

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership Board

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE 2024 AT 10.00 AM
VIRTUAL VIA MS TEAMS

Present:

Members: Richard Benwell (Chair), Ian Boll, Camilla Burrow, Tim Coates, Tom Curtis, Professor Jeremy Biggs, Michelle Leek, James Price, Matthew Morrison Clark, David Rouane, Rosie Rowe and Simon Smith

Officers: Matt Whitney, Huw Thomas, Lizzie Moore, Kevin Jacob, Amber Lyford and Susan Harbour

Guests: Juliet Savage and Ben Taylor

33 Apologies, conflicts of interest and Chair's announcements

Apologises were received from Matthew Stanton, substituted by Matthew Morrison Clark, Gillian Aitken, and Professor David Macdonald. Tom Curtis was expected to join late.

Juliet Savage (Environment Agency) advised the information she can share with the Board will be limited to information already in the public domain due to being in the pre-election period. It was noted that this also applies to any members who work for local authorities.

The Chair listed some of the main party commitments that are relevant to the work of the Board, noting not much has been mentioned regarding Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) at present.

34 Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the Board meeting held on 13 March 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

35 Local Nature Partnership Manager update

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership (OLNP) Manager, gave an update on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) where the board was advised that an information and

update session took place about 1 month ago which saw approximately 200 attendees. Most of the data from that session is now in and analysed. A draft using this data should be created by late summer and the formal consultation period will start in October.

Matt continued by highlighting the advocacy work he has been doing:

- Met with regional directors of National Trust, Natural England's Canal and Rivers trust, Wildlife Trust Chief Execs, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund in London to discuss the Nature Southeast proposal (Looking at a regional approach to nature finance – there will be a workshop in the Autumn)
- Coordinated, with Richard Benwell, a letter to the then DEFRA Minister Rebecca Pow. This was signed by 28 LNP Chairs and asked for direct funding for OLNPs and implementation funding of LNRs. This was sent about 2 weeks before the general election was announced so no response was expected.
- Hosted a visit from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Green Finance team at Farm Ed
- Landscape scale recovery project – met with Fresh Water Habitats Trust and River Thames Conservation Trust to discuss their landscape recovery project. Hoping for a further update from Jeremy during the next Board meeting
- Wrote a letter of support to Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, (BBOWT) regarding Reconnecting the Bernwood Otmoor Ray project (to the northeast of Oxfordshire and into Bucks.)

Matt ended his update by providing some highlights of the work done around nature finance:

- Agreed the creation of a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) shop front. This will initially be a static website which will show what BNG units are available in the County.
- The outcome for the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund Round 3 (NEIRF3) application will be announced in July.

Rosie Rowe provided a Health and Nature update which focused on two recent in-person events.

- Health and Nature subgroup network meeting held on 10 June. Approximately 48 participants joined to discuss opportunities and challenges for scaling up green prescribing in Oxfordshire.
- Inclusive Nature Recovery community engagement day on 25 May at Willowbrook Farm. 70 people attended from challenged communities in Oxford and Banbury.

Rosie continued by advising the Board that the County Council and the local District Councils have been working with Oxford University and Oxford Brookes to provide applied research experience to their research students. Three nature themed questions were accepted to be part of this work and the findings will be presented in July.

The key findings from the Nature Prescribing initiative will be fed back into the Health and Nature subgroup. There are also some short-term actions that can be done. Rosie highlighted that the County Council is going to map out all the social prescribers in the county and it was looking to trial a place-based event where connections can be made between green providers, community connectors and social prescribers.

Rosie informed the Board that the group agreed to meet again on an annual basis to continue the conversations.

Camilla Burrow added that Wild Oxfordshire is working in partnership with Community First Oxfordshire along with other appropriate parties on a bid going into the Thriving Nature fund from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation. The project would fund nature buddies to improve accessibility of nature activities across the County. It was also noted that there will be opportunities for the work that Rosie and Camilla are working on to cross over and work together.

Action – Lizzie M/Becky C to add links to the community practice and buddying scheme to the OLNP website.

The Chair thanked those who assisted with the DEFRA Green Finance team visit to Farm Ed and suggested hosting a similar event in the future with a minister present once the next parliament is in place. The Chair also highlighted the rolling list created by Matt Whitney, detailing significant nature projects in Oxfordshire with their risks and opportunities.

Action - Board members to add any additional risks / opportunities to the list if they feel there are any missing.

Action – Host another event like the one at Farm Ed after the general election with a minister present.

36 Thames Valley Flood Scheme

Juliet Savage, Environment Agency, gave a presentation on this item to update the Board on the Thames Valley Flood Scheme. Before the meeting a link was shared with the Board members regarding this item which is below.

[Thames Valley Flood Scheme introduction video](#)

Juliet explained that one of the main ambitions of the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is to reduce the flood risk while also improving biodiversity and limiting the carbon footprint. A total of 20 approaches were identified with the help of a public consultation and after assessing this data 7 options were chosen to take forward which fall into 2 categories:

- Flood storage
- Natural flood management

Juliet explained that natural flood storage alone isn't enough to manage the floods that are expected with climate change and the way flooding happens in the Thames Valley, so they are looking at online flood storage.

17 locations have been identified as potential flood storage sites. These are still being investigated and Juliet emphasised to the Board that no work will be done on these sites without working closely with the landowners, local communities, and interested groups.

Juliet ended her presentation by showing a timeline for the Thames Valley Flood Scheme which started in 2021 and will run beyond 2035, she noted that the project is still in the early stages, and they are hoping to attract Government funding but will need partnership funding as well.

A discussion followed that emphasised the need for projects like these to have the creation of wetlands and grasslands be an integral part as they are a necessary co-benefit. Juliet

explained that they are working with several wildlife groups to help consider all elements of biodiversity.

It was noted that cost benefit analysis criteria usually analysed the flood risk reduction benefit and not the nature or biodiversity benefits. The Environmental Benefits from Nature (EBN) tool was highlighted as a valuable tool to inform the business case along with the Natural Capital Register and Account Tool (NCRAT) to put emphasis on the other wider environmental benefits of the scheme. The Chair suggested the Board write a recommendation to the Environment Agency to use these tools.

Action – The Board to write recommendation to the Environment Agency to use the tools and methodologies already created by the likes of the Environmental Agency within the cost benefit analysis of the business case for this project.

Juliet explained to the Board that EA are looking at the small-scale projects relating to natural flood management that are currently in place and are doing their own investigation into where natural flood management measures could be best placed.

The Board was asked to engage and support this project where possible and Juliet added EA are keen to continue to work well with groups like the OLN and link in with existing networks.

37 Focus on Nature Finance work

Huw Thomas, Nature Finance Manager for the OLN, provided an update to the Board on this item. Hue updated members on the Nature Based Carbon Offset Project, stating they are continuing to review the methodologies that already exist for different forms of carbon sequestration and how those are captured. He added that biochar and pyrolysis topics which will be included as part of this project and highlighted the benefits of biochar and the current value being approximately £200-£300 per tonne.

Huw explained principles are currently being developed as part of the high integrity market framework review. Discussions have been had with DEFRA regarding the issues with stacking and bundling.

He attended the Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) Prime Markets Forum where he spoke with pensions investors and found there is a lot of interest in the sector but there is still some scepticism around the value benefit and what the cost and revenue flows look like for these projects.

Tim Coates advised there are several small biochar startups based in Oxfordshire and offered to set up introductions. He also highlighted that there are some complications within the value chain of biochar, including the limitation on how much can be deployed on farmland as it is classed as a waste product under UK legislation and that the primary financial beneficiary is the producer of the biochar and not the user.

38 Alignment with Trust of Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE)

Matt Whitney introduced this item, advising there is no formal proposal at this stage, but the paper had been drafted to outline the reasons for bringing the idea forward and asking for the Board's opinion on the risks and opportunity benefits.

He explained that to deliver the LNRS some agricultural land will need to be taken out of production and put into high nature projects while most agriculturally productive land will need to become nature friendly.

Some key reasons for wanting to accelerate this work are:

- The deadline of 2030 is not too far away.
- Ensuring any private money invested in nature is contributing meaningfully towards nature recovery aligned with local priorities.
- Ensuring the money stays in Oxfordshire to contribute towards Oxfordshire's nature recovery.

The above reasons are why Gloucestershire LNP set up their Nature and Climate Fund. However, Oxfordshire already has an existing nature finance intermediary broker (TOE) as well as other expert organisations like BBOWT: working more closely with these would be beneficial.

Matt highlighted some benefits that could come from this close working relationship as:

- Enabling the carbon work that Huw is working on.
- Enabling the creation of a revolving fund.
- Implementing high integrity principles.
- A potential way of managing a shopfront/marketplace.
- A way of reinvesting any surplus into the OLNP's nature and people work.

The two main ways the OLNP could work more closely with Trust of Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) are:

1. operationally (e.g. OLNP-branded project implemented by TOE)
2. governance (e.g. shared board members)

Ben Taylor from TOE went through a presentation to explain the history of TOE and what it does. The presentation detailed the benefits of an alignment between TOE and the OLNP and emphasised the key message of collaboration across Oxfordshire to achieve our shared nature recovery goals.

Matt then added some of the risks with this partnership that will need to be considered:

- Public perception of nature finance.
- Why TOE and not another organisation (favouritism).
- Potential liability if becoming trustees of a charity.
- The OLNP is funded by local authorities – losing that support.

Discussion covered the positives and potential issues with working with TOE. It was highlighted that while there are other organisations that work on nature finance, TOE is not a delivery body but an enabler/facilitator making it a more unique opportunity and more appropriately matched to OLNP. Working with a local institution rather than a national body has benefits of understanding the local area and will facilitate a more nuanced approach.

Recommendations were made to work on some mutual projects, before carefully considering and agreeing any formal / legal partnership. A request was also made to look at all options including what other LNPs and National Parks have done.

It was advised that the governance of collaborative working between the OLNP and TOE should be investigated. However, it was noted that the OLNP is a non-statutory body, closely affiliated with the planning authorities within the County Council.

The Board members agreed to this proposal in principle. Matt and Ben will create a full proposal and share it with members before the next board meeting.

39 Forum Event

It was agreed that the forum event would have a main focus on delivery of the LNRS. It was agreed a good time to host the event would be around late October or early November this year, shortly after the release of the draft LNRS. It was suggested that there be live music as part of the conference to create an atmosphere for inspiration and reflection.

Some concerns were raised around the LNRS guidance from DEFRA as there is a risk that many landowners and wildlife areas could be excluded from the work. It was advised to ensure the messaging is inclusive and the board agreed that the OLNP will need to be proactive around how the LNRS is framed and communicated to avoid exclusion. It was also agreed to include the landowners and farmers in framing the communication.

Matt advised that he would consider, with others, formally communicate these concerns to the team who are creating the LNRS at the County and encourage that they continue to do the work they are doing and emphasis the desire to go above and beyond the base DEFRA guidance. He also added that hopefully the Chair would be the person writing the Foreword for the LNRS which will help frame it positively.

40 Activity tracker

The Chair asked member to review the activity tracker offline and to communicate any gaps or anything that needs to be added after the meeting.

41 Board admin

a To agree to adopt the proposed register of interest

Agreed.

b To agree to hybrid meeting preferences

It was agreed to have an alternating schedule between virtual and in person meetings. Hybrid facilities will still remain available for exceptional circumstances for in person meetings.

Susan Harbour highlighted that the local authorities have meeting rooms with facilities which can allow a mix of hybrid and in person meetings where needed, additional side room bookings that enables working after the meeting and catering facilities.

c To nominate a Vice Chair

The Chair asked Board members to consider whether they would like to be Vice Chair and reach out to him and Matt Whitney if they are interested.

42 Any other business

Rosie Rowe referenced the discussion that was had about the Citizens Assembly during the last board meeting. She raised concerns that many of the suggestions from last meeting had not been taken forward and asked if any other board members have had engagement from the Citizen's Assembly team. It was suggested that the OLNP touch base with the team who had an event planned which Matt or Lizzie will be attending. Matt advised the team will have a discussion with them.

The Chair raised awareness to the board members that there would be a march to Westminster on 22 June to "Restore Nature Now!".

The Summer Solstice celebration in Central London was also highlighted to members.

43 Date of future meetings

18 September 2024

11 December 2024

The meeting closed at 12:00 pm.