

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2023 AT 10.00 AM
VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Members: Richard Benwell (Chair), Dr Prue Addison, Gill Aitken, Ian Boll, Camilla Burrow, Tim Coates, Michelle Leek, 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).

Guests: Steve Proud

20 Apologies, conflicts of interest, Chair's announcements, welcome guests

There were no apologies for absence.

The Chair opened the meeting which was being held virtually rather than in person as originally planned due to the inclement weather conditions. He commented that it was intended to hold a future meeting at Perdiswell Farm later in the year.

Members of the Board and supporting officers gave brief introductions and the Chair welcomed Tim Coates to the meeting commenting that Gill Aitken would be joining the meeting later.

There were no declarations of interest.

21 Introduction to Perdiswell Farm

Due to the inclement weather conditions, it was noted that this item had been deferred.

22 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the Board meeting held on 7 December 2022 were approved.

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership provided a brief update on actions arising from the meeting. The establishment of the new Policy subgroup was progressing well with the selection of a Chair.

A consultation response to the Botley West Solar Farm proposals had been submitted on behalf of the Partnership. This had taken the form discussed at the previous Board meeting with a focus on the raising of factual questions.

Preparations for the next LNP Forum were moving forward. It would be held on 6 June 2023 at Didcot Civic Hall.

Prue Addison suggested that it would be helpful for all Board members to have shared access to Board and other LNP documents which could be relatively easy to organise through a platform such as Teams.

ACTION: Matt Whitney, Prue Addison and Kevin Jacob to implement.

23 Oxfordshire's current affairs updates

Members of the Board Forum raised and discussed matters of importance and relevance to the work of the LNP.

The Chair commented that a lot of LNP related activity had been held up recently in the absence of HM Government guidance, but this was now changing. Guidance on understanding biodiversity net gain had been published in February and guidance on local nature recovery strategies was expected later in March. In addition, a HM Government response to the Julian Glover landscape review of national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty was expected as was a response to the House of Lords land use framework white paper. All of these policy announcements presented opportunities and potential risks to the Oxfordshire natural environment.

Prue Addison referred to the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project being undertaken by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. This was a plan to protect, improve and expand land for nature in an area of land between Buckingham, Bicester, Aylesbury and Oxford. Stakeholder work had been undertaken and an external report produced. Work on an emerging farmer cluster was progressing. Funds were now being sought to take forward the project's work programme forward through the National Lottery or landscape recovery.

The Chair suggested that it might be useful for the Board to focus on a particular nature recovery project per meeting and where appropriate, invite a guest speaker. This would be useful in the context of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

ACTION: Tim Coates to provide an overview of a Natural Environment Investment Fund, (NEIRF), Landscape Recovery project and farmer cluster to the next Board meeting.

ACTION: LNP Manager to draw up a list of potential guest speakers to future Board meetings.

Councillor Rouane referred to the upcoming local elections within a number of the district local authorities within Oxfordshire and it was noted that the pre-election period was due to commence.

Professor Macdonald informed the Board that the University of Oxford had been undertaking an examination of all its estates and how they might contribute to nature recovery. This review was expected to set a 'green estates' direction of the next five years and it was expected there would be a consultation.

The Chair commented that if there was an opportunity to input into a consultation this should be considered by the Policy sub-group.

ACTION: The Policy sub-group to respond to the University of Oxford consultation as and when appropriate.

Simon Smith referred to the publishing of the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 which areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks were under an obligation to prepare. This was a two year period rather than the usual five year period because of expected significant national and local policy announcements. Although it had been hoped that these policy announcements might include adding nature recovery as formal part of the responsibilities of protected landscapes this was now looking less likely.

24 Progress, additional resources and future funding

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager introduced a report setting out the progress of the LNP in year one of two of local authority funding and an attached draft LNP annual report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, (FOP) which it was intended would be presented in September 2023. He informed the Board that it was appropriate time to take stock as a first step to the continuation of local authority funding and to also look at future alternative and additional funding sources.

Over the previous year a significant amount of progress had been made in shaping the LNP as it established itself and undertaking the necessary preparatory work for future delivery. This was consistent with the LNP's three goals and the priorities that underpinned them.

The Board was asked to:

1. consider the detail presented in the report and comment on progress of the partnership to date.
2. comment on the presentation of the report, suggesting ways in which we might better make our case for continuation funding.
3. propose ways to diversify and increase LNP funding, especially core funding.

Members of the Board welcomed the report. In discussion, it was suggested that it would be useful to examine the funding arrangements of more established LNPs to look for best practice.

In making the case for additional funding it was important to seek to demonstrate the positive links between LNP activity and outputs and the wider Oxfordshire agenda

including the voluntary sector. It was also necessary to show what could be delivered in terms LNP activity through a three-five year plan and its benefits to Oxfordshire if funding was available. It was stressed that this should be in addition to existing core funding, (currently provided by the Oxfordshire local authorities) in order to build capacity and not a substitute for the core funding.

In response to these points. Matt Whitney commented the LNPs he was aware of had a range of core funding arrangements. Some were funded entirely from upper tier local authorities whilst some were funded entirely from local wildlife trusts. As an example, the Gloucestershire LNP received funding from the National Trust, the Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, local universities, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England as well as local wildlife trusts and local authorities, but the biggest contributors were local authorities.

Susan Harbour, Strategic Partnership's Manager for South and Vale Councils stated that it was not intended to ask for alternative core funding, a combination of funding sources was needed. It was necessary to make the case of how funding of the LNP would represent value for money by increasing opportunities to leverage in additional funding over and above what would have been possible otherwise. September represented an opportune time to present to the FOP as September usually was the start of the budget planning process. Ian Boll echoed these points and also suggested that major national infrastructure projects such as East West Rail and High Speed Two might provide potential lessons on how funding for nature could be accessed.

Other comments and suggestions for sources of additional funding during the Board's discussion included:

- Planning – contributions to support Biodiversity net gain
- It was important to be transparent that if the LNP did not exist, local authorities would need to set up their own individual arrangements as they would be required to undertake many of its function. But supporting a LNP provided additional opportunities to leverage in more funds.
- Support through contributions in kind or were just as valuable as cash contributions. There other things organisations could do to support the LNP if they could not help financially.
- The majority, if not all local authorities in Oxfordshire had established some kind of climate emergency committee and it was important to establish an ongoing relationship with those committees through regular attendance that could focus on the value added by the LNP how support for the LNP could assist them in delivery of their own climate objectives.
- Drafting of briefing note or summary infographic, or video clip for councillors on the LNP's work, aims and objectives as close to the local elections as possible– although it was noted that a newsletter on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which included a section on the LNP had recently been introduced.
- Exploration of potential private sector funding opportunities including Green Finance – LNP Forum a potential audience. A need to be more transactional in approach rather than seeking more general funding.

ACTION: The LNP manager to investigate opportunities for outreach with the climate emergency committees of the respective Oxfordshire local authorities in order to socialise and share the LNP's plans and ambitions.

25 Towards a Land Use Framework for Oxfordshire

The Board considered a report which set out background information to inform its discussion of the potential importance of a land use framework for Oxfordshire. In introducing the report, the Chair commented that the principle behind a land use framework was that it aimed to enable decisions concerning land to be made in a way that recognised the finite nature of land and which balanced the demands of food production, respiration of nature, housing, and energy production. At the national level it could influence national infrastructure planning. At the Oxfordshire level, a land use framework could be a tool to help inform Local Plans and would have to be delivered and administered locally.

The LNP manager stressed that if taken forward an Oxfordshire land use framework would not be a repeat of the discontinued Oxfordshire Plan 2050 project or curtail sovereignty of district and city councils' Local Plans as it would not be seeking to deal with specific questions around the spatial distribution of housing across the county. Rather it was a process creating and collating a co-designed framework of evidence and principles that could support strategic land-use decisions. It could potentially help the appropriate bodies be better prepared in responding to significant applications affecting land use, such as solar farm applications.

The Board was asked to consider how a land use framework could benefit Oxfordshire and whether such a framework should be proposed to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.

A summary of the main points arising from the Board's discussion included:

- Broad support on the potential benefits and value of a land use land use framework within Oxfordshire.
- A range of views were expressed around the advantages and disadvantages of the development of an Oxfordshire land use framework within the overall umbrella of the LNP with collaboration with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership or whether the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should itself lead on the work.
- A land use framework would have the status of an official strategy that local planning authorities would need to have regard to in planning matters.
- Various Board members commented that there was strong link between land use frameworks and local nature recovery strategies. It was felt that land use frameworks flowed from the development of local nature recovery strategies which were broadly an exercise of what was required of nature to deliver positive benefits should be developed first. Timing and coordination of pieces of the work was therefore very important.

After further discussion there was in principle agreement that the development of an Oxfordshire land use framework was a piece of work that the LNP Board would wish to support, but that the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy should be prioritised. Whilst the majority of views expressed in the discussion were that the LNP should not lead on this piece of work, it was not a unanimous position.

26 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Terms of Reference and membership

The Board considered a report setting out revised Board Terms of Reference, appointment of replacement Board members to replace the outgoing landowner representatives and an additional Board member related to Oxfordshire's main landscape scale nature recovery project. The LNP Manager and Senior Democratic Services Officer were thanked for undertaking the review of the Terms of Reference.

It was agreed that:

- 1) the revised Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board Terms of Reference be adopted.
- 2) Tim Coates be appointed to the Board as a representative of Oxfordshire's main landscape-scale nature recovery project.
- 3) Gillian Aitken be appointed to the Board as a landowner representative.
- 4) The vacancy for business representative be noted and filled as soon as possible.

27 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 or updated.

Biodiversity Gain group

The LNP Manager commented on the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain considerations in planning and the establishment of a national register for biodiversity. One of the objectives of the group was to assist local planning authorities in their preparation of mandatory biodiversity net gain including the suggestion of principles for biodiversity net gain consideration, and the collation of evidence to support those LPAs wishing to aim for higher than the minimum 10% required by the new legislation. At least two LPAs are strongly considering this. The subgroup contained representatives from all the Oxfordshire local authorities and felt to be adding value.

Nature and Health Group

Rosie Rowe reported that the group was continuing to operate productively and was making good progress. At its most recent meeting it had considered the new Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework.

Another highlight had been an update to the mapping of need and provision of nature-based activities through a soon to be searchable by post code online mapping system. This would allow for the linking of nature based activities to health through social prescribing. It could also play a part in the delivery of outcomes from a local nature recovery strategy and there were also links to national policy around access to green space such as the DEFRA commitment around green space access within 15 minutes of home.

Nature Policy Group

It was noted that this was due to meet on the 21 March and a report would be part of the next meeting agenda.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy steering group

Simon Smith commented that much was happening on the national policy stage over the coming months including the national roll out of local nature recovery strategies, although in the absence of secondary regulations and guidance much detail remained unknown including how strategies would be structured.

Nature Capital Investment group

The LNP Manager reported that one bid was in progress related to land-based carbon sequestration in support of the delivery of the Pathways for Zero Carbon Oxfordshire objectives and it was hoped that it would be possible to update on the status of the bid to the next Board meeting. Further, a Nature Finance Strategy is being created by the group, and should be ready to be shared in draft form at the next Board meeting.

28 Any other business

Communications update

Becky Chesshyre, Communications Co-ordinator for the Oxfordshire Partnerships, updated the Board on matters relating to communications and publicity. Work to progress the provision of a LNP website continued to be a priority and would be undertaken as part of the replacement of a number of other websites linked to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. This was expected to produce some cost savings as well as leading to an improved site. Invitations to tender had been sought and once the tender was awarded it was expected there would be two to three month development timeline.

Finance update

The Board noted the update on finance as set out in the agenda.

29 Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm