



Report to:	Council	27 February 2024
Lead Cabinet Member:	Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council	
Lead Officer:	Liz Watts, Chief Executive	

Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership

Executive Summary

1. This report provides an update on the work of the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Council notes the report.

Details

3. Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership Board meeting

4. The PRP Board will meet on 29 February 2024. At the time of writing this report, the papers had not been published, but they will be available on the partnership's website here: [Oxford to Cambridge Partnership \(oxford-cambridge-partnership.info\)](https://oxford-cambridge-partnership.info)

5. A summary of the partnership's work since the last report to this Council (5 October 2023) is set out below:

6. Innovation and Economy

- 6.1. **International Investment Atlas and Prospectus:** The International Investment Atlas and Prospectus will be launched at UKREiif (Real Estate and Investment & Infrastructure Forum) in May 2024, and plans for the launch will be finalised and shared in March 2024.
- 6.2. **Data Observatory:** This project is designed to deliver transparent, unbiased, high quality, and frequently updated economic and environmental evidence to support partners and investors across the region. The building of the portal will take place throughout March. It is expected that the portal will be published by mid-April 2024. Alongside this, capacity is being sought to work on the creation of a Regional Overview Report, using the data collected and presented in the Observatory to present clearer insights into the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the region's economy and environment. This work will commence in April.

6.3. **Science, Innovation and Technology Business Premises study:** this study is currently being procured. A steering group, consisting of local authority planning policy officers and economic development officers, is being assembled to support the project, and ensure the study is consistent with existing strategies.

7. Environment

7.1. **Landscape-scale nature recovery:** The Partnership has identified a landscape-scale pilot project in the region that has the potential to support the creation of sustainable land management plans, particularly farmland, to enhance habitat connectivity, support action on sustainable water management and showcase the value of growing natural capital in the Oxford to Cambridge Region. The Partnership is working closely with its accountable body on commissioning the project and hopes to be able to formally publicise this project imminently.

7.2. **Exploring the application of the region's geospatial expertise to monitor habitat conditions remotely:** Stakeholder engagement identified potential for earth observation and satellite technology in local nature recovery, and the Partnership commissioned a study with the Satellite Application Catapult and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Nature Partnership to explore opportunities. Areas of focus included how the UK space sector can support biodiversity management challenges, raise awareness of satellite-based imagery for biodiversity monitoring, facilitate connections and collaborations within the sector, and generate project proposals for future funding opportunities. The output report will soon be published, with a feedback webinar to partners planned.

7.3. **Electricity Infrastructure:** It is well-known that the region faces limitations in its electricity infrastructure, and many partners already have well-progressed lobbying strategies and are exploring delivering the role that the Local Energy Area Plan can play. Ofgem has announced the creation of Regional Energy Strategic Planners (RESPs) to collaborate with local government and associated networks on infrastructure needs and investment. Ofgem has proposed a RESP that broadly mirrors England's Economic Heartland and Oxford to Cambridge Region.

7.4. **Vision for a community forest:** The "Doubling Nature" project, which predates the Partnership, identified opportunities for expanding tree cover and creating woodland connections. There is a strong vision, with support, for improving the connectivity of the region's trees and woodlands. The Partnership called for interest in a Community Forest competition, and while a submission for that competition wasn't feasible due to timing and requirements, partners have come together to explore a collaborative proposal for a new National Forest competition.

7.5. **Establishing regional green finance mechanism:** A successful panel discussion on nature finance at the Oxford to Cambridge PRP conference set a marker for the nature finance agenda across the region. This was shortly

followed by Oxfordshire's hugely successful "100 Together" event in January, which brought together financial leaders for environmental investments. There is clearly much interest and activity taking place across the region, and the partnership will be convening a Special Interest Group in April to determine the actions needed to identify large-scale nature finance investment opportunities in the region. Activities may include research, pilot projects, capacity building, and policy advocacy.

8. The Board approved plans for an All-Partner Conference to be held on Friday 24th November at The Ridgeway Centre, Wolverton, Milton Keynes.

Implications

9. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Financial

10. The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership has funding from government of £2,500,000 over the next two financial years, subject to business cases being agreed. As part of accessing this funding local contributions are required, both in officer time and in cash contributions. Last financial year's contribution was £4,000. This contribution has been provided for within the Council's 2024/25 proposed budget.

Legal

11. Cabinet formally confirmed its membership of the partnership at its May 2023 meeting.

Risks/Opportunities

12. The partnership offers the Council the opportunity to work at a regional level to shape and influence strategy and ensure that the voice of residents is kept at the forefront of policy and projects as they emerge. The cost to the Council of being in the partnership is relatively small (when considering both financial cost and officer time) and the risk of being part of the Partnership is therefore low.

Climate Change

13. The priorities of the Partnership are focussed on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefits from this growth for our communities now and in the future. The implications of supporting the Partnership would be to benefit from a wider, strategic approach to delivery of its sustainable, climate impact reducing priorities.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

14. This is a key workstream of the PRP.

Being green to our core

15. This is a key workstream of the PRP.

Background Papers

The partnership's website can be found here: [OxCamPartnership \(oxford-cambridge-partnership.info\)](https://oxcampartnership.info)

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