

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Council



Listening Learning Leading

**Held on Thursday 14 July 2022 at 6.00 pm
135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, OX14 4SB**

Present in the meeting room:

Councillors: David Turner (Chair), Ken Arlett, Anna Badcock, Pieter-Paul Barker, David Bartholomew, Robin Bennett, David Bretherton, Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Sue Cooper, Peter Dragonetti, Stefan Gawrysiak, Elizabeth Gillespie, Victoria Haval, Alexandrine Kantor, Mocky Khan, George Levy, Lynn Lloyd, Axel Macdonald, Jane Murphy, Andrea Powell, Leigh Rawlins, Jo Robb, Sue Roberts, David Rouane, Ian Snowdon, Alan Thompson, Andrea Warren and Ian White

Officers: Patrick Arran, Head of Legal & Democratic and Monitoring Officer, Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, and Mark Stone, Chief Executive

Remote attendance:

Councillors: Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Kellie Hinton (Vice-Chair), Caroline Newton and Anne-Marie Simpson

Apologies: Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of councillors Tim Bearder, Kate Gregory, Lorraine Hillier and Celia Wilson

15 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the annual meeting of Council held on 19 May 2022 as a correct record and agree that the Chair sign them as such.

16 Declarations of interest

None.

17 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The Chair provided general housekeeping advice. The Chair provided details of the events he had attended since the last meeting of Council.

18 Public participation

One member of the public had registered to ask a question.

Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, read out the following question on behalf of Julia Benning, Need not Greed Oxfordshire:

“Need not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) understands that the Oxfordshire Councils are currently involved in discussions around the level of housing to be included in the next draft of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

There are a staggering 85,000 dwellings already committed to in existing local plans. The number of additional dwellings which might be included in the Oxfordshire Plan range from 16,000 to 67,000 (as per the Reg 18 consultation).

Need Not Greed believes that no more than the lowest number of additional dwellings should be built, and possibly many less. Anything else would be incompatible with this local authority’s commitment to tackling the climate emergency and the need to address nature’s recovery.

We are concerned that Local Authorities might regard the middle housing trajectory, which is inappropriately called ‘Business as Usual’, as a reasonable compromise between the highest and lowest housing targets. In fact, it is based on a period of high growth following recession and as such it is clearly not ‘Business as Usual’ and should in no way be regarded as ‘middle ground’.

We would like to know this Council's views on:

1. The ‘Business as Usual’ trajectory
2. The number of dwellings that should be built in Oxfordshire in the period to 2050.”

Councillor Simpson, Cabinet member for planning, responded as follows:

“I understand and share concerns about the high level of additional homes that were committed to by the previous administration under the terms of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. I and officers are working with our partner councils in Oxfordshire to identify and agree an appropriate evidence base for the Oxfordshire Plan which will run to 2050. The Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA) was published in 2020, and provides analysis of three broad housing need scenarios for the Councils, which may be appropriate for Council to consider as a starting point for the identifying a housing target for the new plan. The Council is aware that other evidence and models of housing need exist.

These scenarios were an application of: (1) the government’s “standard method” for assessing housing need; (2) a “business as usual” scenario that sought to project forward past growth trends; and then (3) a “transformational growth” scenario that sought to deliver the aspirations of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy. South Oxfordshire District Council is continuing to work with its partners to determine which of these is an appropriate housing need calculation method on which to base the 2050 plan. This process is still ongoing, and we cannot state which of these scenarios will be chosen at this stage.

However, the Council is aware of the potential tensions between higher levels of housing growth, the current and most likely future economic environment and its commitments to address the climate and ecological crises. As a Council, we have yet to come to a final view on whether or not exceptional circumstances exist that would justify going beyond the “standard method”, but we do note that exceptional circumstances would need to exist for

Oxfordshire's Housing Need to go above that indicated by the standard method. The outcomes of the recent consultation remain under consideration.”

19 Petitions

None.

20 Community Governance Review - related alteration order

Council considered an agenda item which set out that the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee was currently undertaking a community governance review and would be making final decisions on a number of matters at its meeting on 8 September 2022. The committee could agree changes to parish boundaries which could impact on district ward and county division boundaries. To make district ward and county divisions coterminous with any parish changes, Council considered a proposal to authorise the head of legal and democratic to request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make related alteration orders to alter both the district wards and county division boundaries where necessary.

RESOLVED: to authorise the head of legal and democratic to request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make related alteration orders to change district wards and county divisions to reflect the changes made to the parish boundaries arising from the current community governance review.

21 Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Rouane, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of issues. The text of his address is available on the council's [website](#).

22 Questions on notice

- A. Question from Councillor Khan to Councillor Cooper, Cabinet member for Environment, Climate Change and Nature Recovery

It seems that all other towns within South Oxfordshire are getting Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points except Didcot. Can the Cabinet member for Environment, Climate Change and Nature Recovery explain the criteria for selection and why Didcot was excluded?

Written Response

Thank you for the question, and I am sure that you are as pleased as I am to be seeing the Council deliver on its climate commitments through such projects as the one identified.

You are correct to note that a number of electric vehicle charging points have been delivered across car parks in South Oxfordshire, and elsewhere in the County. Park and Charge was an externally-funded pilot project with a set budget to test whether this kind of provision is effective and was delivered in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and an organisation called EZ Charge.

There were a number of criteria in the selection of sites set by the pilot including identifying areas where there are larger numbers of residents without off-street parking within a five-

minute walk. Other criteria set by the project included the electricity network connection available, the size of the local population and level of car ownership.

Whilst the car parks in Didcot did not meet the threshold for the Park and Charge pilot, it does not mean that our other car parks will not have an opportunity to install charging infrastructure in the future as EV ownership continues to increase and should further funding opportunities arise.

Officers are currently in the process of seeking funding through the governments local electric vehicle infrastructure (LEVI) pilot funding and the Edinburgh Drive car park in Didcot has been identified as one potential option through that scheme, should a bid be successful.

Supplementary question and answer

As his supplementary question, Councillor Khan asked the Cabinet member to confirm that Didcot will be top of the priority list in the next round of funding and that Didcot will get EV charging points.

In response, Councillor Cooper referred to another source of funding for EV charging points on public land. Each parish and town council had been invited to put forward sites for consideration. These would be assessed against the number of residents in the area with off street parking.

- B. Question from Councillor David Bartholomew to Councillor Andrea Powell, Cabinet member for Corporate Services, Policy and Programmes

At the Full Council meeting in May you announced there will be six FTE officers in the core climate action team.

What is the annual cost of this to the council and what exactly are these officers going to do?

Written Response

Thank you, Cllr Bartholomew, for your question. The most recent South Oxfordshire District Council budget has created a provision for an additional three officers in our joint Climate and Biodiversity team for one year, creating a total provision of up to six officers, although as the matters covered by these roles are a council priority, I would expect our senior officers to do what is needed to achieve them and report by exception to cabinet should the resource need be different.

Of these six officers, three are fully funded by South Oxfordshire District Council and are therefore solely dedicated to the delivery of projects in support of our Corporate Climate and Biodiversity priorities, although by the nature of our joint working with Vale of White Horse, their knowledge and skills will be available in any wider discussions and engagement with other teams in the Councils, as in line with best practice, our s151 Officer undertakes a reconciliation each year. The remaining three officers are split equally between South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and therefore work across a variety of projects and initiatives which serve both districts.

When undergoing the budget process, South Oxfordshire District Council made specific provision within the budget for one year for these three additional roles; the one-off cost of these additional posts is in the order of £167,000, although that is an estimate, as items such as travel, and other costs that could be incurred, may impact this. The ongoing cost of the existing shared team to South Oxfordshire is around £87,000 a year, but as I mention above, in line with legal requirements, this is assessed by our s151 on an annual basis and will vary depending on workloads and actual costs.

In addition to the work required to deliver our ambitious Climate Action Plan, the team provides input and guidance for a number of projects and initiatives across the Council and with partner organisations. This includes, but is not limited to, providing Climate input and advice on projects and formal decision documentation in order to ensure that we are making the best decisions possible in the context of the wider environmental issues we face, seeking external funding (for example to decarbonise our asset base through schemes like the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme), running pilot schemes to enhance biodiversity such as habitat banking, monitoring upcoming changes in legislation such as the developments and opportunities relating to the Environment act. The three dedicated officers, whilst also working on a number of Climate and Biodiversity opportunities for SODC, will also have a focus on supporting the delivery of some specific projects.

These projects were identified by Cabinet as priority areas and include:

- An enhanced Retrofit offer to residents. Whilst we are unable to provide direct Retrofit assistance, we will be looking at what we can do in terms of provision of advice and support, signposting to funding where possible with the aim of reducing carbon emissions, and helping residents reduce their heating and electricity bills through a range of retrofit possibilities. This work is ever more important as we see the increasing cost of living crisis taking hold.
- An enhanced offer to support towns, parishes and community organisations to plant trees, hedges and encourage activities to improve biodiversity. This could mean direct advice in terms of species selection, signposting to funding opportunities, advising on site selection or other advice/support where possible.
- An enhanced offer to support better access and use of blue and green natural assets across the district – this will include, but is not limited to, projects like the management of the Bathing Water Status application for Wallingford beach and working to make the waterways in our district cleaner, safer and more accessible for residents to use.

It should be noted that the delivery of these projects is the responsibility of our senior managers, and it should not be assumed that there will always be a direct correlation between the officers in post today, and those tasked with delivery in the future.

Supplementary question and answer

As his supplementary question, Councillor Bartholomew asked whether the Cabinet member agreed that many residents would rather see the funding deployed to recruit additional planning enforcement officers to address the backlog in cases and that this would have a far greater immediate benefit to residents in South Oxfordshire.

In response, Councillor Powell stated that she did not agree and that the two areas of work were not mutually exclusive with both featuring in the council's Corporate Plan. It was the role of councillors to set the strategies and priorities for the council and for the chief executive and senior managers to ensure those activities were appropriately resourced. She had every confidence both areas of activity were being effectively and appropriately resourced and confirmed that the council had been working to address the planning enforcement backlog, which was a discretionary area of work

23 Motions on notice

Council considered the motions set out in the agenda.

- A. In the absence of Councillor Simpson, who was attending the meeting remotely, Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker moved, and Councillor Alexandrine Kantor seconded, the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 14A

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That good food is vital to us all and food production and farming is an important economic and employment sector in our district, with agriculture at the heart of many of our communities.

However, the rising costs of fuel and other supplies is creating increased pressure on farmers across the district, whilst government policies on international trade deals threaten to undermine UK food quality standards and risk putting farmers out of business – as well as exacerbating food insecurity in the UK. At the same time, significant increases in the cost of living are putting pressure on residents across South Oxfordshire, forcing them to make difficult choices regarding their household budgets, including the amount spent on food and heating.

The district council has a number of ways and opportunities that can help influence food production, support sustainable farming and distribution, reduce food waste, and promote healthy eating for the benefit of our residents and the environment, whilst supporting action to address climate change and building on the council's corporate plan objectives.

Council therefore resolves:

1. To promote local food production and distribution and a sustainable food culture in South Oxfordshire by maximising opportunities to highlight the importance of food and farming in our local economy through our website, communications the press and social media
2. To recognise that the initial cause of food poverty is not agricultural but economic/socio-economic due to high cost of living and to work with local partners such as Good Food Oxfordshire to promote and encourage food planning
3. To encourage farming communities and agricultural businesses to respond to any consultation on our new Joint Local Plan and Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and to engage more generally with the council.
4. To encourage developers to include community gardens and allotment provision within all new housing developments.

5. To encourage and promote high environmental health standards at all stages of food production, distribution and redistribution, and continue to support local businesses, local farmers' markets and 'farm-door' sales, recognising their positive impact on reducing the carbon emissions associated with food miles.
6. To continue to investigate ways we can support food redistribution organisations and food charities to address food poverty in the district, noting the work that has already been done in this regard.
7. To continue to promote ways we can reduce food waste through our waste service and the use of food recycling bins and promotion of the circular economy (reduce, re-use and recycle), highlighting the climate benefits this can bring through initiatives such as Food Waste Action Week.
8. To minimise food waste at any event that we may host that serves food, and to use such occasions to highlight the use of waste food, low carbon options, and locally sourced produce wherever possible.

B. Councillor Rouane moved, and Councillor Bennett seconded, the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 14B:

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED: That Council notes that:

- On 1 April 2022, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54%, however there is no price cap on solid fuel, bottled gas or heating oil.
- The average standard tariff energy bill will increase by £693 per year. The average pre-pay meter energy bill will increase by £708 per year (Ofgem, 2022).
- The energy price cap is expected to rise significantly again in October this year.
- The Universal Credit £20 uplift was removed last year.
- Forecourt fuel prices have rapidly increased and are close to £2 per litre, badly affecting key workers, logistics, farming and food production.
- On 6 April 2022, the Government increased National Insurance by 1.25 per cent, which is projected to cost the average family an additional £108 per year.
- 9 in 10 (88%) adults reported their cost of living had risen over the past month, with many citing affordability of food and medicines as a major concern.
- Reliance on Food Banks has greatly increased across South Oxfordshire.
- The cost of living increases also impact council services, from housing needs to the work of the community hub. Council finances are badly affected by rising inflation.

Council declares that we have moved from a Cost of Living Crisis to a Cost of Living Emergency.

Council asks the leader to call on the Government to:

- Urgently review the energy cap regime and provide much greater protection to consumers, as other European countries have done.
- Make an immediate reduction in VAT, which proportionally helps those most in need
- Increase benefits in line with inflation and reinstate the Universal Credit uplift
- Urgently provide financial support to public transport to avoid service reductions
- Recognise that councils like South Oxfordshire will need additional funding to support services affected by high inflation

Council further resolves:

- To call for a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit with stakeholders, including Oxfordshire County Council, Citizens Advice, Food Banks, and others, and to invite both local MPs to attend to work towards a community response to the emergency.
- To ensure Council continues to maximise opportunities to inform and support residents in need, directing them towards services that advise on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support via our Community Hub
- To continue to offer up to 100% council tax reduction, subject to circumstances, and to advise our residents through all channels of communication how to apply for the scheme

C. Councillor Robb moved, and Councillor Gillespie seconded, the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 14C:

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED: That Council notes:

Residents and councillors remain deeply concerned about water quality and the impact on human health and wildlife, of sewage discharges into the River Thames and its tributaries.

Sewage discharges are happening with increasing frequency. Thames Water dumped raw sewage into the River Thames and its tributaries 5,028 times in 2021.

Data obtained from Thames Water and compiled by the Oxford Rivers Improvement Campaign (ORIC) shows that in 2020, treatment works in South Oxfordshire were operating significantly short of the capacity required to cope with existing populations.

- Didcot has 61% of the capacity required
- Oxford Sewage Treatment Works in (Sandford), has 62% of the capacity required
- Chinnor has 69% of the capacity required
- Wheatley has 86% of the capacity required
- Chalgrove has 71% of the capacity required

South Oxfordshire has plans for almost 30,000 new homes to be delivered between 2011 and 2035. The district has already seen a significant increase in its population of 14,800 from 134,300 (2011) to 149,100 (2021).

Legislation establishes the right to connect to the foul water system. Where Thames Water identifies infrastructure capacity issues and the developer indicates that it intends to connect to the public sewer, South Oxfordshire District Council makes permission conditional on Thames Water taking necessary steps to ensure the public sewer can cope with the increased load (“Grampian-style” conditions).

But the Council is not informed of the specifics of sewage treatment capacity and is not told whether development is likely to lead to an increase in sewage discharges into the Thames or its tributaries.

This Council resolves to:

1. Ensure that an evidence base is compiled that assesses the cumulative impact of sewage discharge so that this is factored into decisions on the new Joint Local Plan.
2. Request that Thames Water submit to Council and make public by the end of 2022, detailed and up to date information on sewage treatment work capacity at all treatment works in South Oxfordshire, make clear plans for infrastructure improvements and detail how these will work to reduce and ultimately eliminate sewage discharges.
3. Ask Thames Water, as part of its response to major planning applications, to provide detailed and up to date information on capacity at the treatment works that will be handling the waste from the new development, and information on the likely impact of additional development on sewage discharges into the River Thames and its tributaries, in order that this information can be considered in the decision-making process.
4. Request that planning officers include in all reports relating to major development, a summary response from Thames Water to our consultation and, where information/data is provided, include a specific section on the impact on the wastewater network and watercourses, including the potential for the development to affect sewage discharges.
5. Noting Thames Water's plans to make information from electronic duration monitors public by the end of 2022, ask Thames Water to measure and make public, information on the *volume* of sewage discharged, not just the number of hours.
6. Request that Thames Water provide detailed costings and timescales to achieve a progressive reduction and ultimately an end to sewage discharges in South Oxfordshire.
7. Ask the Leader to write to OFWAT and the Secretary of State to request that work take place to align water company investment strategies and timetables with strategic local planning so that planned infrastructure investment better relates to planned housing development.
8. Ask the Leader to write to the Secretary of State, OFWAT and the Environment Agency to request that sewerage undertakers be required to make public, up to date information on sewage treatment work capacity and volume of sewage discharges for all sewage treatment works by the end of 2023.

24 Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED:

To exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business under Section 100A and 100I of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that:

- (i) It is likely that there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A, and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

25 Application for grant funding - Thame and District Housing Association (see confidential minute)

Council considered and agreed Cabinet’s recommendation, made at its meeting on 23 June 2023, on the provision of grant funding using commuted sums held by the council, towards an affordable housing project.

The meeting closed at 7:25pm

Chair

Date

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