

# Background Paper B: Spatial Strategy

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this background paper is to set out the context to the spatial strategy, explaining the options considered and why the selected strategy was felt to be the most appropriate for Oxford. It also provides more detail about the strategic locations for development that are considered central to the achievement of the spatial strategy. The background paper is structured in the same way as Section 1 of the Core Strategy Proposed Submission document, using the same sub-headings for ease of reference.

## 2 Spatial portrait

- 2.1 The spatial portrait at Section 1.1 provides a concise overview of the key characteristics of Oxford city. It highlights some of the factors that have influenced the spatial strategy, for instance the role of Oxford as a major employment and service centre; the city's high-quality built and natural environment; the high price of housing relative to average income levels; the high proportion of Oxford's workforce who travel to work by modes of transport other than the private car, and the fact that, away from the world-famous historic core, there is a less well-known Oxford, with areas of deprivation and a huge need for affordable housing.

## 3 Vision and strategic objectives

- 3.1 The Core Strategy vision at Section 1.2 is closely aligned to that of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), with the same overarching aim that Oxford will be "a world-class city for everyone". The SCS and the Core Strategy share a vision of building on Oxford's heritage and its international reputation as a place of learning and innovation to create a high quality of life for all those who live in the city. Both documents also share a vision of developing Oxford as a model of good practice in tackling climate change, and they each seek to enhance Oxford's role within the county and the South East region.
- 3.2 There are two strands to the phrase "a world-class city for everyone". With regard to the first strand, many aspects of the city are already world-class, for instance Oxford's outstanding built heritage and its reputation for excellence in areas such as education, healthcare and manufacturing. These attributes are reflected in the Core Strategy vision, which seeks to build on Oxford's many strengths. The second strand is the words "for everyone". This forms an equally important part of the Core Strategy's vision, with its emphasis on providing everyone with an opportunity to achieve a high quality of life, providing more affordable and family homes and delivering mixed communities.

3.3 The strategic objectives at Section 1.3 indicate the broad direction that more detailed strategy and policy should take in order to fulfil the vision. Both the vision and the strategic objectives are locally distinctive, and flow from the key characteristics of Oxford identified in the spatial portrait. The vision and strategic objectives are structured around the six sections of the Core Strategy in order to provide a clearer link between the vision and objectives, and the policies that relate to them.

3.4 Three strategic objectives are identified as relevant to the spatial strategy and strategic locations for development section of the Core Strategy. These are:

- Ensure that new developments are in accessible locations, to minimise overall travel demand;
- Maximise the reuse of previously developed land and make full and efficient use of all land, having regard to the distinct character of each neighbourhood;
- Provide the development required to meet Oxford's needs, ensuring an appropriate balance of housing and employment growth in the context of other competing land uses.

3.5 These objectives provide the context for the spatial strategy, which is illustrated in the key diagram at Section 1.4.

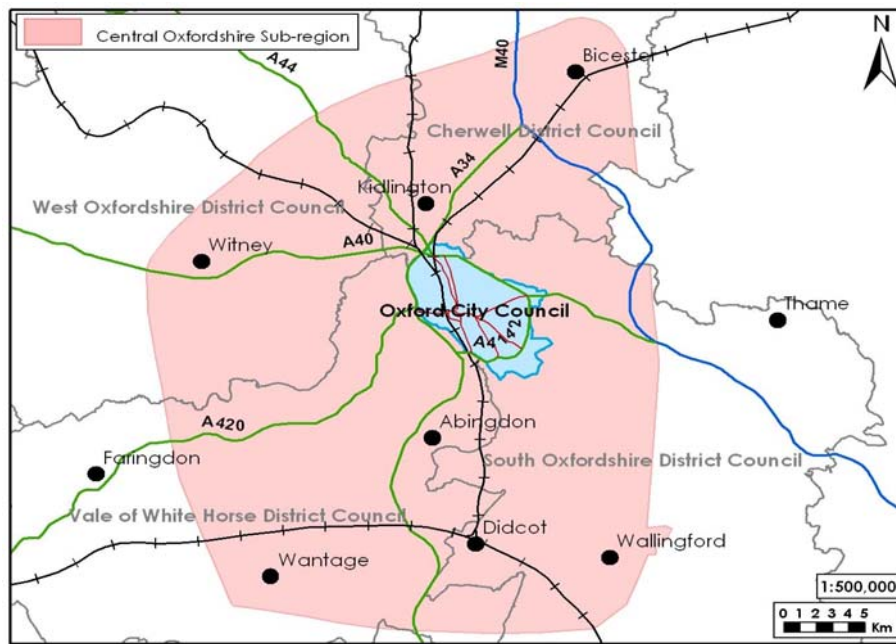
## 4 The role of Oxford in the South East Region

4.1 Section 1.5 of the spatial strategy states that Oxford should continue to grow and develop as the focus of the Central Oxfordshire sub-region, and as a Regional Hub within the South East. There are several reasons why further growth is considered appropriate.

### Central Oxfordshire Sub-region

4.2 Central Oxfordshire is one of nine sub-regions identified in the emerging South East Plan (SEP). Oxford is the largest settlement in this sub-region and lies at its geographical heart, as illustrated by the map below. The sub-region includes almost all of the Oxford Green Belt and the towns beyond in north, west and southerly directions (see **Figure 1**).

**Figure 1: Central Oxfordshire Sub-region**



- 4.3 Sub-regions have been identified where they show strong economic potential or particular regeneration needs. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft SEP indicate that growth and regeneration should be the policy focus for the Central Oxfordshire sub-region (Policy SP1).
- 4.4 The Central Oxfordshire sub-region has been established because it corresponds to a city region with Oxford providing higher order services for the surrounding area; it exhibits a high degree of coherence, representing a relatively self-contained labour market area and a single Housing Market Area, it faces a number of challenges that will require joint working across local authority boundaries; and it will facilitate the implementation of key regional policies by local authorities and other stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>
- 4.5 With regard to the spatial strategy for the Central Oxfordshire sub-region, the draft SEP set out a broad spatial framework based primarily on:
- housing growth focused on previously developed land in Oxford, and at the growth areas of Bicester, Didcot, Wantage and Grove;
  - economic growth focussed around Bicester and Didcot, with some limited intensification of employment development in Oxford;
  - priority being afforded to improving access to Oxford from other settlements in the sub-region, and from outside the sub-region.
- 4.6 The City Council made representations to the SEP Examination in Public, arguing that this strategy did not sufficiently accommodate the needs of Oxford City. In particular, the City Council argued that there was a compelling case for a

<sup>1</sup> The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East, (July 2008), para 22.2

strategic review of the Green Belt in order to assess where best to build sustainable communities associated with the city, and that the SEP should allow more opportunities for managed employment growth within Oxford and its immediate environs.

4.7 The Panel of Inspectors that independently examined the draft SEP supported many of the arguments put forward by the City Council and recommended a number of changes to meet the needs of Oxford, whilst at the same time endorsing further growth in the 'country' towns. The Panel considered that the SEP should be more upbeat about the growth of Oxford, "reflecting an aspiration to maintain its world-class status".<sup>2</sup>

4.8 The key recommendations arising from the Panel report were discussed in the Core Strategy Further Preferred Options document<sup>3</sup>, and can be summarised as:

- exceptional circumstances to justify a Green Belt review to allow a Strategic Development Area (SDA) on the southern edge of Oxford, to accommodate some 4,000 new dwellings;
- a higher level of economic growth for Oxford, to be determined spatially through the LDF process, whilst also supporting economic growth at Bicester and Didcot;
- an increase in the housing delivery target in central Oxfordshire of 6,100 to 40,100 in the period 2006-2026, including 1,000 additional dwellings in Oxford to reflect its New Growth Point status.

4.9 The Secretary of State endorsed the Panel's recommendations in her Proposed Changes to the draft SEP. Of particular relevance is the statement:

*"The settlement pattern of the sub-region will change over the plan period. Oxford itself will be allowed to grow physically and economically in order to accommodate its own needs, contribute to those in the wider region and help maintain its world-class status."*<sup>4</sup>

### **New Growth Point**

4.10 In December 2005, the Government announced its New Growth Points (NGP) initiative, designed to provide support to local communities who wished to pursue large scale and sustainable growth, including new housing, through a partnership with Government. Oxford submitted a bid and was successfully named as one of 29 NGP's across the country in October 2006. Seven of those NGP's were in the South East region.

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<sup>2</sup> The South East Plan Examination in Public: Report of the Panel, (August 2007), para 22.12

<sup>3</sup> Oxford 2026 Core Strategy: Further Preferred Options document (March 2006)

<sup>4</sup> The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East (July 2008), para 22.5

- 4.11 A key criterion in the application process was for successful areas to have “a good case for accelerated, additional economic and housing growth, and where this can be shown to relieve pressure on high demand areas and tackle affordability issues”.<sup>5</sup> Successful bids further had to demonstrate that this could be achieved without major negative environmental, social and economic impacts. Oxford’s bid committed to delivering 5,692 homes across the city by 2016, including 600-1,000 homes in the City centre’s West End quarter.

### **Regional Hub**

- 4.12 The emerging SEP identifies Oxford as one of a network of 22 Regional Hubs. The Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to the SEP indicate that Regional Hubs will be:
- *“A focus for investment in multi-modal transport infrastructure both within and between hubs, supported by initiatives to re-balance travel patterns through behavioural change*
  - *A focus for other new infrastructure, including health, education and social infrastructure, and public services*
  - *A focus for new investment in economic activity and regeneration, including skills and training investment*
  - *A focus for new market and affordable housing, to support the creation of higher density ‘living centres’*
  - *A focus for major new retail and employment development”<sup>6</sup>*

### **Oxford/Central Oxfordshire Diamond for Investment and Growth**

- 4.13 The Regional Economic Strategy (RES)<sup>7</sup> identifies eight ‘Diamonds for Investments and Growth’ in the South East region, one of which is Oxford and Central Oxfordshire. Each of these are centred on an urban core, or comprise networks of urban areas, and are recognised as playing a leading role in the economic viability of their broader sub-regions. The RES states that they should act as catalysts to stimulate prosperity across wider areas, and contribute further sustainable growth based on targeted investment on their infrastructure. A key strand of the RES is to invest to unlock the potential for growth, including by supporting programmes funded by Regional Funding Allocations and New Growth Points funding.

## **5 Access to Oxford**

- 5.1 Oxfordshire County Council has secured a provisional funding allocation (subject to Department for Transport approval) of £62 million from the South East Regional Transport Board to improve strategic road and rail access to Oxford. This is to be split over two financial years (between 2013 and 2015), while further

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<sup>5</sup> Criteria for New Growth Points, see [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

<sup>6</sup> The Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East (July 2008), para 4.8

<sup>7</sup> The Regional Economic Strategy 2006-16 (SEEDA, 2006)

funding sources have increased the overall package to some £88 million. The project aims to prevent road and rail congestion becoming worse in the future because of planned growth in Oxford and other locations in Central Oxfordshire. The main features of the project are:

- A34 active traffic management, allowing road space on the A34 to be used more efficiently using the latest active traffic management techniques such as variable speed limits and variable message signs;
- Oxford northern approaches improvements: tackling congestion around the Wolvercote, Pear Tree and Cutteslowe roundabouts to improve traffic flow and journey time reliability with enhanced bus priority;
- Oxford southern approaches improvements: tackling congestion around the Heyford Hill, Kennington and Hinksey Hill roundabouts to improve traffic flow and journey time reliability with enhanced bus priority;
- Oxford Rail Station: increased capacity by building a new platform for local services. Improvements to integrate the new platform, improve interchange with other modes of transport and develop the station into an attractive gateway into Oxford;
- Oxford to Bicester rail line: service enhancements and line improvements tied in with East-West rail proposals.

5.2 The emerging SEP indicates that *“access to Oxford from major towns in the sub-region and from neighbouring sub-regions will be a priority”* (SEP Policy CO5).

5.3 In light of all the above factors, the City Council considers that it is appropriate for Oxford to grow and develop, as set out in the spatial strategy. While the heritage of the city, together with its setting and Green Belt, are of considerable importance, there is a risk that limiting Oxford's growth could result in it failing to fulfil its role as a Regional Hub and would have a harmful effect on the regional and national economy.

## 6 Reducing the need to travel

6.1 A strategic objective of the Core Strategy is to ensure that new developments are in accessible locations so as to minimise overall travel demand. This objective, which forms the first key plank of the spatial strategy, reflects the following national and regional policy themes.

6.2 *PPG13: Transport (March 2001)* sets out the justification for managing access, travel demand and parking provision. One of the headline objectives is to *“reduce the need to travel, especially by car.”* The document stresses the need to promote more sustainable patterns of development by focusing housing development in existing towns and cities, and focusing major generators of travel demand in city and district centres and near to major public transport interchanges. Emphasis is also given to locating day-to-day services and facilities close to their clients. The objective of reducing the need to travel is

reiterated in the supplement to *PPS1: Planning and Climate Change (December 2007)*.

- 6.3 *PPS3: Housing (November 2006)* seeks to ensure that housing is developed in suitable locations which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure. A key theme is the need to minimise carbon emissions, through focusing new development in locations with good public transport or other non-car accessibility.
- 6.4 *Draft PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Development (December 2007)* sets out the Government's objectives for flexibility within the planning system to respond to economic challenges and opportunities, whilst being sensitive to the challenges of climate change. Office (Class B1a) development should preferably be in, or on the edge of, town centres, whilst recognising that market demand will influence office location.
- 6.5 *PPS6: Planning for Town Centres (March 2005)* gives emphasis to identifying a hierarchy of centres. It recognises the importance of meeting people's everyday needs at the local level, and urges local authorities to consider whether investment and growth may be appropriate in regenerating lower order centres. PPS6 requires local authorities and developers to employ a sequential approach to locating retail, leisure and other 'town centre' uses, prioritising existing centres, followed by edge-of-centre sites. PPS6 is currently under review, but the consultation on proposed changes (July 2008) does not alter the sequential approach to site selection, either in development plans or at the development control stage.
- 6.6 The emerging SEP highlights how development in urban areas can avoid unnecessary travel (Policy SP3: Urban Focus and Urban Renaissance) and promotes reducing the need to travel as part of the mitigation strategy for dealing with climate change (Policy CC2: Climate Change). The section of the Plan that relates to the Central Oxfordshire sub-region also seeks to "*concentrate development where the need to travel, particularly by single occupancy car use, can be reduced*" (Policy CO1: Core Strategy).
- 6.7 It is important to recognise that Oxford as a whole is a relatively accessible location, as evidenced by some of the statistics from the 2001 census summarised in the spatial portrait. However, the city and district centres have the greatest number of shops and services, and the best non-car accessibility. The key mechanism for reducing the need to travel within Oxford is therefore to apply a sequential approach to developments that attract a large number of people. The spatial strategy sets out the proposed hierarchy of centres in Oxford, starting with Oxford city centre; then the Cowley centre primary district centre; then the district centres of Blackbird Leys, Cowley Road, Headington and Summertown.

### **Oxford City centre**

- 6.8 Oxford City centre fulfils many functions. Its unique historic core attracts tourists from around the world. It is a major retail centre and the focus for a wide range of leisure and cultural uses. It contains much of the academic core of the University of Oxford and offers various types of employment. It is also home to residents, for whom it operates as a local service centre.
- 6.9 The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft SEP identify a strategic network of town centres in the region. Out of the 22 centres identified as primary regional centres, 12 are expected to evolve significantly in terms of their range of town centre uses through the life of the SEP, and have been termed as 'Centres for Significant Change'. Oxford is one of those 12 centres.
- 6.10 SEP Policy TC2 states *"major retail developments, and other town centre uses of a large scale, should be located in these Centres for Significant Change"*. The supporting text indicates:
- "Reference should also be made to the distinctive character of particular centres whether planning for growth or change. For example, in Oxford new development will need to build on the architecture and cultural amenity, as well as the value of new services to the local community and tourists alike"*<sup>8</sup>
- 6.11 SEP Policy CO2, relating to Central Oxfordshire's economy, also recognises the potential to enhance the sub-regional role and diversity of the city centre, provided it is consistent with the protection of Oxford's architectural and historic heritage.
- 6.12 Core Strategy Policy CS1 builds on this regional policy framework, stating that the city centre, including the West End, will be the main location for developments attracting a large number of people. The policy particularly supports uses that support its role as a Centre for Significant Change, such as major retail, leisure, cultural and office development. It also supports higher density development, subject to the need to protect and enhance the character and setting of Oxford's historic core, and to deliver a high-quality public realm.
- 6.13 As a Regional Hub, Oxford City centre is widely acknowledged to have excellent accessibility, and is therefore at the top of the hierarchy for locating major development. The central area is the focus for frequent local, sub-regional and some regional bus services; has excellent rail connections to Reading, London, and several major cities to the West and North; has a highly successful Park and Ride network, and is also very accessible by cycle and on

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<sup>8</sup> The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East, (July 2008), para 13.8

foot. Recent census analysis and traffic monitoring data has shown consistently low levels of private car access to the City centre, and amongst the highest proportions of bus and cycle access in the country (see **Background Paper D(ii): Transport and Accessibility** for further detail).

- 6.14 The city centre's role as a Centre for Significant Change will be enhanced through the renaissance of the West End. This area of the city centre, which lies between the rail station and the main shopping streets, does not currently match Oxford's worldwide reputation and has significant opportunities for a range of new mixed-use developments. The West End Area Action Plan, adopted in June 2008, sets a detailed planning framework for the future development of this area, including a schedule of over 20 identified development sites with a list of indicative uses.<sup>9</sup> The West End is one of the strategic locations for development identified in the Core Strategy, and further details about the West End proposals are provided later in this background paper.
- 6.15 The scope for city centre development outside the West End is much more limited. Most land on the northern and eastern side of the city centre is within the city centre Conservation Area and is occupied or controlled by the University of Oxford's colleges. A small number of sites in the remainder of the city centre were allocated for development in the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016, mainly for uses related to the University of Oxford such as additional student accommodation.
- 6.16 Although the city centre benefits from a high quality urban environment and has many assets and attractions, there is scope for improvements to the public realm, to public transport and to the range of shops and other facilities on offer. Most of these opportunities lie within the West End and are addressed in the West End Area Action Plan.
- 6.17 The Oxford Retail Needs Study 2004 found that there is no shortage of retailers and leisure providers seeking representation in the city centre, and that supply of floorspace is failing to keep pace with demand<sup>10</sup>. The principal opportunities to increase retail provision in the city centre are at the Westgate Shopping Centre, which has an extant planning permission for a major redevelopment and expansion, and on land to the west of St Aldates and south of Queen Street, which is allocated in the Oxford Local Plan and is likely to be the subject of a planning application in the near future.

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<sup>9</sup> See [www.oxford.gov.uk/westend](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/westend)

<sup>10</sup> Oxford's Retail Needs Study 2004, (Roger Tym & Partners, February 2004), para 3.72

## District centres

- 6.18 The district centres complement the city centre by providing retail and service facilities for the local population. They are also the focus for many social, community and cultural activities.
- 6.19 Whilst the district centres have generally good accessibility by non-car modes, further improvements are required to support the vitality of these centres. In particular, while the district centres are well connected to radial bus routes into the city centre, there is a need to improve the network of cross-city public transport links. This is an important element of the spatial strategy, as illustrated by the priority accessibility improvements shown on the key diagram, and reflected in the proposals for further development of an orbital bus network in Core Strategy Policy CS16.
- 6.20 Busy roads bisect most of the district centres, and public realm enhancements would improve the quality of the environment, and help make the centres easier and safer for pedestrians to use. It is also desirable to improve cycle and pedestrian access to the district centres.
- 6.21 The adopted Local Plan identifies four district centres in Oxford: Cowley centre, Cowley Road, Headington and Summertown. Each of these centres is given equal status in terms of the sequential hierarchy in the Local Plan.
- 6.22 This policy position has been reviewed in the Core Strategy, and the City Council has decided to redesignate Cowley centre as a primary district centre and to newly designate Blackbird Leys as a district centre. The reasons for these specific changes are set out below, with the policy context being provided by PPS6 and the South East Plan.
- 6.23 PPS6 states *"in promoting and enhancing existing centres, regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should consider the network of centres (i.e. the pattern of provision of existing centres) and their relationship in the hierarchy"*. It adds that local planning authorities should consider, amongst other things, *"the need to address deficiencies in the network by promoting centres to function at a higher level in the hierarchy or designating new centres"*.<sup>11</sup>
- 6.24 Policy TC2 in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft South East Plan indicates that as local planning authorities draw up development plan documents, *"they will need to consider whether there is a need to re-balance the network of centres to ensure that it is not overly dominated by the largest centres. Authorities will also need to consider whether there are areas where investment should be stimulated, including town centres with deficiencies,*

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<sup>11</sup> Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres (March 2005), paragraph 2.9

*deprived areas, or areas that will undergo significant housing and employment growth”.*

- 6.25 It is recognised in the spatial strategy that not all growth can be accommodated in the city centre because of the constraints imposed by Oxford’s outstanding architectural heritage. District centres will therefore be expected to absorb a greater share of future retail development, given that scope in the city centre will be limited following implementation of the Westgate and St Aldates/Queen Street schemes.
- 6.26 As well as specifying the district centres in Oxford, Core Strategy Policy CS2 indicates that district centres will be suitable locations for retail, leisure, employment and other uses serving district-level needs. It supports such development, providing that it is of an appropriate scale and design and maintains or improves the mix of uses available. Policy CS2 also indicates that district centres, and their immediate surroundings, will be appropriate locations for medium to high-density development.
- 6.27 A brief summary of the main characteristics and issues facing each of the district centres is set out below.

#### **Cowley centre**

- 6.28 Cowley centre is located to the south-east of the city centre, and comprises the Templars Square shopping centre together with the John Allen retail park on the opposite side of Between Towns Road. It has the largest amount of floor space concentrated into the smallest number of units, reflecting the fact that unlike the other district centres Cowley centre is a purpose built shopping centre.
- 6.29 Economically, the Cowley centre is very successful; it enjoys the highest rental income of the four centres, and very low vacancy rates. All of which suggests that demand is high, both from local and national retailers.
- 6.30 However, the general environment around the district centre is somewhat sterile and lacking vibrancy. There are few outlets providing services or food and drink facilities, reflecting the daytime only trading hours.
- 6.31 The centre is well served by public transport and accessible to the local population by foot and bicycle, but it is also notable for having a substantial amount of low-cost car parking comprising around 1,200 spaces. While the two halves of the Cowley centre are distinctly separate in terms of unit size and shopping environment, both successfully attract shoppers. The Retail Needs Study 2004 observed that on Fridays and Saturdays, shoppers travel in from as far as 25 miles away, drawn in by the range of shops provided<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Oxford’s Retail Needs Study 2004, (Roger Tym & Partners, February 2004), para 3.149

- 6.32 The Cowley centre is also well placed to benefit from the South Oxford Strategic Development Area (see below), being situated in the south-east quadrant of the city along one of the likely main movement corridors between the SDA and the city centre.
- 6.33 Given the character of this district centre, its capacity to accommodate further growth, the fact that it has a larger catchment area than the other district centres and its relationship to the South Oxford SDA, it is considered appropriate for Cowley centre to be redesignated as a primary district centre and therefore to assume a higher position in the sequential hierarchy than the other district centres.
- 6.34 The proposal to redesignate Cowley centre was well received by stakeholders and the public during the consultation at Preferred Options stage. Around half of the respondents to the detailed questionnaire supported the preferred option for Oxford's retail hierarchy, with around a quarter opposing it and the remainder neutral. The proposed changes to the retail hierarchy were presented in a simplified form in the summary questionnaire, with respondents being asked if they agreed or disagreed with designating Cowley centre as a primary district centre to enable it to accommodate more retail growth. 53% of respondents supported the proposal, with 19% opposing it and the remainder neutral.
- 6.35 Appendix 6 of the Core Strategy Proposed Submission document includes a proposed extension to the existing boundary for Cowley centre to reflect its enhanced status as a primary district centre. The new boundary incorporates a number of additional buildings on either side of Between Towns Road, some of which may be suitable for redevelopment during the Core Strategy period.

### **Blackbird Leys**

- 6.36 Blackbird Leys is identified as a neighbourhood shopping centre in the adopted Local Plan. The centre contains a parade of shops and a number of social and community facilities, including a church, community centre, leisure centre, college of further education and a public house. Unlike the established district centres in Oxford, Blackbird Leys centre is not a linear centre and does not experience high volumes of through traffic. It does, however, have a high-frequency bus service to the city centre via Cowley centre, and is easily accessible by foot or bicycle from the surrounding residential area.
- 6.37 A mixed-use district centre is proposed at Blackbird Leys, to act as a catalyst and a focal point for regeneration. A district centre would provide a broader range of facilities and services than the existing neighbourhood centre, whilst providing a strengthened focus for public transport, and cycling and walking routes. Many of the existing buildings are owned by the City Council or Oxfordshire County Council, and some are considered suitable for

redevelopment or expansion. An opportunity therefore exists to provide a coordinated approach to the future masterplanning of this area.

- 6.38 Designation as a district centre would be likely to increase the opportunities to attract more private investment, such as new retail provision. However, development of community, educational and employment uses will be particularly important in strengthening its role as a focus for the community. It is therefore anticipated that the Blackbird Leys mixed-use district centre would be somewhat different in character to the established district centres within Oxford.
- 6.39 The proposal to designate Blackbird Leys as a district centre was well received by stakeholders and the public during the consultation at Preferred Options stage. Around half of the respondents to the detailed questionnaire supported the preferred option for Oxford's retail hierarchy, with around a quarter opposing it and the remainder neutral. The proposed changes to the retail hierarchy were presented in a simplified form in the summary questionnaire, with respondents being asked if they agreed or disagreed with designating Blackbird Leys as a new mixed-use district centre. 59% of respondents supported the proposal, with 10% opposing it and the remainder neutral.
- 6.40 At Further Preferred Options stage, it was decided to revisit the issue of Blackbird Leys centre in light of the Panel's recommendation for the South Oxford SDA and the likelihood that this would include new local facilities and shops. Two options were presented for consultation – the original preferred option to promote a mixed-use district centre to accommodate a broader range of facilities and services, and an alternative option to promote regeneration in the existing Blackbird Leys centre, but without encouraging its expansion. Results were mixed, with 46% and 45% of respondents to the questionnaire agreeing or strongly agreeing with the preferred option and alternative option respectively. 24% of respondents opposed the preferred option and 13% opposed the alternative option. For both options, a significant proportion of respondents were neutral.
- 6.41 The City Council has expressed the view, in response to a consultation by South Oxfordshire District Council on the proposed urban extension<sup>13</sup>, that there will certainly be opportunities for residents of the urban extension to use existing facilities in Blackbird Leys centre such as the leisure centre, swimming pool, community centre and college given that access by walking, cycling and public transport could be very good. It is also hoped that improvements to the quality and range of facilities at Blackbird Leys will attract residents from the urban extension. However, the relationship between Blackbird Leys centre and the SDA is difficult to gauge at the present time, particularly in terms of new retail provision, since the SDA is at a very early stage of planning and its precise location has yet to be established. The Retail Needs Study Update indicates

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<sup>13</sup> South of Oxford Urban Extension: Consultation, (South Oxfordshire District Council, July 2008)

that Blackbird Leys has potential to accommodate some of Oxford's additional floorspace requirement (both comparison and convenience) in the medium term – up to 2016<sup>14</sup>.

- 6.42 Appendix 6 of the Core Strategy Proposed Submission document includes a proposed boundary for the Blackbird Leys district centre. This is largely based on the boundary of the Blackbird Leys regeneration zone identified in the adopted Oxford Local Plan, but has been enlarged to incorporate the two tower blocks and an area of land adjacent to the leisure centre. This will enable options for the future of the tower blocks and the potential expansion of the leisure centre to be considered as part of the masterplanning of Blackbird Leys centre.
- 6.43 The City Council intends to bring forward a Supplementary Planning Document to guide the development of the Blackbird Leys district centre. The City Executive Board resolved at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008 to set up a steering group to take forward the regeneration of Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook, of which the development of the proposed district centre will be an important element.

#### **Cowley Road**

- 6.44 Cowley Road is located closest to the City centre and is the smallest of the existing district centres. It is composed of a large number of small units, with rental values lower than that of Summertown and the Cowley centre. There is a smaller amount of comparison goods floor space than in other district centres, and a higher proportion of service activity, mainly food and drink uses catering for the high student population in this area. Demand for retail units is mainly from local independents with few chain stores, which may be due to the centre's proximity to the city centre.
- 6.45 Cowley Road is one of the principle routes into the city centre, and suffers from through traffic and congestion. Traffic calming measures were implemented in 2005 in order to improve safety and the street environment through the centre. The district centre is well served by public transport and many of its users travel by foot or bicycle from the surrounding residential area. The centre itself has few car parking spaces. While not the most economically successful, many users enjoy the Cowley Road for its vibrant and diverse nature, exemplified by its annual carnival.
- 6.46 There are no allocated development sites within this district centre in the adopted Local Plan, and opportunities for significant growth are limited. However, a number of small redevelopment schemes have taken place in recent years, and a full review of the role of this district centre, together with its boundary, will be carried out in the Development Management DPD.

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<sup>14</sup> Oxford Retail Needs Study Update: Final Report, (Roger Tym & Partners, March 2008), paras 6.33 and 6.39

## **Headington**

- 6.47 Located to the north east of the city centre, Headington district centre serves the resident population in much of that quadrant of the city, including many of the students at Oxford Brookes University. It is also the nearest shopping centre for workers at the Headington hospitals.
- 6.48 Shopping provision in Headington is considered reasonable, with a large proportion of independent retailers selling a wide range of goods. However, Headington commands the lowest retail rents of all the district centres and demand for retail floor space is more limited than in other centres. Some concerns were expressed during the consultation on the Core Strategy about a perceived decline in the retail offer at Headington, as illustrated by the number of charity shops and food and drink outlets.
- 6.49 Headington district centre is easily accessible by all modes, but the busy London Road does divide the centre and detracts from the pedestrian environment.
- 6.50 There are no allocated development sites within this district centre in the adopted Local Plan, and opportunities for significant growth are limited. However, a number of small redevelopment schemes have taken place in recent years, and a full review of the role of this district centre, together with its boundary, will be carried out in the Development Management DPD.

## **Summertown**

- 6.51 Summertown serves the resident population in the north of Oxford, and is one of the more economically successful district centres as evidenced by retail rents and demand for floorspace. While the range of convenience shopping provision is good, there is a lower level of comparison provision, which may be a reflection on its relative proximity to the city centre. The district centre includes social and community facilities such as the Ferry Sports Centre.
- 6.52 Summertown is well served by different modes of transport with many users walking and cycling, although there is also adequate nearby car parking. The centre is divided by the Banbury Road, but has wider pavements than some of the other district centres, providing a more comfortable pedestrian environment.
- 6.53 The adopted Local Plan allocates three sites within the district centre for mixed-use development, none of which have so far been implemented. The Diamond Place, Ferry Pool car park site, in particular, offers potential for additional retail, employment, residential and/or commercial leisure uses. If residential development were to take place on the land at Summertown (see below) during the lifetime of the Core Strategy, that would also help to support expansion of the services provided at Summertown district centre. A full review

of the role of this district centre, together with its boundary, will be carried out in the Development Management DPD.

### **Neighbourhood areas**

- 6.54 The policy focus of the Core Strategy is on the City centre and district centres as these are the locations that have the most potential to accommodate growth in retail, leisure, employment and other services. However, it is recognised that, even in a fairly compact city such as Oxford, many residents will seek to meet their everyday needs within their own communities. The Core Strategy spatial strategy includes a map of fifteen neighbourhood areas, which were identified as local sustainable communities through the work on the Balance of Dwellings SPD.<sup>15</sup> These areas represent distinctive communities based on factors such as neighbourhood shopping centres, townscape character and physical features such as main roads, although they also take account of ward boundaries in order to ensure ease of access to demographic and household data. The City Council intends to develop the neighbourhood areas concept as a spatial planning tool within the LDF, in particular the Development Management DPD, in order to refine the application of planning policy to suit local circumstances.

## **7 The reuse of previously developed land**

- 7.1 A strategic objective of the Core Strategy is to maximise the reuse of previously developed land and make full and efficient use of all land, having regard to the distinct character of each neighbourhood. This objective, which forms the second key plank of the spatial strategy, reflects the following national and regional policy themes.
- 7.2 *PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)* sets out the Government's overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. Paragraph 27 indicates that in preparing development plans, planning authorities should seek to, amongst other things, "*promote the more efficient use of land through higher density, mixed use development and the use of suitably located previously developed land and buildings*".
- 7.3 *PPS3: Housing (November 2006)* indicates at paragraph 36 that the "*priority for development should be previously developed land, in particular vacant and derelict land and buildings*". Paragraph 40 emphasises that a key objective is that local planning authorities should continue to make effective use of land by re-using land that has previously been developed.
- 7.4 Draft *PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Development (December 2007)* states that due to the increasing demands on land available for development,

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<sup>15</sup> Balance of Dwellings Supplementary Planning Document, (Oxford City Council, January 2008), paras 39-44

local planning authorities should seek to make the most efficient and effective use of land and buildings, especially vacant or derelict buildings. Paragraph 25 indicates that local planning authorities should, amongst other things, prioritise previously developed land which is suitable for re-use.

- 7.5 The spatial strategy of the emerging SEP is based on an urban focus, which aims to concentrate development and support services, thereby making the best use of previously developed land and setting out opportunities for sustainable urban expansions. Policy SP3 (Urban Focus and Urban Renaissance) is designed to achieve this aim, and includes a regional target of 60% for the proportion of development on previously developed land. The section of the Plan that relates to the Central Oxfordshire sub-region also seeks to *“make best use of previously developed land within urban areas to reduce the need for greenfield development”* (Policy CO1: Core Strategy).

**Previously developed and greenfield land**

- 7.6 Providing new housing on previously developed land within the existing built-up area enables people to live close to shops and services, and also potentially closer to their place of work. It can therefore help to reduce the need to travel, as well as helping to sustain existing businesses and facilities in the locality. Using previously developed land for all types of development, and making most efficient use of this land, helps to protect Oxford’s intrinsic environmental assets including the valuable open space within and around the city.
- 7.7 A large proportion of development in Oxford has occurred on previously developed land in the recent past. **Table 1** below illustrates that housing completions on previously developed land have ranged from 93.00% to 100.00% over the six years between 2001/02 and 2006/07, compared to the draft SEP target of 60%.

**Table 1: Housing completions on previously developed land**

Year	Percentage of gross housing completions on previously developed land
2001/2002	98.60%
2002/2003	93.00%
2003/2004	95.00%
2004/2005	99.87%
2005/2006	99.43%
2006/2007	100.00%

Source: Oxford Annual Monitoring Report 2007, page 16

- 7.8 The City Council’s preferred approach is to continue to focus development on brownfield land. However, less brownfield land is likely to come forward for

development in the future as many of the large sites that were allocated in the adopted Local Plan have already been developed, or are progressing through the planning process.

- 7.9 In relation to housing, the SHLAA has carried out a comprehensive assessment of land availability in the city, and has identified insufficient brownfield sites to meet in full the SEP target for Oxford of at least 8,000 additional dwellings over the period 2006-2026 (see **Background Paper E: Maintaining a balanced housing supply**). Some greenfield land has therefore been identified as suitable for housing in the SHLAA, including the proposed strategic site at Barton, and even including this greenfield land an element of windfall development would still be needed to meet the 8,000 target.
- 7.10 The SHLAA has assessed the availability of land that could accommodate 10 or more dwellings. Below that threshold, there will be scope for continued infilling and redevelopment on smaller sites in existing built-up areas, but this will be limited to some extent by the need to promote balanced communities and to retain family dwellings in areas of the city under significant pressure from flat conversions.<sup>16</sup>
- 7.11 In relation to employment land, there is also a limited supply of available previously developed land to meet Oxford's needs. The Employment Land Study found that the amount of land currently available for development is just under 30 ha, which is broadly equivalent to 7-8 years supply at recent take-up rates.<sup>17</sup> The Study concluded that just to meet Oxford's minimum employment land requirement up to 2021 would require the release of greenfield land in the form of the Peartree Safeguarded Land. Providing an additional allowance for flexibility, or seeking to meet 'higher growth' scenarios, would require the release of additional greenfield land.<sup>18</sup> Further details are provided in **Background Paper F(i): Oxford's Economy**.
- 7.12 In light of the above circumstances, Core Strategy Policy CS3 makes provision for some development to occur on greenfield land during the lifetime of the Core Strategy. However, in order to maintain a focus on the re-use of previously developed land, development will only be permitted on greenfield land if (i) it is specifically allocated for that use in the Local Development Framework (LDF); or if (ii) in the case of residential development, it is required to maintain a 5-year rolling housing land supply.
- 7.13 This policy approach accords with the principles of the plan-led system, whereby local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the needs of their areas through their LDF's, whilst also enabling action to be taken to ensure

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<sup>16</sup> See Balance of Dwellings Study: Final Report, (Fordham Research, July 2007)

<sup>17</sup> Oxford Employment Land Study: Main Report, (Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners, March 2006), page 58

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, pages 81-82

a continuing supply of housing as required by PPS3. It is likely that further, as yet unidentified, previously developed sites may become available over the Core Strategy period, in which case Policy CS3 will ensure that housing continues to be focused on previously developed rather than greenfield land. Policy CS3 also makes clear that greenfield land will not be allocated for development where this would conflict with key environmental and social objectives such as protection of the undeveloped flood plain and sites designated for their ecological value, or community well-being.

- 7.14 The Core Strategy monitoring framework sets a target for 90% of dwellings to be built on previously developed land in 2009/14, reducing to 75% in 2014/26. This is intended to be challenging, whilst at the same time reflecting the likelihood of a diminishing supply of previously developed land during the next 20 years.

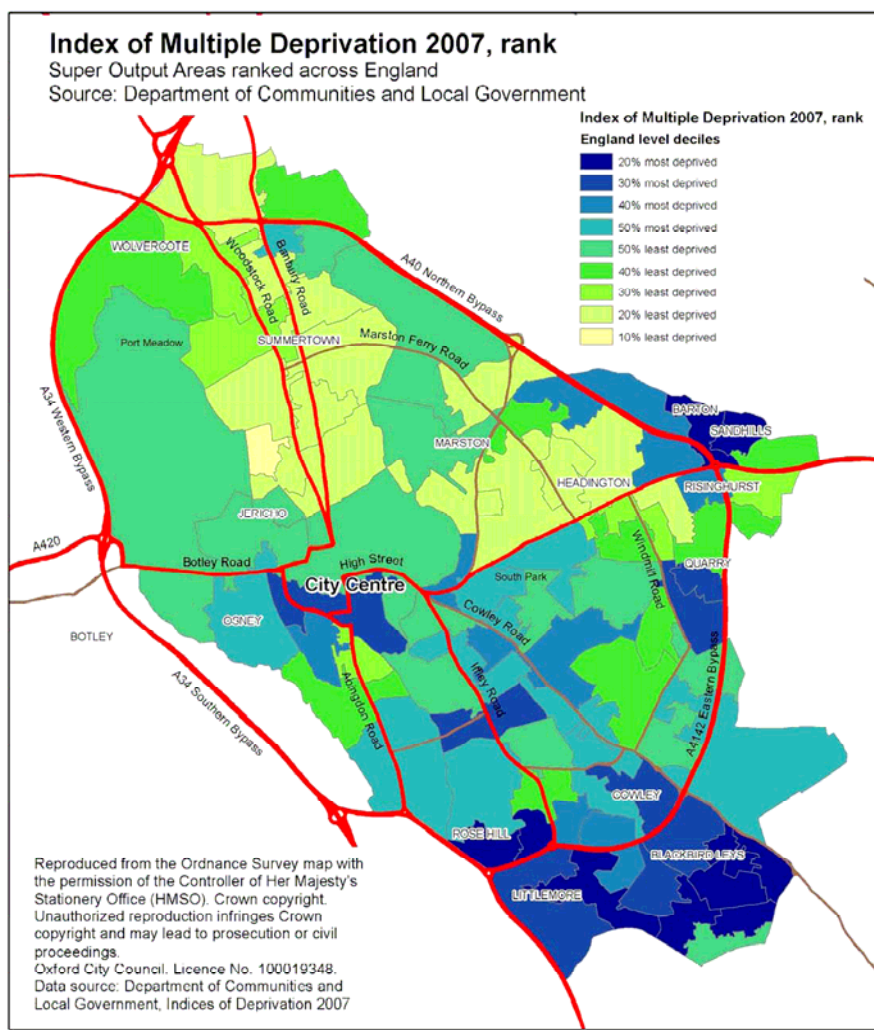
### **Regeneration areas**

- 7.15 Oxford is a dynamic, ethnically and culturally diverse city - with all the opportunities and challenges that cities bring, including areas of significant deprivation. The index of multiple deprivation 2007 ranks Oxford 155<sup>th</sup> out of 354 local authorities in England, which puts the city in the most deprived half. Of the 85 Super Output Areas (SOA's) in Oxford, 18 are amongst the 30% most deprived in England and 10 are amongst the 20% most deprived.
- 7.16 Deprivation is largely concentrated in areas on the south eastern and north eastern periphery of the city, although there are other pockets within the City centre and parts of east Oxford (see **Figure 2** below).
- 7.17 The main issues in Oxford's deprived areas are poor education and skills, child poverty and high levels of crime. In these most deprived areas, education and skills are amongst the 5% worst in England. Throughout the city, there is a high score for 'barriers to housing and services' – due to the high ratio of house prices to average earnings.<sup>19</sup>
- 7.18 Improving health and social inclusion is a flagship issue in the Oxford Sustainable Community Strategy (2008), while reducing inequalities and breaking the cycle of deprivation is a strategic objective in the emerging Oxfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy: Oxfordshire 2030.

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<sup>19</sup> Briefing Note: Deprivation in Oxford, (Oxfordshire Date Observatory, July 2008), [www.oxfordshireobservatory.info](http://www.oxfordshireobservatory.info)

**Figure 2: Index of Multiple Deprivation by ward**



7.19 National and regional policy also stresses the importance of promoting regeneration and social inclusion. For instance, Policy SP4 (Regeneration and Social Inclusion) in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft South East Plan indicates that funding and initiatives should be focused to:

*ii) "implement appropriate actions to address the pockets of deprivation and broader exclusion issues facing other parts of the region both inside and outside sub-regional strategy areas"*

7.20 Spatial planning can help to promote regeneration and social inclusion by bringing different agencies together to address the social, economic and environmental needs of deprived areas. Core Strategy Policy CS4 sets a framework for future initiatives in the city by identifying five priority areas for regeneration (Barton; Blackbird Leys; Northway; Rose Hill; and Wood Farm). These areas were selected because they are areas with high levels of deprivation, and because they are areas where there may be a need to redevelop social housing stock that is coming to the end of its useful life.

- 7.21 The City Council is committed to implementation of the Decent Homes Standard, set up by Government to ensure that all social housing landlords bring their properties up to basic standard of habitation by 2010. The standards will ensure that each of the City Council's homes has modern facilities and services; is in a reasonable state of repair; has a reasonable degree of thermal comfort; and meets the minimum fitness standards. In 2003, only 49% of the Council's homes were found to be decent, but by 2006/07 the Council's target of 77% of homes meeting the standard had been met<sup>20</sup>. This work is being funded directly through the Housing Revenue Account.
- 7.22 The City Council is also working to improve the quality of homes beyond the Decent Homes Standard. In some cases, this involves the whole scale redevelopment of areas or types of dwelling. For instance, work is currently progressing on the redevelopment of 97 orlit (pre-cast reinforced concrete) houses and two sheltered housing blocks at Rose Hill with 254 new residential units – 113 private and 141 affordable. The Council has worked closely with the local community and Oxford Citizens Housing Association to bring this project to fruition.
- 7.23 The City Council intends to undertake an options appraisal for the future use and potential redevelopment of its five tower blocks. Two of these tower blocks are located at Blackbird Leys (Windrush and Evenlode), one at Northway (Plowman), one at Wood Farm (Foresters), and one at Cowley centre (Hockmore).
- 7.24 The Council recognises that regeneration is about more than new housing and other building works. Policy CS4 provides support for other key aspects of regeneration, such as the enhancement or provision of local community facilities; the provision of employment opportunities and training; and improvements to accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport.
- 7.25 The preferred approach for regeneration areas was supported by 80% of respondents to the detailed and summary questionnaires during the Preferred Options consultation, with only 5% of respondents opposing it.

### **Green Belt**

- 7.26 There are 1,215 ha of Green Belt land within Oxford, covering some 27% of the city's land area. Most of this land is part of the river corridors of the Thames and Cherwell. Protection of the Green Belt therefore helps to retain the distinctive physical form of the city, whereby the river corridors run either side of Oxford's historic core and provide an essential part of its special character and landscape setting.

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<sup>20</sup> Oxford City Council Housing Strategy 2008 to 2011, para 5.3.3

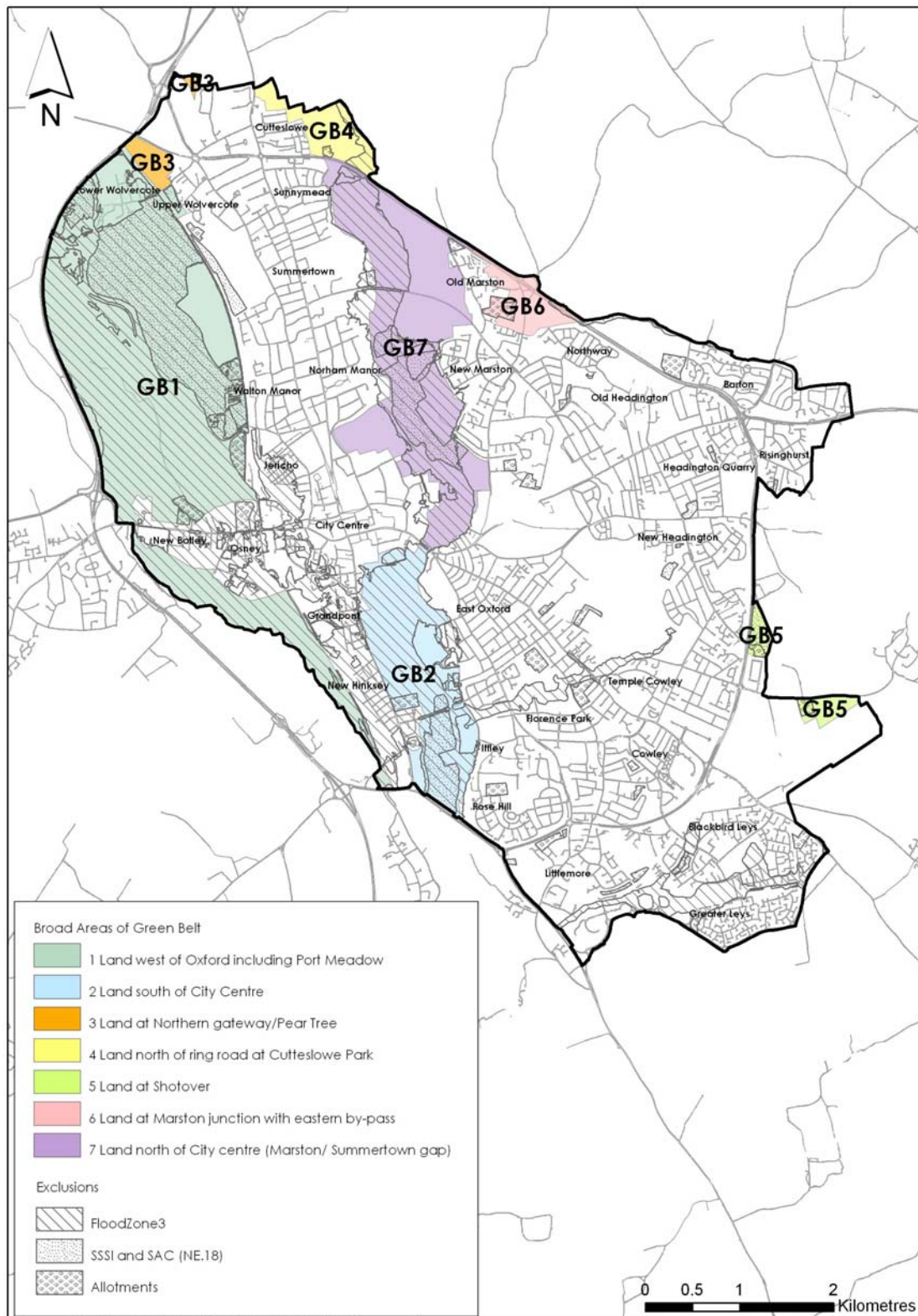
- 7.27 Although the outer boundary of the Oxford Green Belt was approved by the Secretary of State in 1975, the inner boundary was conferred with interim status for many years and was only confirmed within the City Council's administrative area upon the adoption of the Oxford Local Plan 1991-2001 in September 1997. Policies for the control of development in the Green Belt were subsequently rolled forward into the current adopted Local Plan.
- 7.28 Permanence is a key characteristic of Green Belts, as set out in *PPG2: Green Belts (January 1995)*, and Core Strategy Policy CS5 indicates that the general extent of the Green Belt inside Oxford's boundaries will be maintained. It also seeks to prevent inappropriate development in accordance with national policy.
- 7.29 Nevertheless, in the context of the intense development pressures faced in Oxford and the scarcity of available land, the City Council has carried out an initial broad review of the Green Belt within Oxford for the Core Strategy and the SHLAA to consider whether there is any potential for development. The results of that review are summarised below (**Table 2**), together with the accompanying map from the SHLAA.

**Table 2: Broad review of Oxford's inner Green Belt**

Map ref	Broad area	Potential for development
GB1	Land west of Oxford including Port Meadow	<b>Unsuitable.</b> Nearly all the land is in the flood plain and Oxford Meadows SAC except a piece of open space segregated from Oxford by a railway line. Area not suitable for development.
GB2	Land south of City centre	<b>Unsuitable.</b> Nearly all is in the flood plain except for a non-strategic piece of land also designated for nature conservation value. Area not suitable for development.
GB3	Land at Northern Gateway/Pear Tree	May be some suitable in some locations.
GB4	Land north of ring road at Cutteslowe Park	<b>Unsuitable.</b> In the flood plain, and an important publicly accessible open space. Area not suitable for development. Policy SR.6 in the Local Plan seeks to extend the park.
GB5	Land at Shotover	<b>Unsuitable.</b> Designated for nature conservation value. Land at Horspath is an open air sports facility which currently fulfils the purpose of the Green Belt. Area not suitable for development.
GB6	Land at Marston junction with eastern by-pass	<b>Unsuitable.</b> Core outdoor sports facility including Oxford City Football Club and OxRad. Important publicly accessible open space. Area not suitable for development.
GB7	Land north of City centre (Marston/Summertown gap)	May be some suitable locations but majority of area not suitable for development. Much is in the flood plain and designated for nature conservation value. Area important in fulfilling the function of the Green Belt (PPG2) by protecting the gap between Marston and Summertown. May be minor areas that could be considered in Site Allocations DPD.

*Source: Oxford Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (Oxford City Council, Aug 2008)*

**Figure 3: Broad areas of Green Belt within Oxford's administrative boundary**



Source: Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, (Oxford City Council, August 2008), page 64

- 7.30 The SHLAA assesses the land at Northern Gateway/Pear Tree and in the Marston/Summertown gap in more detail, and finds only one area of land west of the Oxford Hotel potentially suitable for housing. This area is 7.78 ha in total (0.64% of the total Green Belt inside the city), and not all of this is likely to be suitable having regard to conservation area and noise issues.
- 7.31 However, the SHLAA is not a policy document and merely provides background evidence on the potential availability of land for housing. Core Strategy Policy CS5 indicates that the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan and the Site Allocations DPD will consider the potential for any small-scale review of existing Green Belt boundaries. Policy CS5 provides guidance for those future DPD's by setting out the criteria that would need to be met before any land could be released from the Green Belt.
- 7.32 Policy SP5 in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the South East Plan indicates that small-scale local reviews of the Green Belt should be pursued through the Local Development Framework process. It adds that these reviews *"should satisfy national criteria for Green Belt releases, accord with the spatial strategy, and ensure that sufficient land is safeguarded to avoid the need for further review to meet development needs until at least 2031"*.
- 7.33 Issues relating to the review of the Oxford Green Belt to the south of the city to accommodate an urban extension are discussed below under the South Oxford Strategic Development Area sub-heading.

## **8 Meeting Oxford's housing and employment needs**

- 8.1 A strategic objective of the Core Strategy is to provide the development required to meet Oxford's needs, ensuring an appropriate balance of housing and employment growth in the context of other competing land uses. This objective, which forms the third key plank of the spatial strategy, reflects the fact that there is a scarcity of land in Oxford to accommodate the many development pressures faced by the city.
- 8.2 These development pressures include a huge demand for market housing; a pressing need for affordable housing; enabling key employment sectors such as higher education, healthcare and medical and scientific research to continue to grow; and development needed to maintain the city's role as a regional centre for shopping, leisure and cultural activities in the face of competition from other urban centres.
- 8.3 However, development is constrained by Oxford's tight administrative boundary; the Green Belt which both encircles and extends into the city; extensive areas of flood plain; areas of nature conservation importance; and the city's outstanding architectural heritage, which places

limitations on the height of buildings within the identified view cones and the City centre so as to preserve Oxford's famous skyline.

- 8.4 The Core Strategy Issues and Options paper identified development constraints as the key overarching issue for Oxford and indicated that the priorities for land uses need to be established in this context. It is important to recognise that due to Oxford's physical and environmental constraints, the city cannot accommodate all the various land-use needs that have been identified. Housing need and demand far exceeds the supply of available and suitable land, while studies undertaken in relation to other land-uses such as Class 'B' employment uses, retail and tourism, have revealed levels of potential need and demand that cannot realistically be met in full within the city.
- 8.5 Nevertheless, the City Council recognises that Oxford is an inherently sustainable location for housing, with high levels of self-containment in terms of residents working within the city and a high proportion of trips made by sustainable modes of transport. Oxford is also in a relatively good position to assimilate growth because of its well-established bus and cycle networks, and its social infrastructure made up of extensive retail, health, leisure, cultural and community provision.
- 8.6 The City Council also recognises that Oxford has unique economic strengths, in particular the interaction between the universities, teaching hospitals and research and spin out companies, and the associated record of innovation. These strengths need to be developed and promoted if Oxford is to continue to make a significant contribution towards the future economic prosperity of those living in the Central Oxfordshire sub-region and beyond, as well as fulfilling its role as a Regional Hub and the focus of the Oxford/Central Oxfordshire Diamond for Growth and Investment.
- 8.7 This means that a balance has to be struck between delivering housing and at the same time providing for Oxford's economy. This is all within the context of providing the various other facilities and services needed by existing and new residents.

#### **Housing/employment balance**

- 8.8 Historically the number of jobs in Oxford has significantly exceeded the resident workforce, resulting in considerable levels of in-commuting into Oxford, staff retention and recruitment difficulties for employers and adding to housing pressures in the city. To a degree, it is inevitable that there will be some imbalance given the economic importance of Oxford and that it contains seven of the largest ten employers in the county. However, the imbalance has narrowed over recent decades, with the ratio of jobs to resident workforce

declining from 1.76 in 1971 to 1.44 in 2001.<sup>21</sup> This reflects the fact that Oxford has been losing employment land to other uses, mainly residential, over several decades and that the city has often exceeded its planned housing provision (Further details are provided in **Background Paper F(i): Oxford's Economy**).

- 8.9 Looking forward over the Core Strategy period, the main policy context is provided by the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. Policy CO2 in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft South East Plan states:

*"In Oxford, development for employment uses will be expected to take place primarily on previously developed land and former safeguarded land or in conjunction with development schemes for mixed uses incorporating housing, town centre or other facilities".*

- 8.10 Paragraph 22.7 of the supporting text to SEP Policy CO2 indicates that for monitoring purposes and pending any updated evidence or guidance, a guide figure of a minimum 18,000 net additional new jobs will be created within the Central Oxfordshire sub-region between 2006 and 2016. It adds that over the whole plan period, *"there is a need to ensure that the balance of jobs and houses at both the sub-regional and main settlement level does not worsen and preferably improves"*.

- 8.11 Paragraph 22.9 addresses Oxford specifically, stating: *"within Oxford, the overall aim will be to achieve a broad balance between housing and jobs by protecting, as appropriate, existing sites and allocating new land suited to providing for a range of opportunities in accordance with Policy RE3. Options regarding the location, level and form of employment development, including the possible use of the currently safeguarded land at Peartree, will be a matter for local determination."*

- 8.12 Policy CO3 in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft SEP sets a minimum housing requirement of 400 dwellings per year for Oxford (8,000 over the 20-year period 2006 to 2026), as well as making a separate allowance for 4,000 dwellings within the South Oxford Strategic Development Area.

- 8.13 In line with the emerging SEP, the Oxford Core Strategy seeks to achieve a broad balance between housing and employment growth. [Appendix 1](#) sets out an analysis of the projected increase in Oxford's workforce and employment during the Core Strategy period. This is acknowledged to be somewhat broad brush in nature since it is dependent on assumptions about factors such as economic activity rates and household size, as well as assumptions about the number of jobs that might be generated by development in particular locations.

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<sup>21</sup> An economic profile of Oxfordshire, (Oxfordshire Economic Observatory and Oxfordshire County Council, 2004)

- 8.14 The analysis at [Appendix 1](#) shows that the provision of 8,000 additional dwellings within Oxford by 2026, as required by the emerging SEP, would be likely to generate an additional potential workforce in the region of 9,760 – 10,205, depending on which method of calculation is used. This figure would, of course, be higher if actual provision were to exceed the 8,000 minimum target. Taking into account the proposed South Oxford SDA, which was recommended by the Examination-in-Public Panel amongst other reasons to help address the housing-employment imbalance in Oxford, then the additional potential workforce available to Oxford's economy is likely to be in the region of 14,640 – 15,308.
- 8.15 In terms of employment growth, it is estimated that some 10,300 – 13,250 jobs will be generated in Oxford during the Core Strategy period. This includes existing commitments as well as growth arising from the Core Strategy proposals. In the period up to 2016, employment growth is estimated to be in the region of 7,350-9,750. This reflects the fact that existing B1 commitments from the Local Plan and major retail and services growth in the West End are expected to be completed prior to 2016.
- 8.16 Employment growth forecasts are subject to considerable uncertainty, but the analysis shows that employment growth in Oxford should be broadly in line with housing growth. Having regard to the proposed SDA, Oxford's jobs-housing imbalance should improve over the latter part of the Plan period, albeit that no allowance has been made for employment growth within the SDA since it is too early to say whether or not any significant employment allocations will be made as part of the SDA.
- 8.17 Another factor that will affect the broader situation within the sub-region is the proposed eco-town at Weston Otmoor in Cherwell district, which has been shortlisted by the Government for consultation and further appraisal. This proposal, which is around 7 miles north east of Oxford, envisages 10,000-15,000 new homes plus significant transport improvements linking to Oxford city and economic development. If this scheme were to go ahead, it is reasonable to expect that it would help to significantly alleviate staff recruitment and retention problems in Oxford and the surrounding area, although the precise implications would depend on the eventual size of the new settlement, the size and mix of new employment within the eco-town and the nature of the transport links that would be delivered as a result of this proposal.

## 9 Strategic sites

- 9.1 A key mechanism for meeting Oxford's housing and employment needs is the identification of strategic sites within the Core Strategy.

- 9.2 *PPS12: Creating strong safe and prosperous communities through Local Spatial Planning (2008)* confirms at paragraph 4.6 that core strategies may allocate strategic sites for development where these are considered central to the achievement of the strategy. It adds that progress on the core strategy should not be held up by the inclusion of non strategic sites. Paragraph 4.7 indicates that it may be preferable for the site area to be delineated in outline rather than detailed terms, with site specific criteria set out to allow more precise definition through masterplanning using an area action plan or supplementary planning document.
- 9.3 The Core Strategy Issues and Options paper (June 2006) sought views on broad options for accommodating development, such as building at greater density on 'brownfield' land within the built-up area; allowing some development of Safeguarded Land; allowing some development of other greenfield land within the city; and working with other local authorities to review the Green Belt outside the city.
- 9.4 At the Preferred Options stage (March 2007), the City Council identified five strategic greenfield locations and consulted upon options relating to each of these locations (including the option of not bringing that particular location forward for development). The locations identified were:
- Pear Tree/Northern Gateway;
  - Land at Summertown;
  - Land at Barton;
  - Southfield Golf Course (east and west).
- 9.5 Three of these locations (Pear Tree/Northern Gateway, Summertown and Barton) are areas of Safeguarded Land between the built-up area and the inner edge of the Green Belt that have been protected in the Local Plan to meet possible longer-term development needs. In the context of a tightly constrained urban area, these areas of Safeguarded Land were considered to be of strategic significance for Oxford and therefore needed to be considered in the Core Strategy. Each of the three areas also exceeded the 10 hectare threshold used by the City Council to decide whether or not a location was strategic to the future development of the city.
- 9.6 Most other areas of greenfield land in Oxford were discounted at an early stage due to intrinsic environmental constraints, for instance because they were in the flood plain or were designated for their ecological value, or because they were too small to be central to the delivery of the strategy. Southfield Golf Course was the only additional site to be identified at a strategic level.
- 9.7 No suitable brownfield sites of 10 hectares or more were identified, although the proposals for major mixed-use development in the West End were included

under the section of the Preferred Options document relating to the City centre. The West End renaissance area was also illustrated on the key diagram.

- 9.8 The City Council subsequently decided to prepare and consult upon a second round of Preferred Options in March 2008 in order to reflect a change in circumstances arising from publication of the South East Plan Panel Report in August 2007, in particular the Panel's recommendation for an urban extension of at least 4,000 houses on the southern edge of Oxford – the South Oxford Strategic Development Area (SDA). While the new housing in the SDA is likely to be wholly or predominantly within South Oxfordshire district, the development will impact on Oxford and is clearly of major strategic significance for the city.
- 9.9 The Further Preferred Options document also contained an update on the original strategic sites and a revised spatial strategy and key diagram. Aside from the SDA, the main change was to indicate that Southfield Golf Course was unlikely to be taken forward into the submission version of the Core Strategy. This decision reflected the findings of studies relating to on-site biodiversity and the potential ecological and hydrological impacts of development on the nearby Lye Valley SSSI, all of which revealed significant constraints on potential development. The decision not to include Southfield Golf Course as a strategic site was confirmed when the Council agreed the proposed submission document in August 2008.
- 9.10 Consultation with the public and stakeholders at the Preferred Options/Further Preferred Options stages did not result in any additional suggestions for strategic sites within Oxford other than those put forward in the documents themselves.
- 9.11 The Proposed Submission document includes policies relating specifically to the West End (CS6); Northern Gateway (CS7); Barton (CS8); South Oxford Strategic Development Area (CS9); and Summertown (CS10). Each of these is considered below. In relation to Summertown, the main landowners still require the land for operational purposes and the policy therefore seeks merely to prevent any development that would prejudice the potential for the site to meet longer-term residential development needs.

### **West End**

- 9.12 The West End Area Action Plan (AAP) was identified as a key priority in the first Local Development Scheme (2005) produced by the City Council and this AAP was produced in advance of the Core Strategy.
- 9.13 The Inspector who conducted the Examination into the West End AAP in January 2008 noted that this was not an approach recommended in PPS12, but acknowledged that the renaissance of the western quarter of the City centre was identified by the City Council as being an urgent priority and that its regeneration is anticipated to be fundamental to the overall long-term success

of Oxford as a whole. She also noted that the Government Office for the South East supported the approach of producing the AAP in advance of the Core Strategy, and that the AAP was set within the context of the relatively up-to-date Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 and Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016, both adopted in 2005, as well as the emerging Core Strategy.

9.14 The Inspector stated that *"taking these factors into account and having regard to the highly sustainable city centre location of the West End, it is my opinion that the early production of this geographically tightly-focussed document meets a current need to harness funding and developer interest that would not prejudice or pre-empt the development of options or policies of the Core Strategy for the District"*.<sup>22</sup>

9.15 The benefits of focusing development in the West End are made comprehensively in the AAP itself but briefly they include:

- the juxtaposition of a number of development sites identified in the Local Plan and brought forward into the AAP;
- the current under-utilisation of the area and poor quality street environment;
- the highly sustainable nature of its location (ideally situated in terms of the PPS6 sequential test and in terms of transport as it includes a mainline railway station and is serviced by local buses, park and ride buses and scheduled coaches), and;
- the proximity of a wide range of services and amenities (being part of the City centre).

9.16 The West End renaissance would provide around 700-800 new homes; student accommodation; up to 15,000 sq m of private sector office accommodation; around 20,000 sq m of public sector office accommodation; new retail floorspace within the Primary Shopping Area; new hotel accommodation; a new conference centre facility and a range of cultural and leisure facilities.

### **Northern Gateway**

9.17 The proposed area of search is some 4.5 km north of Carfax in the City centre, adjacent to the administrative boundary with Cherwell district. It is situated immediately east of the A34 and is also bisected by the A44 (which runs north-south through the area of search) and the A40 (which runs east-west along the southern part of the area of search). The principal opportunities for development comprise two key parcels of land on either side of a dual-carriageway section of the A44, which are identified as Safeguarded Land in the Local Plan. The larger section of some 11.5 ha lies on the west side of the A44, with the smaller section of some 4.5 ha to the east of the A44.

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<sup>22</sup> Report on the Examination into the West End Area Action Plan, (by Shelagh Bussey MA, DipTP, DipEM, PhD, MRTPI April 2008), para 2.5

- 9.18 The main land uses within the proposed area of search include agricultural grazing, the Pear Tree Park and Ride site and the service area, which includes two hotels as well as a filling station, restaurant facilities and car parking. The area of search also includes a range of commercial enterprises, including a car showroom and filling station, close to the Wolvercote roundabout, and the Oxford Hotel on the southern side of the A40. It incorporates a small area of Green Belt land at Pear Tree Hill Farm and a larger area of Green Belt land adjacent to the Oxford Hotel.
- 9.19 Inclusion of land-uses adjoining the Safeguarded Land within the area of search does not necessarily imply that those land-uses will be considered appropriate for development or redevelopment, but it will enable a comprehensive approach to be taken to the future planning of the area. It is particularly important to take a holistic approach to the planning of this area given its strategically important position at the northern entrance to the city, offering the opportunity to create a high-quality gateway to Oxford, and the proposals for transport improvements in this locality as part of Oxfordshire County Council's 'Access to Oxford' proposals.
- 9.20 There are not considered to be any fundamental constraints to development on the Safeguarded Land, although traffic generation is a significant issue as discussed below. The land is entirely in Flood Zone 1 and the area was assessed as having low landscape quality, biodiversity interest and historic integrity in A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting.<sup>23</sup> The consultants noted that the area is dominated by the Peartree interchange on the A34, and that the development of transport related services to the east of the A34 in contrast with the tracts of agricultural land has made for a discordant character.
- 9.21 However, it was also noted that despite the absence of highly valued ecological or historic features and the generally low scenic quality, the area is in a visually sensitive location, at the gateway to Oxford from the north. It also forms a setting to Wolvercote Conservation Area, historic Goose Green and the Thames floodplain and for these reasons its sensitivity may be described as moderate.
- 9.22 A Phase 1 Habitat Survey and a Bird Survey were carried out on behalf of Arlington Development Services Ltd in relation to the Safeguarded Land west of the A44 and the Green Belt land south of the A40. The Phase 1 survey found the Safeguarded Land to be dominated by improved fields with a network of generally species poor hedgerows and scrub, described as being of local value. Other areas of habitat are of value at the site level only. The consultants did not consider that development would affect the Oxford Meadows Special

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<sup>23</sup> A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting, (Land Use Consultants, March 2002), page 283

Area of Conservation (SAC), four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) within 2 km of the site, or the Meadow/Oxford Canal Marsh County Wildlife Site (CWS)/Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC). The site was, however, found to have potential to support foraging and commuting bats.<sup>24</sup>

- 9.23 The area south of the A40 was also found to be dominated by improved and semi-improved fields, which are of importance at the site level with a network of generally species poor hedgerows of local value. The land was found to have potential to support a number of species of biodiversity value, including reptiles, roosting, commuting and foraging bats and water vole. The consultants did not consider that development would have any impact on the SAC or SSSI's, but found that development could result in direct and indirect impacts on the Meadow/Oxford Canal Marsh CWS/SLINC. Recommendations were made to avoid the part of the site that falls within this designation, together with other measures to avoid indirect impacts upon this site.
- 9.24 The bird survey found typical breeding bird species associated with farmland and woodland fringe, including one species listed on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (song thrush) on the Safeguarded Land and three (linnet, bullfinch and song thrush) on the land south of the A40. No birds protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 were recorded on either site.<sup>25</sup>
- 9.25 An ecological appraisal on behalf of Kier Property Developments Ltd of the Safeguarded Land east of the A44 found no evidence to suggest that the site supports ecological interest sufficient to prevent the principle of development. The consultants state that "with the removal of the habitats of between negligible and Site ecological value and enhancements provided by native planting and provision of bird boxes the proposed development would be accordance with legislation and policy".<sup>26</sup>
- 9.26 The main options considered for the Northern Gateway were residential or employment-led developments.
- 9.27 Residential development would generate less peak hour traffic than employment and would contribute towards meeting Oxford's pressing housing needs. However, residential is probably the form of development in which integration with the surrounding area and facilities is most important, both in terms of strengthening communities and accessing facilities. Unfortunately, the site has several constraints in terms of creating meaningful links with the surroundings, particularly the containment by the Oxford-Bicester railway line and the road network. New housing would be very restricted by the transport infrastructure, causing it to be segregated from the wider neighbourhood.

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<sup>24</sup> Pear Tree, Oxford: Phase 1 Habitat Survey, (WSP, June 2007), page 1

<sup>25</sup> Pear Tree, Oxford: Bird Report, (Arlington Development Services Ltd., June 2007), page 1

<sup>26</sup> Pear Tree Lane, Oxford: Ecological Appraisal, (Waterman CPM, May 2008), para 6.2

- 9.28 Furthermore, the quality of the residential environment would be affected by problems such as noise and poor outlook, resulting from the proximity of the site to transport infrastructure. Whilst it may be possible for some housing to have a better quality environment, for instance where road traffic noise is less severe, overall the site is not considered to be suitable for a residential-led development. The Sustainability Appraisal concluded that Pear Tree would not be a good location for residential development due to noise and air pollution from the surrounding roads.
- 9.29 In contrast, the site is considered to be suitable for employment-led development. The Employment Land Study 2006 provides the evidence base for Oxford's future employment needs. The study warned that if Oxford's supply of suitable employment space runs out, and no new land is provided, this could seriously threaten its role as a leading centre of knowledge based industries. The consultants advised that Oxford should guard against complacency and take steps to ensure it remains competitive. The study identified the Safeguarded land at Pear Tree as the principle opportunity to meet Oxford's future employment needs.
- 9.30 The consultants indicated that allocating the Pear Tree site for employment use would just meet the minimum land requirement under the 'business as usual' scenario. They assessed the suitability of each of the three Safeguarded sites using a range of criteria, and scored Pear Tree the highest (34) compared to Barton (28) and Summertown (26). The consultants stated: "*overall accessibility, prominence and limited constraints make this a highly suitable site for a range of employment uses*".<sup>27</sup> No other sites have been identified in Oxford other than the Safeguarded sites that would be large enough to meet the needs identified in the Employment Land Study. More detail on the economic need for this proposal is provided in **Background Paper F(i): Oxford's Economy**.
- 9.31 Employment-led development was therefore the City Council's preferred option at the Preferred Options stage of the Core Strategy, although consultees were also invited to comment on the option of a residential-led development or the option of not releasing the land during the Core Strategy period. The consultation results were mixed, although the preferred option had the highest percentage of respondents to the questionnaires agreeing/strongly agreeing (46%) and the lowest proportion disagreeing/strongly disagreeing (30%). Residential development was supported by 35% of respondents but opposed by 43%, while the option of continuing to safeguard the land from development was supported by 33% and opposed by 35%.

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<sup>27</sup> Oxford Employment Land Study Appendices, (Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, March 2006), Appendix 12

- 9.32 Given the shortage of available land, it is important that economic development at the Northern Gateway builds on Oxford's inherent strengths. Core Strategy Policy CS7 therefore sets out criteria to ensure that employment proposals are well related to Oxford's economy.
- 9.33 The location of the site adjoining the strategic road network make it suitable for the relocation of Oxford's emergency services, improving response times and freeing up City centre land for potential redevelopment. Preliminary discussions have taken place with each of the emergency services regarding this proposal, which is reflected in Policy CS7. The site could also incorporate some non-teaching university development, again potentially freeing up City centre sites. Other uses that would support or complement employment development will be considered in the proposed Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP).
- 9.34 The principal constraint to development relates to access and traffic generation issues. The Pear Tree area experiences significant peak-hour congestion and the County Council has developed proposals for highway improvements as part of the 'Access to Oxford' package mentioned above. The highways and transport issues would need to be resolved before any development could take place. Further information is provided in **Background Paper D(ii): Transport and Accessibility**, include the outcome of the transport modelling and mitigation work undertaken to date.
- 9.35 The Northern Gateway area of search is around 500 metres from the Oxford Meadows SAC at the nearest point. The Habitats Regulations Assessment carried out for the Core Strategy identifies that groundwater flow from the North Oxford Gravel terrace may have an important role in maintaining water levels in the Wolvercote Common/Port Meadow area of the Oxford Meadows SAC. It is important, therefore, that new development in north Oxford, including at the Northern Gateway, includes provision for sustainable drainage so that rainwater is able to continue to percolate into the ground, in order to avoid diminishing this water resource. This issue is raised in the supporting text to Core Strategy Policy CS7 and will need to be taken forward as part of the masterplanning of the site in the proposed AAP.
- 9.36 The Northern Gateway proposals will be taken forward in conjunction with key stakeholders, particularly those with an interest in the land. This includes Goodman, formerly known as Arlington (who have an interest in the St John's College land to the west of the A44), Kier Properties/Worcester College in relation to the land to the east of the A44 and Merton College in relation to the service area. These landowners have formed the Northern Gateway Consortium, and have offered to work in partnership with the City Council and County Council in producing an AAP. A range of other organisations are also likely to be involved in this AAP, including the Highways Agency, Cherwell

District Council, together with other landowners, amenity bodies and local residents.

### **Land at Barton**

- 9.37 The proposed area of search focuses on the Safeguarded Land immediately to the west of Barton estate, but also includes some land to the south of the A40 Ring Road. The Safeguarded Land consists mainly of agricultural grazing land. It also includes allotments, sports pitches and an electricity substation. The total site area is 36ha of which some 23.5ha is likely to be developable once the allotments, public open space and an area of floodplain adjoining Bayswater Brook have been excluded. The land is owned by the City Council, apart from an area of approximately 3.7 hectares adjoining the substation that is owned by Scottish and Southern Energy.
- 9.38 The consultants who produced A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting noted that the area performs an important role in the setting of Headington. They found that it is distinctive as a result of its rural character, its notable lack of development and historic connections to Headington Meads. However, they added that fragmentation of the area by the northern by-pass, the invisible course of the river and the lack of floodplain features means the integrity of the landscape has been lost and landscape quality is perceived as being moderate.<sup>28</sup>
- 9.39 Whilst the comments about this area's rural character are noted by the City Council, given the severe shortage of available land for development in Oxford, as described earlier, this is not considered to be of such intrinsic importance as to prevent any future development.
- 9.40 An ecological report has been undertaken for the Safeguarded Land, comprising an extended Phase 1 habitat survey of the site and detailed Phase 2 botanical surveys, bird surveys and various species surveys. This work has identified some features within the site, which would merit retention enhancement or restoration as part of any development. These include Bayswater Brook on the northern boundary, which is designated as a SLINC. This would need protecting with an appropriate buffer zone, probably in the form of a linear nature park. However, the survey work did not find any major constraints on development.
- 9.41 The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the whole of the city (June 2008) includes an initial analysis and mapping of the Barton land, although a site specific Flood Risk Assessment will be needed at a later stage. The SFRA shows that 90% of the site is in Flood Zone 1, with approximately 10% (adjoining

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<sup>28</sup> A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting, (Land Use Consultants, March 2002), page 263

Bayswater Brook) in Flood Zone 3b (functional floodplain)<sup>29</sup>. The area in Flood Zone 3b could be set aside as a linear nature park, as suggested in the ecological report.

- 9.42 At Preferred Options stage, a number of options were put forward for the land at Barton with no preferred option selected. The options consulted on were residential, employment, hospital/university use and retail/commercial, as well as the option of no development during the Core Strategy period. The lack of a preferred option reflected the fact that work was still being undertaken on the Core Strategy evidence base, including the SHLAA and a study relating to the needs of Oxford's Higher Education, Health and Retail sectors.
- 9.43 The option for residential-led development attracted the most support, with 51% of respondents to the questionnaires either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this option and only 23% opposing it. The option for retail/commercial development was clearly the least popular, with 53% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and only 13% supporting that option. The results for the other three options were fairly evenly divided, with the percentage of respondents each of those options being marginally higher than the percentage supporting them.
- 9.44 The Sustainability Appraisal at Preferred Options had concluded that this is probably a more sustainable location for residential or medical research linked to the Headington Hospital sites, than for employment or retail.
- 9.45 Following Preferred Options, the Nathaniel Lichfield study found that most of the future development needs of the Oxford health sector can be accommodated within established hospital and health trust sites. There will be some need for new health centres elsewhere in the city, but their land requirements are likely to be relatively small. The study also found that for the higher education sector, the space requirements of core academic activities can largely be accommodated on established university sites.<sup>30</sup>
- 9.46 Meanwhile, work on the SHLAA found that there would be insufficient previously developed land to meet Oxford's housing targets and that some greenfield land would therefore be required. The decision not to take forward Southfield Golf Course for housing and the position of the main landowners regarding the land at Summertown have increased the necessity to release the Barton site for housing.
- 9.47 Furthermore, the Government's sustainable communities agenda, combined with Oxford's designation as a Growth Point and a Regional Hub, presents an

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<sup>29</sup> Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Oxford City: Final Report, (Atkins, June 2008), page 28

<sup>30</sup> The Economic Role of the Higher Education, Health and Retail Sectors in the Oxford Economy, (Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, March 2008), paras 8.10-8.11

opportunity to secure the funding needed to bring this land forward. The City Council has been in discussion with English Partnerships, which has written to the Council to confirm that it is keen to assist in bringing forward this site for a residential led development. The location of the Safeguarded Land adjoining the Barton estate and opposite the Northway estate, two of the City Council's priority areas for regeneration, presents an opportunity for development to act as a catalyst for a wider estate renewal scheme in those areas.

- 9.48 Having regard to all the above factors, residential-led development has emerged as clearly the preferable option for this site, as reflected in Core Strategy Policy CS8.
- 9.49 Given that the Safeguarded Land is separated from the rest of Oxford by the A40 ring road, it will be a difficult challenge to integrate development on this site into the wider community because of the access issues and the 'severance' effect of the A40. The City Council has informally discussed with the Local Highway Authority the concept of providing a bus, cycle and pedestrian only bridge between the proposed development and the Northway estate to the south of the A40, potentially linking with the existing bus route into the John Radcliffe Hospital. This has been broadly agreed as an appropriate mitigation measure.
- 9.50 Opportunities have also been identified to reduce the sense of isolation of the existing Barton estate from the rest of the city by providing a further new footbridge across the A40, and/or improvements to the existing underpass between Barton Village Road and the Headington borders.
- 9.51 The City Council is working with English Partnerships to assess the feasibility and viability of these proposed links, together with other key infrastructure, and the consequences for the viability of residential development. It is envisaged that the outcome of this work will be known by the time of the Core Strategy examination. The SHLAA assessed the land as being developable in the period 2014-19 and as having capacity for 800 dwellings based upon 50 dwellings per hectare, although work on viability is also likely to look at options of up to 1,200 dwellings.
- 9.52 The Barton proposals will be taken forward through an AAP, which will involve a range of different stakeholders and local residents. This will consider the form and density of the new housing, the mix of complementary uses to be provided on-site, measures to mitigate potential impacts on the strategic and local road network, and how best to link the development of the greenfield site to the regeneration of Barton and Northway estates.

### **South Oxford Strategic Development Area (SDA)**

- 9.53 The Panel that independently examined the draft SEP recommended an urban extension of at least 4,000 dwellings, and possibly some additional employment land, on the southern edge of Oxford – termed the South Oxford SDA.
- 9.54 The Panel considered that there are limits to the amount of development that could be accommodated within Oxford’s urban fabric, without damaging the special character of the city and putting pressure on its green spaces. They further highlighted the increase in car travel that would result from concentrating development on the outer edge of the Green Belt in the surrounding towns. While the Panel considered other options for new housing in the Central Oxfordshire sub-region, including new settlements, they considered that an urban extension at Oxford would provide a more sustainable solution, particularly on travel patterns.
- 9.55 To accommodate an urban extension, the Panel recommended a highly focused, selective Green Belt review just south of Oxford. The land likely to form a southern urban extension lies within South Oxfordshire district, and the Panel recommended that the City Council and South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) should produce a joint Area Action Plan to take forward the SDA, ensuring its integration with Oxford’s urban fabric.
- 9.56 The City Council published the Further Preferred Options document in March 2008 so that the Oxford Core Strategy could consider the spatial implications of the Panel’s recommendations, and to ensure that the Core Strategy conforms with the SEP when that Plan is adopted.
- 9.57 The Further Preferred Options document indicated that the City Council would seek to work constructively with SODC to take forward the SDA in the context of wider regeneration opportunities in the local area. We will look for strong community and functional links with the city as a whole, but in particular with Blackbird Leys, Greater Leys and Littlemore. It will be equally important, however, to ensure that new and existing communities maintain and enhance their local distinctiveness.
- 9.58 The City Council’s preferred approach, as set out in the Further Preferred Options, was therefore to work closely with South Oxfordshire to produce a joint AAP for the proposed SDA and to seek, through a joint AAP, to integrate the new community into the urban fabric of Oxford, while promoting a distinctive urban village neighbourhood.
- 9.59 An addendum to the Sustainability Appraisal published alongside the Further Preferred Options, concluded that a joint AAP would be likely to have more benefits for Oxford in terms of objectives such as creating vibrant communities,

providing accessibility to essential services and stimulating economic revival in regeneration areas.

9.60 This preferred approach was broadly supported, with 57% of respondents to the questionnaire agreeing or strongly agreeing. Around a third of respondents (32%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the preferred approach.

9.61 Since the Further Preferred Options consultation, the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft SEP have been published in July 2008. These endorse the Panel's recommendation regarding the SDA. Policy CO4 in the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes states:

*"A selective review of Green Belt boundaries will take place on the southern edge of Oxford through one or more coordinated development plan documents. It will identify land to be removed from the Green Belt to facilitate a sustainable urban extension to Oxford with minimal impact on village identity and the landscape setting of the city."*

9.62 Paragraph 22.18 of the supporting text to Policy CO4 sets out the special circumstances that exist to justify a Green Belt review:

- *"the regional imperative to deliver higher housing numbers and economic growth*
- *persisting jobs-housing imbalances*
- *poor housing affordability and a backlog of need*
- *worsening congestion and staff recruitment and retention problems; and*
- *a lack of realistic alternatives to focusing growth at Oxford, combined with a lack of capacity within Oxford"*

9.63 Paragraph 22.19 adds that a strategic Green Belt review appears to be unnecessary and advocates a review focused on the southern edge of the city since this would:

- *"reduce the risk of coalescence with surrounding settlements present elsewhere*
- *facilitate better integration with existing public transport systems and sources of employment*
- *reduce the competition for employment growth faced by Bicester and Witney; and*
- *utilise the existing evidence base."*

9.64 South Oxfordshire District Council published a consultation on the proposed SDA in July 2008. This document stated SODC's continuing opposition to the release of land from the Green Belt to accommodate an urban extension to Oxford, but indicated that the Government Office had advised them that they must demonstrate how the proposal can be accommodated in their planning

documents if the SDA ultimately becomes a requirement.<sup>31</sup> It is understood that this consultation will help inform the SODC Core Strategy preferred approach to be published this autumn.

- 9.65 The consultation set out some of the main issues and sought views on three possible locations for the urban extension within the area of search. The City Council responded to this consultation separately in its capacity as a local planning authority and as a major landowner in the area. The City Council's response as a planning authority pointed out that it is important to ensure that a review of the Green Belt boundary has the capacity to cope with longer-term development needs rather than limiting it to an area for 4,000 dwellings. In this respect, the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the draft SEP indicate at paragraph 22.20 that *"the boundaries of the revised Green Belt, Strategic Development Area, and any additional safeguarded land necessary to ensure the new boundaries will endure over the long term, will be shown in the relevant parts of the Oxford City and South Oxfordshire Local Development Frameworks"*.
- 9.66 With regard to the arrangements for future plan-making, SODC indicated in their response to the Oxford Core Strategy Further Preferred Options that they are not convinced that there is a need to prepare a joint plan and that final decisions and adoption of the AAP would reside with South Oxfordshire. The consultation document published by SODC in July 2008 indicated that if an urban extension is required by the SEP they will prepare a detailed planning document for it and will work closely with Oxford City Council when they do this.
- 9.67 Paragraph 22.20 of the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the SEP indicates that the Green Belt review and any subsequent plan-marking *"will be carried out collaboratively by Oxford City Council and South Oxfordshire District Council to a timetable and in a form to be agreed by the Government Office for the South East. The agreement will also cover evidence base compilation, including a transport impact assessment..."*
- 9.68 In light of the fact that the future plan-making arrangements are yet to be resolved, Policy CS9 in the Core Strategy Proposed Submission document does not specifically refer to a joint AAP but indicates that the City Council will work with SODC to bring forward the SDA. The indicative area of search shown on the key diagram includes land within Oxford City, to the south of the Cowley branch rail line, because the City Council believes that the regeneration of this area should be considered in parallel with the planning of the urban extension. The Sustainability Appraisal found that the benefits of any joint AAP would be maximised if it included the south eastern part of the city.

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<sup>31</sup> South of Oxford Urban Extension: Consultation, (South Oxfordshire District Council, July 2008)

- 9.69 Policy CS9 emphasises the importance that the City Council places on integration of the SDA with existing transport networks and infrastructure, and that the development should bring benefits for existing communities as well as for occupiers of the urban extension. This is consistent with the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the SEP, which highlight at paragraph 22.20 that the relevant plans will *"also take account of the opportunities the urban extension may present as a catalyst for regeneration in The Leys area, and how best to integrate the new development into the wider city"*.
- 9.70 The City Council has taken account of the proposed SDA in its evidence base, for example in the transport modelling work described in **Background Paper D(ii): Transport and Accessibility**. However, given that the new development will be either wholly or predominantly in South Oxfordshire district, much of the detailed evidence base compilation will need to be carried out by SODC or jointly depending on the form of the agreement with the Government Office mentioned above.

#### **Land at Summertown**

- 9.71 The third area of Safeguarded Land identified in the Preferred Options document was at Summertown. This land totals adjoins Summer Fields School and totals about 17 ha, of which around 8 ha is currently occupied by protected open space (school playing fields) and a small area of flood plain in the south eastern corner. Some of the site is in agricultural use.
- 9.72 The land is next to a residential area and close to Summertown District centre. It would be a sustainable location for residential development, within easy walking distance of existing services and with good access to public transport and cycle networks. However, it is in an environmentally sensitive location adjoining the Cherwell Valley.
- 9.73 The consultants who produced A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting considered the Safeguarded land as part of Summertown, which they considered to have a moderate landscape quality. The consultants noted: *"the built area of the North Oxford River Terrace is at its narrowest point allowing the open fields of the River Terrace either side to have an influence on the character of the area. There is also a relatively large area of greenspace within the townscape fabric in the form of front and back gardens, recreation grounds and school grounds."*<sup>32</sup>
- 9.74 An ecological report has been undertaken for the Safeguarded Land, comprising a Phase 1 habitat survey, a Phase 2 botanical surveys and a breeding bird survey. These surveys have identified some features within the site, particularly the hedges and bands of planted trees, which provide shelter

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<sup>32</sup> A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting, (Land Use Consultants, March 2002), page 139

and protection to many species. These features would merit retention and enhancement as part of any development. The surveys found that much of the site is of relatively low value from an ecological point of view, although it is recommended that the strip of land adjacent to the River Cherwell (a wildlife corridor) should be excluded from any development. Further survey work would be needed to establish whether certain protected species are present, and the extent to which they might be affected by development.

9.75 The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for the whole of the city (June 2008) includes an initial analysis and mapping of the Summertown land, although a site specific Flood Risk Assessment would be needed at a later stage should the site be brought forward for development. The SFRA shows that the south east corner of the site, equating to around 0.8 hectares, is located within Flood Zone 3b (functional floodplain), and similar sized areas of the site are within Flood Zone 3a and Flood Zone 2. Approximately 90% of the site is in Flood Zone 1. The SFRA notes that through careful planning of the site it may be possible to avoid development within flood risk areas altogether.<sup>33</sup>

9.76 It is considered that there would be an opportunity to provide more public open space as part of any development in this area. This could include improving footpath links and bridges to give access to the Cherwell Valley, as well as providing formal open space within any development, which could include children's play provision. Development could also potentially provide an opportunity to improve access and space for Cherwell School. Vehicular access would be most suitable from Marston Ferry Road. A new pedestrian/cycle link could be formed to the heart of the Summertown District centre, through the Diamond Place car park site.

9.77 At preferred options stage, the City Council consulted on its preferred option of residential development on the site, together with the alternative option of continuing to safeguard the land during the Core Strategy period. The site was not considered suitable for employment use given the evaluation carried out for the Employment Land Study, which concluded: *"limited accessibility, and proximity to a range of sensitive uses would constrain the range of potential employment uses appropriate for this site"*.<sup>34</sup>

9.78 A majority of respondents to the questionnaires opposed the preferred option, with 45% strongly disagreeing and a further 13% disagreeing with it. Just over a quarter of respondents (27%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the preferred option. Likewise, a clear majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the alternative option. The strength of feeling locally

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<sup>33</sup> Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Oxford City: Final Report, (Atkins, June 2008), pages 27-28

<sup>34</sup> Oxford Employment Land Study Appendices, (Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, March 2006), Appendix 12

against development on the Safeguarded Land was emphasised at a public meeting during the consultation period, attended by around 100 residents.

- 9.79 Notwithstanding local opposition and the environmental sensitivity of its location adjoining the Cherwell Valley, the City Council considers that a carefully designed and landscaped residential development could be accommodated on this site without fundamentally compromising the character of the area. The SHLAA assesses the site as suitable for housing and developable.
- 9.80 Whilst the main landowners (Summer Fields School and Wadham College) indicated that they supported the preferred option for residential development, they added that the development capacity assumed in the draft SHLAA (500 dwellings) did not take into account their operational needs in providing sport and recreation opportunities for their pupils and students. In light of these comments and subsequent discussions, the capacity of the site in the SHLAA has been downgraded to 200 dwellings. If the landowners were to no longer require either the whole site or a substantive part of it at some point in the future, then the original estimate of 500 dwellings may become realistic again.
- 9.81 In view of doubts over deliverability, the Further Preferred Options document indicated that the land at Summertown was likely to be proposed as a contingency site for residential development, which would mean the site being released only if it was found in future that housing development elsewhere in Oxford could not meet adopted housing targets. The main landowners supported this approach, stating in their response that release of the land for development would be subject to Summer Fields School and Wadham College still being able to meet their operational requirements, as assessed at the appropriate time.
- 9.82 In order to clarify the position prior to finalising the Core Strategy, the City Council met with the landowners in June 2008. This included St John's College, who own the allotments adjacent to the Safeguarded Land. At that meeting, the main landowners indicated that, having given the matter due consideration, they had concluded that the land was still required for operational purposes and this was anticipated to be the case for the foreseeable future. They added that it was not possible for them to state with certainty that this would remain the position throughout the Core Strategy period.
- 9.83 In light of these circumstances, Policy CS10 in the Proposed Submission document identifies the land as having potential to meet longer-term residential development needs, and seeks to prevent any other development that prejudices this potential. It does not, however, allocate the site for residential development. Should the landowners no longer require a substantive part of

the site for operational purposes, then its development would be dependent on satisfying Policy CS3.

## 10 Conclusions

- 10.1 This paper demonstrates how the spatial strategy will deliver the overall vision that Oxford will be a world-class city for everyone. It outlines why Oxford is an inherently sustainable location for growth and why the Core Strategy takes a positive approach to growth by identifying strategic locations for development to meet the city's housing, employment and other development needs.
- 10.2 The paper highlights how the spatial strategy seeks to build on the existing strengths of Oxford's economy and to ensure that all Oxford's communities benefit from the city's prosperity by promoting regeneration in areas of greatest need. It also highlights how the spatial strategy seeks to do this in a way that reduces the need to travel, makes full and efficient use of previously developed land, and conserves and enhances Oxford's outstanding built and natural environment.
- 10.3 The spatial strategy has evolved during the preparation of the Core Strategy to reflect changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy, additions to the evidence base and to take account of public and stakeholder opinion as far as possible. The paper demonstrates that the spatial strategy is consistent with national policy and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, while also being unique to Oxford and appropriate to the city's particular circumstances.

## Appendix 1: Estimated increase in Oxford's workforce and employment

This note provides some details about the planned growth in Oxford's workforce and jobs during the Core Strategy period. It is acknowledged that this is a broad brush analysis, which does not attempt to break down data on population growth or household size to ward level for instance, but it provides a basis upon which to compare the proposed employment growth figures with the housing delivery figures.

### Workforce growth

1. The 2001 census indicated that there were 63,265 economically active persons in Oxford and 51,732 households. This is a ratio of 1.22 economically active persons per dwelling. If such a ratio continued in future, this would result in:

8,000 additional dwellings x 1.22 = **9,760** additional economically active persons

Taking account of the proposed South Oxford Strategic Development Area (SDA):

12,000 additional dwellings x 1.22 = **14,640** additional economically active persons

2. Another way of estimating the potential increase in Oxford's workforce is by using the most up-to-date population and labour supply data as a base point. Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for 2006 indicated for Oxford<sup>35</sup>:

Total population – 149,100

Working age population – 107,300

Economically active persons – 79,900

This equates to 53.6% of the total population being economically active. The South East Plan seeks to increase economic activity rates in the sub-region, and particularly in Oxford, but given the considerable uncertainty that exists in this area, for the purposes of this calculation the same proportion of economic activity rates has been applied to future population increases.

Research undertaken for the City Council by Fordham Research forecast that the average household size in Oxford will drop from 2.63 in 2006 to 2.38 in 2026.<sup>36</sup> This is in line with predicted national trends.

If 2.38 were assumed to be the average household size in Oxford in 2026, then the increase in economically active residents arising from the Core Strategy housing target would be:

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<sup>35</sup> Labour Market Profile: Oxford, Office for National Statistics (see [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk))

<sup>36</sup> Balance of Dwellings Study: Final Report, (Fordham Research, July 2007), paras 8.19-8.20

8,000 additional dwellings x 2.38 persons = 19,040 x 53.6% economic activity rate = **10,205** additional economically active persons

Taking account of the proposed South Oxford SDA:

12,000 additional dwellings x 2.38 persons = 28,560 x 53.6% economic activity rate = **15,308** additional economically active persons

The above analysis shows that 8,000 additional dwellings within Oxford by 2026 would be likely to generate an additional potential workforce in the region of **9,760 – 10,205**, depending on which method of calculation is used. It should be noted that 8,000 is a minimum target for additional housing and actual provision may therefore exceed this figure, which would obviously have knock-on implications for the potential additional workforce.

If we take into account the proposed South Oxford SDA, which was recommended by the Examination-in-Public Panel amongst other reasons to help address the housing-employment imbalance in Oxford, then the additional potential workforce available to Oxford's economy is likely to be in the region of **14,640 – 15,308**.

### **Employment growth**

1. The Core Strategy proposes a 'managed growth' approach to economic development, with the main land allocation at Pear Tree/Northern Gateway, some employment growth in the City and district centres and through the protection and modernisation of key employment sites. This managed growth approach accords with option 3 in the Employment Land Study 2006 (allocate one Reserve Site), which forecast that it would generate a gross increase of jobs of around **4,500**. However, the actual increase in employment depends to a large extent on the precise mix of uses and the density of development at the Northern Gateway strategic site, which will be determined through the Area Action Plan for this area. This figure also excludes existing commitments and other sources of employment growth, such as that arising from retail development.
2. A more detailed assessment of the potential employment growth over the period April 2007-March 2026 has therefore been carried out, which is summarised below. This includes existing commitments from the Local Plan, and provides lower and upper employment growth estimates for the main locations as follows. Again the figures will be heavily influenced by the precise mix of uses and the density of development at the Northern Gateway strategic site, as well as by the nature of any modernisation that may occur on existing key employment sites.

Type of development	Location	Lower jobs growth estimate 2007-2016	Upper jobs growth estimate 2007-2016	Lower jobs growth estimate 2007-2026	Upper jobs growth estimate 2007-2026
B1 committed	Oxford Business Park (Lye Valley)	1,450	1,450	1,450	1,450
B1 committed	Oxford Science Park/Littlemore Park/Minchery Farm (Littlemore)	1,150	1,150	1,150	1,150
B1 committed	Land rear of Oxford Retail Park (Blackbird Leys)	50	50	50	50
B1, B2, B8 modernisation of key protected site	County Trading Estate & Horspath Industrial Estate (Lye Valley)	85	750	235	835
B1, B2, B8 modernisation of key protected site	Harrow Road Industrial Estate & Nuffield Industrial Estate	85	750	235	835
B1, B2, B8 modernisation of key protected site	Osney Mead Industrial Estate (Jericho & Osney)	40	350	40	390
B1, B2, B8 modernisation of key protected site	Jordan Hill Business Park (Wolvercote)	40	350	40	390
Core Strategy strategic site	Northern Gateway	1,250	1,500	3,150	3,750
Core Strategy strategic site	West End	800	800	800	800
Retail and services	Westgate centre/Queen Street (City centre)	2,100	2,100	2,250	2,250
Retail and services	Rest of City centre	90	150	440	500
Retail and services	Blackbird Leys District centre	55	100	55	100
Retail and services	Cowley Primary District centre	120	200	370	700

Retail and services	Summertown District centre	35	50	35	50
<b>Total 'B' class jobs, excluding commitments</b>		<b>2,300</b>	<b>4,500</b>	<b>4,500</b>	<b>7,000</b>
<b>Total all jobs</b>		<b>7,350</b>	<b>9,750</b>	<b>10,300</b>	<b>13,250</b>

The above figures do not include employment growth at the universities and hospitals since a recent study undertaken for the City Council by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners found that *“the growth expectations of the higher education and health sectors do not appear to require any significant increase in labour requirements”*.<sup>37</sup> This situation could change during the Core Strategy period depending on a number of factors that are difficult to predict, such as possible changes to funding arrangements or Government policy.

- It should also be noted that forecasts of employment growth for a range of sectors in Oxford up to 2021 were prepared for the City Council by Cambridge Econometrics. These forecasts reflect 'business as usual' assumptions that past economic and employment trends, and relationships between the local area and the region with regard to outputs in different economic sectors, will continue in the future. The results showed that future job growth in Oxford would be almost entirely in the office (B1) based sector, with only modest growth in distribution and a significant decline in manufacturing employment. The net result being an estimated growth of **10,910 (Class B) jobs to 2021**, which is equivalent to some 11% of current employment in the city. This would amount to some **7,500 jobs to 2016**. These forecasts are, however, entirely trend-based and take no account of constraints in labour or land supply in Oxford.

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<sup>37</sup> The Economic Role of the Higher Education, Health and Retail sectors in the Oxford Economy, (Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, March 2008), para 8.9