

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2023 AT 10.00 AM
OXFORD MARTIN SCHOOL, 34 BROAD ST, OXFORD OX1 3BD

Present:

Members: Richard Benwell (Chair), Dr Prue Addison, Ian Boll, Camilla Burrow, Tim Field, Michelle Leek, Professor David Macdonald, David Rouane, Rosie Rowe and Simon Smith

Officers: Susan Harbour (Strategic Partnerships Managers, South and Vale Councils), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership Democratic Services Officer), Huw Thomas, (Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Nature Finance Manager), Matt Whitney, (Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnerships Manager)

Guests: Dr Martha Crockatt, Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery at the University of Oxford

11 Apologies, conflicts of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted from Gill Aitken, (Landowner representative), Tim Coates, (Landscape Scale Delivery Lead) who was substituted by Tim Field, Tom Curtis, (Business Representative), and James Price, (Farming representative).

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were made.

12 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the Board meeting held on 13 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

13 Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Manager Update

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager presented a report as set out in the agenda that provided an update on his work and activities since the previous Board

meeting. With regard to the launch of the OLNP's new dedicated website he paid tribute to the contributions of Becky Chesshyre, Communications Lead for the Oxfordshire Partnerships and Rob Hale from IM23 for all their hard work.

During the discussion that followed, it was noted that the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan had now been adopted by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP). It was also noted that HM Government was to withdraw funding for local enterprise partnerships and to transfer their functions to upper tier authorities. Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet was due consider a report on its approach to the integration of OxLEP early in 2024.

The Chair referred to the Oxford to Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership, (PRP) as an important strategic body that was undertaking a significant amount of nature based work in the background and he suggested that the Oxfordshire LNP should engage with its environmental workstreams. Matt Whitney commented that there was grouping of local nature partnerships within the PRP geography and discussions were ongoing.

Simon Smith referred to a problem with current green finance options around landscape recovery which because of the way the schemes were structured and the weighting criteria used were acting to discourage investments in chalk or calcareous landscapes. It was hoped that future rounds would correct this.

Rosie Rowe suggested that the OLNP responses to the Local Plans should be circulated so that any synergies in the responses about the role of nature in supporting positive health outcomes could be identified.

Action: It was agreed that any OLNP responses to Local Plan consultations and principles for responses should be circulated to Health colleagues.

Rosie Rowe updated the meeting that a report providing an update on healthy place shaping and the new agreed Health & Wellbeing Strategy for Oxfordshire was to be brought to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership at its meeting in January 2024. The strategy which covered the building blocks of health and the impact of climate change on health was being developed into an action plan for the next three years which would include actions linked to the nature aspects of place including access to blue and green spaces.

14 Oxfordshire's current affairs update

The Chair invited members of the Board to raise any matters of note, interest or concern at a local or national level which might impact on Oxfordshire's natural environment of the LNP.

Tim Field reported back on a study of flood plain restoration in the Windrush Valley and the positive impacts of flood plain restoration for carbon reduction and botanical diversity. Next steps included exploring options for facilitation funding.

Prue Addison spoke to the work of the Flood Plain Meadows Partnership which was supported by a number of partners including BBOWT. The Meadows for the Climate Project had been way supported by Ecover to work with local farmers to restore a section of the Thames Vally flood plan. This was in its final year and reports would be published in due course on the carbon storage possibilities of flood meadow in comparison to regular fields. A survey of the flood plain at Chimney Meadows would form part of this.

Prue also commented that Matthew Stanton would be taking over from her at the end of the year as interim Conservation Strategy Director of BBOWT at the commencement of her maternity leave.

Simon Smith provided an update on the Nature Recovery Plan for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (AONB) which had just been published and nationally, HM Government's response to the Glover report on National Parks and AONBs. This was expected to include a strengthened duty to further the purposes of designation and this and other measures had the aim of enabling protected landscapes to play a greater role in nature recovery.

The Chair commented that given the recent policy announcements by HM Government the Board should return to the issue of the target to preserve and protect 30% of the planet's land and sea by 2030 at its next meeting

Councillor David Rouane commented that as with Local Plans, the corporate plans of local authorities were key strategic documents that the LNP might wish to engage with and influence. Corporate Plans set out the key policy and political objectives of an administration and the link between those objectives and spending priorities.

Nationally, local authorities were expecting to be informed of the indicative level of central government funding per authority by the end of December 2023. This would inform their budget setting processes for 2024 against a nationally very challenging and constraining overall financial situation for local government.

Camilla Burrow referred to the launch of the [Our Planet: Our Business](#) film which amongst its content included the top five steps that businesses could take to action to address the planet's environmental crisis. She also referred to the Witney Wind landscape project and to the establishment of farmer cluster in Witney to enable the sharing of information and joint working.

Professor David Macdonald provided an update on HM Government's continuation of Badger culling which was now taking place within Oxfordshire with the stated objective of controlling TB in cattle. He commented that he had written a briefing on this ethically and technically complicated issue for the Badger Trust which he was seeking permission to share to OLNP Board members.

15 Bernwood Otmoor Ray

Prue Addison presented a letter as set out in the agenda seeking the OLNP's support for a forthcoming National Lottery Heritage Fund application that the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust was making for a project to reconnect the Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray landscapes, an area of 300 km² that covered parts of all both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The aim of the project over a seven year period was to bring nature into recovery, connect people to nature and to promote/create access green space.

In discussion, members of the Board were supportive of giving support but suggested that the elements of the proposals which were unique to Oxfordshire could be emphasised more and that a picture of 'before and after' the project could also be included to demonstrate the positive improvement it would make.

It was **agreed** that the Board should support the bid.

16 Guest presentation - equitable distribution of accessible natural greenspace in Oxfordshire

Dr Martha Crockatt, from the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery at the University of Oxford gave a presentation on a [project examining the equitable distribution of accessible green space within Oxfordshire](#). The aim of the desk-based project had been to identify neighbourhoods experiencing both social economic deprivation and poor provision of accessible green space within the county to help inform thinking of how neighbourhoods might be prioritised for improvements to accessible green space covering planning, allocation of funding and effort.

The report had concluded that 16 neighbourhoods across Oxfordshire had not met multiple criteria regarding accessible green space although it was stressed that the report needed to be used alongside local knowledge.

Recommendations were as follows:

- In collaboration with local communities, increase knowledge of accessible greenspace before taking action.
- Consider diversity within and between accessible greenspaces, in terms of both biodiversity and diversity of function.
- Protect existing accessible greenspaces, while looking for innovative opportunities to increase the quantity of accessible greenspace;
- Explore green infrastructure opportunities to increase neighbourhood “greenness”.
- Increase connectivity of accessible greenspace for nature and people.
- Ensure policy instruments support development to have a positive gain on accessible greenspace.
- Investigate the potential for an Oxfordshire sub-regional publicly accessible greenspace (> 500 ha) that is accessible by active travel and public transport.

Following the presentation, a detailed discussion took place and members of the Board asked a few specific questions. The Chair asked the Board to consider what it might do with the research to inform decisions. He suggested that work on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy should be informed by it.

Points coming out of the discussion included:

- The importance of facilitating connectivity between existing green spaces, not only in terms of biodiversity, but also to facilitate public access.
- The issue was more nuanced than just the creation of more ‘green spaces’ in the county. Examples were given of areas of green spaces, some provided by developers because of major development which were technically green spaces, but which were completely inaccessible. It was on accessibility that more needed to be done.
- It was suggested that local authorities needed to assess the amount and location of accessible green space in their areas and feeding that into negotiations with developers which might lead to developers making a financial contribution to enable existing green space to become more accessible rather asking them to provide additional green space direct.

- Could facilities such as community gardens potentially be considered to be accessible green space, even if they involved for example reuse of car parks etc? Would they meet other criteria around health outcomes as part of a wider mix of objectives.
- In targeting actions from the study, it would be necessary to agree the defining criteria. For instance, should it be the amount of green space or quality of the green space?
- Previous studies undertaken in the North Cotswold area mapping indices of deprivation had also identified that those who stood to gain the most from access to green spaces were often the least able to do so.
- Natural England had started a search for a new National Park and both the Cotswolds and Chilterns were possible areas for consideration. Analysis of communities that needed access to green space but whom were not currently benefiting from it was likely to be a consideration in that process.
- It was noted that traditionally Oxfordshire had not developed a network of country parks in contrast to some other county area, most likely because of the associated costs. However, the downside of this was around now around accessibility.
- The report was an important piece of evidence that should inform local plan formation once published and there should be discussion at that point on how it recommendation might be taken forward and by whom.
- There was a need to consult with the public so decision makers could understand what kind of accessible green space people wanted.

The Chair concluded the discussion by suggesting that there the research should be shared with DEFRA as part of current discussions.

17 Immediate opportunities for nature recovery and nature-based solutions in Oxfordshire – event

The Board considered a paper as set out in the Agenda which proposed a theme for a workshop at which partners would agree the local narrative for the OLNP's vision, identify major projects, and promotion of those projects in advance of the agreement of the county wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Members of the Board were asked to indicate outside of the meeting if they had any objections to the setting up of the workshop or if they had suggestions for how it might be conducted. The Chair indicated that in the absence of any significant objections preparations would begin.

18 Appointing a new eNGO rep

Matt Whitney commented that after an election process, Professor Jeremy Biggs, CEO of the Freshwater Habitats Trust had been the nomination of the Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, (eNGOs) to replace Prue Addison as the second ENGO representative on the OLNP Board.

It was **agreed** that Professor Jeremy Biggs be added to the Board.

19 Funding update

The Chair indicated that funding remained within the OLNP budget.

20 Any other business

At this point, the Chair and members of the Board placed on record their appreciation and gratitude to Prue Addison for her service to the OLNP commenting that she was very much instrumental to the way in which it had developed and all of its work.

Prue thanked the Board for these remarks and commented that she looked forward to seeing the progress the LNP had made in 12 months' time.

21 Dates of future meetings

The date of future meetings was noted.

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm