

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 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), Councillor Andy Graham, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Councillor David Hingley, (Cherwell District Council), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business rep), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business rep), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business rep), Councillor David Rouane, (South Oxfordshire District Council) and Councillor Bethia Thomas, (Vale of White Horse District Council).

Officers: Lorna Baxter (Oxfordshire County Council), Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Becky Chesshyre, Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Valerie Lambrechts, (Oxfordshire County Council), Martin Reeves (Oxfordshire County Council), Mark Stone, (South Oxfordshire and Vale District Councils) and Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)

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

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

Apologies for absence were submitted from Professor Alex Betts, Professor Alistair Fitt and Julia Krause.

There were no declarations of interest.

31. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

32. Public participation

There were three representations from members of the public. [The full text of the representations is available here, but a summary is set out below:](#)

Ian Green on behalf of the Oxford Civic Society made an address in which he asked three questions:

- 1) Did the Future Oxfordshire Partnership agree that the proposed reset was premature, (and as proposed flawed) because of current unknowns around strategic planning and that the granting of decision-making powers without scrutiny oversight would not be right?
- 2) Was the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, as currently set up, not ideally suited to address the imminent Planning and Infrastructure Bill and Devolution White Paper? This was on the grounds that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill was expected to introduce strategic inter authority planning and a strengthened Duty to Cooperate which in the opinion of the Civic Society would be of benefit to Oxfordshire and essential for planning for longer term infrastructure beyond Local Plan horizons. The Devolution White Paper might include proposals around local government reorganisation which the Partnership was well placed to consider.
- 3) Should the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (in whatever form), be better orientated towards public debate, bearing in mind the anticipated challenges of the Bill and White Paper, as current arrangements for public discussion of strategic issues being considered by the Partnership was considered to be inadequate. This included the recent expression of interest by the Oxfordshire local authorities to HM Government around exploring devolution options.

In light of these issues, the recommendation of the Oxford Civic Society was that the recommendations set out in the Partnership Reset report not be agreed.

In the absence of Councillor Katherine Foxhall, Kevin Jacob read out an address to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in her capacity as Co-Chair of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' Joint Scrutiny Committee and personally, as a member of Vale of White Horse District Council.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee had recommended to the Leaders of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils that:

- 1) The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Partnership be limited to where the Partnership adds value and to avoid duplication. Devolution, Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP), PAZCO, and the use of task and finish groups for other areas were suggested as areas where the FOP can add value.
- 2) The [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision](#) must be front and centre as the democratic basis of any future iteration of the Partnership. Thematic Priorities must derive from delivery of aims of this Vision.
- 3) There must be more clarity on accountability, transparency and scrutiny. It was noted that Partnership Scrutiny members were also worried about the lack of reference to

scrutiny in the Reset paper, particularly if the Partnership is to have some powers delegated to it. Any powers must have equally weighted scrutiny.

- 4) Leaders of Councils should be in charge of the work programme and ensure real results, delivery of priorities and added value.
- 5) South and Vale Joint Scrutiny are very concerned about majority voting remaining in the Terms of Reference, rather than consensus.
- 6) If less work is being carried out by the Partnership, there should be less cost to member councils of the Partnership.

In her personal capacity as a member of Vale of White Horse District Council Councillor Foxhall added that Leaders needed to justify what the very clearly what the Partnership was for and that it should be democratic, transparent and accountable. Otherwise, there was the risk it would be regarded as funnelling resources towards a talking shop of the Leaders without any attempt to consider if was necessary or if resources could be better used elsewhere.

In the absence of Councillor Sarah James, Kevin Jacob read out an address to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in her capacity as member of the Vale of White Horse District Council.

Councillor James set out that her overall impression having listened to the deliberations of the Partnership's Scrutiny Panel was that there was confusion and contradiction regarding the current nature and powers of the Partnership, let alone the proposed reset and drew attention to what she regarded as responses that could be regarded as being contradictory around the Partnership's current powers to take decisions from Councillor Leffman and Councillor Thomas.

A concern was that the Partnership's purpose, areas of responsibility and responsibility are poorly defined and that the Scrutiny Panel has struggled to find a clear and effective role. This mattered because Partnership required resources to maintain it, either directly or indirectly and therefore it was important to examine what worked well and represented value for money and what duplication, distraction or even hindrance to the work of the councils individually.

Considering the discussions of the Panel, which had not given her a sense of confidence, there was a need for Leaders to have open and frank discussion of the expectations and aims of all partners so these could be understood.

33. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

The Chair welcomed Councillor Barry Wood, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Scrutiny Panel to the meeting in order to present [his report and the formal recommendations of the Panel](#).

Councillor Wood referred to the formal recommendations which had been circulated to Partnership members and thanked Councillor Leffman for her attendance and taking part in the Panel's discussion on the Partnership Reset report which had enabled a number of initial misunderstandings to be clarified.

In support of the Panel's recommendations, he wished to highlight that:

- In the Panel's view it was very important that whatever its title, the successor to the Partnership continued to reflect the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
- Consideration should be given to what appropriate inward investment into the county would look like and that this had to be sustainable, taking account of the need to replace fading industries with emerging ones.
- Clarity on governance arrangements linked to HM Government's Devolution White Paper and potential local government reorganisation, (although it was acknowledged by the Panel this could not be done prior to publication of the White Paper).
- It was assumed by the Panel that if a statutory joint committee was formed with its own delegated decision-making powers that a formally constituted overview and scrutiny committee would be required to hold it to account.

The Chair thanked Councillor Wood for his report and commented that she had found it to be a lively meeting. She commented that the Panel's recommendations and the representations made by the public speakers would be considered by Partnership members as part of the consideration of the reset report.

34. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Reset

The Partnership considered a report that summarised recent discussions about the future purpose of partnership working in Oxfordshire and which presented an interim position. The Partnership was recommended to endorse the proposed powers, purposes, priorities and steps set out in the report, and to request that officers develop the plans in more detail along with revised terms of reference.

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director introduced the report and highlighted that the paper was an attempt to reflect the direction of conversations around the future of the Partnership to date and it was not at this stage trying to set out a definitive set of proposals for the way forward. It was intended that Partnership members should have a discussion around the elements of the paper that should be taken forward to enable officers to develop the next level of detail.

The reasons why a reset was necessary had been expressed before, but included expected announcements around devolution which Oxfordshire needed to be able to engage with and the winding down of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal which meant that the governance arrangements put in place to support that would no longer be needed or continue to be appropriate.

Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, Oxfordshire County Council added that one of the purposes of the paper and work more generally, was to seek to position Oxfordshire as a county in the best possible position to be able to react to and engage with HM Government's emerging agenda.

In discussion, various members of the Partnership commented that the paper was a good starting point and an opportunity to set out a new democratic vision for Oxfordshire. There was a need to change without delay, notwithstanding that many uncertainties around the Government's policy direction remained.

Taking the development of the amended terms of reference forward there was a need, considering the concerns of the Scrutiny Panel and others, to recognise the need for clarity

as soon as possible around what the proportionate level of overview and scrutiny of the new joint committee should be. This should be closely linked to the role and the nature of whatever powers might be delegated to the joint committee.

It was also accepted that there was a need to move forward with a more strategic, streamlined approach and for the revised committee to offer strong strategic leadership for the county by the Leaders setting the joint committee's agenda and forward programme. As part of the terms of reference there was therefore a need to develop a mechanism for this.

A range of views was expressed with regards to the decision-making process of the new joint committee. Some Leaders expressed some concerns regarding a process of majority voting whereas others, whilst commenting that consensus should always be sought amongst them, felt that no one authority should be able to exercise an absolute veto if the decision was supported by the majority.

As Chair, Councillor Leffman commented that her observation of the comments of the Scrutiny Panel and public speakers was that there was concern around the decision-making process of the new joint committee and therefore there was a need for clarity in the terms of reference around whether decision making power would be granted to it. The purpose of the joint committee should be to add value to what councils were doing individually at a strategic level by acting collectively where it made sense to do so. Initiatives such as local area energy planning and around the pathway to Net Zero were important and should continue and partnerships such as the Local Nature Partnership and Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership also needed ongoing support.

Councillor Leffman also paid tribute to the valuable and insightful contributions made to the Partnership and its work by the non-voting representatives of various partner organisations.

In response to a question, Andrew Down commented that it would not be possible to immediately move formally to a reconstituted joint committee at the next meeting, because changes to the terms of reference had to be agreed first by the individual local councils through their own democratic decision-making arrangements. However, officers could commit to bring proposed terms of reference to the January 2025 meeting for Leaders to consider agreeing to recommend the terms of reference to their councils for adoption.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed powers, purposes, priorities and steps as set out in the report be endorsed.
2. That officers be requested to develop the plans in more detail along with revised terms of reference for consideration at the 28 January meeting.

35. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 2 2024/2025

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 Quarter 2, 2024/2025. Lorna Baxter, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of

Resources, and Valerie Lambrechts, Infrastructure Portfolio Manager, Oxfordshire County Council presented the report.

It was noted around a quarter of a financial year remained before all the remaining Housing and Growth Deal funding from the Housing from Infrastructure, (Hfi) programme needed to be committed, but it was expected that the programme would be delivered by financial year end.

Recently completed Hfi schemes included the new Kidlington roundabout, Wantage Eastern Link Road and Benson Relief Road. Schemes in construction and on target for delivery by 25 February 2025 included the Banbury Road roundabout, the Woodstock Road corridor, Banbury Road roundabout (Bicester) and Tramway Road. Contracts had been agreed for Abingdon, Lodge Hill and Steventon lights.

RESOLVED: That the financial position as of end of September 2024 be noted.

36. Enabling Community Led Housing; approval of Business Case

The Partnership considered a covering report and attached business case seeking approval for a project to commission Community First Oxfordshire to provide an enabling service to Oxfordshire residents who are interested in the development of Community Led Housing, (CLH) and use of £38,000 of Housing and Growth Deal funding to support the service.

Paul Staines, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Programme Manager presented the report and addressed Partnership member questions. He highlighted that:

- Community Led Housing support via Community First Oxfordshire was an initiative already collectively promoted and supported by the councils in Oxfordshire and its promotion was referenced in several local plans.
- The ask for additional funding was to enable more proactive contact with local groups of residents to support them.
- There would not be additional ongoing resource requirements as existing project governance structures could be used and this would also facilitate the quick start up of the project.
- Community Led Housing was a generic term and could take a number of different forms including community land trusts, housing co-operatives, or a partnership with a housing association depending on the direction a local group wished. The support was intended for groups at their very earliest stages.
- Support for Community Led Housing had been one of the original stated objectives of the Housing and Growth Deal.

In discussion, Councillor Graham referred to the comments of the Scrutiny Panel with regarding to fostering community-led trusts/organizations in new (or possibly existing as well) developer-built estates where there was local interest, to look after e.g. green spaces instead of residents having to pay a management fee to a private company. In response, members were informed the issue of the management of community led space was felt to more effectively considered as part of existing discussion between councils with developers, but community land trusts were one way of clearly defining ownership of areas of land.

It was also clarified that reference in the report to a £2,000 per annum grant was the amount currently paid by each council in support of the existing arrangement with Community First Oxfordshire and it was currently expected this would continue.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Community Led Housing Business Case, attached at Appendix 1 of this report be agreed.
2. That £38,000 of Housing and Growth Deal Net Capacity Fund to fund the implementation of the business case be agreed.

37. Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, (NZRMAP) Annual Report

The Partnership considered a report which provided an update on the steps taken to operationalise the actions agreed for inclusion in the first delivery phase of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, (NZRMAP) in March 2023. In addition, an update was provided on countywide greenhouse gas emissions. Sarah Gilbert, Head of Climate Action, Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report and gave a [presentation highlighting key points of progress around:](#)

- Building Decarbonisation
- Net Zero Energy
- Cross cutting actions
- Transport (Electric Vehicle Charge Points)
- Nature recovery and carbon sequestration

In discussion, members of the Partnership welcomed what was an important update which set out the breadth of the Net Zero agenda that all partners were seeking to implement and deliver.

Regarding charging points for electric vehicles, Councillor Susan Brown commented on the demand from residents in Oxford, but also residents across the whole county, for on street charging solutions where provision of off-street charging points was not possible and referred to the difficulties in taking this work forward because of procurement challenges. In her view, representations on the issue should be made to HM Government because it needed to understand the effect the restrictions on the roll out of EV charge points and the preferability of using local suppliers where it was appropriate to do so.

Councillor Andy Graham referred to the need to implement Net Zero programmes at scale and referred to the work being headed by the District Councils Network, (DCN) to develop a plan for retro fit across some 170 district areas. He suggested that the Partnership should align with this work to achieve a much roll out of retrofit measures.

In response to a question, Sarah Gilbert clarified that as referred to in para 20 of the report, £1.2m of retrofit initiatives had been delivered in the 2024/2025 financial year as of August 2024. The initial tranche of houses retrofitted had been delivered at an average cost of £15,000 whereas it was expected that the average costs of the second tranche of homes would be slightly lower average cost. A map of homes retrofitted across the county could be provided on request to show the geographical spread of delivery and it was

highlighted that funding for this scheme was aimed at properties not connected to the national gas grid.

Regarding the scaling up of retrofitting, a challenge existed around appropriately splitting roles. Experience so far tended to indicate that local retrofitting schemes operated more effectively than nationally led ones because of additional knowledge and connections of those that would benefit from retrofit locally, but it was a question of seeking to find the correct balance. She indicated that she would contact officers at West Oxfordshire District Council regarding the specific DCN initiative Councillor Graham had referred to.

Following further discussion of the procurement challenges around on-street EV charging points, there was support for the drafting of a letter on behalf of the Partnership to the relevant minister to seek their support for procurement regulation changes and officers were asked to consider this outside of the meeting.

Councillor David Rouane commented that because current environmental building standards did not go far enough, more new homes were still being completed every day that would require retrofitting in the future to meet Net Zero standard was far in excess of the number of older homes that had been retrofitted. Councillor Bethia Thomas highlighted the importance of retrofit training schemes and apprenticeships in order to deliver retrofitting schemes.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report and activity underway to implement the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan be noted.
2. That the countywide greenhouse gas emissions update be noted.

38. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual Report 2023/2024

The Partnership considered its Annual Report for 2023/2024 which provided an update on its work to deliver the nine outcomes of the [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development](#). Becky Chesshyre, Communications Coordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnerships introduced the report thanked various officers within the councils for their contributions to it.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual Report 2023/2024 be noted.

39. Planning Advisory Group Update

Councillor Andy Graham referred to the written notes of the Planning Advisory Group held on 13 September 2024. He commented that the notes set out:

- The significant concerns that members of the advisory group had expressed about planning for health infrastructure and the delivery of primary care health infrastructure across the county.
- The issues and challenges around planning for primary health care went much further than considerations of planning policy or development management, although there were linkages between subjects such as developer contributions for

primary health care and the way in which local NHS health infrastructure overall was funded by HM Government and delivered.

- It had been felt that the current arrangement was broke and not operating effectively with a lack of joined up thinking and strategy.
- There was an opportunity to lobby HM Government for its assistance in delivering facilities more locally and strategically if the Partnership could plan and act collectively.

In discussion, several Leaders referred to frustrations they had experienced of within their own authorities around weaknesses in historical engagement with the NHS regarding strategic planning for health infrastructure, (including understanding and engagement around Local Plan development at the appropriate time) and problems in the current delivery and funding arrangements for infrastructure such as GP surgeries.

Other members commented that in their view, strategic health infrastructure planning policy was not the principal problem and that the core blockers related to the prohibition of the Integrated Care Board to owning health infrastructure, with the status of GP surgeries as standalone private businesses as another contributing factor. In addition, existing GP surgeries were also not always located in the right places with over provision in some areas and under provision, (including areas of most need) in others.

Members also referred to the agreement at the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership, (ICP) of an Integrated Care Strategy which included consideration of GP surgeries, whilst acknowledging that practical delivery to residents was what mattered.

Councillor Graham suggested that the new joint committee consider the actions listed within the notes of the advisory group and that this also be factored into the development of the new joint committee's role and purpose.

The Chair suggested that given the issues did not appear to directly relate to matters within the direct remit of local authorities that the situation should also be raised at the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and the ICP.

40. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan

RESOLVED: That the Forward Programme be noted.

41. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

No updates were provided under this heading.

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

Councillor Graham reported that HM Government was undertaking a consultation on the continued funding of pan regional partnerships which would affect the future of the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership, (PRP). The PRP was due to hold a conference on 29 November 2024 which he and Councillor Brown would be attending.

Councillor Leffman commented that following recent meetings of England's Economic Heartland she was pleased to be able to say that HM Government had now approved

funding for East West Rail, but confirmation that trains could begin operating on the line in the second half of 2025 was still awaited. Existing diesel trains would be used initially, but the intention was to move to a system of discontinuous electrification in the future whereby trains ran on battery power along some of the line before switching back to electric power where this was available. Discussion was ongoing regarding the potential electrification of freight services.

Finally, the Partnership was informed of the Oxford to Midlands Rail Conference that was due to take place on 31 January 2025 which was intended to focus on the objective of electrifying the Oxfordshire rail network, the legacy of East West Rail on local communities and ways to improve the first mile/last mile of rail journeys.

43. Dates of next meetings

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

The meeting closed at 3.40 pm

Chairman

Date