

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environment Advisory Group

HELD ON THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 3.00 PM

Present:

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

Officers: Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Becky Chesshyre (Oxfordshire Partnerships), Ariane Crampton (Oxfordshire County Council), Inga Doherty (Oxfordshire County Council), Jessie Fieth (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils), Sarah Gilbert (Oxfordshire County Council), Susan Harbour, 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), Mish Tullar (Oxford City Council), David Yates (Future Oxfordshire Partnership).

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

None.

102 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 08 September 2023 were agreed to be an accurate record of matters discussed. All actions arising from that meeting had been completed.

103 Forward work programme

The Chair advised members of the group that the EAG work programme could be developed further following the FOP workshop and subsequent discussion at the next FOP meeting on 28 November 2023.

Officers asked whether Biodiversity Net Gain obligations should be revisited as part of the forward work programme. Susan Harbour advised officers and members that this

workstream had been picked up by the Planning Advisory Group (PAG) and Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager, was running a session with PAG members next week.

Members praised the effectiveness of the Environment Advisory Group and wanted to maintain the momentum of the advisory group. Members highlighted the importance of being aware of all work programmes for the FOP advisory groups.

Action: Alex Jeffery to remind Councillor David Rouane to raise Biodiversity Net Gain during work programme discussion at FOP on 28 November 2023.

104 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP)

Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP) Manager, spoke to this agenda item.

In term of a general update, Matt advised members that the OLNP was supporting Oxfordshire County Council along with the other councils in Oxfordshire to produce the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). In terms of completion of the LNRS, Matt advised members that full adoption was anticipated for the end of the 2024/2025 financial year.

On policy advocacy locally the OLNP through a policy subgroup was setting the position of the OLNP on various local issues. Nationally the OLNP had been pushing central government for LNRS to be embedded in local plans. In response to questions about the LNRS and local plans, officers suggested that most local planning authorities were putting 'hooks' into the local plans for the LNRS, for it to be referenced and used as a tool when it was finalised.

Updating members on green finance, Matt noted that the bulk of focus for the OLNP at present was putting in place the building blocks to deliver the LNRS through green finance. The nature finance strategy for Oxfordshire sets out the framework on how to leverage private money to deliver nature-based recovery and solutions. The OLNP were about to deliver a set of workshops on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and the OLNP had created a set of guiding principles which the workshop would be framed around, and how the LNP and partners can support LPAs to make the best success of BNG.

Members queried the geography of landowners in the county who had the ability to host offset projects and specifically sought an update on the progress of carbon offset projects. Matt advised members that the offset market varied from district to district but part of the upcoming BNG workshops would look at whether there was a role for LPAs to support the availability of offsite BNG units. On carbon offset projects, Matt explained that tree planting for carbon did not pay farmers enough money to be a viable option but on soil carbon Matt advised the Northeast Cotswold Farmer Cluster were at the forefront of soil carbon nationally. Although the verification of soil carbon was a global issue, in the meantime, Matt suggested that local authorities should consider how they could support farmer clusters.

On nature and health, Matt updated members that a nature and health project manager was in post and the OLNP had recently worked with the University of Oxford to produce an accessible greenspace report which cross-referenced indices of deprivation with availability of accessible natural green space. Matt noted the report and recommendations to address the disparity and unfair distribution of accessible green space should be available in the coming weeks.

Finally, on the nature-based carbon sequestration workstream of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (Action 6), Matt advised members that a project manager had been recruited to lead this work and other nature finance projects. In response to a question from members about governance and monitoring, Matt advised this would come into the metrics and mechanisms. It was important to ensure long term maintenance was in place to radically enhance nature in line with the vision of the OLNP.

The Chair asked Matt what the take-away message was for local authorities. Matt encouraged members to aim for a higher BNG percentage in their local plans and also encouraged councils to think about how they could support farmers and landowners in bringing forward projects (both BNG and carbon sequestration) and the associated costs.

105 Countywide Emissions Reporting

Inga Doherty spoke to this agenda item which was an update on the latest greenhouse gas emissions data for Oxfordshire. Figures presented within the report were taken from the figures which were released by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero in June 2023.

Inga noted that the targets within the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP) included targets and policies that were in place when the route map was developed. Despite Government indication to amend (push back) some of these implementation dates, members were asked at the end of the report to endorse the retention of target set out in the sectoral pathways in the Oxfordshire NZRMAP. Members noted there was no appetite to slow down on these targets.

With reference to figure 3, members noted a substantial reduction in the CO2 emissions in the commercial sector. Inga offered to look into this further and feedback to members at a later date. Members noted that going forward it would be useful to understand which levers were impacting local emissions.

106 Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP)

107 Update on operationalising the prioritised actions in the NZRMAP

This update paper had been requested by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership when they approved the NZRMAP in March 2023 and would be part of the agenda for the FOP meeting on 28 November 2023.

a NZRMAP Progress Overview

Inga Doherty spoke to this agenda item and highlighted to members key programme updates since the last EAG meeting in September.

Action 1: Expand and scale-up retrofit delivery

Work was underway to deliver grant-funded retrofit programmes, the Home Upgrade Grant and Local Authority Delivered programmes, both of which had so far distributed over £1 million of funding.

Inga noted that officers had hoped to update further on FutureFit One Stop Shop (FOSS), being led by Oxford City Council, however the announcement on funding had been delayed until the end of November.

Members asked whether Oxfordshire was unusually successful in securing funding and could this be attributed to countywide collaboration. Officers did agree that Oxfordshire had been successful in securing funding for a number of years and considered the partnership approach helpful in doing so.

Action 4: Develop an on-going local area energy planning (LAEP) function

The governance was now in place and the first meeting of the Executive Steering Board and Energy Planning Working Group had taken place. Inga highlighted that in both of those groups there were representatives from each Oxfordshire local authority, OxLEP, the electricity and gas distribution operators, Low Carbon Hub and the Great Southeast Net Zero Hub.

Building on project LEO (Local Energy Oxfordshire), funding had been awarded for delivery of a further six-month feasibility study commencing in October 2023 for project LEON (Local Energy Oxfordshire – Neighbourhoods).

Action 5: Accelerate the roll out of publicly accessible EV charge points

The detailed proposal for the funding allocated by the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) bid would be submitted to the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) by the end of November 2023.

Action 7: Explore Innovative Green Finance

Invites had just been sent for a Green Finance conference (100 TOGETHER: Financing Oxfordshire's Green Future) to be held on 11 January 2024.

Members noted that there was still no convening lead for this workstream. Officers agreed to take this as an action for the next EAG officer group meeting.

Action: Officers supporting the EAG to discuss appointment of convening lead for Green Finance workstream.

108 NZRMAP Spotlight Focus: Upscale Domestic Retrofit Skills

Richard Byard, Director of Business Development at OxLEP, provided a spotlight paper on action 2 of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan; Scale up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap.

Members asked how local authorities could encourage businesses to invest and upgrade their retrofit skills training. Richard agreed there were challenges in engaging with industry, predominantly where the construction industry was small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) and sole trader led. Richard suggested there were several routes by which to influence change, including asking questions about future-proofing their procurement channels. Richard noted that this was also being picked up through the Community Employment Plan (CEP) where OxLEP were seeking to maximise the positive impact of major developments on local communities through providing the framework and infrastructure for skills outcomes.

Members discussed the inclusion (and exclusion by an inspector) of the CEP in local plans and whether the retrofit skills gap could be filled with occupations identified by HM Government as given special status for immigration. Richard agreed to take this away for further investigation.

Richard encouraged members to build on the positive momentum in this sector to carry the work forwards.

109 Horizon Scanning

There were no comments on this agenda item at the meeting.

110 Chairs update from the FOP

The Chair noted that the majority of the last FOP meeting on 26 September 2023 was the FOP workshop which had already been discussed.

111 Future Oxfordshire Partnership Advisory Group Meeting Notes

Members noted this agenda item.

112 Dates of future meetings

Members noted the dates of the next meeting as:

- 18 January 2024
- 07 March 2024
- 04 July 2024

The meeting closed at 16:30