

To: Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Title of Report: Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual Report 2023/2024
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Report of: Andrew Down, Director of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership
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Executive Summary and Purpose:

This report provides an annual update on the FOP's work to deliver the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development which was formally endorsed by the FOP in March 2021 and subsequently approved by each of the Oxfordshire Councils. The update covers the period Aug 2023 – Aug 2024. Many of the workstreams that support the delivery of the Strategic Vision are ongoing; as such, this report is intended to provide a snapshot of these programmes rather than a comprehensive review.

Appendices:

- **Appendix 1:** [FOP Update Report from the previous year](#)
- **Appendix 2:** [Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Annual Report 2023-4](#)
- **Appendix 3:** [Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Annual report 2022-23](#)
- **Appendix 4:** Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP) annual report (included in the FOP report pack for the 26th November 2024 meeting of the FOP)
- **Appendix 4:** [Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire](#)

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Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Annual report 2023-24

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Background

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) is a joint committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire together with key strategic partners, focused on the delivery of the bold and ambitious outcomes set out in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long Term Sustainable Development. FOP does not hold any delegated powers from the constituent councils but instead seeks to offer a single strategic voice on matters of common concern or interest. It does this by:

- Coordinating local efforts to manage the big challenges Oxfordshire faces like the transition to net zero carbon, improved county-wide connectivity, healthy place-shaping, inequality, and improving the state of our natural environment.
- Facilitating delivery of projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to execute collaboratively in the fields of economic development, strategic infrastructure planning, and climate change.
- Representing Oxfordshire on matters of regional and national interest.

Its four current focus areas of environment, housing, infrastructure, and planning are informed by four corresponding Advisory Groups of lead cabinet members from each council, and four corresponding officer groups. The Partnership's work is reviewed by a Scrutiny Panel with 18 members, three from each authority, and is supported by a small team of specialist officers.

To effectively tackle county-wide, challenges like those set out above we need to collaborate with partners across district and organisational boundaries. The role of the FOP is to facilitate shared working and peer support to enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of provision in these areas, and to co-ordinate monitoring to keep us on track to deliver our goals.

Strategic Vision

The [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for long term sustainable development](#), which was formally endorsed by the FOP in March 2021 and subsequently approved by each of the Oxfordshire Councils, sets out the FOP's long-term ambition for what the county could be like by 2050. The nine outcomes within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision are ambitious - delivering them requires long-term collective commitment and investment by the partners that make up the FOP as well as a wider set of strategic stakeholders and partners who make decisions about investment and placemaking across Oxfordshire.

The nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision



Figure 1: Graphic showing the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire.

The Strategic Vision is a non-statutory document. It provides an overarching framework to inform a range of different plans, strategies, and programmes, to drive improvements in environmental, social, and economic well-being and further complements plans and strategies already in place and approved by the FOP and partner organisations.

Work programmes

Each of these work programmes works directly to deliver the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision above.

- Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan
- Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy
- Homes from Infrastructure Programme (Housing & Growth Deal)
- Best practice, knowledge transfer and information sharing
- Existing council programmes of work overseen by FOP advisory groups
- Supply and sustainability of energy

Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan

To support the objective of a net zero Oxfordshire, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership commissioned the development of a route map and action plan for the county, intended to identify joint actions that the Oxfordshire local authorities can take together to provide a catalyst for positive action with regards to net zero, across the region.

The resulting Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (City Science, 2023) details:

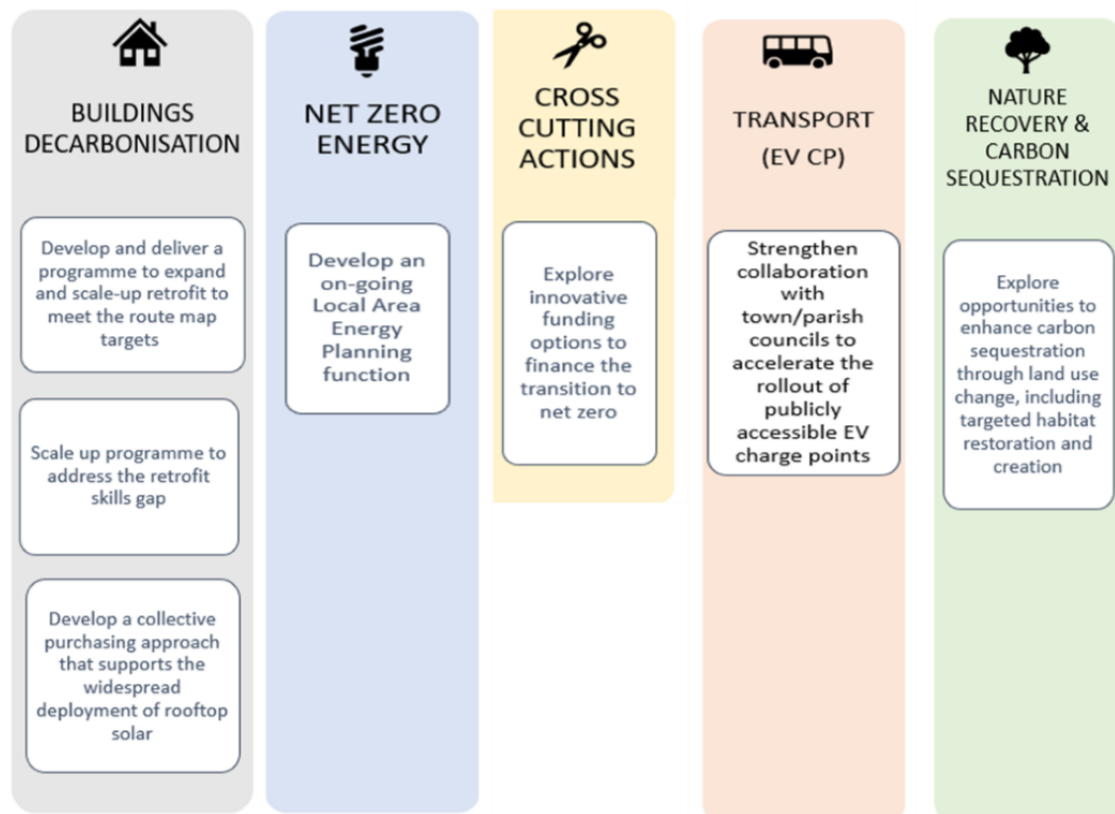
- The emission reductions necessary to achieve net zero by 2050

- The key milestones in 2025, 2030 and 2040
- Carbon budgets of maximum emissions that can be emitted to maintain this pathway
- KPIs to track progress
- Recommended areas for FOP members to work on jointly to accelerate action.

The plan identifies 14 actions to be implemented to help realise collective net zero ambitions. The collaborative action plan does not replace individual organisations' net zero strategy and workplans, or statutory documents and activity such as Local Plans or the Local Transport & Connectivity Plan.

At its meeting in March 2023, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership endorsed the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and phased delivery of the identified joint actions. Five action areas were prioritised. Officers and convening leads have been working together to draw up the next steps across the prioritised actions. A programme tracker has been set up to monitor progress. An update on countywide emissions and progress toward net zero targets will be provided to FOP and the respective advisory groups on an annual basis.

The prioritised actions from the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan being taken forward as core FOP workstreams are as follows:



The workstreams under the prioritised actions are focussed on supporting mobilisation of external investment. Delivery against joint actions is currently being met through existing resources, with additional funding agreed at FOP in March 2023 (£150k to support development of a local area energy planning approach, and £100K for carbon sequestration activity) and July 2024 (£450k for further development of the Local Area Energy Planning project).

Future resource gaps will be looked at through joint funding bids and efficiency savings from commissioning joint evidence – exploring funding mechanisms is one of the five core workstreams (see above).

Local Area Energy Planning

A Local Area Energy Plan is a spatial plan which maps all the existing energy infrastructure of an area, evaluates the current and future energy demand and produces a plan of actions to deliver the net zero transition. LAEPs aim to deliver cost savings, social benefits, and a more coordinated energy transition by taking a proactive, whole-systems, place-specific approach to energy planning.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership had allocated an initial £150,000 to the local area energy planning workstream in March 2023. In July 2024 FOP approved the development of a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) and an ongoing LAEP function for Oxfordshire, allocating a further £450,000 to complete the project.

Background and progress to date

In 2023 FOP agreed for work to commence on the production of a LAEP programme to support Oxfordshire's ambition to transition to net zero, as one of the priority actions in the [Oxfordshire Pathways to Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan \(NZRMAP\)](#). An officer working group (EPWG) and steering group (ESB) was established in September 2023. In March the FOP's Executive Officer Group asked the EPWG for a Business Case on our proposed LAEP programme to be produced.

The EPWG conducted a thorough early market process with the principal LAEP consultants. This, together with engagement with EPWG local authority members, led to the development of a LAEP Scope for the County with two proposed work streams:

- 1) LAE Plans: District level plans produced following data analysis, modelling and stakeholder engagement by a specialist consultant.
- 2) LAEP Function: Areas that need to be developed so that LAE Planning is effective and the procured LAEPs result in the right outcomes. This is in effect how councils can have the capability to develop and deliver LAEPs in the future.

Early market engagement and the delivery model

Following engagement with consultants, the following model for LAEP development has been proposed:

- Phase 1: Data collection and modelling for the whole County
- Phase 2: Production of LAEPs at district level.
- Phase 3: The extension of activity post publication of LAEPs into enabling effective delivery of projects.

Benefits of LAEPs

- The route to decarbonised energy (mainly heat and transport) is more efficient if it is planned via the LAEP process, and even more effective if this is done by all the councils of Oxfordshire working collectively.
- LAEPs support responsive and proactive grid management, reducing overdependence on costly infrastructure expansion. By improving the operation of the distribution network, we can delay or avoid expensive reinforcements, ensuring energy needs are met while prioritising high-need areas. This approach will result in reduced network impacts and allow Distribution System Operators (DSOs) to allocate resources more efficiently.
- In addition, LAEPs generate a costed action plan, promoting planned investment based on solid evidence. This will enhance the likelihood of successful delivery and informed investment decisions. While LAEPs support the planning system, they do not replace it; effective integration between LAE Planning and the Planning System is crucial for project implementation.
- The LAEPs will enable Oxfordshire to present a unified voice to the newly established Regional Energy System Planner (RESP), ensuring our local energy objectives are incorporated into regional plans. The LAEPs will empower local decision-making, allowing us to communicate agreed-upon priorities to the DSOs and RESP.
- Stakeholder engagement is central to a Local Area Energy Plan. LAEPs should serve as a platform for engaging with communities, enabling them to influence the development of the energy system in line with their aspirations.

LAEPs have recently become a statutory requirement for Welsh local authorities. 'Trailblazer cities' like Greater Manchester and 20 other English areas have adopted LAEPs with ambitious pre-2050 net zero targets across the UK.

Next steps

Following the decision from the leaders of Oxfordshire's six councils to proceed with the development of LAEPs and a LAEP function for Oxfordshire, the LAEP project has gone out to procurement. Contract award is anticipated in November 2024, with commencement shortly thereafter.

Partnership working and engagement is integral to the successful development and delivery of the LAEP. Regular updates will be circulated to stakeholders as the LAEP progresses.

The Infrastructure Advisory Group currently oversees and inputs into the development of the workstream and provides updates to the FOP.

Updates on the other four workstreams of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP) that the FOP oversees are included in a separate report presented to the FOP, the ‘Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP) Annual Report.’

These workstreams are currently overseen by FOP advisory groups and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership. They are:

- **buildings decarbonisation**
- **accelerating the roll out of publicly accessible EV charge points**
- **exploring opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation**
- **exploring new funding mechanisms to support delivery of net zero activity**

Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)

The first iteration of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) was endorsed by the then Oxfordshire Growth Board in November 2017. It is credited with contributing to securing significant investment for infrastructure in Oxfordshire, particularly the redevelopment of Oxford Station, and transport schemes being funded through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (i.e., Homes from Infrastructure) and the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF).

As part of the Housing and Growth Deal, there was a commitment to update OxIS to support the proposed Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP2050). However, as reported last year the cessation of the OP2050 project led to a pause to allow FOP to reconsider the direction of travel for OxIS, its place within plans to deliver the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, and how it could best underpin the county’s infrastructure ambitions.

Partners took the time to reflect and consider the successes of the first OxIS, and opportunities to improve the new version. This led to the adoption of some key principles for OxIS.

These included agreement that OxIS should:

- Be longer term, to 2050.
- Be strategic in nature and not duplicate the Infrastructure Development Plans that district planning authorities prepare alongside their local plans.
- Be holistic so that it reflects the full suite of infrastructure issues, including green and digital infrastructure.

- Recognise the areas of comparative weakness in previous OxIS and specifically seek to address those. Most notably: energy, water and health infrastructure.
- Be a tool for meaningful engagement with residents and stakeholders, as part of a wider conversation over Oxfordshire’s future development

Using these principles as a guide a core working group of relevant officers drew up a brief for the commissioning of OxIS. This brief was then used to commission consultants to deliver the project with an anticipated completion date of Summer 2025.

Homes from Infrastructure Programme (Housing & Growth Deal)

This programme to deliver strategic infrastructure to support the acceleration of already planned houses in Oxfordshire was allocated £150m of government funding. The final tranche of funding is subject to government and reporting requirements set out in a letter from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following the cessation of work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in August 2022.

Figures as of 30 Sept 2024	
Infrastructure schemes completed	10
Infrastructure schemes in progress (<i>meaning any in Stage 1, 2 or 3</i>)	10 on progress + 10 that are development only
Accelerated housing units (<i>deal and deal extension combined</i>)	7,745 delivered (a further 584 to be delivered to make a total of 8,329)

The table above shows the number of infrastructure schemes completed, the number in progress, and the number of housing units these have accelerated. The original target for accelerated homes in the Housing and Growth Deal was 6549 units, so we will exceed that by 1780 homes.

Oxfordshire County Council is now accountable for delivery of the remaining programme; a Memorandum of Understanding sets out commitments to positive partnership working, with particular regard to consulting with partners over any proposed changes to the programme of infrastructure delivery.

Best practice, knowledge transfer and information sharing

The partnership working of the FOP is an essential mechanism for sharing knowledge and best practice across the partner organisations. Recent examples include:

- **Planning for primary healthcare infrastructure:** The Planning Advisory Group (PAG) is attended by a representative from Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB). The PAG was tasked with improving the understanding of Local Planning Authorities and BOB ICB about the challenges each faces around the provision of primary healthcare infrastructure, and investigating how the partners might better work together so that the needed infrastructure is delivered. Officers worked closely with BOB ICB to deliver two papers for consideration by PAG members that set out the challenges, possible solutions and a way forward, towards better collaborative working.
- **Environment strategy map and project/programme tracker:** The EAG and EAG Officer group has continued to monitor delivery against the Net Zero Route Map and Action Tracker and supported collaboration between officers working on the delivery of the plan's objectives.
- **Salt Cross:** PAG Members received a presentation from a West Oxfordshire Planning Officer on the recent legal decision on the Salt Cross Garden Village inspection report. The successful challenge to the inspector's decision by a community action group vindicated West Oxfordshire District Council's initial position on zero carbon standards. The successful challenge has both local and national significance for the ability of councils to set standards over and above those set out nationally.
- **Viability Assessments:** PAG Members received a report on opportunities for joint working on viability assessments. The report considered: section 106 agreements and their relationship to development viability, the importance of assessing infrastructure contributions together with affordable housing and other requirements to ensure the viability and deliverability of new development, issues around the procurement of viability consultants and how the process could be improved and issues around benchmark land values, their importance to development viability and the scope for improved sharing of information.

Existing council programmes of work overseen by FOP advisory groups

Several existing pieces of work currently in development have been identified as benefiting from inclusion within the work programmes of the advisory groups and the FOP as a mechanism for increasing broader member input and buy in at an earlier stage.

- **Infrastructure Advisory Group:** Strategies and delivery plans emerging from the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan including Local Area Travel Plans, Bus Service Improvement Plan, mobility hub activity, freight strategy, and Vision Zero are now coming forward to IAG for update and broader member input.
- **Environment Advisory Group:** Work on climate adaptation and resilience, the Oxfordshire food strategy, and Climate Action Oxfordshire behaviour change campaign are now coming forward to EAG for update and broader member input.
- **Housing Advisory Group:** Funding for a project to enable the development of Community Led Housing.

Supply and sustainability of energy

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership is uniquely positioned to amplify the collective voice of Oxfordshire's local authorities and co-ordinate advocacy work in support of the nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision.

The FOP identified shared concerns across Oxfordshire that constraints in the development of the electricity grid have the potential to negatively impact upon the pace of delivery of net zero ambitions.

To achieve collective net zero ambitions while maintaining inward investment within the county, a sustainable, decarbonized energy system is required. However, grid constraints in both the transmission and distribution elements of the electricity network are resulting in delays to deliver renewable energy projects and decarbonization activity, which (including electric vehicle charger rollout and heat pump installation) whilst inhibiting inward investment within Oxfordshire.

In 2023, following written letters from FOP to the three Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) which cover Oxfordshire, Local Authority Leaders and OxLEP met with the DNOs to identify opportunities to work together to address these ongoing challenges. This meeting highlighted the importance of local area energy planning as the primary local methodology to identify and secure sustainable energy solutions and this is a workstream which has since been progressed (see NZRMAP section of this report, above).

The FOP also co-ordinated an Oxfordshire-wide response to government's Environmental Audit Committee's call for evidence on 'The sustainable electrification of the UK economy'. [The full response to the call for evidence from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership has been published online.](#)

[The committee's report and recommendations can be found here.](#)

Updates from longstanding work programmes

In addition to those workstreams listed above, the FOP has delivered outcomes through established programmes of work.

Rail connectivity

A study undertaken on behalf of FOP is facilitating improvements to Oxfordshire's rail connectivity, supporting the delivery of the Strategic Vision outcomes.

The Oxford Station & Area Upgrade work currently underway will enable greener travel by providing better access to the station entrance, delivering extra rail capacity, getting more freight off roads and onto rail, and enhancing cycling, walking and bus infrastructure at the station. In addition, the planned re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line will improve Oxfordshire's rail infrastructure and transform our connectivity. Both of these projects were identified as a priorities thanks to the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS) undertaken on behalf of the FOP.

The ORCS, published in 2021, provided a strategic vision for the proposed development of rail services in Oxfordshire, aligning major programmes of work on the rail network within the county. Recommendations from the ORCS were brought together in an overarching industry strategy for the county known as 'Oxfordshire Connect'.

Other partnerships

The FOP works closely with other partnerships in the county and nationally to enable FOP members to engage with and influence these forums in support of the outcomes of the Strategic Vision.

FOP representatives are given a seat on the following partnerships:

- **England's Economic Heartland** - a sub-national transport body for the region stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire which advised the government on the transport infrastructure, services and policy framework which will realise our region's economic potential while supporting the journey to net zero.
- **Oxford to Cambridge Partnership** – A group of leaders from local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and England's Economic Heartland, with government, in a new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area which collaborates to accelerate economic opportunities and achieve environmental enhancements and to unlock investment for inclusive, high quality sustainable development.
<https://www.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info/>
- **Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership** - an organization of key partners working together to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our

climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive. While a discrete partnership which does not report into the FOP, the OLNP links in with the FOP on projects and programmes in support of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – for example, the OLNP is leading on the carbon sequestration workstream of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route map and Action Plan. The six Oxfordshire councils contribute funding to the OLNP. Please refer to OLNP annual report for updates on the work of this partnership.

In addition, the FOP oversees the work of the **Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership**. The work of the OIEP is aligned to and supports delivery against the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, by working to enable a local economy which is globally competitive, sustainable, diverse, and inclusive. The six Oxfordshire councils contribute funding to the OIEP. Please refer to OIEP annual report for updates on the work of this partnership.

FOP also works closely with other partnerships in Oxfordshire, including the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) and the Oxfordshire Bus Enhanced Partnership (OBEP), to support delivery of the aims of the strategic vision.

Looking forward

Future plans

As the remaining elements of the Housing and Growth Deal near their conclusion with that programme coming to an end in March 2025, the partners of the FOP have been reviewing the future work programmes of the partnership, and the most appropriate structure for the partnership to effectively deliver them. Discussions about the future structure of the partnership have also taken into account the announcements made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government around opportunities for the potential devolution of powers to councils.

At the time of writing, no decision has been taken on the future structure of the partnership, but some general principles have been discussed. These include a commitment to shared working across the councils where this adds value and efficiency, and support for avoiding duplication.

Partners will bring a paper with a proposed structure to a future meeting of FOP for discussion.

In the meantime, the partnership aims to:

- Maintain momentum and delivery of substantial existing programmes of work (see 'Current work programmes', above).
- Play an active role in representing a collective Oxfordshire voice on matters of regional and national interest, lobbying HM Government as the partnership

deems appropriate, for the benefit of the county's residents, businesses, and the local environment.

- Improve engagement with key strategic partners to draw in and leverage support which helps to deliver the ambitions of the Vision.

Structure and governance

The Partnership currently meets six times each year, most often in a non-decision-making capacity, and it is supported by four Advisory Sub-Groups for infrastructure, environment, housing and planning), a Scrutiny Panel and a small team of officers who are tasked with coordinating and/or delivering on elements of the Partnership's work programme.

Whilst voting rights are retained for local authority members only, the FOP's membership also includes the following co-opted Associate Members:

- Chair of OxLEP
- Chair of the Oxfordshire Skills Board
- Universities Representative (OxLEP)
- OxLEP Business Representative-Bicester
- OxLEP Business Representative-Oxford City
- OxLEP Business Representative-Science Vale
- Homes England Representative
- DEFRA Agencies Representative
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) Representative (formerly Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group)
- When considering transport infrastructure matters, Network Rail and National Highways have the right to attend as associate members.

The Future Oxfordshire Partnership

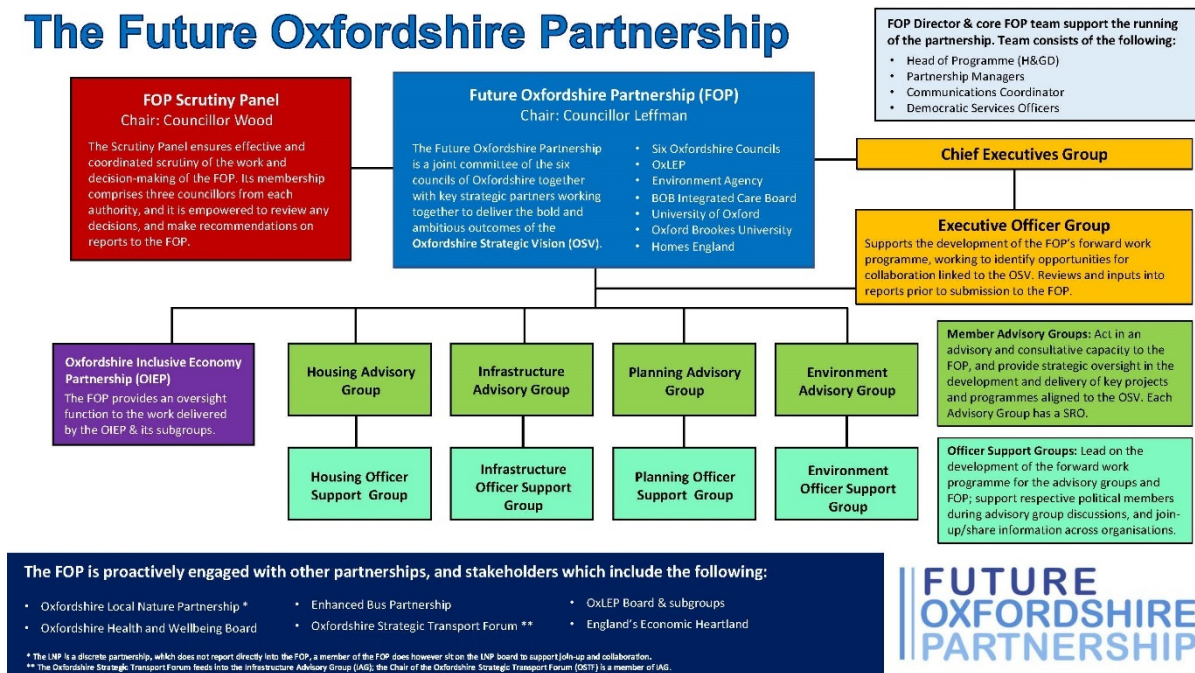


Figure 3: Future Oxfordshire Partnership structure chart

Funding and resourcing

The FOP is funded by the six local authorities of Oxfordshire. This funding provides a core team of officers who work together to facilitate and co-ordinate delivery of its work. This includes the FOP programme manager, FOP director, FOP democratic services officers, and a communications co-ordinator. The team is hosted and managed at South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils on behalf of all the partners.

Communications support

The communications co-ordinator has led on the development of a new website for the partnership which launched in November 2023 and allows FOP to effectively showcase its work and advocate for the Strategic Vision. The new site is designed to be easy to navigate, so that information about meetings and work programmes of the partnership can be easily accessed and explored.

The FOP is a large partnership organisation with multiple complex and overlapping workstreams – in this context it is important that all the partners and officers supporting the partnership are kept up to date with progress. Communications support from the communications co-ordinator helps to achieve this.

Dedicated communications support also facilitates liaison between the communications teams of the individual partners, who can then use their internal and external platforms to inform stakeholders about the workstreams and outputs of the partnership. This communications support also facilitates the FOP's advocacy work - for example, through co-ordinating input into and writing detailed and clear responses to government calls for evidence.

Through the the website and, where appropriate, press releases and social media content through FOP and partner channels, the communications co-ordinator works to highlight Oxfordshire's pioneering partnership work to deliver a better future for its residents.

Secretariat support

The FOP's democratic services officers are essential to the proper functioning of the partnership. Together they provide a full suite of democratic support to the FOP and all subgroups, including providing advice and support to members and officers, scheduling, planning and delivering cross-county meetings, producing and publishing agendas and minutes, livestreaming meetings, providing background support and updating work programmes.

They provide this support for:

- Future Oxfordshire Partnership
- Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel
- Housing Advisory Group (HAG)

- Infrastructure Advisory Group (IAG)
- Environment Advisory Group (EAG)
- Planning Advisory Group (PAG)
- Executive Officer Group (EOG)
- HAG Officer Group
- IAG Officer Group
- EAG Officer Group
- PAG Officer Group
- Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership
- Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

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