

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday 13 August 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Railton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Tom Bridgman, Deputy Chief Executive – Place

Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance, and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)

Nigel Kennedy, Group Finance Director

Jenny Barker, the Regeneration and Development Lead

Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Turner, Chapman and Linda Smith sent apologies.

32. Declarations of Interest

None.

33. Minutes of the previous meeting

Cabinet resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on **09 July 2025** as a true and accurate record.

34. Addresses by members of the public

An address to Cabinet was given by Dan Glazebrook, a representative of the Friends of Grandpont Nature Park group:

Almost 2000 people, the vast majority of them local residents, have now signed the petition against Oxpens River Bridge and its connecting paths. There are many reasons people are up in arms - the ecological destruction involved, the lack of democratic consultation, the fact that there are already two excellent pedestrian and cycle bridges within quarter of a mile of the site, the misuse of £10million of public money intended to facilitate affordable housing - but what I want to focus on today is how the bridge singularly fails to meet its own intended purpose - to provide a floodproof connection from Osney Mead to Oxpens.

So the local plan specifies the need for both a new bridge linking Osney Mead to the other side of the river, and a floodproof route out of Osney Mead. These two things have subsequently been combined into plans for a single floodproof connection reaching all the way from Osney Mead across the river, as is made clear in several official documents.

The problem is, to reach the bridge from Osney Mead, users would have to go across a stream and under a railway bridge along a section of the towpath that frequently floods.

To solve this problem, the City Council commissioned Stantec to develop a project called Osney Pathworks, to create a new floodproof path linking Osney Mead to the planned new bridge. The preferred plan was to erect floodwalls under the railway bridge. But the Environment Agency vetoed this proposal in 2021, as it would cause further flooding elsewhere. Stantec's report admitted there is no solution currently available which adequately addresses the flooding issue whilst also meeting current safety standards for cycling and walking. This remains the case today.

This makes the bridge completely redundant, as it utterly fails to provide the new floodproof connection from Osney Mead across the river without which housing cannot be built on the site and which was the whole point of the project in the first place.

The City Council is now right on the verge of committing up to £14million of public money, and causing irrevocable damage to a cherished piece of countryside on our doorstep, for a bridge that singularly fails to meet its basic purpose. We urge you - please do not be a party to this shocking waste of money and biodiversity. Surely no further funds should be committed so long as there remains no viable plan to floodproof the connection between Osney Mead and the new bridge.

I would also like to address the issue of the University's funding commitments to the scheme. A spokesman for the University told the Oxford Mail back in January that, the University, quote, "last year agreed to make a contribution of around 10 per cent of the cost of the new bridge after learning that cost increases had put its viability at risk."

10% at that time equated to more than £1 million of the project's projected costs. If the University had already committed more than a million pounds last year, why is this financial commitment not appearing in the figures before us today? Why is the public purse being asked to guarantee the full £3.7million in increased costs, and not, say, £2.7 million, given that a million from the University is already in the bag? Have the University now reneged on this commitment? And if the Council is willing to commit the entirety of the increased costs from the public purse, what incentive is there for the University to contribute any money at all?

Finally, I would also like to address the issue of Balfour Beatty's monopoly position in the delivery of the scheme. Balfour Beatty are set to be awarded the construction

contract without any competitive tendering process at all. Balfour Beatty are a notorious company. They are involved in the imposition of near-slavery conditions on their migrant workforce in Qatar; just four years ago they were fined £49 million for massive fraud against the US government after it was revealed they had been systematically falsifying data in order to get bonus payments - and in this country their failure to comply with statutory safety requirements led in 2020 to the death of one construction worker and serious injuries to another, according to a [ruling](#) by the Health and Safety Executive last year.

But as well as being criminally unethical, they are also just not very good builders. On trustpilot, they are rated 'bad' with just 1.7 stars out of 5 and student residents have had to be moved out of their accommodation in Bethnal Green recently due to significant defects which have been blamed on the contractor, and which have cost its owner over £34million to address.

Why is the Council so keen to work with these incompetent criminals that it is prepared to set aside its usual tendering process and guarantee the contract to Balfour Beatty without any tendering at all? And is it's willingness to do so the reason why the company feels confident enough to hike its bill by over 35%, from £10 to £14 million in just a few months?

After all, the company do have form here - in 2016, one of their employees [revealed](#) how they had been extorting the taxpayer by systematically inflating their costs. The company responded by sacking the whistleblower, for which they were later forced to pay £137,000.

I will end there but if you would like to be in touch about this, or to see any of the documentation I have referred to today, please do not hesitate to be in touch with Friends of Grandpont Nature Park at gnptrees@gmail.com

More information is also available at our website - savegnp.org

An address to Cabinet was submitted by Andrew Smith, resident of Grandpont:

We are longstanding residents of Grandpont and we have lived in the area for the past 50 years. We are therefore asking the Cabinet to critically review the necessity of continuing with the plan to instal the proposed Oxpens Bridge. The Council appears determined to press ahead with the project despite there being strong grounds to consider cheaper and more environmentally friendly alternatives, and in the face of well informed and consistent opposition. Local residents exercised their democratic right to raise objections and galvanise support to oppose the bridge. An appeal is pending the recent Judicial review.

The cost of the proposed River Bridge has now spiralled to some £14+million. Local democratic objection has been blamed for this rise from the £10m. In fact, the original deadline for project completion was March 2023, when the price was £6million. The delays were due to the Council's mismanagement of the project (eg not having applied for planning permission and a licence to fell trees) - costs had spiralled long before the Judicial Review October 2024 initiated by the SaveGNP group.

The area of Grandpont Nature park (GNP) that will be unnecessarily destroyed, is a unique area of land that was regenerated from the "poisoned" land that blighted this part of Oxford for many years. The GNP is therefore a success story, that highlights the important partnership between the then environmentally aware council (some 35 years ago) that supported the regeneration, the local community and the capacity of nature to

grow and diversify, and turn this once abandoned and toxic part of Oxford into a thriving biodiverse area for the people of Oxford.

The Council must continue to take responsibility for the natural environment in Oxford. These principles seem to have sadly been abandoned and to have become a willing participant in the destruction of this unique area. It is a legacy that should be respected and protected for future generations.

The Council appears to simply brush aside this argument, seeing the bridge as being essential for connectivity and as part of the yet to be authorised Osney Mead science park development. but perhaps will do so in a manner that seriously limits a open minded and informed approach to the There are much cheaper and better alternatives:

The Gas Works Bridge, built in 1927, was recently publicised by Cllr Railton and Liz Wooley (local historian) as an important part of Oxford's industrial heritage (but in need of maintenance). As you are aware it is a 2 minute walk from the proposed site of the new bridge. It offers not only a historical connection to the regenerated nature reserve, but offers an ongoing route for local people into Oxford. A Council feasibility study (cost updated 2024: £679.344) highlighted the Gas work Bridge as offering good much cheaper connectivity to the city and proposed a redevelopment scheme that would create a flood proof oute across the Oxpens Meadow. This was roundly rejected by the Council as not a viable option, but is something that the council as guardians of tax payers' money should revisit and perhaps, put into practice the commitment to sustainability that the Council projects as a guiding principle. The Council's focus on the proposed bridge has become rigid and unimaginative.

It has been pointed out repeatedly, that the position of the River Bridge, does not take into account the serious limitations of the route under the railway bridge on the pathway towards Osney/Botley. It has a limited height and often floods. You then have to cross a small wooden bridge in poor condition, where 2 cyclists can't pass each other. The proposed 4 metre wide bridge would exit into an area that is not suitable: a motorway grade construction and roadway would lead into an ancient cycle and pedestrian path, which would be hazardous for all users. There are no plans about connectivity towards Osney and how to safely negotiate the rail bridge limitations. When we asked Council officials about these obvious problems, during a "walk about" in March 2024, officer Jenny said: "it is not in our remit - up to the University to sort out ". Thus confirming a planning infrastructure "black hole" that does little justice to the planned bridge and the safety and needs of local people. We see ever more electric bikes/delivery vans going at breakneck speeds along existing paths. We dread to think of the ever higher speeds across the new "motorway", then screeching down a path under the low, often flooded railway bridge/tiny wooden bridge! This is a shared space : pedestrians (often elderly) love to walk through the woods.

It is time for a rethink! Is this really the time for such a poorly conceived and unpopular project to be advanced with our public money, intended for much needed housing for local people? We are regularly in the glade where the proposed bridge will be situated. We have had many conversations with members of the local public who use the cycle track or walk through the area. The most common response is WHY?- we already have 2 good bridges" Then followed by shock about the scale and purpose of the proposed bridge.

After considering all the local objections, it would be seen as reasonable and admirable for the Council to cancel the River Bridge, not a weakness or loss of face. This which would greatly improve the public perception that the Council are working in the best interest of us, your tax payers.

We thank you for considering our views and hope you will reconsider the River Bridge.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth provided Cabinet's response to the two addresses from members of the public. He noted that the second member of the public who had submitted an address had not been able to attend in person and that the response below was being given to respond to both addresses from members of the public.

"The Cabinet report is seeking agreement to delegate the signing of agreements and entering of contracts to deliver the bridge. This is necessary to be able to meet the programme to deliver the bridge in 2026.

The Bridge has long been part of the policy and placemaking proposals for the West End. Councillor Hollingsworth noted that all of the previous policies and proposals had been subject to public consultation and democratic approval by the Council.

The West End AAP, adopted June 2008, sought

A new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the Thames to join Oxpens Field to the Thames towpath is proposed. This would link the West End to Osney Mead and the West Oxford Cycle Route. Improvements will also be made to the route running east from the pedestrian bridge

The Oxford Core Strategy adopted March 2011 sought; A new Thames cycle and pedestrian bridge

The Oxpens SPD, adopted Nov 2013 sought (5.30)

A new footbridge crossing the Thames (Isis) should be provided to enhance opportunities to move between Oxpens and the wider area, notably the Grandpont Nature Reserve, the residential areas up/down stream on the opposite side of the river. Indicative locations for the proposed bridge crossing are illustrated on the Development Framework Plan and Illustrative Masterplan. The exact location of the bridge is to be determined, and the Environment Agency must be consulted on the design.

The Oxford LP policy SP2 June 20

The masterplan should consider in greater detail how and when a new pedestrian and cycle bridge will be delivered linking this site with the other side of the river.

West End and Osney Mead SPD Nov 22

Key Infrastructure priorities in relation to movement are:

....Oxpens River Bridge

- The proposed bridge now has planning permission and technical approval for the structure and a route has been identified to deliver the bridge. Further work has been done to refine the proposals to reduce the impact on trees at Grandpont through reuse of the existing path as far as possible and these are*

set out in a Non-Material Amendment currently with the planning team. Grandpont Nature Park will remain for recreational use. The proposals include replacement planting and deliver a Net Biodiversity Gain.

- The path through Grandpont is already well used and with further development in the West End the level of use is forecast to increase. Optioneering was done to look at the options to floodproof the tow path under the rail bridge but they were not taken forward as there was not funding available for them. That does not mean the route will not continue to be used the rest of the time, and the pathworks and the proposed bridge will provide an attractive and legible route across the river to the city centre.*
- The other Gasworks bridges will remain. The potential to improve the Gasworks Rail bridge was considered by the County Council in 2016/17 and discounted. Further review has highlighted considerable challenges particularly with the footpath alongside Castle Mill Stream which is too narrow to accommodate cycling and the alternative route over the Castle Mill Stream bridge which would require alterations to create a hardened path and altered levels across the Meadow.*
- The proposed bridge provides the opportunity for a new and convenient active travel route across the river, designed specifically for the location and to support the placemaking that will support the development of the West End as a vibrant quarter of the City.”*

Councillor Brown thanked the members of the public for their submissions.

35. Councillor addresses on any item for decision on the Cabinet agenda

None.

36. Councillor addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

None received.

37. Items raised by Cabinet Members

None.

38. Reports from the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee met on 5 August 2025 and reviewed the Oxpens River Bridge Update. The Climate and Environment Working Group met on 22 July 2025 to consider the Net Zero Tracker, the Local Plan 2042 Climate Change and Resilience, and the Annual Air Quality Status Report. Councillor Alex Powell noted that there were not recommendations arising from the Working Group regarding the Net Zero Tracker.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Scrutiny Committee's discussions and recommendations regarding the Oxpens River Bridge Update. He noted that the Committee discussed possible impacts, risks, and the likelihood of further delays.

- **Recommendation:** That Cabinet undertake high-level remodelling and assess potential impact of the judicial review appeal progressing to a hearing,

particularly around timescales and future costings, to ensure the Council is better prepared and has a more informed basis for decision.

Councillor Hollingsworth responded to the recommendations from Scrutiny and said that Cabinet had agreed the recommendation from Scrutiny.

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Climate and Environment Working Group's discussions and recommendations relating to the Local Plan 2042 Climate Change and Resilience. He noted that the Working Group emphasised the need to integrate building cooling systems into building plans moving forward.

- **Recommendation 1:** That the Local Plan 2042 include clearer support for renewable energy schemes, particularly the potential for solar panel installations on terraced houses through community-led energy schemes.
- **Recommendation 2:** That there is greater robustness demonstrated in the Local Plan 2042 supporting text acknowledging the urgency of climate action when balancing the need to address climate emergency through retrofitting heritage buildings to support decarbonisation against the need to minimise harm to heritage assets.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the Plan explicitly references the potential use of energy offsetting funds from developers for retrofit improvements to schools and community buildings, recognising the wider public benefit of public buildings rather than individual residential buildings, and criteria applied to the allocation of these funds prioritises maximum community impact.
- **Recommendation 4:** That there is specific language acknowledging the potential for loss and damage associated with new and existing properties in areas of high flood risk, and that local plan policies ensure applicants take account of these potential impacts in future planning and climate resilience design features to minimise possible damage (e.g. positioning of plugs, use of specific materials on the ground floor that can cope with flood damage).

Councillor Alex Powell presented the Climate and Environment Working Group's discussions and recommendations relating to the Annual Air Quality Status Report.

- **Recommendation:** That the Air Quality Action Plan incorporates specific measures addressing the use of diesel generators associated with street trading, construction and similar activities, reflecting the Council's regulatory responsibilities in relation to street trading and seek to reduce air quality impacts.

Councillor Hollingsworth provided the Cabinet responses to the recommendations from the Climate and Environment Working Group regarding the Local Plan 2042. Generally, he said that they would agree with most of the recommendations regarding the Local Plan 2042. He noted that there were limitations from government guidance and legislation which meant that they could only agree in part to recommendations two and three from the Working Group. Regarding loss and damage policies, he said that those would be set out in greater detail later on in the Local Plan delivery process. He said that recommendations one and four had been agreed by Cabinet.

Councillor Railton provided the Cabinet response to the recommendation from the Climate and Environment Working Group relating to the Annual Air Quality Status Report. She said that they had agreed the recommendation in part.

Councillor Brown thanked the Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of Scrutiny for their work and discussions on these items.

39. Oxpens River Bridge Update on Delivery and Funding

The Deputy Chief Executive – Place had submitted a report to Cabinet to request that Cabinet agree to the virement of underspend in the current capital programme to increase the project budget in the capital programme for the Oxpens bridge; to accept additional funding for the construction of the bridge from external bodies, and to agree to amending and entering legal agreements as necessary for the funding, construction and transfer of the bridge.

Councillor Hollingsworth presented the report. He highlighted key elements of the report, including the fact that the bridge had been in many different policy plans, adopted through public consultation, for about twenty years. He emphasised that the first recommendation requests delegated authority to seek external funds to support this project. Clarifying the original funding for the bridge, he said it had come from central government, the County Council was accountable for the funds, and that the City Council had taken responsibility for the delivery. He noted that if the Council decided not to proceed with this, they would have to return residual money not spent on the program to central government and could not spend the money on a different program.

Jenny Barker, the Regeneration and Development Lead, highlighted the work which had been done in the planning and approvals process for this project. She said that their timing was key and that to deliver the bridge, construction needed to take place when land is at its driest. She noted that they had agreed with the EA to do the construction in September. Responding to Scrutiny, regarding the impacts of further delays, she said that their team had concluded that further delay would move construction back to 2027. With inflationary rises in costs, this would cause an increase in the total cost of the project, between 600k and 1 million.

Councillor Munkonge thanked the team for their work on this report and said that he supported this project. He thanked Councillor Hollingsworth for the background he had provided. He emphasised that he supported the report's aim to seek external funds first, as a way of funding the project.

Councillor Railton discussed the difficulties with alternative cycle path options in this area and how these challenges necessitated the purpose-built bridge being proposed in this project. She expressed her support for the report and the project.

Councillor Brown acknowledged the issues that had been raised and highlighted that they were there today to approve the latest round of funding for the bridge. She acknowledged the possibility of legal proceedings delaying the project and increasing costs but noted that they needed to take action accordingly. She said that she supported the report and the project.

Councillor Hollingsworth provided a summary of the report. He emphasised the third recommendation and noted that they did not yet have a contract for construction of the bridge.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Delegate** authority to the Deputy Chief Executive - Place, in consultation with the Council's Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer), the Director of Law Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture to enter into legal agreements, or amend legal agreements, to secure the additional external funds required to meet the £3.7 m

needed to deliver the Oxpens River Bridge and to enter an amended agreement with Oxfordshire County Council to enable the Growth Deal funding to be spent in 26/27

2. To **approve** the increase in the budget for the project within in the capital programme for the Oxpens River Bridge project by £3.7 m from £10.3m to £14.00m through the virement of underspend within the capital programme 2025/26.
3. **Delegate** authority to the Deputy Chief Executive - Place, in consultation with the Council's Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer), the Director of Law Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture to enter into a construction contract and any necessary ancillary contracts for the delivery of the bridge, subject to the necessary funds being in place.
4. **Delegate** authority to the Deputy Chief Executive - Place, in consultation with the Council's Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer), the Director of Law Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture, to approve the transfer of the bridge to Oxfordshire County Council on completion.

40. Dates of future meetings

Cabinet noted the dates of future meetings.

Matters Exempt from Publication

If Cabinet wishes to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of any of the items on the exempt from publication part of the agenda, it will be necessary for Cabinet to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Cabinet may maintain the exemption if and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The meeting started at 18:00 and ended at 18:40.

Chair
2025

Date: Wednesday 17 September

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.