

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group

HELD ON FRIDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 10.00 AM

Present:

Councillors: David Rouane (Chair), Sue Cooper, Andrew McHugh, Andrew Prosser, Anna Railton, Pete Sudbury and Bethia Thomas

Officers: Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Jessie Fieth (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Sarah Gilbert (Oxfordshire County Council), Dale Hoyland (Oxfordshire County Council), Alex Jeffery (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Hannah Kenyon (West Oxfordshire District Council), Dominic Lamb (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Suzanne Malcolm (Senior Responsible Officer), David Yates (Future Oxfordshire Partnership).

Guests: Fiona Steel (Good Food Oxfordshire).

92 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutes; declaration of interests; Chair's announcements

Apologies had been received from Councillor Andrea Powell (substituted by Councillor Sue Cooper).

93 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes from the previous meeting held on 07 July 2023 were agreed to be an accurate record of matters discussed.

94 Forward work programme

Members questioned whether schools and academies were being covered sufficiently by work underway as part of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP). Officers responded that schools were being picked-up as part of the skills work that the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) were bringing to the next meeting as well as the Action on Carbon and Energy in Oxfordshire Schools (ACES) programme and a loan scheme which is being piloted in schools.

In response to a question from officers regarding the requirement for local authorities to have a 5-year biodiversity plan and potential collaborative working on this, the Chair advised that the Environment Advisory Group had made the decision in its infancy to focus on climate matters and suggested the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership was the forum for biodiversity conversations. The Chair recommended that officers tasked with developing those plans could discuss offline to see if and where this conversation could come together. Members from Oxford City Council and West Oxfordshire District Council offered to follow up with their respective officers on this.

95 Oxfordshire Food Strategy

Fiona Steel, Good Food Oxfordshire Manager, spoke to this agenda item. Fiona updated members on progress since the last update to the Environment Advisory Group in June 2022.

Members praised the progress of the food strategy and recommended the importance of education and diet.

Members noted the need to build a local economy for produce from agroecological farms, noting that input costs drive the extent to which farmers in Oxfordshire were on the scale of agroecological farming. Anna agreed that there were levers in creating a market and noted a pilot project in the food strategy of direct sales of local produce to institutional buyers. A community wealth building approach to food procurement was also being developed with nine Oxford colleges buying from nine local producers.

Members questioned the balance between the amount of land used for organic farming versus conventional farming using less land for a greater yield. Fiona responded that increasingly the cost of organic farming was levelling out with conventional farming. Fiona noted that this was why scale at an institutional level was important to bring the cost down and organisations such as schools and colleges forward pledging to buy vegetables was important to farmers to continue producing organic produce.

On community wealth building, Fiona noted an opportunity through the rural prosperity fund which was available to some of the districts for infrastructure for food and farming businesses, noting that aggregation facilities and refrigeration were posing a particular challenge. Ian Boll noted that Cherwell District Council and (potentially) other councils were out for expressions of interest for the UK shared prosperity and rural England prosperity funding and therefore recommended haste in preparing a bid.

Action: Suzanne Malcolm to connect Fiona Steel with economic development officer's group who are running the various shared prosperity fund schemes.

Regarding the development of local plans, members noted this was a lever in terms of recognising and mapping layers of grades of land. A second lever was emergency planning and Councillor Prosser framed this in the context of when supply chain difficulties lead to a change in growing habits and practices which could include growing closer to rivers for example.

Members noted an absence in the food strategy of food that you can get for free through foraging and community allotments. Fiona responded that allotments were very much being discussed in the action plan as well as expanding a small gleaning network by

connecting landowners who might have surplus crops with food banks and charities. Fiona emphasised the requirement for adequate infrastructure to preserve that food through processing, refrigeration, transportation and delivery.

The Chair thanked Fiona for the update on the Oxfordshire Food Strategy.

96 Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP) Progress Overview

Expand and scale-up retrofit delivery

Dale Hoyland spoke to this update. Dale noted that a challenge regarding this action was working with a wider audience but noted that capital funding was available to remove the financial barrier for residents living in fuel poverty in Oxfordshire without gas central heating through the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG). For those who are able to pay and invest in energy efficiency measures, Dale noted that the Cosy Homes Oxfordshire scheme was available.

For residents that don't fall into either of the categories referenced above, Dale explained that there were a number of green finance mechanisms available which Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had made or were preparing bids for.

Scale-up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap

A spotlight paper on this action had been deferred to the next meeting of EAG in November 2023.

Develop a collective purchasing approach that supports the widespread deployment of rooftop solar on existing buildings

Officers noted that the action had been paused and recommend the document needed to reflect this.

Action: Alex Jeffery to update NZRMAP project management tracker to note this action had been paused.

Develop an ongoing local area energy planning (LAEP) function

Sarah Gilbert updated members on the remaining actions. Sarah reminded members that this workstream formally reports to the Infrastructure Advisory Group (IAG). A full update report went to IAG in September 2023 and the officer led steering group would meet next Wednesday. Sarah reported a positive response from the Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) about their willingness to be involved in LAEP approach.

Collaborate with town and parish councils to accelerate the roll out of publicly accessible electric vehicle (EV) charge points

Sarah noted that this priority action also reported to the IAG. Sarah advised members that a successful bid secured £4 million of funding for 100 EV charging micro-hubs. An application submitted by OCC in partnership with the districts was successful and will be moving to procure. Work with town and parish councils will map-out where the charging infrastructure would be best placed. Members noted the importance of the EV car club in encouraging households to avoid owning a second car and thereby reducing resource use in building cars.

Explore opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation

Dominic Lamb spoke to this action. Dominic noted that a draft Nature Finance Strategy had been produced by the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP) and funding had been secured towards new officer time and a job description for a OLNP project manager role was being developed and would be out for advert soon.

Explore new funding mechanisms to support delivery of net zero actions

Sarah Gilbert noted strong synergy with work that the Local Nature Partnership are doing in this area and the establishment of an inseting trial established by Oxford City Council. Sarah noted that this workstream would also be looking at opportunities on how Councils could use treasury functions but also how private capital could be unlocked.

Sarah updated members that a date had been agreed for a Green Finance conference on 11 January 2024.

Responding to the question from members earlier in the meeting regarding engagement with schools and academies, Sarah noted that Oxfordshire County Council had launched a trial revolving loan scheme for schools to finance solar and LED measures with a view to replacing Salix. Sarah noted that there has been some early interest but encouraged members to promote the scheme if they had contact with schools.

Officers noted that during the next officer group meeting a discussion should take place on how to bring this workstream together owing to the fact there was no identified lead.

The Chair thanked officers for the update.

97 Horizon Scanning

Members were notified of a carbon sequestration project taking place in Bicester which was researching sustainable carbon fuels by taking carbon dioxide and mixing it was solar-derived hydrogen to make aviation fuel. Councillor McHugh noted that an aircraft flight had been fuelled from sequestered carbon dioxide.

98 Chairs Update from the FOP

The Chair pointed members to the new strategy from Homes England which was presented at the last FOP meeting. The Chair also highlighted a paper on 'A Place Narrative for Oxfordshire' to which the feedback from FOP members was that the work ought to reflect existing policies. The Chair also noted an update on the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) from OxLEP to which the feedback from FOP members was to remember the nine FOP principles agreed by all councils and OxLEP.

99 Future Oxfordshire Partnership Advisory Group Meeting Notes

Members noted this agenda item.

100 Dates of future meetings

Members noted the dates of future meetings as:

- 09 November 2023 15:00 – 17:00
- 18 January 2024 14:00 – 16:00
- 07 March 2024 14:00 – 16:00
- 04 July 2024 14:00 – 16:00

The meeting closed at 12:30pm.