PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 23 April 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.37 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:	Councillor Liam Walker - in the Chair Councillor Robin Bennett (Deputy Chair) Councillor Duncan Enright Councillor Charlie Hicks Councillor Susanna Pressel Councillor Nigel Simpson
Other Members in Attendance:	Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy
Officers:	Paul Fermer, Director of Highways and Environment Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place Tom Scholes, Operational Manager for Data Intelligence Jason Sherwood, Head of Regulatory Planning Enforcement Natalie Crawford, Capital Programme Manager Alistair Read, Head of IT Melanie Graham, Operational Manager for Business Performance Bryan Evans, Rail Project Manager Pete Brunskill, Rail Development Lead Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

11/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Bethia Thomas.

12/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

13/25 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes for the meeting on 5 February 2025, were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate record.

14/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS
(Agenda No. 4)

Andy Gilbert, Mayor of Thame, addressed the Committee and requested updates on the Greenway project due to delays despite funding approval two years ago. He emphasised the need for a safe route to Haddenham Parkway because of population growth. The Chair invited comment from officers and Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, confirmed the project was active, addressing land ownership and structural issues, and promised regular updates.

15/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER
(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker.

After agenda item 10, Paul Fermer, Director of Highways and Environment, gave a brief oral update on Vision Zero recommendations. He discussed collaboration with Thames Valley Police on speed limits, enforcement, and new speed cameras. He emphasised a data-driven approach and ongoing engagement with local authorities. Some recommendations were still in progress or required further updates. The Committee was advised that a full written update would be provided to the first substantive meeting of the Committee in the new municipal year.

16/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS
(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to the recommendations on:

- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- City Centre Accommodation Strategy – Disposal of Old and New County Hall
- Infrastructure Funding Statement and s.106 Funding Review Report

17/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN
(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **AGREED** to the Committee forward work plan.

The Committee **AGREED** to include the Verge and Vegetation Management report on the forward plan for 25 June 2025 and **AGREED** to Cabinet's request to consider the Citizens Assembly update at the same meeting.

18/25 SECTION 106 IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE
(Agenda No. 8)

Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy, Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, and Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, were invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions. Invitations were also extended to officers in Finance and in Information Technology. Tom Scholes, Operational Manager for Data Intelligence, Jason Sherwood, Head of Regulatory Planning Enforcement, Natalie Crawford, Capital Programme Manager, Alistair Read, Head of IT, and Melanie Graham, Operational Manager for Business Performance, attended to answer any question the Committee had.

The Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy reported progress on Section 106 improvements, highlighting better fund delivery, system enhancements, and a new transparency dashboard. Cllr Roberts emphasised the need for flexible legal terms and repurposing leftover funds. The Director of Economy and Place addressed Section 106 funding and delivery system improvements and described having established a project team for better management and transparency.

The Operational Manager for Data Intelligence demonstrated how the new dashboard integrating financial, programme management, and Section 106 data for transparency and effective management worked. This was intended to be rolled out as part of the induction process for new and returning members after the May 2025 election. Members welcomed the dashboard and discussed data integration, project tracking, and resource limitations, suggesting appointing a Section 106 officer for better member engagement.

Members inquired about earlier involvement in Section 106 discussions for appropriate contributions and increasing transparency on strategic sites and infrastructure without breaching pre-application confidentiality. Officers explained that, while pre-application meetings were confidential, members could engage with officers throughout the process and provide input. It was suggested to have a more structured mechanism for member input at an earlier stage.

Members requested clarification on the presence of key performance indicators (KPIs) for programme elements within phase two of the improvement project to ensure thorough oversight and optimise performance. It was confirmed that KPIs were crucial for monitoring expenditure profiles and guaranteeing that the council achieved its quarterly objectives. The pre-pipeline initiative was identified as a tool to enhance project tracking, while acknowledging that certain expenditure profiles would necessitate modelling due to the specifics of development funding.

The Committee resolved to make recommendations to Cabinet under the following headings:

- That the Council should include more detail of contractual agreements within the s.106 dashboard;

- That the Council should celebrate the learning that has arisen from the s.106 Improvement Project and disseminate it across the organisation;

- That the Council should include information within the dashboard linking projects to LTCP targets, including modal share;

- That the Council should publish milestones and targets for its Key Performance Indicators;

- That the Council should ensure that there is sufficient officer resource to be represented at developer fora;

- That the Council should prioritise data set integration to enhance the dashboard's capabilities;

- That the Council should continue to explore the benefits of Local Development Orders and whether they should be used more widely.

19/25 RAIL STRATEGY
(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee had requested an update on the development of the Council's Rail Strategy. Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy, Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, Bryan Evans, Rail Project Manager, and Pete Brunskill, Rail Development Lead, were invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Director of Economy and Place and the Rail Project Manager introduced the OxRAIL 2040 project which aligned with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). They discussed key projects including Oxford Station expansion, electrification, and new stations. Members emphasised stakeholder collaboration, active travel integration, and funding strategies, highlighting the need for realistic and vision-led planning.

Members discussed collaborating with stakeholders like Begbroke Science Park and Oxford University Development to integrate the rail strategy. They inquired about engaging train users and the delivery program for Heyford Park, including the rail freight interchange and the proposed Puy de Fou theme park. The Director confirmed ongoing support and discussions with partners. A workshop was planned for Begbroke Science Park integration, and meetings also considered Heyford Park developments. Connectivity with travel and bus routes remained a priority.

Members highlighted transport hubs, active travel integration, and electric bike use, necessitating secure cycle parking at stations. Funding was allocated for the A44 mobility hub. Heyford Park connectivity proposals included cycle routes, pathways, and bus routes to reduce car reliance. Mobility hubs intercepting rural buses before entering the city were also discussed to improve efficiency and coverage.

The Committee hoped that its new membership would scrutinise the draft Strategy to the Committee.

The Committee resolved to make recommendations to Cabinet under the following headings:

- That the Council should integrate the Futures-led Foresight approach into the rail strategy modelling, to align with the LTCP and to ensure strategic planning;

- That the Council should support private-public finance upskilling and apply lessons from the funding of the Elizabeth Line.

The Committee adjourned at 12:08 and resumed at 12:14

20/25 TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP REPORT

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee’s Transport Working Group (TWG) had completed its work and had submitted its report to the Committee for its approval. The report was presented by Cllr Hicks, with thanks to Cllrs Walker, Bennett and Haywood supported by Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, for sitting on the TWG.

Cllr Hicks, as Chair of the TWG, introduced the report and summarised its recommendations explaining that it sought to ensure the Council could meet its ambitions arising from the Local Transport Connectivity Plan. The recommendations focused on data, governance, capacity building, funding, partnerships, and public engagement.

The Director of Environment and Highways acknowledged the usefulness of the TWG's recommendations and ongoing efforts to address resource needs and project delays.

Members asked about resources for the active travel team, referencing the TWG's recommendation. The Director of Environment and Highways explained that various teams handle active travel: policy, highway maintenance, transport delivery, development control, and place-shaping. The Council was reorganising to assess resource levels and skills needed for active travel.

Members expressed concern about delays in projects like Witney High Street, noting that slow progress diminished the value of government grants despite public engagement efforts. They suggested adopting best practices and enhancing in-house design capacity to speed up project delivery. The Director of Environment and Highways argued that co-production might not have changed timelines and was not suitable for every project. He recommended a framework to determine the appropriate level of engagement for each project.

The Committee resolved to **ENDORSE** the recommendations and report of the Transport Working Group; to **SUBMIT** the substantive report of the Transport Working Group (paragraphs 2 onwards) to Cabinet; to **DELEGATE** any minor editing to the Scrutiny Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Chair of the Transport Working Group.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked all members and officers for their contribution to the work of the Committee. He wished all members standing for re-election well and thanked Cllr Bennett and Cllr Hicks who were not standing for re-election.

.... in the Chair

Date of signing ....