

# Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



## The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

HELD ON THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER 2024 AT 2.00 PM

MEETING ROOMS 2-3, COUNTY HALL, NEW ROAD, OXFORD, OX1 1ND

### Present:

**Members:** Councillor Liz Leffman (Chair), (Oxfordshire County Council), Professor Alex Betts, (OxLEP Universities rep), Councillor Susan Brown, (Oxford City Council), Professor Alistair Fitt, (OxLEP Chair), Councillor Andy Graham, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor David Hingley, (Cherwell District Council), Angus Horner, (OxLEP business rep), Julia Krause, (Homes England), Dean Lusby-Gordan, (Environment Agency), Miranda Markham, (OxLEP business rep), Councillor David Rouane (South Oxfordshire District Council) and Councillor Bethia Thomas, (Vale of White Horse District Council).

**Officers:** Ian Boll (Cherwell District Council), Becky Chesshyre, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Emma Coles, (Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership), Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Caroline Green (Oxford City Council), Susan Harbour, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Giles Hughes (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Valerie Lambrechts, (Oxfordshire County Council), Amber Lyford (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Babatunde Ogundele (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Martin Reeves (Oxfordshire County Council), Paul Staines (Future Oxfordshire Partnership) and Matt Whitney, (Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership).

**Other councillors:** Councillor Barry Wood, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

### 17. Apologies for absence; declarations of interest and Chair's announcement

Apologies for absence were submitted from Emma Hill, (substituted by Dean Lusby-Gordon) and Dan Leveson.

There were no declarations of interests.

### 18. Minutes

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

## **19. Public participation**

It was noted that no formal requests for public speaking had been received by the published deadline, but the Chair informed the meeting that she had that morning received a representation from the Chair of Shirburn Parish Council regarding the Housing and Growth Deal Q1 2024/2025 update report and specifically the Watlington Relief Road. This would be responded to in due course.

## **20. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel update**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Barry Wood, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Panel to the meeting to present his report.

Councillor Wood commented that unfortunately, the meeting of the Panel had to be abandoned on the basis that it had not been quorate because at least one member of each constituent council had not been present as per the Panel's Terms of Reference. Comments on various reports made by several individual Panel members had been circulated to FOP members informally.

Councillor Wood requested that council leaders, as members of the Partnership, do all they could to ensure the future attendance of at least one representative from their councils at Panel meetings.

The Chair responded that she agreed that leaders needed to do all they could to ensure attendance at the Scrutiny Panel and that she looked forward to attending the Panel herself as a guest in November.

## **21. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 1 2024/2025**

The Partnership considered a report which provided an update on progress and spend for the remaining programmes included as part of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as of Quarter 1, 2024/2025. Valerie Lambrechts, Infrastructure Portfolio Manager, Oxfordshire County introduced the Housing from Infrastructure, (Hfi) section of the report and [shared a presentation illustrating a number of the schemes.](#)

In response to a question from Councillor Bethia Thomas, Valerie commented that it was expected that work on the Lodge Hill scheme would commence on site in late October/early November and on the Steventon Lights scheme in October.

Councillor David Rouane referred to paragraph 3.2.6 of the report concerning the Watlington Relief Road scheme. He noted that it was considered no longer possible to complete the scheme as part of the Hfi programme and sought assurance that the project would still go ahead even though it would no longer use Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal funding. The meeting was informed that the portion of the cost of the scheme which had previously been allocated as using Housing and Growth Deal funding had been returned to the Hfi programme budget in light of delays in the planning process. Officers would be seeking the approval of the Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet of alternative funds to deliver the scheme with the goal that work could start in the New Year.

Councillor Liz Leffman as Leader of Oxfordshire County Council commented that its Cabinet had committed to finding the funding to deliver the scheme, noting the need to provide the final section of the overall Watlington Relief Road linking two developments.

In response to a question from Councillor David Hingley, officers commented that work on the Tramway Road scheme was expected to commence on the 21 October and appropriate communications would be issued with stakeholders in due course.

**RESOLVED:** That the financial position of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal as at Quarter 1, 2024/2025 be noted.

## **22. Social Value Brokerage Platform Business Case**

The Partnership considered a report and business case seeking to address the challenge of increasing the amount of social value delivered through procurement activity across Oxfordshire using Social Value Brokerage. Emma Coles, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Manager introduced the report and responded to member questions.

The Partnership was asked to approve the business case and the use of up to £90,000 from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Funding to support the implementation of the proposals. It was explained that by establishing an Oxfordshire wide social value brokerage platform it would be possible to reduce costs and enable faster more efficient connections between suppliers and local organisations leading to increased opportunities for social value procurement and inclusive economic growth. It was stressed that appropriate officers within each council would be engaged about the procurement of the platform as that process progressed.

In discussion, Councillors Bethia Thomas whilst expressing full support for the aims and aspiration of the proposals with regard to a more inclusive economy, expressed some concern that there was a need to proceed cautiously given the timing of the approval of the proposals in the context of the wider change and the review of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. She also spoke to the need to work closely with officers in all the councils and avoid any duplication of existing effort and resources across the county and different partnerships given pressure on resources.

Councillor David Rouane commented that although he also fully supported the aims and objectives of the proposals, it was a very technical area and he felt unsure as to how the proposals demonstrated they would deliver wider benefits to the Oxfordshire economy. Officers responded that the platform was intended to essentially 'match' typically larger organisations wishing to increase the social value of their procurement processes with local suppliers and enterprises looking for opportunities to meet those needs. It was recognised that the platform would only be as good as the opportunities that were listed upon it and the organisations involved, which is why it was intended to use Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Capacity funding to put in place capacity to promote the platform and engage with appropriate networks to build the momentum necessary for the platform to succeed.

The meeting was also informed the costings within the business case covered a period of two years including licensing.

Councillor Andy Graham commented that he felt the proposals represented a significant step forward and it was up to councils to all use the platform and to promote its use

working with their respective Economic Development teams. He also echoed remarks that there should be continued engagement in the platform engagement process.

In response to a question regarding the business case options for the procurement process, the meeting was updated that initially two procuring body options had been considered as set out in the report, one via Oxford City Council which already had experience of the 'Match my Project' platform and the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership, (OxLEP), but since that time OxLEP had indicated that they would find it difficult to assist. However, Oxford City Council had indicated they were happy to assist on behalf of all the councils.

Professor Alex Betts and Professor Alistair Fitt supported the recommendation. Professor Betts highlighted the importance of the social value agenda and that it could help to underpin an inclusive growth agenda for Oxfordshire. There was an increasing impetus from many organisations, including 'Anchor Institutions' to want to award contracts based upon considerations which were not just based around price and quality, but also recognised social value. The types of employment practices companies followed was also important, as was the aspiration to use local companies, making the greatest social difference in the county. Small and medium sized local businesses needed assistance with this which the brokerage platform would help assist.

Councillor Susan Brown and Councillor David Hingley supported the recommendations. Councillor Brown commenting that in her view, the proposed brokerage platform fitted with the ethos of the local authorities within the Partnership and that the use of Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Funding to support the project closely aligned with the wider remit and scope of the Housing and Growth Deal.

Upon being out to the voting members of the Partnership, it was:

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Social Value Brokerage Business Case be agreed.
2. That the funding for the implementation of the business case to the value of £90,000 be agreed from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal Net Capacity Fund.

## **23. Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Update - Annual Report 2023/2024**

The Partnership considered the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, (OLNP) Annual Report 2023/2024. Matt Whitney, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager introduced the report and gave a [presentation highlighting the role of the Local Nature Partnership](#). The OLNP was funded by the local authority members of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, but also received strong support from a range of statutory and voluntary stakeholders. The highlights of the previous year were set out and work in progress around nature finance, people and nature and nature recovering, (including coordination of the delivery of the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy) summarised.

In discussion, members strongly welcomed the report and the partnership work of the OLNP. Several points were raised as summarised below:

- The importance of links between the research eco-system in Oxfordshire and the OLNP around nature recovery and biodiversity were stressed. The meeting was informed there were strong links and support from both universities in the county to the OLNP and that Professor David Macdonald of the University of Oxford was a member of the OLNP Board representing the sector. In addition, the OLNP's work had received significant support from members of the [Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery](#) including Professor Alison Smith and Professor Yadvinder Malhi.
- Potential to build on the nature in sport agenda and opportunities for nature around social prescribing. The meeting was informed that this related to the breadth of ways in which people engaged with nature. Engaging with all people at each interaction was a significant challenge and therefore activity was prioritised towards, but the importance of nature in sport was fully recognised.
- Role of footpaths and public rights of way such as the Oxfordshire Way were mechanisms for the public to engage with nature and challenges around accessibility at certain times of year. The meeting was informed that OLNP officers did work with Oxfordshire County Council officers and other organisations around the public right of way network and footpaths also provided very important linear corridors connecting nature rich habitats.
- There were several ways of defining nature rich habitats. In Oxfordshire it was considered that around 6.5% of land currently met the local definition which was based on criteria such as agri-environment stewardship schemes, priority habitats and areas protected for nature such as [Sites of Special Scientific Interest](#) which met a certain habitat quality threshold.
- Use of limited resources – keys priority areas. The meeting was informed that it was expected that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy would spatially identify key places for investment. With regard to thematic policy areas, there was a need to more specifically link nature recovery into the decision making process, potentially including Local Plans and to link nature recovery ambitions to agriculture.
- It would not be possible to meet the cost of delivering Oxfordshire's nature recovery ambitions estimated at least £800m through the public sector, but there could be greater opportunities to leverage more private sector funding from the emergent nature markets where business was required to off-set the impact of activity through carbon credits or proactively deliver a bio-diversity net gain.
- Money was critical. Food manufacturing and processing was the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, but studies had estimated this to be around 0.33% of GDP. Unfortunately, there were currently no funds available to farmers and most landowners to affect the outcomes all parties wanted for nature recovery through the LNRS. This was a national as well as local issue. Whilst Oxfordshire was fortunate to have access to some valuable and innovative green technology, it was important to realistic about the scale of the challenges involved in nature recovery delivery financially and economically.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress described in the annual report be noted.
2. That the Future Oxfordshire Partnership notes the importance of continuing to support the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, aligned to several outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.

## **24. Advisory Group updates**

### **(a) Planning Advisory Group update**

Councillor Andy Graham, Chair of the Planning Advisory Group provided a verbal update on the meeting of the advisory group held on 13 September 2024.

He commented that the meeting had considered a briefing paper on planning for primary healthcare infrastructure which had been developed with input from officers from the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board, (ICB) who had also attended the meeting. This was a matter of high importance across with residents across the county with a common view that there an extreme deficit of primary healthcare infrastructure given the county's growing population. This was of mutual concern to both local authorities and NHS organisations.

The discussion had included how councils as planning authorities could work with the ICB going forward for instance around Section 106 agreements to provide better access to health infrastructure.

To be effective, such a partnership approach would also need to include HM Government through its funding of the NHS and in setting the regulatory environment, but local authorities had a role to play in working together now to leverage the most influence and impact possible. With the new indicating it was open to discussions on the future of the NHS there was potential to influence it.

In discussion, various Partnership members echoed the sentiments expressed by Councillor Graham and referred to the need for better engagement with ICB and health colleagues including at the strategic level of planning for the future location of health facilities. It was felt by a number of members that there had been issues historically with engagement of NHS colleagues in planning matters at Local Plan level and that that these efforts needed to continue, and a solution be found. However, members also commented that they were aware of the acute resource challenges and structural changes the ICB was facing.

## **25. Future Oxfordshire Partnership Forward Plan**

The Partnership considered its forward programme. The Chair commented that the agenda for the next meeting in November was quite heavy but that she was proposing that a paper on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be added. This was agreed.

In discussion, members concurred that the agenda for the November meeting was heavy and suggested that given the importance of the item on the Partnership, that some of the non-time sensitive agenda items be rescheduled to a later meeting.

Kevin Jacob, Senior Future Oxfordshire Partnership Democratic Services Officer referred to the possibility of an additional item on climate adaptation. It was decided that further discussion with district councils was required before the paper could be considered and it was added to the January 2025 work programme.

## **26. Appointment of representative to the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Andy Graham be appointed as the representative of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership for the 2024/2025 municipal year.

## **27. Updates on matters relevant to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership**

The Chair referred to the invitation she had received as Leader of Oxfordshire County Council from the Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP on behalf of HM Government for local authorities to register expressions of interest in discussions around a potential devolution deal. In response, following discussions between all the principal authority Leaders, a joint letter on behalf of all the councils making an expression of interest had been submitted.

The expression of interest had been general at the current stage because of the uncertainties around what parameters the Government intended to put in place regarding devolution. The letter had underscored the positive net contribution that Oxfordshire made to the UK economy and the willingness of the councils to work together as well as some of the challenges the county faced, for example around infrastructure and affordable housing.

## **28. Updates from key strategic partnerships supporting delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision**

Councillor Andy Graham provided a verbal update of the [Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership Board, \(PRP\) meeting held on 19 September 2024](#)

The discussion at the PRP meeting had been through, positive and open. Matters discussed included the organisations constitution, its work programme and environmental principles moving forward. This included the role of the PRP in acting as a facilitator and conveyor of the Environment Agency's integrated water framework at a regional scale and green finance investment opportunities. Councillor Graham commented that in his view, the value of a pan regional collective approach had been demonstrated, but further financial support was needed from HM Government for the PRP to continue.

Professor Alistair Fitt added that had been developments around partnership working between the PRP, the Arc Universities Group, England Economic Heartland, the Oxford to Cambridge Supercluster and East West Rail. The [Oxford to Cambridge Supercluster](#) now been established as a legal entity with a board of directors.

In his view, the future of East West Rail within the grouping was unclear pending HM Government clarification. He concurred that time was running out in terms of the PRP's financial position. There had also been discussions around the new Government's emerging policy position.

Councillor Susan Brown referred to remarks by the Chair of Ofgem at the meeting about changes and reorganisation of the national electricity grid. These changes were not well socialised in her view, but they were important as it was understood that Ofgem would be working more closely with planning authorities around future grid needs although it was not yet clear how. It was important that further discussions about the grid took place at an

Oxfordshire level so the collective views of Oxfordshire could be fed into whatever structures were put in place.

The Chair gave an update on the [meeting of England's Economic Heartland](#), (EEH) which had taken place on 27 September 2024. Agenda topics had priorities for rail investment on a regional basis, with a focus on issues such as decarbonisation of the rail network which would affect the network around Didcot and Oxford and the presentation had also included mention of the possibilities around a station at Wantage and Grove. The Chiltern Line and East West Rail has also been discussed and unfortunately there was no current plan for East West Rail to be electric.

Other matters discussed include an update on the new Government's approach, the possibilities for the EEH to seek statutory functions and powers and the response of the EEH to the Government's consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework and other consultations.

A Bus symposium was to be held on 10 October 2024 which was expected to include discussion of bus franchising arrangements.

Miranda Markham commented that on behalf of a number of business stakeholders including Bicester Village she had written to the Secretary of State for Transport around the fleet capacity of the Chiltern Line which was also acting as a barrier to future economic growth in the area. She commented that it was important to seek to raise the issue in any conversation with HM Government.

## **29. Dates of next meetings**

The dates of meetings as set out in the agenda were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chairman

Date