

# 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.

#### Response:

*The Future Oxfordshire Partnership acknowledges the concerns expressed in the question and agrees that the water quality of the Thames is of high importance to the residents of the County with a significant impact on the visitor economy. In consultation with local authority partners, the Partnership will write to the appropriate Secretaries of State to seek feedback as to the reasons why Water Bathing Status has been refused for the Thames at Wallingford and any other locations in the county.*

## 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?

### Response.

- *We are in the very early stages of considering what a local area energy planning approach could look like for Oxfordshire, so are yet to fully map out a complete stakeholder list, and consultation approach.*
- *An initial workshop has taken place with local authority and OxLEP colleagues to explore in the first instance, what local area energy planning is, how such an approach led by the local authorities could support Oxfordshire to achieve its net zero ambitions, and what the appropriate scale for energy planning is.*
- *Following the workshop, we will be establishing a steering group to further evolve our thinking and develop a proposed approach to local area energy planning. The steering group will be multi-agency, recognising that energy planning is not something the councils can and should tackle alone, and will include partners such as the energy distribution network operators who cover Oxfordshire; other stakeholders will be encouraged to join the steering group.*
- *We will not be starting from scratch with local area energy planning; through Project Local Energy Oxfordshire (LEO) we have developed the LEO Geospatial Land Use Mapping Tool, which draws together into a single space a wide range of information on*

*land use (including environmental and landscape designations, agricultural grade, flood risk zones, planned housing and employment growth) and energy assets in Oxfordshire. Making use of the data available, both from external sources and internally generated sources allows us to evaluate past performance, optimise operation, prioritise retrofit opportunities, and inform future local clean growth strategies and approaches. There are also other learnings from Project LEO which will support the development of energy planning in Oxfordshire >>> <https://project-leo.co.uk/blog/final-report/>*

- We recognise the critical need to make the most effective use of land across Oxfordshire recognising multiple competing demands and will consider this as we further evolve our thinking re: a local area energy planning approach for Oxfordshire.*
- Each of the Oxfordshire authorities are in the process of preparing new Local Plans which will provide the opportunity to consider the most appropriate policies for securing the use of renewable energy in new developments. Any such policies will need to be consulted upon and developed in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework, some initial revisions to which are expected shortly with further changes anticipated to follow later this year.*

### **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?

Response:

*The Strategic Economic Plan is being developed and funded in partnership with local authorities, both universities and the OxLEP partners. OxLEP launched an open call for evidence in February which closed on the 10 March, this was to facilitate wide ranging engagement and to inform an Independent Economic Review. OxLEP intend to undertake a series of deep dives into Inclusive Economic Growth, Net Zero and Sustainability, The Foundation Economy and Innovation & Diffusion through both stakeholder and workshop engagement. OxLEP will be holding 6 (3 x 2) workshops in total across the three phases of the SEP work programme between March and June. Attendance is subject to registration for each workshop through the Eventbrite platforms advertised on our website and promoted by our partners to secure strong representative engagement; the first two workshops took place on 22/23 March and were focused upon the Deep Dive themes. Each workshop will have capacity to accommodate 50-60 participants with workshops taking place at 3 locations across the county - Oxford Brookes, Milton Park and Begbroke. The findings being reported back at agreed intervals over this period to both FOP and OxLEP Board as the SEP and Action plan are developed. Work is overseen by a stakeholder working group representative of the key stakeholders and government and it is anticipated that the final document will be signed off by the OxLEP Board in late September.*

#### **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?

Response:

*The Net Zero route map and action plan has focussed on scope 1 and 2 emissions to enable us to take collective action now in areas within our immediate control, to progress proactively towards net zero carbon. As is highlighted in the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map & Action Plan, we do recognise the importance of scope 3 emissions (which are other organisations' scope 1&2 emissions), and while emissions from Scope 3 have not been explicitly modelled, they have been considered within some of the planned actions e.g., workstreams on the circular economy and the use of common standards to suppliers have been identified to help address scope 3 (indirect) emissions. Over-time we anticipate an increased focus on scope 3 emissions, however, we wouldn't want this to prevent our immediate activity to manage our own scope 1 and 2 emissions as laid out in the route map and action plan. It is recognised that the action plan should be a living document, so can be reviewed and developed as new opportunities to help progress towards net zero are identified.*

*It is important to note that the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan builds on current deliverables and work programmes across the organisations which make up the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. There is already work underway to tackle scope 3 emissions which includes:*

- Supporting community-led repair and sharing economy business models through the Community Action Group network e.g., The Library of Things, repair cafes etc.*
- An electric vehicle (EV) workstream looking at the role of car clubs in non-traditional locations (e.g., rural locations) helping to reduce reliance on personal car ownership.*
- All councils are supporting the development of actions aligned to the Oxfordshire Food Strategy, a priority for which is to strengthen short, transparent local food supply chains.*
- Through our collective work on waste management, we have a strong focus on the 'waste hierarchy' – keeping things in use for longer e.g., promoting charity shops through the Waste Wizard toolkit, and promoting reuse in the household waste and recycling centres.*
- Councils are exploring opportunities to embed climate and carbon considerations in their procurement activities.*
- Oxfordshire County Council are exploring the PAS2080 (the standard for managing carbon in infrastructure projects) with several contractors, and are commencing a project with the Future Highways Research Group on quantifying carbon in infrastructure schemes*

- *Oxfordshire County Council will be working with district colleagues and partners to develop a circular economy strategy.*
- *The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership are currently assessing best practice approaches to scope 3 emissions with partners and other organisations.*

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

Response:

*OxLEP notes the request to consider the principles of the Doughnut Economics in the development of the Strategic Economic Plan work. The brief for this work was developed and agreed with all local authority and university stakeholders before being subject to full open tender. It is not possible to change this brief at this stage but it should be noted that many of the ambitions and measures proposed by such an approach are already key features of the brief and we have taken extensive steps to ensure the Environment, Net Zero and Sustainability principles are embedded as key features of the plan process. We already have strong engagement from a number of leading Environmental organisations including the Oxfordshire LNP, Earth Trust, BBOWT and are reaching out to others such as RSPB, Natural England etc to ensure we have strong engagement in the workshop and evidence gathering associated with the development of the plan. We also welcome the Scrutiny Panel recommendations of engaging with colleagues at the University of Oxford who developed and promote the Doughnut Economics measures in a future workshop.*