

## **Future Oxfordshire Partnership report to Vale of White Horse District Council – February 2022**

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership is a joint committee of the six principal councils of Oxfordshire together with key strategic partners. Following an extensive public review in 2020, the Partnership has adopted a new purpose to:

- Coordinate local efforts to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits;
- Support the development of local planning policy that meets the UK Government's stated aim of net zero carbon by 2050, and contributes towards biodiversity gain whilst embracing the changes needed for a low carbon world; and,
- Seek to secure funding in the pursuit of these aims and oversee the delivery of related work programmes delegated to it by the joint committee's constituent local authority members.

The Partnership meets six times each year to discuss issues facing Oxfordshire's future, most often in a non-decision-making capacity. It is supported by four Advisory Sub-Groups (Infrastructure, Environment, Housing and Oxfordshire Plan 2050), a Scrutiny Panel and a small team of officers.

The current Chair is Councillor Michele Mead, Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council.

Vale is represented on the Partnership and sub-groups as follows:

Future Oxfordshire Partnership	Councillor Emily Smith
Infrastructure Advisory Sub-Group	Councillor Judy Roberts
Affordable Housing Advisory Sub-Group	Councillor Judy Roberts
Oxfordshire Plan 2050	Councillor Debby Hallett
Environmental Advisory Sub-Group	Councillor Catherine Webber

### **OxPlan 2050 update**

Now that the Regulation 18, part 2 consultation is complete, we are in crunch time for OxPlan50. Now the five councils need to reach agreement on housing numbers and spatial options, and our political differences are apparent.

From the data we have seen so far, and the feedback I have heard from residents, and the discussions at the sub-group, I believe that there is a strong case for Vale to argue for the Plan to use the government's standard method, which would give us lower housing numbers than the other two methods within the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment. Colleagues and I think that lower numbers are the most effective way for us to maintain a strong focus on affordability and environmental

sustainability, plus give an opportunity for infrastructure provision to catch up with the boom in housebuilding here over the past few years. A lower target will also help to safeguard our 5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS).

Each council's 5YHLS is critical, because when a council drops below 5 years, then a presumption is made in favour of development, which means our good policies cannot rule and speculative development runs rampant. Some of our neighbours are now in that position, and it would seem reasonable for them to want to take on a lower target.

The City Council continues to want high housing targets; of course they do -- they never have to build them out, but instead take advantage of the 'duty to cooperate' to force the neighbouring rural districts to take on their unmet need. This causes more commuting traffic and environmental stress, and utterly fails to achieve the objectives of the Plan.

It's all to play for now as we try to reach agreement among the councils.

### **Current key projects**

- Oxfordshire Connect Rail Programme.
- Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)
- Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map (see Environment Advisory Group update below)
- Growth Deal housing delivery

### **Partnership Meeting January 25th**

Councillor Bethia Thomas represented the Vale at the FOP meeting this time. Updates were presented on the Oxfordshire Rail Connect Rail Programme, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and cross council work on the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire.

Councillor Thomas made the case for Vale members and officers to be fully involved in discussions about the Oxford Station/East West Rail development because of its impact on the eastern part of our district and the need for rail services to link with bus services and active travel infrastructure to ensure proper integration and simple journey for people.

The new framework for assessing infrastructure schemes in terms of health and environment, as opposed to the recent approach of just facilitating growth, was supported and the work with other Oxfordshire councils on zero carbon initiatives was also supported. There will be a small financial contribution from Vale towards this collective effort that will be funded from within existing climate budget allocations.

Recommendations from the FOP Scrutiny panel were discussed, including the need for OxPlan2050 to consider the impact of extreme weather conditions, ensure zero carbon ambitions remain a priority and the request for a review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment housing numbers options in the reg 18 consultation be considered.

### **Letter regarding Local Government Grant funding**

The Partnership wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, calling for the rationalisation of local government funding and a move away from the large range of grant funding pots. This fragmented approach leads to a significant amount of officer time being spent on bidding processes rather than actually delivering projects and services.

### **Environment Advisory Group (EAG) update**

- 1) Based on a paper on Climate Action marketing and communications strategy, the group agreed that there is a need to increase awareness of the impact of climate change and overall ambition for Oxfordshire and how to inspire individuals' behaviour changes. The County Council will lead on a joint communications project and work is starting on how to align the climate plans of all six Oxfordshire councils in the future
- 2) Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PazCo) is a standing item on EAG meetings. PazCO needs expert help to help us develop an action so the group agreed to employ a consultancy to develop a short to medium term plan showing a route map and targets. Each council has been asked to contribute £7,000 towards cost of consultancy. OCC will pay 50% of cost.
- 3) EAG agreed to develop 3 pieces of county wide work:
  - Promotion of the use of solar panels in the county.
  - Water quality and sewage.
  - Increase tree cover on the county.

**Councillor Neil Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Place**