

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON TUESDAY 25 JANUARY 2022 AT 2.00 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

[Link to watch the meeting](#)

Present:

Councillor Michele Mead (Chair), (West Oxfordshire District Council), Dr David Chapman, (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group), Professor Alistair Fitt, (Universities representative), Emma Hill, (Environment Agency), Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, (Oxford City Council), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business representative - Science Vale), Councillor Liz Leffman, (Oxfordshire County Council), Adrian Lockwood, (Oxfordshire Skills Board Chair), Jeremy Long, (OxLEP Chair), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business representative - Bicester), Peter Nolan, (OxLEP business representative - Oxford City), Councillor David Rouane, (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Bethia Thomas, (Vale of White Horse District Council), Catherine Turner (Homes England) and Councillor Barry Wood, (Cherwell District Council)

Officers: John Disley, (Oxfordshire County Council), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council CEX), Susan Harbour, (South and Vale Councils), Giles Hughes, (West Oxfordshire Council CEX), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Claire Mahoney, (Network Rail), Stefan Robinson, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Rosie Rowe, (Oxfordshire County Council), Mark Stone, (South and Vale Councils CEX), Paul Staines, (Oxfordshire Growth Deal Team), Nigel Tipple (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)

Other councillors: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Susan Brown, Oxford City Council, (substituted by Councillor Alex Hollingsworth) and Councillor Emily Smith, Vale of White Horse District Council, (substituted by Councillor Bethia Thomas).

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair commented that the meeting, in its entirety, was being held virtually. It was, therefore, an informal gathering of the members of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership with no reports requiring formal decision.

51. Minutes

It was noted that formal agreement of the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2021 would be deferred. Informally, no points on the draft minutes were raised – it was, nevertheless, highlighted that the list of officers shown as present should be updated.

52. Public participation

Michael Tyce asked a question on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire. This referred to the recent granting of planning permission by South Oxfordshire District Council for a solar farm within the Green Belt. The question expressed concerns regarding the lack of protections against the inappropriate siting of such infrastructure considering the expected need to increase solar electricity generation in the county. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership was, therefore, asked to commit to the production of a county-wide spatial and quantitative strategy for renewable energy as part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

In response, the Chair stated that the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy – produced by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) in 2019 – had set out an ambitious framework to enable the county to be at the forefront of clean energy innovation. Work on furthering these aspirations is currently being overseen by OxLEP's Clean Growth Energy Sub-Group.

The Chair also made clear that there was a need, if Net Zero is to be achieved, to increase the proportion of renewable energy produced within county. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 would, therefore, consider the future infrastructure needs for renewable energy generation capacity and set a framework for its delivery as part of a sustainable spatial strategy (there is already a strand of work within the Plan that will specifically examine these issues).

In addition, it was also possible that a focus on this topic could also arise from either the emerging zero carbon Oxfordshire work or through the Environment Advisory Group.

Linda Ward had submitted a written question on behalf of the Cherwell Development Alliance.

The Chair thanked Ms Ward for her question. She informed members that the full text and the Partnership's formal response would be published [online](#) alongside the Agenda for the meeting.

53. Oxfordshire Connect Rail Programme

The Partnership received a presentation from Claire Mahoney, Industry Programme Director, Greater Oxfordshire Area, Network Rail. This set out an update on the Oxfordshire Connect rail programme and included references to the improvements to Oxford Station, East West Rail and the reopening of the Cowley branch line for passenger traffic.

While members welcomed the progress made with the Oxfordshire Connect Rail Programme to date, they, nevertheless, raised several questions/points that they hoped would be taken into consideration going forwards:

Councillor Wood referred to the level crossing on the East West Rail route close to Bicester Village Station. As East West Rail became operational and rail traffic grew, the

amount of time during which the crossing was closed would increase and have an impact on the roads. Network Rail and East West Rail, therefore, needed to consider how they would address this matter.

In response, the Partnership was informed that the issue of the crossing would be examined by East West Rail and that a variety of options were currently under consideration. Oxfordshire County Council would also have the opportunity to feed into this process.

Councillor Thomas made mention to the second stage of the redevelopment of Oxford Station. While the planned improvements were very much welcomed, it was important to recognise the disruption that would be caused to the local road network while they were being undertaken. She, therefore, highlighted the importance of Network Rail consulting with local community groups. Councillor Thomas also stressed the need, as part of the redevelopment of Oxford Station, to integrate rail and bus services.

In addition, she expressed her hope that Grove Station would be reopened.

The Partnership was informed that contact had/was being made with local community groups. They were also told that the issue of integrating rail and bus services was to be addressed via a bus operator plan, which would be consistent with the principles of the 'first mile, last mile' concept of journeys.

In relation to the feasibility of reopening Grove Station, members were told that while it did form part of the wider Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study, it was not currently funded.

Councillor Leffman commented on the importance of maintaining a focus on the encouragement of active travel when considering the changes to Oxford Station. She, therefore, questioned whether there remained a proposal for a significant car park on the site. This sentiment was supported by Councillor Hollingsworth, who also made the case for the minimal level of car parking provision.

Councillor Leffman also noted that the portion of East West Rail currently under construction was not to be electrified. Accordingly, she asked what plans there were regarding electrification in Oxfordshire.

Members were told that an active Oxford Station Master Plan was being developed – with input from both Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils. This Plan would establish the transport requirements of travel to and from the station. Several scenarios around parking would be considered (including options around reduced provision) but no decisions have so far been taken.

In relation to East West Rail, while the route was not currently electrified, infrastructure was being put in place to help support electrification if funding became available.

In response to a question from Miranda Markham, the Partnership noted that the provision of high-speed crossovers would make it easier for rail traffic to move and change direction. This would help in reducing journey times.

Councillor Hollingsworth highlighted the importance of the reopening of the Cowley branch line to passenger traffic. He mentioned that the accessibility of significant developments in both Oxford and South Oxfordshire to public transport would be improved by its reopening.

In addition, it would also provide an opportunity for public transport to be the primary method of travel to local employment sites.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Oxfordshire Connect rail programme be noted.

54. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update

The Chair invited Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel, to present the nine recommendations from the Panel's meeting on 17 January 2022.

Recommendations 1 and 2 related to the Panel's discussions with Councillor Emily Smith about the emerging Oxfordshire Plan 2050. It was their view that the Plan needed to make provision for contingency planning in respects of severe weather events.

Recommendations 3.a and 3.b reiterated previous submissions by the Scrutiny Panel regarding a review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment and the mechanism for how decisions related to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 could be revisited. In raising these issues, Councillor Gant referred to the comments made by previous speakers to the Partnership.

Recommendations 4 and 5 related to the Panel's support for East West Rail. It was their view that all councils should be encouraged to play an active role in the East West Mainline Partnership and that the line should be electrified.

Recommendations 6 and 7 referred to the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy Stage One report. The Scrutiny Panel wished to prompt the inclusion of a holistic approach which prioritised sustainable growth and took account of the cross-cutting nature of green infrastructure and priorities.

Recommendations 8 and 9 referred to the Panel's strong support for the approach outlined in the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map report. They particularly emphasised the need for Oxfordshire to ensure that it was well placed to make future related requests of HM Government. They also stressed the importance of each of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's local authorities giving support to the funding of the report's next steps.

The Chair thanked Councillor Gant for the Scrutiny Panel's hard work and recommendations. She stated that the Partnership's formal response would be published in due course.

55. Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)- Stage 1

Members considered a report – and supporting appendices – summarising the completed first stage of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS).

It was highlighted that the OxIS, first produced in 2017, had been updated to take account of current infrastructure priorities and the use of a revised multiple criteria assessment framework and methodology. (The assessment criteria comprised two main elements, a needs-based assessment which linked directly to the five key themes of the OxIS and a level of growth assessment). The next stage of the work, which is designed to take the Strategy up to 2050 (so that it is in tandem with the Oxfordshire Plan 2050), will include

consideration of both its scope and timing. Moreover, given the interrelationship between the OxIS and the Oxfordshire Plan, the coordination of timings and decisions will need to be reflected in both documents.

Members referred to the use of the word 'growth' within para 6.1 of the OxIS summary – an appraisal of particular schemes. It was suggested that there needed to be clarity about what was meant by 'growth' within the document and that, therefore, perhaps a different descriptor may be more appropriate. It was also felt that it was important to take into consideration that the strategy sought to reflect the infrastructure needed to support housing growth that had already been collectively agreed to. In response, officers agreed that these matters could be considered in the next stages of the work. It was also highlighted that the assessment framework was intended to be a guide for decision makers, not an absolute determinant of priority.

Members also commented on the importance of continuing the gap analysis work to cover important infrastructure provision and specific requirements which were not currently within the assessment framework e.g., primary healthcare and water treatment infrastructure.

The issue of the length of time taken for infrastructure plans to be delivered was also raised. Members emphasised the importance of building sufficient flexibility and speed within plans to ensure that they responded to anticipated future needs rather than just current assessments. It was also felt that there was an ongoing, historic infrastructure deficit which needed to be addressed. This, therefore, raised the importance of the prioritisation of projects based upon available resources.

After further discussion, the Partnership expressed their endorsement of the OxIS Stage One report as a framework for prioritising the county's strategic infrastructure priorities to 2040. They also gave their support for the use of OxIS by partner councils as part of their methodologies for assessing and prioritising infrastructure.

RESOLVED: That the OxIS Stage 1 report be noted.

56. Delivering a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Route Map and Action Plan Proposal

The Partnership considered a report setting out proposals to scope out the work required to develop a multi-stakeholder route map and implementation plan to deliver the outcomes of the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PaZCO) report.

Councillor Rouane, as Chair of the Partnership's Environment Advisory Group, presented the report. He commented that the proposals represented an important step in giving the work around moving to zero carbon a definite focus. Further progress reports would be considered in due course.

The Partnership expressed its support for the proposals.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

57. Feedback from Joint meeting with the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board

Members considered a report presented by Rosie Rowe, Head of Healthy Place Shaping on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, setting out the feedback received from the joint

workshop held on 14 October 2021 between the Partnership and the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board. She commented that such events were becoming a useful and effective forum for developing an approach where local authorities and the NHS could work together more effectively. It was noted that this was particularly timely given the additional challenges arising from the pandemic and the pressing need for increased collaboration to address the wider social and economic determinants of health.

The joint workshop had also provided an opportunity for Health and Wellbeing Board members to be briefed on the scope of the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership – particularly the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This in turn, had allowed for NHS partners to be brought into some of the longer-term planning taking place as part of the Plan’s drafting.

It was anticipated that there was the potential to use future meetings to discuss wider community and social infrastructure requirements. The expectation was that climate action would feature as an agenda item at the next workshop planned for 9 March 2022.

The Chair commented that she had found the joint workshop to have been very useful – a view echoed by Councillor Leffman in her capacity as Chair of the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board. Councillor Leffman also added that in her view it was not possible to separate the issues of public health from those of infrastructure, connectivity, and equalities.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

58. Housing and Growth Deal Reports

(a) Infrastructure Advisory Group update

Councillor Leffman referred to the meeting of the Infrastructure Advisory Group held on 12 January 2022. While this had principally covered discussion of the OxIS Stage One Final report, there had also been debate, and a presentation, on the work of the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum.

RESOLVED: That the update report be noted.

(b) Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group update

At the invitation of the Chair, Giles Hughes, Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council, referred to the notes of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group meetings held in November, December, and January. These had focused on discussing responses to the Regulation 18 Part Two consultation and plans for an update report for planning authority scrutiny committees. The planned next steps for the Group would be to further reflect on the consultation responses and to finalise the future work programme of the Oxfordshire Plan 20250. Mr Hughes stressed that the importance of further engagement with council scrutiny committees was fully recognised.

A joint workshop had also been held in mid-January between members of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Advisory Group and the Housing Advisory Group. This has considered issues relating to affordable housing and the role of the Oxfordshire Plan alongside Local Plans.

RESOLVED: That the update report be noted.

(c) Environment Advisory Group update

Councillor Rouane referred to the notes of the Environment Advisory Group held on 26 November 2021.

RESOLVED: That the update report be noted.

59. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan

Stefan Robinson, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Manager, presented the Partnership's Forward Plan. In addition to the matters currently scheduled for March 2022, it was expected that items would be added relating to an enhanced partnership with bus operators, the OxLEP Economic Recovery Plan and Oxfordshire's innovation economic ecosystem.

RESOLVED: That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan be noted.

60. Partnership network

Members considered a report describing activities linked to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. It set out in diagrammatic form how these were all related.

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, presented the report. He highlighted that although it did not attempt to cover everything, it did show the growing range of partnership activities across the county. It was also planned, subject to budget approvals, to provide additional resource to help support these going forwards.

RESOLVED: That report be noted.

61. Oxford to Cambridge Arc Update

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director, provided a verbal update. He informed that Partnership that while there had been no recent announcements/activity, it was, nevertheless, expected that a report on the responses to the public consultation on a vision for the proposed Arc Spatial Framework would be published in February. This report would also potentially provide more information on any next steps.

In relation to the potential for a Growth Body for the Arc, there remained some uncertainties and differences of opinion around whether it should be locally or nationally driven, and the extent to which partners would want to be involved. It was anticipated that there would be further discussions when the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) provided additional information on its position.

Councillor Wood commented that, in the short term at least, the Levelling Up White Paper would be the key piece of HM Government policy which would cross over with the work of bodies such as the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

Professor Fitt referred to the activities of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Universities Group. They had recently met with Emran Mian, Director General, Decentralisation and Growth at DLUHC – an event that was felt to have gone positively.

In addition, the Group was also considering different approaches to secure funding for the Arc given the expectation that HM Government support opportunities were likely to be limited.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

62. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Leffman and Councillor Wood in their capacities as the Leaders of Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council updated members on the organisational relationship between the two authorities. It was noted that the formal partnership and shared management structure between the councils – which had been in place since 2018 – would be coming to an end. Consequently, Oxfordshire County and Cherwell District Councils would be separating over a six-month period. As a result, the County Council would appoint its own Head of Paid Service and Chief Executive.

Councillor Leffman paid tribute to Yvonne Rees, currently Joint Chief Executive of both councils, for service and wished her all the best for the future. It was noted that Ms Rees would remain Chief Executive of Cherwell District Council.

Councillor Wood stressed that in terms of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership there would be no impact and both Leaders stressed the importance and value of continued partnership working across all the councils in Oxfordshire.

63. Dates of next meetings

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership noted the dates of future meetings as set out in the agenda. This included proposed meeting dates for September 2022 to July 2023.

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm

Chairman

Date

--	--