

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON TUESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Andrew Gant (Chair), Councillor Brad Baines, Councillor Samantha Bowring, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor Peter Dragonetti, Councillor Victoria Haval, Councillor David Hughes, Councillor Dan Levy, Councillor Katherine Miles, Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley, Councillor Adam Nell, Councillor Lucy Pegg, Councillor Alex Postan, Councillor David Turner, Councillor Liam Walker and Councillor Sean Woodcock, (Vice-Chair).

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Giles Hughes	Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council
Susan Harbour	Strategic Partnerships Manager – South and Vale District Councils
Archie Martin	Interim Assistant Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Stefan Robinson	Manager – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Paul Staines	Interim Head of Programme - Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

Other councillors: Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader, Oxfordshire County Council

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

Councillors Bowring and Walker apologised that they would have to leave the meeting early due to other commitments. There were no declarations of interest and no substitutions.

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

38. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 September 2021 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

39. Public participation

The Scrutiny Panel received written questions from two public speakers.

Helen Marshall from the Campaign to Protect Rural England (Oxfordshire) asked who would be making the decisions on which direction the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 should take, on what basis would these decisions be taken, and how would this process be made transparent to the public.

The Chair invited Giles Hughes, Chief Executive of West Oxfordshire District Council and senior officer for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, to comment. He explained that the decision on the policies to guide development as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would be taken by the five local planning authorities (the City and the four district councils) with consideration of national planning policy. This would be taken through formal decisions when councils approve the draft Oxfordshire Plan 2050 for consultation, which is planned for July 2022.

The principal Oxfordshire Councils would work together to assess the options and to reach a common position through discussion ahead of those formal decisions. Any decision would be taken following Scrutiny Committee consideration at the Councils in the normal way. Decisions would be taken in accordance with all relevant access to information legislation, requiring for example, forward notice of decisions to be published.

The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the question and agreed that this question should also be put to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership meeting on 30 November 2021.

Suzanne McIvor, from Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, added to her written statement. She expressed concern regarding the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) that it was not concise and clear for the public. She expressed the view that the number of homes being proposed in the scenarios within the OGNA did not represent actual need, but instead unrealistic growth forecasts. A request was made to commission a peer review of the OGNA, its methods and underlying assumptions, and the impact this has had on the number of homes proposed. Suzanne asked whether the Scrutiny Panel would support calling for a peer review of the OGNA, and whether the Panel would ask the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to agree terms of reference with civic groups to commission a peer review.

Giles Hughes explained that officers were in the process of logging and analysing responses to the recent consultation, which were significant in number and very welcome. More work was needed to reflect on the totality of those responses before the next steps could be decided, such as whether to undertake a review of the OGNA. A paper was expected to be forthcoming in 2022 setting out next steps.

The Chair invited comments and a mixture of views were expressed. The meeting agreed to vote on whether the Panel should support the request for a peer review of the OGNA. The meeting voted in favour of supporting a review.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. explain who is going to make the decisions on which direction the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 should take, on what basis these decisions will be taken, and how this process will be transparent to the public.
2. initiate a peer review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment.

40. Update from Councillor Liz Leffman, Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Group and member of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Councillor Liz Leffman provided an update in her role as Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Group. She explained that the Infrastructure Advisory Group had received an update from England's Economic Heartland (EEH), covering issues including rail transport, first and last mile connections, and digital connectivity.

The other main items from the recent meeting concerned proposed changes to the infrastructure funding allocation from the Housing and Growth Deal. The A4095 alignment in North-West Bicester was proposed to be removed and the funding instead allocated to the Lodge Hill diamond interchange in north Abingdon. This would enable more housing to be accelerated. It was clarified that this would be a decision for Oxfordshire County Council. The Infrastructure Advisory Group were also looking to meet with a representative from the UK Infrastructure Bank when it was set up.

Panel members commented that whilst the decision to move the funds to Lodge Hill on this occasion can be understood, there would be disappointed groups, and a request was made that alternative sources of funding be identified as early as possible for the A4095 alignment. This infrastructure was considered very important for existing residents too, and not just for the homes that were due to be built.

Members asked whether the gender dimensions of infrastructure development were being adequately considered through the infrastructure development process. Councillor Leffman advised that the Infrastructure Advisory Group was not a decision-making group, but that it was important to ensure all groups were consulted in these processes, and she would take this feedback on board and back into her work with the Infrastructure Advisory Group and EEH.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. ensure that the gender dimensions of infrastructure developments within its remit of influence are properly considered through consultation with diverse groups.
2. support continued efforts to identify funding for the A4095 [Howes Lane] re-alignment work.

41. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Chair highlighted that in relation to recommendation one from the previous meeting, a letter was being drafted to HM government from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership concerning local government funding fragmentation, and the need for rationalisation in this space.

42. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Progress Report - Quarter 2, Year 4

Paul Staines, Interim Head of Programme for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, introduced this report. Panel members asked a question regarding delays with housing delivery in and around Bicester. In response, officers advised that housing delivery was slow across the County due to systemic, nation-wide delivery challenges. Additionally, Cherwell District Council had set ambitious low carbon standards for their developments which may have slowed some processes. Members provided several specific questions of clarification on the contents of the report which Paul responded to.

The issue of modern methods of construction was raised, and members commented that this has the potential make housing delivery faster, more economical, and more environmentally sustainable. It was proposed that this could be an area that the Panel could review in future. Paul Staines explained that modern methods of construction had been under discussion at the Housing Advisory Group, and that some more information could be brought back on this issue to the Panel in the new year.

The subject of councillor involvement in the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was raised, and members agreed that there should be strong member engagement in preparation for the Regulation 19 consultation. Officers commented that this was the intention and clarified that the Heads of Planning Group's role was centred on technical work in the development of the Plan.

(b) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Financial Report Quarter 2, Year 4

Councillors asked with respect to affordable housing whether achievements by local authority area could be set out. In response, officers explained that this data could be provided as part of the next quarterly update and advised that this would need to be considered in conjunction with an appropriate explanatory narrative.

(c) Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Infrastructure Programme - Six Month Review and changes.

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

(d) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

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

(e) Housing Advisory Group update

The Panel raised a question based on the Housing Advisory Group minutes, as to why there was an over delivery of shared ownership properties and an under delivery of social rented properties. Members also asked why some areas were seeking to extend shared ownership given that councils had already overdelivered in this area, given that social rent tends to be more affordable and accessible. The Panel asked that an answer to this question be brought back to the Panel.

(f) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

The Chair identified reference to the potential for a Green Belt Review within the Advisory Group minutes, and that there would be a benefit to having a holistic review of the Green Belt as a whole. Members commented that green infrastructure and access to green space were key issues that should be considered in future planning.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership supports the establishment of a Green Belt Review as referenced in the minutes of the Oxfordshire Plan Advisory Group meeting on 14 October 2021

(g) Environment Advisory Group update

A question was raised in relation to the Environment Advisory Group minutes about the tension between cycleway development and maintenance, and the associated loss of Flora and Fauna.

A question was also raised about what retrofitting infrastructure was required at a community level. For example, it was accepted that ground source heat pumps were less suitable for terrace houses, and that heating infrastructure might preferably be installed in public areas for groups of these housing types. The Panel wanted to refer both of these issues back to the Environment Advisory Group.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Request the Environment Advisory Group to add the following items to its work programme:

1. To explore how the tension between cycleway development and maintenance, and the associated loss of Flora and Fauna, can be effectively managed to maximise sustainable outcomes.
2. To explore what retrofitting infrastructure is required to be implemented at a community level, such as the need for ground source heat pumps.

43. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, explained that the formation of an Arc 'Growth Body' and an Arc wide spatial framework were currently under review following the arrival of Michael Gove as the new Secretary of State. Councils were awaiting further news.

44. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Name Change Update

The Scrutiny panel noted the report, which provided an update on progress in changing the name of the Growth Board to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

45. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel and action log - November 2021

The Scrutiny Panel noted the work programme and action log.

46. Dates of next meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting closed at 8.13 pm