

Didcot Garden Town

Note of Advisory Board meeting on Microsoft Teams 20 October 2025, 10 to 12noon

ATTENDANCE¹:

Board Members

Chair: Liz Leffman (LL), Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
David Rouane (DR), Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council
Bethia Thomas (BT) Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council
Helen Pighills (HP), Cabinet Member for Vale of White Horse District Council
Rita Atkinson (RA), Chairman of Sutton Courtenay Parish Council
David Pryor (DP), Chair of Didcot First
Andrew Jones (AJ), Member of Didcot Town Council (obo Cllr Kelly-Marie Morrison)
Tony Worgan (TW), Cabinet Member for South Oxfordshire District Council
Sian Carter (SC), Senior Partnership & Business Development Manager Homes England

Garden Communities team, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Nicky Wyer (NW), Garden Communities Team Leader
Charlotte Cottingham (CC), Didcot Garden Town Programme Manager
Emma East (EE), Didcot Garden Town Project Manager
Dionne Freeman (DF), Didcot Garden Town Project Officer
Wendy Foster, Community Development Officer
Lenka Devereux, Community Wellbeing Business Support Officer

Other attendees – South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Andrew Busby (AB), Head of Development and Corporate Landlord
Nick King, Economic Development Manager
Sean Thornton-Mills, Enterprise Zones Partnership Manager
Lyn Russell, Project Officer (Housing)
Emma Wright, Principal Planning Policy Officer

Other attendees – Oxfordshire County Council

Judy Roberts (JR), Cabinet Member for Oxfordshire County Council
Karina Santiago (KS), Senior Transport Planner – South and Vale
Dan Fenn (DFN), Oxfordshire County Council Project Manager - South and Vale
Ashley Hayden (AH), Transport Strategy Lead, Oxfordshire County Council

Other attendees – Didcot Town Council

Janet Wheeler (JW), Town Clerk for Didcot Town Council

APOLOGIES

Kelly-Marie Morrison, Advisory Board Member and Leader of Didcot Town Council
Nigel Tipple, CEO Enterprise Oxfordshire England, Communities team
Di Chesterman, Sustainable Didcot

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Jon Palmer, South and Vale Enterprise Zones team
Phil Barker, Head of Communities
Nick Bennett, Head of Legal & Democratic Services,
Jayne Bolton, Community Wellbeing Manager

Oxfordshire County Council

Julia Hawkins, Operations Manager Placemaking & Transport
Tom Wilkins, Area Travel Plans Technical lead

¹ The job titles in the attendance list reflect each person's role at Advisory Board meetings but they may have other roles for example as members of another Local Authority tier.

	Notes	Action
1.	Introductions and apologies - apologies noted above. Declarations and conflicts of interest - none	
2.	Public participation - none	
3.	<p>Notes of previous meeting 21 July 2025 and matters arising</p> <p>The Chair noted that a few minor changes had been made to the minutes after they were published:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reference to “JH’s team” was amended to “Oxfordshire County Council”, as the responsibility extends beyond JH’s specific team. • An action regarding construction plans and ongoing programme work was moved into the main body of the minutes rather than listed as a specific action to be completed before the current meeting. <p>It was confirmed these were acceptable changes.</p>	
4.	<p>Updated programme tracking on SMART dashboard</p> <p>CC described the three-page SMART dashboard that was developed in response to members’ requests for clearer project tracking, particularly around timescales. The dashboard uses a SMART framework, and projects are RAG rated to reflect delivery status based on critical workstreams. Updates will be provided quarterly in board papers and through the regular newsletter. Images and more detailed updates will be included in slide packs to be published after each Advisory Board meeting.</p> <p>DR raised concerns about project slippage on two items on the dashboard, the Cow Lane underpass art works and implementation of the Didcot Wayfinding Strategy.</p> <p>DF explained that the approved Public Art Plan Project Options schedule proposed completion before the end of 2025 but a three-month extension to the timescales is due to unexpected complexity and technical requirements of the design. The Cow Lane project Strand 1 works at Didcot Station and on the underpass wing walls will begin before Christmas and the Strand 2 artistic lighting is to be installed by February 2026, subject to planning approval, with full completion before the end of March.</p> <p>EE explained that it has taken longer than expected to finalise detailed designs for the approved Didcot Wayfinding scheme and adjusted timescales take into account potential delays in gaining</p>	Didcot Garden Town team to report to the January Advisory Board on implementation of the Cow Lane underpass public art and the wayfinding scheme.

	<p>permissions from landowners and planning.</p> <p>AJ contributed local insight to the Didcot Wayfinding project, recommending the inclusion of several additional destinations to improve community coverage and accessibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marsh Recreation Ground • Ladygrove Lakes • Skate Park • Millennium Wood • North East Community Centre • Green route to Wittenham Clumps • Northbourne Centre (for clarification) <p>EE confirmed that these sites are already included in the scheme or will be incorporated in later phases as new developments become active.</p>	
<p>5. 18 September Community Update meeting</p>	<p>NW provided an update on the new Community Update Meeting format, which replaces the previous Sounding Boards, as agreed by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and the Advisory Board in the July Cabinet meeting.</p> <p>The first Community Update Meeting was held on 18 September at the District Community Centre, Great Western Park. This was designed as a drop-in session for stakeholders and residents. The theme of the event was sport, recreation, and open space with key features from the Garden Town team including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a life-size mock-up of a proposed wayfinding board, displaying location and information content (the final signage colour will be a brighter orange than seen in some printed formats) • maps displayed to show existing sport, leisure and community centres • engagement by consultants Groundwork on green infrastructure designs for Central Didcot and Ladygrove. • engagement by artists Pixel Puppets showcasing interactive elements of the Cow Lane Underpass public art project. <p>AJ expressed concern about delays in the handover of allotment land at Great Western Park, which requires further work by the developer to bring the allotment areas up to standard. AB confirmed the delay is due to issues with underground infrastructure that must be resolved by the developer to ensure no future liabilities fall on the local authorities. Public open space and allotment land are affected by this issue and will not be transferred until the required standard for adoption are met. JW requested visibility of Section 106 commuted sums for transferred assets to support budget planning for Town and Parish Councils.</p>	<p>AB to share with Didcot Town Council information on s106 commuted sums for Great Western Park land transfers.</p>

<p>6. Didcot Garden Town projects quarterly update</p>	<p>EE provided an update on the green infrastructure project, noting that consultants Groundwork London have completed the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan and landscape designs for Zone 1 (Central Didcot). EE confirmed that funding is secured for all four zones of the Green Infrastructure project and is liaising with the district councils' Grounds Maintenance team, Oxfordshire County Council's Tree Service and Highways Verge teams.</p> <p>TW raised concerns about the condition of existing walking/cycling routes, noting that many of the older "yellow brick road" paths in Ladygrove, installed in the 1990s, are now in poor condition. EE acknowledged the issue and confirmed it has been raised by local accessibility groups, including MyVision, who noted uneven surfaces that make some paths difficult for visually impaired residents. NW added that these paths are classified as highways and the issue is addressed in the Didcot Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). The matter will be raised with Oxfordshire County Council colleagues to ask that priority routes in Ladygrove are included in future maintenance and upgrade plans.</p> <p>DF gave an update on the Didcot public art projects, which have included a strong focus on community engagement throughout the summer. About the Cow Lane underpass, DF reassured colleagues the entire underpass area is included within the contractor's remit for improvement, focusing on enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring the space feels safe and pleasant. A clean-up operation will take place ahead of installation, in collaboration with the Community Safety team and local community groups to help deter anti-social behaviour. Four other art projects are actively underway, with a further seven in development under the approved Didcot Public Art Plan.</p> <p>EE provided an update on implementation of the Wayfinding Strategy. The locations for all 49 types of signage have now been finalised. Colleagues are currently negotiating licences to access land and carry out works with various landowners, including Oxfordshire County Council, developers, and the Orchard Centre. Timescales for this process are difficult to determine as licences require legal input from all parties. Internal approvals for the scheme are in place, and a planning application will be submitted as soon as landowner agreements are confirmed.</p> <p>CC highlighted ongoing partnership projects that focus on legacy and long-term stewardship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 6 Didcot Gateway - discussions with Great Western Railways (GWR) and Network Rail on design improvements for the Didcot Parkway gateway • Project 7 Heart of Science Vale - collaboration with partners, including support for a climate initiative exploring data centre 	<p>Didcot Garden Town team to contact Ladygrove Park Run organisers to ensure the designs are compatible with that use.</p> <p>The Didcot Garden Town team to liaise with Oxfordshire County Council to request path repair and maintenance in Ladygrove is prioritised.</p>
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	<p>heat recovery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 8 Garden Town Principles - continued input to planning policy and major applications to align with Garden Town principles, recently including support for Didcot Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan and comments on Signia Park proposals. • Project 9 Future Planning - work to scope and set milestones by March 2026 for planning Didcot's long-term future. <p>In responding to RA's query about whether the Government's New Town policy would affect Didcot Garden Town, CC noted that the policy reflects a broader shift but doesn't directly impact Didcot. Lessons from new towns may be useful but no immediate effect is expected.</p> <p>Didcot Garden Town has a two-way dialogue with government, sharing experience through Homes England forums. Homes England representative on the Board, SC clarified that the New Towns and Garden Communities programmes are separate but managed by the same team with no direct impact or shared funding. Funding is still unclear, and the Garden Communities programme may be reduced.</p> <p>AJ referenced previous branding discussions from 2008-2010, including initiatives like "Brilliant Didcot". EE confirmed that some signage, like the Lady Grove Loop signs near Cow Lane underpass, will remain in place, including existing wooden posts in the area.</p>	
7.	<p>District council development at 116-120 Broadway</p> <p>AB Head of Development and Corporate Landlord for the district councils gave an update on the council's development of Passivhaus affordable homes on Broadway. Demolition is complete, the site is ready for new construction, planning permission has been secured and mandatory site visits by potential tenderers have taken place. Tender submissions for detailed design and build are currently being evaluated with a view to selecting a contractor in December. Meanwhile, the project team is collaborating with Homes England in a bid for grant aid.</p>	
8.	<p>Oxfordshire County Council Project Updates</p> <p>AH Oxfordshire County Council Transport Strategy Lead provided an update on the County Council's Movement and Place Plans, which form part of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) adopted in 2022. Across the county, Movement and Place Plans go beyond transport management, incorporating green spaces, high street environments, and community needs, in a shift toward more holistic, community-focused planning.</p>	

	<p>The Science Vale Movement and Place Plan (covering Didcot, Wantage, Grove, Culham, Milton, etc.) is currently being developed for which stakeholder engagement has taken place with members, district officers, and other local stakeholders. Public consultation starts on Monday, 3 November and will run for four weeks to allow the Plan to be adopted by January 2026.</p> <p>Engagement events during the consultation period, including attendance at existing stakeholder forums such as the Active Travel Roundtable. While a full programme of consultation events is not yet available, Oxfordshire County Council is open to hosting online meetings with stakeholders on request.</p> <p>KS Oxfordshire County Council Senior Transport Planner - South and Vale provided an update on the HIF1 Public Information Roadshow which comprised HIF1 Team hosting drop-in information events to review the scheme, designs and emerging programmes for construction.</p> <p>KS updated on the Didcot Central Corridor Technical Note, which will be the final output of ongoing work with Atkins on project optioneering. The note includes transport modelling, options for consideration, high-level costs, and recommendations for further work. The document has been updated and circulated among Oxfordshire County Council officers and the Didcot Garden Town officers and is on track for completion by December 2025.</p> <p>On being asked whether the transport modelling assumes current driver behaviour or anticipated behaviour changes, KS explained that the Paramics transport model incorporates future development, including housing numbers and infrastructure projects such as HIF1 and MPR3.</p> <p>Next step is to create a comprehensive scheme list for Didcot, prioritise short, medium, and long-term measures and, where possible, identify funding opportunities.</p> <p>DFN, Oxfordshire County Council Project Manager – South and Vale provided a progress update on the NPR3 scheme. Design work is well underway, incorporating feedback from stakeholders and previous consultations. Lessons learned from this and other infrastructure projects are being applied to design and planning.</p> <p>There is active exploration of options to align the whole scheme's northern and southern sections for a coordinated delivery timeframe.</p> <p>Ecology, environmental, and archaeological surveys are ongoing or near completion. EIA scoping documentation is being prepared for the planning application, which is on track for submission in Q1 2026 (February/March).</p> <p>Construction Environmental Management Plans are being developed to address concerns such as buildability, working hours,</p>	<p>Oxfordshire County Council to clarify whether assumptions are made in the paramics modelling about changes to driver behaviour</p>
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	<p>and network disruption. These plans will be revisited with stakeholders once a contractor is appointed to ensure concerns are incorporated.</p> <p>Regular engagement continues with key stakeholders, including Bloor Homes regarding the Ladygrove East development.</p> <p>A project milestone slide was shared showing progress on surveys and preparatory work, with approximately 30% of the overall project completed. Future updates will track progress against these milestones.</p> <p>DFN confirmed that the NPR3 team, working alongside the legal and planning teams, is exploring all opportunities to open both sections together. TW declared interest as a member of Oxfordshire County Council planning committee. DFN also stated that the teams are looking at the traffic management as part of the planning, working with the street works team as well as network management team.</p>	
<p>9. Town and Parish Council projects quarterly update</p>	<p>RA, highlighted the importance of acknowledging parish councils in ongoing projects across the area, including BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems), Didcot Data Campus, NPR3, and HIF1. She praised the progress in Didcot, but echoed concerns previously raised about the cumulative impact of multiple developments.</p> <p>DFN confirmed that communications teams for HIF1 and NPR3 have common oversight to ensure joined-up communication.</p> <p>RA stressed the need for a liaison group involving parish councils to provide local insight and feedback on day-to-day matters, emphasising that residents often have a better understanding of local issues than officers, it will be helpful to incorporate local knowledge and experience, especially considering residents who may not access online updates. She asked if there could be a mechanism to facilitate this without excessive demands on officer time or project delays.</p> <p>The Chair, LL, recalled previous discussions about establishing a local area committee involving district council leaders and local community members to address these concerns and suggested this be revisited.</p> <p>JR recommended use of the Oxfordshire County Council website's "Future Transport Projects" and "Live Roadworks" maps as valuable tools for residents to track planned and emergency roadworks, though she noted that official closures might sometimes appear more severe than actual traffic management on site. She also suggested involving the Oxfordshire County Council Highways coordination team in future meetings to align multiple construction schedules.</p>	<p>Oxfordshire County Council to feed back to the highway team the importance of including parish councils in decision making going forward.</p> <p>JR to contact Highways Coordination Team about setting up a possible new working group to include DP, RA and BT with ongoing Highways infrastructure projects and parish council involvement as the main focus.</p>

	BT agreed with the points raised and expressed willingness to be involved, underscoring the importance of two-way communication between local members, parishes, and officers.	
10.	<p>Advisory Board and Community Update Meeting dates 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday 26 January 10am Advisory Board (online) • Wednesday 18 March 5-7.30pm Community Update Meeting (drop-in event at the Cornerstone Arts Centre) • Monday 20 April 2026 at 10am Advisory Board (online) • Monday 20 July at 10am Advisory Board (online) • Monday 19 October at 10am Advisory Board (online) 	
<p>The next Advisory Board meeting will be an online Teams meeting on Monday 26 January 2026, 10am to midday.</p>		

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