

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER 2022 AT 10.00 AM
WILLOW ROOM, CORNERSTONE ARTS CENTRE, 25 STATION ROAD,
DIDCOT, OX11 7NE

Present:

Members: Richard Benwell (Chair), Dr Prue Addison, Ian Boll, David Knight, Professor David Macdonald, James Price, David Rouane, Rosie Rowe and Simon Smith

Officers: Becky Chesshyre, (Communications Co-ordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnership), Susan Harbour, (Strategic Partnerships Manager, South and Vale Councils), Kevin Jacob (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Matt Whitney, (Local Nature Partnerships Manager)

10 Apologies, conflicts of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted by Giles Brockbank, Business representative and Michelle Leek, DEFRA family of organisations.

During the discussion of Agenda item four, James Price, David Knight and the Chair declared interests as set out in the minute for that item.

The Chair commented on the successful holding of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Forum on 12 October 2022 and he thanked Board members for all their contributions before and after the event. Since the Forum a lot of activity had taken place within the various subgroups to progress the various actions and workstreams discussed at the Forum, notwithstanding that work on the local nature recovery strategy was still awaiting a HM Government policy announcement.

Members of the Board and Officers present were asked to introduce themselves.

11 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the Board meeting held on 21 September 2022 were approved.

12 Oxfordshire's current affairs updates

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager provided a verbal update on current affairs and activity within the county which were relevant to the work of the LNP and which the LNP might wish to influence. This included a draft version of a 'calendar of influence' setting out consultation periods for various plans and strategies. The Board was informed that there would be a need to prioritise responses on key issues given the finite time and resources available.

To date, a response from the LNP had been made to the draft Oxford City Local Plan. It was expected that other Oxfordshire councils would be refreshing their local plans in the following 12 months.

ACTION: - LNP Manager to share the LNP response to Oxford City Local Plan consultation to all members of the Board.

It was suggested that in addition to the plans listed, there were two Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (AONB) Management Plans which could be included. It was also noted that consultation would shortly be commencing on the North Wessex Downs and Chiltern Nature Recovery Plans and that these should also be added to the calendar.

ACTION: - LNP Manager to add potential responses to the Cotswold AONB Management Plan, West Oxfordshire Issues and Options Consultation, North Wessex Downs and Chiltern Nature Recovery Plans to the calendar.

A discussion took place on how the LNP could best formulate future consultation responses and draft responses be shared. The Board was informed that a Policy Sub-Group was in development to draft responses and the Chair proposed that this group have delegated authority to draft responses on the Partnership's behalf, but that Board members be copied in on the responses if they so request. The often short periods in which responses had to be formulated were acknowledged, but it was also noted that having responses available as early as possible was of benefit to the wider group of LNP stakeholders.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Policy Sub-Group be delegated authority to make consultation responses on behalf of the LNP.
- 2) That the Board be copied in on those responses where Board members express a preference to do so.

The Board noted that although there would always be some variations in response reflecting the nature of individual consultations, it ought to be possible to work towards largely common responses in many areas which could help with the resource implications. The Board was also informed that it was intended to share position papers on the LNP's website once this was created.

It was suggested that whilst council Local Plans formed an important area for LNP influence, it was also important to consider seeking to influence council's Corporate Plans when they were reviewed as these set out the strategic direction and priorities for funding decisions of those organisations. The importance of also considering responses to other

consultations such as those relating to strategic highways, green infrastructure, and Active Travel was also highlighted.

ACTION:

1. LNP Manager to share LNP position papers on the LNP website when appropriate and possible to do so.
2. LNP Manager to include council corporate plans in the calendar of influence.

13 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership approach to influencing policy

The Board considered a report which set out a number of suggested methods to progress the decision that the LNP should '*influence planning to ensure better outcomes for people and nature*'. The paper suggested that the LNP avoid campaigning, but that it work in a supportive and encouraging capacity and provide evidence, case studies and experience to influence local and strategic plans in Oxfordshire via the Policy subgroup. In introducing the report, Matt Whitney, asked the Board to agree an approach to two specific questions:

- 1) What policies and plans should the LNP try to influence?
- 2) What methods should the LNP employ?

In the Board's discussion reference was made to two major proposed developments which provided examples of the type of issues and challenges the LNP needed an agreed approach to in terms of if, and how, it sought to respond and influence policy more generally. These were the Botley West Solar Farm proposals and the South Abingdon reservoir.

James Price declared an interest related to the Botley West Solar Farm proposals on the grounds that he was a tenant farmer of some of the land within the site area.

David Knight declared an interest related to the Botley West proposals on the grounds that he was a member of a parish council and local resident near the development area.

The Chair declared an interest related to the Botley West proposals on the grounds that he was a former director of West Mill Solar, but that this company had not been involved in greenfield solar provision.

The Board noted there was an initial consultation response deadline of 15 December. The Board discussed whether the LNP should seek to take a view on issues relating to the impact of the proposals on landscape character. Arguments were put forward by various members of the Board for and against this, but on balance it was felt that the giving of a specific response on these grounds would be outside of the LNP's Terms of Reference and was not directly related to its aims.

. After further discussion, it was agreed that the focus of any questions or request for further information relating to Botley West should be based on the LNP priorities of biodiversity, natural capital, nature recovery, and people & nature.

ACTION:

- 1) That a response on the Botley West Solar Farm proposal initial consultation be drafted by the LNP Manager with input from the Policy subgroup.

- 2) That the Board be copied in on those responses where Board members express a preference to do so.

14 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Forum review

The Board considered a report which set out the results of a review of the inaugural Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Forum which had taken place on 12 October 2022 and which set out in appendices outputs relating to the LNP priorities of natural capital investment, nature recovery and people & nature. Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager summarised the report's key recommendations:

- That the main in person Forum event should be held on annual basis, but that separate topic based online Forum engagement events be organised as necessary
- That Didcot Civic Hall be the preferred venue for the 2023 event given its accessibility

In discussion, members of the Board referred to there being a cross over in membership between the LNP advisory groups and the wider Forum membership which was felt to be a positive in the delivery of the outputs of the Forum. The principle of an annual forum whilst allowing for the setting up of ad-hoc events was supported.

In terms of a future venue, it was felt that accessibility should be key criteria but also considering affordability. It was also suggested that the possibility of holding the meeting earlier in the year should be investigated taking into account the impact of the 2023 local government elections in May 2023.

ACTION:

- 1) That the LNP Forum be organised on annual basis but that separate topic based online Forum engagement events be organised as necessary.
- 2) That the feasibility of holding the Forum in late June 2023 or July 2023 be investigated.
- 3) That Didcot Civic Hall be the preferred venue for the 2023 event given its accessibility.

15 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership membership changes

As set out in the report Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager outlined that the Board was asked to approve the inclusion of a second local authority representative and associated changes to the Board's Terms of Reference including:

- Approve the change of Wild Oxfordshire representative
- Consider the most appropriate way to recruit a new landowner representative

In discussion, it was felt that the proposed change to the appointment from Wild Oxfordshire as one of the environmental Non-Governmental Organisations, (NGO) representatives on the Board should be communicated to NGOs generally so they were fully aware of it.

With regard to the recruitment of a new landowner representative, it was suggested that the Country Landowners Association, National Farmers Union, and Lady Jennifer Stringer as the previous representative should be approached for proposals.

At this point Ian Boll, Corporate Director, Cherwell District Council, left the meeting room for the duration of the discussion relating to the recommendation to add a second local authority representative to the Board.

The Board was informed that a rationale for the addition of a second officer representative from the local authority sector was that it provided an additional and alternate avenue of two-way communication and influence between the LNP and councils. Members of the Board supported the recommendation but suggested that in order to provide the most value added, the officer appointed should be of a senior level equivalent to Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive level.

ACTION:

- 1) That the addition of a second local authority representative to the Board be approved and that associated changes be made to the Board's Terms of Reference.
- 2) That the change in appointment from the Chair of Wild Oxfordshire to the Chief Executive of Wild Oxfordshire be approved.

At this point Ian Boll re-joined the meeting.

16 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Sub-groups update

The Board considered written updates for each of the LNP sub-groups as set out in the Agenda. The following points were highlighted.

Biodiversity Gain subgroup

Discussion had included debate around the optimum level of percentage biodiversity net gain (BNG) that should be sought through the planning process arising from development, and the impact of this rate on site viability, with a variety of views expressed within the subgroup. The need to be able to demonstrate a strong evidence base supporting a rate in excess of 10% was highlighted. Arising from the subgroup meeting, the Board was asked to consider how biodiversity net gain requirements could be linked to the wider Local Nature Recovery Strategy, (LNRS).

The Chair suggested that given the delays in HM Government guidance, now was not the time to link the BNG directly to the LNRS. In discussion, the consensus view of the Board was that notwithstanding the need to provide a strong evidence base, it is appropriate to go over and above the baseline figure of 10% BNG if real benefit was to be achieved.

The Board noted that the majority of cost to developers was incurred in reaching 10%, with the additional cost of reaching 20% shown by various studies to be relatively negligible. It was felt that supporting evidence of Oxfordshire's historical biodiversity depletion needed to be gathered. The wider position at a Southeast LNP (SENP) level also needed to be checked in order to minimise regional inequality.

Nature and Health subgroup

This group had considered feedback from the LNP Forum event on priority actions from the people and nature theme and information sharing. The case study of '*Flo's – the Place in the Park*' community hub, located within Florence Park in Oxford, had been shared to the subgroup as an example of what could be achieved by active volunteers in small urban areas to support the environment even with limited funding.

The Board noted the view of the subgroup that as it moved forward, the LNRS would be a key part of delivering the enablers to achieve the subgroup's overall objectives.

Other matters discussed by the subgroup included the need for high quality green spaces accessible to all and local authority design guides to facilitate this.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy subgroup

It was highlighted that the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, (DEFRA) had confirmed that now it aimed to roll out LNRS in April 2023 with associated secondary legislation and guidance expected before then. The Board noted that whilst DEFRA would make the final designation, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership had at its November meeting endorsed the position of Oxfordshire County Council becoming the LNRS responsible authority and that the County Council had itself subsequently agreed to this status.

17 Communications update

Becky Chesshyre, Communications Co-ordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnerships, updated the Board on matters relating to communications and publicity. It was noted that a key project was the development of an Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership website. Ways in which to maintain regular contact with interested individuals through channels such as a regular LNP newsletter were also being explored.

18 Any other business

Cotswold Dark Skies survey

It was agreed that further details of the project and survey should be shared to Board members by Simon Smith.

ACTION: Simon Smith to share details of the Dark Skies project with Board members.

19 Dates of future meetings

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

The meeting closed at 12.06 pm