

Public speakers

26 September 2023

1. George Curtis on behalf of Bioabundance

The Draft Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), August 2023, fails to prioritise the over-riding need for policies to minimise carbon emissions and to measure properly our progress towards future wellbeing and sustainability. Oxfordshire is one of the most nature-depleted counties in the country. We live in one of the most unequal counties; there is a 15 year difference in male life expectancy and a 30% child poverty rate in Oxford. The LEP economic growth agenda is incompatible with addressing these or the urgent transition to zero carbon.

The SEP Introduction includes '*There is, in particular, heightened awareness of the imperatives surrounding a transition to net zero carbon, and its urgency....there has been increasing recognition that – in and of itself – economic growth (usually measured in terms of gross value added (GVA)) is both unsatisfactory as an indicator of effective local prosperity and flawed as a statement of purpose.*' And yet 'Economic Growth' (presumably GVA measured?) takes precedence over 'Sustainability' in much of the rest of the report.

There is no framework within the SEP to balance the complexities and sometimes competing priorities set out in the 10 Strategies. Zero carbon will only be achieved if the PaZCO predominates over the other nine Oxfordshire Strategies. The economic plan for Oxfordshire in the 2020's must show how the restoration of nature will be managed. Delivery of aspirations based on productivity alone focuses on employment and innovation; and fails on the environmental and societal goals of the Oxfordshire Vision.

The overriding principles of wellbeing and zero carbon disappear in the SEP section on Measuring Progress. There is an opportunity here for Oxfordshire to set a globally relevant example to complement our ambitions as global centre for innovation and energy technology. Our opportunity is to use 21st C economic principles to measure progress towards the twelve 'Social Foundations' identified by the UN; and how we keep within nine Ecological Ceilings. The Introduction to the SEP report states, '*In this context, insights have been drawn from Doughnut Economics and its vision of an ecologically safe and socially just space in which humanity can thrive.*' Here is a readymade methodology for Oxfordshire to lead the way in changing our purpose from growing to thriving, to guide our decision making to balance environmental and social goals, both locally and globally.

It is our view that Oxfordshire's Councils should support a Strategic Economic Partnership for Oxfordshire (Oxon StEP). This partnership should be multisector, for a multi stakeholder community and be place-based. It would connect the existing activity and networks in Oxfordshire for the common purpose of generating an economic strategy that meets everyone's needs within the means of our living planet.

We are concerned that the FOP members are only to 'take note' of the LEP report. Who has the authority to re-direct this very important Strategic plan to encompass 21st C Economics?

We are concerned that those of our local politicians who are directors of the LEP board have a conflict of interest between supporting this LEP as it is, and discharging their duties as our elected representatives to plan for the wellbeing of future generations.

Questions to put to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership:

1. What further evidence of climate change do our decision makers need to justify setting the wellbeing of future generations as the over-riding top priority in the SEP?

Answer

The Partnership fully appreciates the importance of addressing climate change to future generations and agrees that should be taken into account by OxLEP in the drafting of the Strategic Economic Plan.

2. What legal and material influence does the SEP have on Local Plans?

Answer

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has content on this point. The NPPF, which is guidance and not legislation, requires Local Plans to set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to Local Industrial Strategies and other local policies for economic development and regeneration. In this context new Local Plans in Oxfordshire will need to have regard to the Strategic Economic Plan when it is finalised.

3. Why is the SEP being rushed through for adoption by OxLEP in advance of the central government changes to LEP funding and devolution of responsibility for Strategic Economic Plans to Local Authorities?

Answer

The Strategic Economic Plan process led by OxLEP commenced in February 2023 supported by SQW with a review of existing strategies followed by an open call for evidence, stakeholder interviews, and 7 public ½ day workshops held across the county between March and June. It has been supported throughout by a senior officer working group with representatives drawn from all Oxfordshire Local Authorities, Universities, FE College engagement and Government representation. Following the workshops and evidence gathering process, OxLEP's consultants SQW prepared a first working draft in August and then following initial comment from the Officer working group prepared Version 2 which was circulated to all stakeholders, OXLEP Board and Sub-Groups, FOP and FOP Scrutiny, all registered workshop participants, Business Representative Organisations and MPs on the 12/13th September. Following consideration at Board and now FOP, OxLEP will review any further comments during October and early November before preparing a final draft for consideration at the OXLEP Board in December.

4. How will Local Authorities and the FOP take advantage of the opportunity in April 2024 for local leadership and local residents to determine their own economic strategies rather than defer to the vested interests of business-led OxLEP?

Answer

Guidance for the integration of LEP functions into local authorities was issued during August 2023 and the development of the future model for the delivery of current LEP functions is at an early stage of development. The August guidance stated that further specific guidance on business representation and local economic planning will be issued by January 2024.