

8.0	Economy	Page
8.1	Introduction	92
8.2	Sustainable Economy	92
8.3	Protection of Key Employment Sites	93
8.4	Modernising Employment Sites	94
8.5	Loss of Employment Sites	94
8.6	Change of Use of Employment Sites	95
8.7	Employment Diversity and Small Businesses	96
8.8	Employment Training	96
8.9	Warehousing	97

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 Oxford plays a central role in the economy of Oxfordshire. In the city there are firms representing important sectors, as well as major employers involved in car manufacturing, education and healthcare. All contribute to the South East region and to the national economy. The vitality, diversity and responsiveness of the economy are fundamental concerns in the future development of Oxford.

8.1.2 This section of the Plan refers to different types of land uses defined in the Use Classes (Amendment) Order 2005 and Use Classes Order 1987 (see Appendix 7). The Use Classes Order is currently under review and any necessary changes to it will be incorporated in the Plan.

8.2 Sustainable Economy

8.2.1 The Plan is designed to encourage sustainable development, strengthen existing employment sectors and modernise existing employment uses within Oxford. This will take place in the context of a policy of employment restraint, which is required to protect Oxford's character and avoid adding to Oxford's housing and transport pressures. This overall approach will encourage better use of existing resources and provide diversity in job opportunities.

8.2.2 The Plan seeks to build on Oxford's economic strengths such as education, the motor industry, publishing, healthcare, research and development and tourism. Oxford needs to encourage and support a variety of businesses to strengthen and diversify the local economy. This will also help to maximise employment opportunities for local people. A flexible approach will be required to make sure premises meet changing market demands and accommodate future ways of working such as home-working and 'hot-desking'.

POLICY EC.1 - SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

The City Council will seek to maintain, strengthen, modernise and diversify a sustainable economic base for Oxford. Employment growth related to major developments, that will attract a significant number of additional people to Oxford, will only be granted planning permission where:

- a. there are exceptional and important benefits to Oxford and its local workforce; and
- b. it can be demonstrated that additional pressure will not be placed on the existing housing stock and transport infrastructure.

8.2.3 Policies EC.2 – EC.5 set out a cascade approach to employment-generating land use in Oxford and are summarised below.

- First, Policy EC.2 protects key employment generating sites in terms of their current use, or allow them to be modernised for another appropriate employment-generating use. These sites are shown on the Proposals Map and listed in Appendix 8.
- Second, sites protected by Policy EC.2 should be modernised for employment purposes.
- Third, if a site is not a protected employment-generating site, then the site will be assessed against the loss of employment criteria in Policy EC.4.

- Fourth, if the loss of employment criteria can be met then proposals for change of use from employment to other uses will be assessed against the criteria in Policy EC.5 and other policies in the Plan.

8.2.4 To avoid doubt, the term *employment-generating sites* means only land and premises in Class B use, and acceptable Sui Generis type uses (see glossary), but does not include Class A uses. The City Council will normally regard Class B use as suitable for university research, administration, and accommodation.

8.3 Protection of Key Employment Sites

8.3.1 Oxford has been recycling land to other uses over several decades, mainly from employment use to residential use. The loss of employment land in some locations can undermine sustainability, increase the need to travel, reduce both the mix and range of local jobs and the number of small businesses. It is therefore important to make the best use of key employment-generating sites to match the skills of the local workforce and to provide a diverse range of jobs across Oxford. Employment land in the City centre and District centres will generally be retained in accordance with the sequential approach set out in the Core Policies, but it is recognised that there will be some ebb and flow of the market. Major business parks and industrial estates are allocated on the Proposals Map and will remain in employment use.

8.3.2 The City Council will retain key employment generating sites in Class B use (business, industrial and warehousing) and other employment generating sites such as transport operators, builders' yards, local depots 'Sui Generis'. Together these key sites are defined on the Proposals Map. The identification of key employment sites is based on the following criteria:

- good accessibility by walking, cycling, or public transport for the majority of the local workforce;
- protects a range of large to small businesses;
- provides a diverse type of jobs; and
- employment that is significant to Oxford's economy.

POLICY EC.2 - PROTECTION OF EMPLOYMENT SITES

Planning permission will not be granted for development that will result in the loss of key existing employment generating sites and premises (Class B1, B2, B8 and Sui Generis) as shown on the Proposals Map.

8.3.3 To avoid doubt, the Oxford Science Park, Littlemore Park and the Oxford Business Park, are allocated for development in Section 14.0, Development Sites, and shown on the Proposals Map. They are also protected employment sites. This policy does not apply to all the other Development Sites in Section 14.0.

8.4 Modernising Employment Sites

8.4.1 Modernising employment sites can contribute to economic diversity and better match jobs to local skills. The loss of local employment sites can undermine the economic vitality of

an area. The type and nature of employment is evolving and may be significantly different in the future. Modernising employment sites, in appropriate circumstances, may involve the larger part of a site in employment use along with small elements of other types of land uses to create a mixed-use development. This would help achieve the aims of sustainability and reduce the need to travel. Policy EC.3 applies to a range of other existing employment sites which are not protected by Policy EC.2. However, if there is no significant reduction in the number of jobs, employment-generating sites protected by Policy EC.2 may be modernised and will be assessed against the criteria in Policy EC.3. Changes of use, or modernisation, of existing Sui Generis sites to alternative Sui Generis uses will be assessed against the criteria set out in Policy EC.3.

POLICY EC.3 - MODERNISING EXISTING EMPLOYMENT SITES

Planning permission will be granted for development that modernises existing employment-generating sites (B1, B2, B8 and Sui Generis). All the following criteria will be used to assess developments:

- a. the proposal secures or creates employment opportunities important to Oxford's economy and the local workforce;
- b. the potential employment density should not significantly exceed the existing employment level unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the existing site does not make efficient and effective use of the land;
- c. any development including a change of use that would cause a significant intensification of Sui Generis uses will not be permitted where it would have an adverse impact;
- d. the proposed buildings and structures are of a scale and character appropriate to the nature of the site and sympathetic to the surrounding environment;
- e. landscape proposals are included as an integral part of the redevelopment scheme to help blend the development into the wider environment;
- f. the use will not cause unacceptable environmental intrusion or nuisance;
- g. there is no material intensification of the use that would generate an unacceptable increase in traffic; and
- h. the overall number of car parking spaces should not be increased, but either maintained or reduced.

8.5 Loss of Employment Sites

8.5.1 If it can be demonstrated that a site is not suitable for its present use, then it would next be assessed against the criteria in Policy EC.4. The City Council would need to be assured that the loss of an employment-generating site would not cause any unacceptable harm to Oxford's economic diversity and would be beneficial to the City Council's core aims and objectives. The marketing period for vacant employment sites will normally be a minimum of one year but shorter periods may be considered if adequately justified.

POLICY EC.4 - LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT SITES

Subject to Policies EC.2 and EC.3, the City Council will only allow the loss of employment generating sites when it can be demonstrated that the development meets all the following criteria:

- a. the loss of jobs would not reduce the diversity and availability of local employment opportunities; and

- b. it will not significantly reduce the number of small and start-up business premises; and
- c. no other suitable alternative business occupiers can be found following a realistic effort at marketing the site and/or premises at a reasonable price for an appropriate time period; or
- d. the premises are shown to be badly sited or unsuitable due to operational reasons, which cause nuisance or environmental problems to the surrounding area. However, the City Council will not regard premises as badly sited or unsuitable solely because they are in a residential area.

For the avoidance of doubt, this Policy does not apply to employment sites protected by Policy EC.2.

8.6 Change of Use of Employment Sites

8.6.1 The above cascade approach to employment sites must be followed before the City Council will allow the loss of employment sites to other uses. The City Council will encourage mixed-use development, which could include live/work units (see paragraph 7.10.2). The change of use will need to accord with other policies in the Development Plan, especially housing policies HS.1, and HS.12. Reference should be made to Section 2.0, Core Policies, and Section 14.0, Development Sites, for mixed-use development sites in Oxford.

POLICY EC.5 - CHANGE OF USE OF EMPLOYMENT SITES

Subject to Policies EC.2, EC.3, EC.4 and other Development Plan policies, planning permission will only be granted for changes of use from employment-generating uses to other types of land uses when the development meets all the following criteria:

- a. proposals for alternative uses should first consider the suitability of the site for residential developments or for mixed-use developments comprising employment and residential uses, which could include studio workshops and live/work units on smaller sites;
- b. there is no conflict with Core Policies and other policies relevant to the proposed uses in the Development Plan;
- c. removal of the existing employment use will result in substantial environmental and other planning benefits;
- d. the use is appropriate to the location and adds value to the local community and area; and
- e. the development is appropriate in siting, scale, massing, details, and in using materials that respect the local character of the area without ruling out good innovative design.

To avoid doubt, this Policy does not apply to employment sites protected by Policy EC.2.

8.7 Employment Diversity and Small Businesses

8.7.1 Planning policy can make a limited contribution to the provision of a diverse range of jobs. For example, it can encourage a mix of developments across a range of employment uses (B1 offices, B2 general industry and B8 warehouses) and other employment uses such as artists studios, rehearsal areas, galleries, premises for web designers, bus garages and

telecommunications. A good range of employment opportunities helps to contribute to Oxford's creative culture and economic vitality.

POLICY EC.6 - EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

Planning permission will be granted for employment generating developments that maintain and enhance the employment diversity of Oxford, to meet the needs of its local workforce.

8.7.2 Small and start-up business units play an important role in Oxford's economy but they are in short supply. These types of employment uses can regenerate areas, create local jobs and reduce the need to travel. Many small businesses specialise in developing new technology that can in turn lead to innovation and enterprise. Other specialist businesses have close links and support research and development associated with both universities and the hospitals. Provision for small and enterprising businesses will help widen the range of employment opportunities and will make use of, develop and raise the skills of local people.

POLICY EC.7 - SMALL BUSINESSES

Planning permission will be granted for small business units (up to 500 m²) in the following locations:

- a. on existing employment-generating sites;
- b. on mixed-use development sites;
- c. at other appropriate locations, if there is no conflict with other policies in the Development Plan;

Provided that the development complies with all of the following:

- d. the use is appropriate to the location and adds value to the local community and area;
- e. the development will not cause unacceptable nuisance or environmental problems to the surrounding area;
- f. there is satisfactory access, parking and servicing; and
- g. it does not result in unacceptable traffic generation or highway safety problems.

8.8 Employment Training

8.8.1 There is a need to create employment diversity and to increase access to employment opportunities and improve skill levels. Training is the key to economic sustainability as it helps up-grade and up-date the ever changing employment skills required for a wide range of businesses. The City Council will seek financial contributions towards training the local workforce or providing start up business units to compensate for the loss of employment generating land and from major employment generating developments. The City Council will from time to time prepare and publish a Supplementary Planning Document to detail how this policy will apply to appropriate developments.

POLICY EC.8 - EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

In granting planning permission for a change of use of buildings or land, which either involves the loss of employment land or generates major employment growth the City Council will seek a financial contribution towards the provision of training facilities or start up business units where the development would require new skills not found in the local workforce. This would be secured by a planning obligation.

8.9 Warehousing

8.9.1 Warehousing developments use large amounts of land, provide relatively few jobs and often generate significant heavy vehicle movements. In Oxford, land is scarce so warehousing provision should be targeted to meet the needs of the local market and businesses. There is no significant demand for warehouse developments. However, where a need can be demonstrated, then it would be best located on sites near to the ring road, and wherever possible making use of the railway. New warehouse developments should be designed to a high standard to respect their visual setting, especially on land adjacent to the Green Belt and areas of open countryside. Warehousing, that is ancillary to an existing industrial use, may be appropriate, if it meets transport and design policies.

POLICY EC.9 - WAREHOUSING

Planning permission will only be granted for new warehouse development if:

- a. it demonstrates a need to be located in Oxford;
- b. there are no suitable vacant warehouse buildings existing, under construction or with planning permission;
- c. it is located near to Oxford's ring road and wherever possible makes use of the railway;
- d. it is designed to a high standard and respects its landscape setting;
- e. there is satisfactory provision for access, servicing and parking;
- f. there is no unacceptable environmental impact due to increased traffic, noise, and light pollution;
- g. the development would not significantly reduce the amenities of occupants of nearby properties; and
- h. landscape proposals are included as an integral part of the development proposal.

In cases involving the re-use of existing employment-generating sites, the applicant will need to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in a significant loss of jobs.

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