

# Public speakers

20 March 2023

## 1. Councillor Sue Roberts, South Oxfordshire District Council.

### Refused Water Bathing Status - sewage - a drag on Wallingford's Economy

My husband's birthday treat: sampling along the River Thames to apply for Bathing Water Status for Wallingford Beach. It was remarkably hard work and we finished exhausted, finally delivering samples to Thames Water in Reading to analyse faecal contamination of our river. This citizen science project involved fifty Wallingford citizens.

Water Bathing Status has been refused by DEFRA with no explanation given.

We are confounded that no protections will be put in for the hundreds of children and old folk swimming here. The whole town was behind South Oxfordshire District Council's investment of over £40,000 for experts Thames 21 to lead on this, with their proven-track record of achieving Water Bathing Status at Port Meadow, Oxford.

We were confident of success. Our beach is jam-packed with young kids ducking their heads under the water, families paddle-boarding, old folks (like me) swimming.

The River Thames is the lifeblood of our market town. Oxford University and Oxford Brookes elite rowing teams train here; hosts of visitors and locals play at our beach. The town is thriving economically, with this new-found love of wild-water. Bars and restaurants are opening up and Wallingford has a real buzz.

Who is putting their foot on the neck of Wallingford's future? Is it DEFRA or Thames Water? It was a body-blow to discover that we are not to be protected from swimming in sewage.

Please would FOP write to the Secretary of States for DEFRA and DCMS, to deplore this retrograde decision to keep Wallingford mired in excrement?

Would you kindly consider this under your agenda item on Oxfordshire's Visitor Economy.

## 2. Professor Richard Harding on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire

CPRE Oxfordshire welcomes the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Joint Action Plan (Agenda Item 5).

As councillors and officers will know, CPRE has been calling for a county-wide strategy for renewables to ensure we get what is needed as soon as possible, but in a way that protects our countryside and respects the views of local communities. (An as yet largely unpublicised petition on this matter has already drawn nearly 500 signatories from members of the public who share our views.)

We are therefore delighted to see the proposal for a Local Area Energy Plan for Oxfordshire and this commitment to strategic planning of energy generation.

We are also pleased to note that, despite the ambitious solar renewable energy targets for the county, these would only require a small portion of Oxfordshire's land and that, as CPRE has always said, priority should be given to rooftops and brownfield locations.

In our view, this confirms our position that our local authorities can and must be selective about any greenfield allocations of solar, particularly avoiding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belt, wildlife sites and nature recovery areas, and good agricultural land. In welcoming the Local Area Energy Plan proposal, we would like to ask the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

- Which 'stakeholders' (p48, Action 4, 1) will be involved in the formulation of the Plan?
- Will the Plan be, rightly, subject to full public consultation?
- How will the Plan take into account other potentially competing uses for land, such as biodiversity and food production, possibly moving towards a broader comprehensive land use plan for Oxfordshire?
- And when will local authorities be in a position to turn down any building applications (domestic or commercial) that do not make adequate provision for renewable energy, especially solar?

### **3. Suzanne McIvor on behalf of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire**

There seem to be three phases to the preparation of the Strategic Economic Plan. Firstly "scoping", secondly "evidence gathering analysis, future thinking through an Independent Economic Review" (which will include a call for evidence), and thirdly an Action Plan which will include the final outputs. All done and dusted by the end of June!

The headlines on the SEP suggest it is supposed to be a "new, constructive and creative county-wide conversation about Oxfordshire's economic future" but we don't see any evidence to suggest that the residents of Oxfordshire or groups such as ourselves are going to be involved in this conversation. Where in the timetable is the public consultation to allow everyone a say, rather than just including those whose focus is purely economic and business-based?

And is the SEP going to be adopted by each of the Oxfordshire Local Authorities or are we going to wake up one day to an announcement that it has been approved by the government?

We assume that as the Future Oxfordshire Partnership is not a decision-making body, the sign up to the SEP will need to be approved by each Local Authority.

We ask the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to:

1. Carry out a full public consultation on the SEP, and
2. Ensure that the SEP goes through an appropriate scrutiny and approval process by each Local Authority

#### 4. George Curtis on behalf of Bioabundance

Thank you for the opportunity to question the FOP about the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan 2023 and Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map & Action Plan Final Report on behalf of Bioabundance whose objective is to protect, extend, grow and restore nature in Oxfordshire.

I had the privilege of asking two questions to the FOP Scrutiny Panel on 13<sup>th</sup> March:

- Could the Net Zero Plan be reworked to include the Scope 3 emissions before it can be accepted?
- Could the Economic Strategy include the use of Doughnut Economics to measure and present plans for enabling wellbeing whilst minimising environmental harm?

I quote from the Net Zero Report.

*The size of the challenge to achieve net zero carbon by 2050 at latest will require a considerable step change in activity. We need to embed climate change into decision making across Oxfordshire's local authorities.*

We understand from the responses to the Scrutiny Panel that the Net Zero plan will still be put forward to the FOP despite the fact that Scope 3 emissions are not included in this iteration of the plan. From other points made in the Scrutiny Panel meeting, the net zero imperative is to be considered in many of the FOP sponsored workstreams. The net zero imperative applies to all FOP activities. It is our contention that the Scope 3 emission information from the housing and road developments are crucial elements in FOP decision-making to embrace the net zero strategy. Houses are estimated at between 50 and 150 tons of carbon each. The present Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map & Action Plan is not fit for purpose until it is extended to include Scope 3 emissions.

We understand that the Scrutiny Panel will recommend that the FOP ask Kate Raworth to present the Doughnut Economics approach to manage sustainable growth within ecological targets whilst ensuring wellbeing. We would ask the FOP to follow this recommendation so that they can see the benefits of weaving the principles and measurement schemes in this economic model into the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan 2023.

In other parts of the country, for instance the WFG (Wales) Act, the well-being of future generations is acquiring greater significance than in the now outdated quest for GDP growth at any cost. The number of houses in the Oxford city Housing & Economic Needs Assessment, produced by Cambridge Economics, seems to be based on the 1930s economic concept of GDP driven growth without regard to the environment. Net Zero calls for a considerable step change in this thinking.

Could the opportunity be taken to use Oxford developed Doughnut Economics to guide the Oxfordshire economy to enable wellbeing and prosperity whilst minimising environmental harm? Doughnut Economics is a globally recognised framework which is used to avoid the problem of pursuing GDP alone.

Our questions:

1. Could the Net Zero Plan be reworked to include the Scope 3 emissions before it can be accepted?

2. Could the Economic Strategy include the use of Doughnut Economics to measure and present plans for enabling wellbeing whilst minimising environmental harm?