000 of additional Housing and Growth Deal funding be allocated to the project.

## **7. Initial verbal update on Future Oxfordshire Partnership Futures local authority leaders' summit**

The Chair provided an initial verbal update on the discussion held by the Leaders of the Partnership's local authorities on the future of the Partnership held on 29 July 2024.

It was noted that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, under its previous title of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, had originally been established in 2014 to facilitate and manage the Oxford and Oxfordshire City Deal and then later the 2018 Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal which would come to an end in March 2025. At this point it was felt appropriate to discuss a full refresh of the Partnership and its operation, including how collaboration between partners could be taken forward in the future. It was stressed that no decisions had been taken and further work and discussions would need to take place before any proposals were considered formerly, but it was intended to bring a paper to the Partnership's next meeting.

The Chair then summarised her personal observations on the discussion before inviting the other council leaders to do so.

- Two main areas had been subject of discussion – the role of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and its future governance structures including whether the current advisory groups were still needed and in relation to this, the announcements made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government around opportunities for the potential devolution of powers to councils.
- There had been a general willingness to work together and to seek to find ways to continue to make the Partnership relevant.
- That there was in principle support for the devolution of powers to the councils linked to the Partnership as a collaborative body and to look at how that might be taken forward, acknowledging that currently it was unclear what HM Government's offer might be.

- There was support for avoiding duplication.
- There was support for tackling inequalities and promoting inclusivity within the Oxfordshire economy.

Councillor Andy Graham commented that whilst no decisions had been made there had been a fruitful and productive discussion around the areas and issues that the councils had in common which had included starting to explore the areas where a strategic approach could be mutually beneficial. In his opinion, there were potential exciting opportunities around issues such as strategic infrastructure which might inform a future programme of work. Change was on the way, and it was intended that this should be focussed and deliverable so that all residents benefitted as a result, without adversely affecting individual councils' sovereignty.

Councillor Bethia Thomas expressed her appreciation for the discussion, noting that it had been an informal discussion and no decisions had been taken. She stated that it was important for the Partnership to be restructured to provide better value for money for all partners and residents by focussing on areas where collaborative working would be most helpful and produce impacts across Oxfordshire. Membership should also follow a streamlined model.

It was clarified that following the discussion, officers from Oxfordshire County Council would be working on the outputs of the discussion with a view to taking a paper through the Partnership's Executive Officer Group and local authority Chief Executives.

Councillor David Hingley stated that as a new leader he had found the discussion to be very useful and he had been pleased to see a broad consensus that the work of the Partnership should continue in some form to work together at a strategic level when appropriate to do so. He also welcomed updating the Partnership to make it fit for purpose.

Councillor David Rouane commented that it was important to be cognisant the Partnership had been created to undertake a specific function which was no longer the case, or which was taking place in other bodies. Therefore, it was important to be clear now what the Partnership's future role and objectives should be and how the authorities would decide what to work together on.

Councillor Susan Brown commented that the Oxfordshire Growth Board, as it then was then known, had originally been established partially to facilitate and produce what would become the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. From its start it had all been around partnership working on the basis that more could be achieved working together than individually with the aim of trying to get powers devolved into Oxfordshire and to secure funds for the county to the benefit of all residents. Whilst there had been several previous iterations and a name change, it was right that as the Housing and Growth Deal concluded a new review was undertaken. There had been many points of agreement in the discussion and so she felt that it could be possible to get another good deal for the residents of Oxfordshire, which was important given the challenges the county faced, particularly with regards to infrastructure.

Professor Alistair Fitt stated that he agreed that the Partnership was no longer undertaking what it had originally been created to do, but that it was important to recognise the value and convening power of the Partnership. Prior to its establishment there hadn't really been a similar body in which partners worked together. This had developed over time.

The Chair concluded by reiterating that it was intended to bring a paper to the next meeting.

## **8. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Appointments 2024-2025**

The Chair commented that pending the outcome of the review of the Partnership's future it was proposed that appointment of advisory group chairs take place, but that the advisory groups only meet when it was considered there was a benefit to do so.

With regard to the appointment of a representative to the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership, (PRP) the Chair commented that normally the Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership attended those meetings, but that she sat on the PRP in a different capacity, and it was not possible to appoint the current Vice-Chair. This appointment would be deferred for further discussion.

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the following Future Oxfordshire related appointments be made for the 2024/2025 year:
  - a) Housing Advisory Group – Councillor Susan Brown
  - b) Environment Advisory Group – Councillor David Rouane
  - c) Infrastructure Advisory Group – Councillor Liz Leffman
  - d) Planning Advisory Group – Councillor Andy Graham
2. That an appointment of a representative to the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership be deferred.
3. That Councillor David Rouane be appointed as the Partnership's districts representative on England's Economic Heartland.
4. That it be noted that Councillor David Rouane continues to be appointed to Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership by virtue of his position as Chair of the Environmental Advisory Group.

## **9. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 4 2023/24**

The Partnership considered a report which provided an update on progress and spend for the remaining programmes included as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of Quarter 4, 2023/2024. Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report to the meeting and highlighted the following matters:

- The Housing from Infrastructure, (HfI) Grant and Housing and Growth Deal Net Capacity Fund remained.
- Oxfordshire County Council was the responsible and accountable body for the two remaining programmes. It was also responsible under the terms of the agreement signed with HM Government in 2022 for taking all decisions on the allocation of the remaining HfI grant funding, in consultation with other partners. It also held all the risk associated with the programme.

- Hfl expenditure as of the Quarter 4 was £20.5m, taking overall spend up to £86.5m.
- To utilise all the remaining grant budget, a further £56.3m would need to be spent during the 2024/2025 financial year. Due to this tight deadline, Hfl funding had been prioritised towards schemes entering the construction phase that could meet the deadline and which had other sources of funding that could be utilised after the deadline.
  - The overall Hfl programme remained over profiled by £1.6m against available grant funding with the aim of maximising the use of funding by the deadline.
  - Paragraphs 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 of the report set out details in respect of ongoing schemes under construction or where construction contracts had been agreed. A correction was noted to para 3.2.3 in that construction for Abingdon Lodge Hill was anticipated to begin in October 2024 and Steventon lights in October 2024.
  - It was important that the remaining schemes entered the construction phase as soon as possible.
  - Other funding sources including S106 funds would be utilised to complete schemes beyond March 2025.
  - Remaining recycled funds were £26.2m which had to be utilised before the final £30m of grant funding could be requested which meant the allocation would need to be claimed retrospectively.
  - A planning decision on the Watlington Relief Road scheme was expected later in 2024, potentially in October or November. Work was ongoing to assess the impact of this on the Housing and Growth deal funding and the ongoing deliverability of the scheme, considering the need to maximise use of grant funding by March 2025.
  - An update on schemes that would be funded from the Housing and Growth Deal element would be included in the Quarter 1, 2024/2025 report to the Partnership.
  - The total original Housing and Growth Deal Net Capacity budget had been £5m. Up to Quarter 4 spend in 2023/2024 had been £115,000 with a total of £1.2m of the budget remaining. It was expected that this budget would be nearly completely utilised if all of the anticipated business cases for use of the funds were agreed.

The Chair referred to the representation submitted from Shirburn Parish Council in respect of the Watlington Relief Road, (WRR). Kevin Jacob responded that the letter referred back to a question asked by the parish council to the Scrutiny Panel and also expressed concerns about the relief road scheme relating to the planning application and appointment of contractors. He suggested that a written response be given.

**RESOLVED:** That the financial position of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as at Quarter 4 2023/2024 be noted.

## 10. Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Update Report

The Partnership considered a report setting out an update on the progress of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, (OIEP). Jeremy Long, Co-Chair of the OIEP provided a detailed summary against each of the OIEP's priorities of:

- Educational attainment focussing on early years education and support.
- Inclusive Economy focussing on both employees and employers.
- Social value and procurement focussing on increasing the amount of money that was spent in Oxfordshire for the benefit of Oxfordshire's residents.
- Place shaping focussing on investing in the localities within Oxfordshire that needed it most.

The OIEP was grateful for the support of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership towards its officers but there was still more it could do if its support was further augmented.

In discussion, members of the Partnership paid tribute to the important work the OIEP was undertaking.

Councillor Andy Graham commented on the importance of officers within the different councils being fully connected and integrated into the OIEP's work and activity if the potential of the OIEP was to be fully realised. He asked how integration and connectivity around the OIEP could be more formally strengthened within councils to achieve the impact needed.

Councillor Graham also commented on the importance of work to support refugees into employment as being vital in assisting individuals to reach their full human potential and asked whether the OIEP could also play a wider role and a route to national government in promoting the welfare of refugees on a range of issues including claiming asylum, homes and housing.

The Chair referred to the applications of the County Council, Oxford City Council, and the universities to become places of sanctuary. A collective and collaborate effort would be required. Attention was draw to the mentoring scheme of Refugee Resource.

Jeremy Long responded that he would take these points back for consideration. He stressed that it was not the aim of the OIEP to lead the refugee response, but that it was seeking to highlight opportunities for training programmes that had worked elsewhere, and which might not otherwise have been brought into Oxfordshire. It was also seeking to promote the capabilities of refugees and other minorities to employers in a similar way as it had done with prison leavers.

Nigel Tipple supported these points and outlined the support and work that OxLEP was doing around the social contract which included mobilising practical IT support for refugees such as laptops and mobile phones. It was also working with partners such as [Sofea](#).

Councillor David Rouane referred to the aspiration of local authority leaders for the Oxfordshire economy to be more fairly distributed between the areas of great wealth and deprivation. The OIEP was playing an important role in assisting communities that had previously been left behind to become a greater part of the main economy.

**RESOLVED:** That the update report of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership be noted.

## **11. Update on the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

The Partnership considered a report which set out an update on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, (LNRS) and plans for public consultation. Chloe Edwards, Local Nature Recovery Strategy Project Manager, Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report and [gave a presentation highlighting progress against its five steps](#) and Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager also responded to questions.



In discussion, members of the Partnership thanked officers for the presentation and commented that action on nature recovery through the LNRS was critical for the county. Leaders commented they looked forward to their councils responding as part of the process and could potentially help with promoting the consultation through their own council websites.

It was suggested that further information on the relevant timelines and deliverable outcomes as part of the consultation would be useful. In response Matt Whitney commented that it was fully recognised that there was a need to deliver real outcomes from the LNRS. Unfortunately, HM Government had not yet allocated any additional resources for the LNRS delivery, but the Local Nature Partnership was working to facilitate and coordinate action on nature recovery alongside a wide range of individuals and organisations. The Local Nature Partnership Forum on 23 October 2024 would also discuss and try to find ideas as to how positive outcomes might be delivered.

The Chair stated that it was important to consider the deliverability of the LNRS, recognising that a lot of work and innovative nature recovery actions were already being developed and implemented by independent groups and parish councils etc. Councillors could potentially help link the LNRS consultation into these groups. Officers responded that they were working with these types of groups including farm clusters, schools, and parish councils.

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

## **12. Advisory Group updates**

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

**RESOLVED:** That the update from the meetings of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 12 March 2024 and 6 June 2024 be noted.

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

**RESOLVED:** That the update from the meeting of the Planning Advisory Group held on 15 March 2024 be noted

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

The Partnership considered its Forward Plan as set out in the agenda. The Chair reminded the meeting that there could be changes to the programme in the longer term to reflect the discussions taking place on the Partnership's future and that an item should be added to the next Partnership meeting on the review process and discussions.

Robin Rogers referred to the planned joint session of the Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board on 20 November 2024.

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

No matters were raised under this heading.

## **15. Updates from key strategic partnerships supporting delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

Professor Alistair Fitt referred to the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership, (PRP) and commented that a key issue was the securing of funding for the future. The new Government had yet to make any specific announcements regarding the PRP.

Councillor Susan Brown commented that she was taking every opportunity to try and raised the profile of the PRP with HM Government and to try to obtain specific assurances about the future, but in general terms she did feel that the government recognised the value of pan regional partnerships and their potential to positively influence issues as such as inclusive and environmental economic growth, skills and innovation.

The Chair provided an update on recent meetings of England's Economic Heartland. It was noted that the new Managing Director of East West Rail had attended the most recent meeting and there had been some uncertainty around future HM Government funding for the programme in the light of recent government announcements. Work by EEH on rail network corridor studies was going well.

A recent success had been the restoration of services between Oxford and Bristol which could also open up the possibility of the reinstating Wantage and Grove Station. Discussion was also taking place regarding the North Cotswold line which at the present was single tracked considering the status of Worcester Parkway as a strategic housing site and to encourage non car travel. Lobbying of HM Government was also continuing with regard to the electrification of the Didcot to Oxford line.

## **16. Dates of next meetings**

The dates of future meetings as set out in the agenda.

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm