

Minutes of a meeting of the Climate and Environment Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Wednesday 29 November 2023



Committee members present:

Councillor Hollingsworth (Chair)

Councillor Kerr

Councillor Miles

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Chris Bell, Green and Blue Spaces Development Manager

Tina Mould, Head of Sustainability

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks

Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice

Apologies:

No apologies were received

19. Declarations of Interest

None.

20. Chair's Announcements

None.

The Panel agreed to consider items 7, 8 and 9 next on the agenda, followed by items 4, 5, 6 and 10.

21. Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas - September 2023 Review

Cllr Chewe Munkonge, Deputy Leader (Non-Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks introduced the report, highlighting that there were only a small number of actions which had not been progressed and this was largely as a result of lack of available funding.

Chris Bell, Green and Blue Spaces Development Manager added that the Biodiversity Review of Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas had been developed in 2020 to set out the Council's current progress and demonstrate what it was doing to promote and support biodiversity in Council parks and nature areas. He added that there was a

lot of aspiration within the Council and highlighted the importance of identifying specific sites and projects where this aspiration could be delivered on the ground.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- There had been good progress made against the Action Plan, but there was still work to be done across the City.
- In terms of grass management, specific meadow restoration had been successful, but more work was required in relation to a general review of grass verge management.
- There was a need to broaden understanding around geology and land use to ensure that the right approach to biodiversity was taken on the right site (i.e. avoiding a narrow, sometimes inappropriate, focus on planting trees on all sites).
- The Council's relationship with Oxford Direct Services (ODS) as contractor for the management of parks and green spaces was positive; ODS had a wealth of expertise and site-specific knowledge in terms of site and habitat management.
- There was no centralised document where information on all sites, habitats and projects across the City were located and their needs in terms of funding.

The Panel noted that it was pleased to see an action plan where the majority of actions had been progressed and appropriate lessons learned; and praised the Green and Blue Spaces Development Manager and his team for the work done.

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

- The Council, in collaboration with partners who hold relevant data, maps data relating to landscape and habitat type onto a centralised system (e.g. GIS) and populates with information about particular sites or projects which require funding; and makes this publicly accessible so that Members, community groups and the general public can find and support local projects near to them.
- The Council explores how volunteer coordination could be delivered within existing resource as part of the Council's core 'business as usual'.
- The Council reviews the structure of its contracts with Oxford Direct Services in relation to parks and green space management in the longer-term, to ensure that there is clarity within those contracts as to whether the management of parks and green spaces is led by prescriptive inputs (certain amount of work over a defined period of time) or outputs (supporting, protecting and enhancing biodiversity).
- The Council ensures the most appropriate approach for enhancing biodiversity is taken in its parks and nature areas according to environment on a site-by-site basis – with a focus on the right approach in the right place, rather than a uniform approach across all sites.

Cllr Chewe Munkonge, Deputy Leader (Non-Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks and Chris Bell, Green and Blue Spaces Development Manager left the meeting and did not return.

22. Retrofit [presentation]

Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice delivered a presentation which set out an overview of issues including FutureFit Oxford and Pioneering Places, on which the Council was anticipating a decision on grant funding imminently; Clean Heat Streets; Planning (permitted development) and Air

Source Heat Pumps; the Council's Retrofit campaign; Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund; and retrofit of the Council's property portfolio. A copy of the presentation slides is included in the minutes pack.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- There was no information available on the impact of the Council's Retrofit campaign currently, as the campaign was still in its infancy.
- There was a lot of technical complexity surrounding retrofit which could make it difficult for the public to engage with; it was anticipated that projects such as FutureFit Oxford(shire) would help to demystify and simplify the options and processes relating to retrofit – which in turn would encourage public engagement and uptake.
- The Council tried to reach out as much as possible to community groups and groups of residents who were interested in community retrofit schemes; lots of this work was done through the Low Carbon Hub.
- The Low Carbon Hub had been set up, in part, to take key learnings from retrofit projects and share with key partners; this included learning from retrofit on listed buildings owned by the universities (e.g. Wolfson College).

The Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

- The Council, through its current Retrofit campaign and any future initiatives, ensures a focus on simplification and demystification of retrofit so that the options and processes are easily digestible by the public – thus encouraging uptake at scale.
- The Council ensures an emphasis on two-way communication in relation to retrofit and maintains a list of interested community groups and areas of the city where residents are interested in community retrofit schemes, so that relevant information, intelligence and opportunities can be shared.
- The Council compiles a list of local retrofit suppliers/installers to share publicly so that residents can see which suppliers are in the retrofit market.

23. Net Zero Masterplan

The Panel considered the Net Zero Masterplan, which set out Oxford City Council's actions over the next two years to achieve its two carbon targets: a Net Zero Estate and Operations by 2030 and a Net Zero City by 2040.

Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice and Tina Mould, Head of Sustainability were in attendance to answer questions.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The Council was not required by statute to undertake any of the work included within the Masterplan.
- The Masterplan included the key deliverables for the Council to meet its 2030 and 2040 targets; prioritisation had been done in relation to achieving those targets.
- If budget bids for additional resource were not successful, officers would need to discuss the implications in terms of the deliverability of the actions included in the Masterplan.

The Panel requested that consideration be given to:

- Where the priorities within the Masterplan overlapped with the Council's statutory service functions – and whether this impacted prioritisation.
- Control versus influence – specifically that priority should be afforded to actions where the Council had control, rather than only influence.
- Reflecting on the progress of actions in terms of prioritisation; in particular were the lower and medium priority actions being completed faster than the high priority actions because they were easier to do.

Cllr Katherine Miles left the meeting and did not return.

The Panel agreed to consider the Masterplan again at future meetings, once the budget position was clearer. The Panel noted that it would focus on what had changed between this and future iterations.

The Panel noted the Net Zero Masterplan; no recommendations were agreed.

Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice and Tina Mould, Head of Sustainability left the meeting and did not return.

24. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 as a true and accurate record.

25. Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the Work Plan and agreed to add a 'year in review' item to the meeting scheduled for 20 March 2024, where the Panel could assess its impact and where it could add more value going forward.

The Panel noted that the Scrutiny Officer would continue to schedule items which had been agreed at previous meetings into the Work Plan as time and resources allowed; along with monitoring the Forward Plan to bring forward any relevant and timely Cabinet reports to Panel meetings.

The Panel agreed the Work Plan, with the addition of the 'year in review' item for the 20 March 2024 meeting.

26. Report back on recommendations

The Panel noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- City Wide Smoke Control Area Declaration
- HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24
- Air Pollution

The Panel agreed to keep a record of recommendations where it could track progress and implementation of recommendations which were longer-term. The Panel requested that the Scrutiny Officer develop a tracker document to feed into the 'year in review' item that had been requested be added to the agenda for the meeting in March 2024.

27. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.29 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 27 February 2024

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.

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