

Public speakers

27 September 2022

1. Ian Green has asked the following question on behalf of the Oxford Civic Society

It was a huge surprise and disappointment when the district and city councils announced the abandonment of Oxfordshire 2050 Plan preparation.

Recommendation #1 The OCS recommends that good planning work achieved in the course of preparation of the Plan needs to be deployed in the updating of the Local Plans. In addition, the public have responded to Oxfordshire 2050 consultations in various ways and their contributions should not be abandoned.

OCS recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership agrees to public discussions on making good use of work done to date on the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan.

Recommendation #2 - At the same time OCS recognises that to update the Local Plans of the districts and city, some kind of agreement on Oxfordshire growth rate and distribution is still necessary: without evidence that the Local Plans have been prepared in cooperation with neighbouring local authorities (the 'Duty to Cooperate'), the Local Plans will not be approved by the Planning Inspectorate / Secretary of State.

Optimisation of strategic infrastructure investment could be a major casualty of the abandonment of the 2050 Plan – care needs to be taken to limit the damage.

OCS recommends that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership identifies and makes public the strategic infrastructure investment implications of each local planning authority establishing its own rate, pace and distribution of employment and housing growth.

Recommendation #3 - As noted in the OCS report published just before the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan abandonment, the links between the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (and its emerging Travel Plans), the Local Industrial Strategy, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and Pathways to Net Zero need to be carefully considered. Public discussion needs to continue on strategic (inter-local planning authority) planning matters and OCS will be pleased to contribute to this.

OCS recommends that as Oxfordshire strategic plans still need to be well coordinated and synchronized with, and integrated into, the local plans, the future Oxfordshire partnership should publicly debate how this is done.

Final point - An Oxfordshire spatial plan is a very useful tool if we are to optimise strategic infrastructure investment and achieve economic, social and environmental goals. is it a profound mistake to abandon it? what message does abandonment send to government and private sector investors?

2. Suzanne McIvor has asked the following question on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire

Oxford City Council's Preferred Options document for its Oxford Local Plan 2040 will be out for public consultation at the start of October. This explains that the City intends to commission a piece of work to establish its housing need with "the methodology agreed with as many of our neighbouring districts as possible".

However, the document also states that the City considers that "circumstances are likely to exist in Oxfordshire that justify using an alternative method to calculate housing need, owing to its important role in the local and national economy".

We understand from these statements that Oxford City does not intend to adopt the Standard Method to calculate its housing need and will be looking for an alternative method which gives rise to a higher housing need, to support its economic growth ambitions. As it has in the past, Oxford City will be looking to the Districts to take its unmet housing "need".

Opinion Research Services, experienced housing market assessment consultants, did a report on the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) for Cherwell Development Watch Alliance earlier this year. It stated: "Based on updated Office for National Statistics projections for Oxford City we consider that there may be exceptional circumstances in Oxford City (but not in the other Districts) for adopting *a housing need figure substantially lower than that given by the Standard Method* (as currently formulated)".

This statement is still valid but is directly at odds with the approach that Oxford City is taking by seeking to increase its housing requirement.

We believe there are really important issues of transparency and accountability here. We have phrased our questions as simply as possible and numbered them, as we wish to have a clear and full response to all questions.

1. Does the Partnership agree that the Duty to Co-operate is *not* a duty to cater for the growth ambitions of any particular local authority?
2. Does the Partnership agree that, given the fact that the OGNA was heavily criticised by a wide range of parties, it would:
 - a) Not be appropriate to use the same consultants in taking forward preparation of an evidence base for any of the emerging Local Plans
 - b) The tendering process for any such consultants should take into account the amount of work they carry out for developers?

3. Professor Richard Harding has asked the following question on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire.

The questions below were raised to FOP members via an earlier letter and we are grateful for Councillor Wood's reply on behalf of the FOP. However, we note that the update on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 published as part of the FOP papers largely fails to address the issues raised and therefore think the questions bear repeating.

As long-standing supporters of strategic planning in the county, CPRE Oxfordshire has been concerned to learn of the demise of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan.

It is disappointing that those Councils determined to pursue an aggressive growth agenda could apparently not be persuaded that this would be in conflict with the broader social, environmental and economic Vision for the county that has previously been agreed.

The current situation raises a number of significant questions:

1. Transparency & democracy – the public is entitled to a clear explanation of where agreement was reached and could be fed into Local Plans, and where agreement could not be reached and for what reasons. How will this happen?
2. Spatial strategy – if, as has been indicated, the disagreement is on the issue of housing numbers alone, is it not possible to proceed with establishing a broad spatial strategy that could guide whatever growth does finally come forward? This is vital in ensuring the protection of our key assets – our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Oxford Green Belt and core nature recovery areas.
3. Key emerging policies - There were a number of strong emerging policies that clearly make most sense if applied at a county-wide level, such as those on zero carbon housing and nature recovery. These policies are urgent, to help meet our climate and biodiversity emergencies. Were these agreed? If so, how can they be taken forward in a logical and consistent way? If not, how will agreement now be reached?
4. Renewables – at the moment, Oxfordshire’s farmland is under threat from a wave of speculative applications for solar industrial units. There is an urgent need for a county-wide strategy, supported by public consultation and engagement, setting out the amount and spatial location for all renewables projects, balanced with other requirements such as food security, biodiversity and landscape. How will this be taken forward?

4. Cllr Charlie Hicks, Oxfordshire County Council has asked the following question:

It appears that Officers are not following Oxfordshire County Council policies set out in the LTCP adopted in July 2022 in their criteria for the Review of Homes from Infrastructure Programme. When questioned on this point in FOP Scrutiny, senior Officers seemed to suggest that the policies that Officers are guided by in the Future Oxfordshire Partnership are those which were in place in 2017 when the Growth Deal was started, and that this is unaffected by updates to any of the County Council's policies since then, including updates to the County Council's LTCP.

However, there are many references throughout the Growth Board papers from when it was set up that suggest the County Council's Local Transport Plan policies should be aligned to the work of the Growth Board/Future Oxfordshire Partnership. Which is right? Do the decisions on transport infrastructure, such as prioritisation of schemes made here in September 2022 in Agenda item 5c, need to align to the County Council's policies that have been adopted in July 2022 under the Terms of Reference of the Oxfordshire Growth Board? If not, please can it be specified where in the agreed arrangements of the Growth Board/Future Oxfordshire Partnership it states that policies set out in 2017 take precedent over more recently agreed council policies?

If the answer to the above questions is that existing County Council policies in the LTCP **do** matter for how decisions are made and projects prioritised in the Review of Homes from Infrastructure Programme, then I would expect to see this exercise re-run with updated criteria based on the latest agreed LTCP policies. Please can you let me know if this re-run of the prioritisation will happen?

5. Dr Alison Hill on behalf of Cyclox has submitted the following address:

Thank you for letting me address this meeting of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. I want to comment on the Growth Deal Schemes being agreed today, looking at them through the lens of the promotion of active travel, which is as you know a priority in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, and is critically important in ensuring Oxfordshire meets net zero and achieves Vision Zero.

The list of proposed infrastructure investments currently under review give the original allocation and the proposed allocation. Looking at the changes it is clear that higher priority has been given to road schemes that will increase motor traffic. The percentage spent on active travel schemes has reduced from the original proposals. This goes against the LTCP policies and will embed car use for years to come. All councils have declared climate emergency. There is nothing to suggest that the proposals will do anything but increase carbon emissions.

We feel particularly aggrieved at the removal of plans for Woodstock Road which would have been the first truly safe cycling infrastructure along any of the Oxford major roads. The planning for the Woodstock Road scheme had significant stakeholder involvement. I was one of the stakeholders. The time and effort of many was wasted.

We are concerned too about the eye watering cost of the Oxpens Bridge, which we have long said is situated in the wrong place and should have been above Osney Lock. There are better ways to spend £8.8million to create safe routes for cycling, wheeling and walking from the west of Oxford across the Thames.

It is unclear how the remaining active travel schemes will result in an increase in active travel, as we have seen no modelling. They appear not to be considered as part of a county wide integrated cycle network.

Overall, we feel we that the process that has got you to the point of approving these schemes has been very opaque, has not involved stakeholders, and fails to address the policies of the LTCP.

6. Robin Tucker on behalf of CoHSAT has submitted the following address:

I am Robin Tucker, Co-Chair of CoHSAT, the Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel in Oxfordshire. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

We ask you to consider three things in your infrastructure decisions.

First, the elephant in the room. The £300m HIF1 roads programme goes against County LTCP strategy and County, Vale, and South Oxfordshire climate policies because it will increase emissions both from construction (288k tonnes, Prof Whitelegg) and traffic increases. It is unwanted by CoHSAT member groups, and by all five Parish Councils on its route.

Further, every cost increase in HIF1 drives out schemes that have wider benefit. 10% on HIF1 is £30m – two or three other schemes gone. If costs go up further, you'll have to axe more schemes or drop parts of the HIF leaving a patchwork.

For the A40 corridor, the County Council considered five strategic options including bus lanes (the eventual choice) and light rail. We don't know if you as decision-makers have been

presented with strategic options for this corridor – certainly we as the public have not. We think you should take a step back before it's too late and take a look at more sustainable and affordable options – just as you did for the A40.

Second, the collateral damage of cost increases seems to fall most heavily on the sustainable transport. Witness the proposed retention of dual carriageway schemes, but the dropping of Milton Heights Pedestrian and Cycle bridge and the massive cuts to the promising co-produced Woodstock Road scheme. That is completely the wrong direction if you want to achieve your traffic reduction and Climate Change targets for 2030 and 2040. You need to put active travel and bus priority schemes first.

Third, the Oxpens bridge, now rising in cost to a ridiculous £8.8m. We like investment in active travel, but we said for years that this is in the wrong place – too far south to be useful for either Osney Mead or Oxpens, and it doesn't connect to any useful routes to the city centre or station. This will be a white elephant. Instead, there should be a simpler cheaper bridge at Osney Lock and use the money saved to improve the ramps on Grandpont Bridge. This creates two more useful routes for people on the new developments and for existing residents.

7. Councillor Fouweather, Oxford City Council – to be confirmed.