

Housing Types and Sizes

This topic addresses:

SA Objective:

(3) To meet local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home

SEA Theme: Population; Material assets

Introduction

The Local Plan will need to consider the overall number of homes delivered in Oxford, but it will also need to consider the specific housing needs of different types of households for example the type of home, size, and features such as accessibility.

People have different needs in terms of the types and sizes of homes that are needed to suit their lifestyles and different stages of life. The Local Plan will need to respond to the range of needs as well as adding to the choice available to people.

This Background Paper will consider these issues including:

- Different types of housing (flats, houses, shared houses or 'houses of multiple occupation', student accommodation);
- Housing for older persons and other specialist needs, such as residential moorings and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation;
- Tenure (private/market homes, affordable)
- Sizes of homes (number of bedrooms, and internal space standards)

The general need and supply of housing student accommodation is covered in subsequent papers. There is also a paper which discusses the affordability issues linked to housing in Oxford.

Plans, Policies and Programmes

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) asks local councils to plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends and the needs of different groups in the community, including older and disabled people.

The key sections of the NPPF are in Section 6, **Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes (paragraphs 47 to 53)** and Para 159 within the Plan-making evidence base section. Paragraph 50 of the NPPF sets out that local planning authorities should identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand:

“To deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, local planning authorities should:

- *plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the **needs of different groups in the community (such as, but not limited to, families with children, older people, people with disabilities, service families and people wishing to build their own homes)**;*
- *identify the **size, type, tenure and range of housing** that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand; and*
- *where they have identified that affordable housing is needed, set policies for meeting this need on site, unless off-site provision or a financial contribution of broadly equivalent value can be robustly justified (for example to improve or make more effective use of the existing housing stock) and the agreed approach contributes to the objective of **creating mixed and balanced communities**. Such policies should be sufficiently flexible to take account of changing market conditions over time.”*

With regards to accessibility and wheelchair housing standards, the NPPF is clear that local planning authorities should plan to create safe, accessible environments and promote inclusion and community cohesion. This includes buildings and their surrounding spaces. Local planning authorities should take account of evidence that demonstrates a clear need for housing for people with specific housing needs and plan to meet this need¹.

Housing and Planning Act 2016

The changes introduced as a result of the Housing and Planning Act are likely to affect the types and sizes of new housing in Oxford, especially affordable housing, although the full impacts are not known at this stage. Potential changes which might influence size and types of homes (market and affordable homes) include:

- Introduction of discounted Starter Homes as part of S106 agreements
- Annual payments by local authorities for the highest value council homes (High Value Property Void levy)
- Caps on Local Housing Allowance/annual rent increases for social rent providers
- Extension of voluntary right to buy for social rent tenants.

Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (first published March 2012, updated August 2015)

This document sets out how local planning authorities should make provision for traveller sites through assessment of need which should be met through the allocation of sites. Access to education, health, welfare and employment infrastructure from sites is crucial, whilst protecting amenity. It sets out a number of key processes that should be undertaken in assessing need, including traveller community liaison and co-operation.

Planning for traveller sites should be on a similar basis to housing in general, by identifying a five year supply of sites to meet the identified needs-based plot and pitches target; and broad locations for years 6 to 10 and 11 to 15. Criteria should guide allocations where there is an identified need and criteria-based policies for decisions on applications as they arise.

¹ Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 56-005-20150327

National Optional Technical Housing Standards (2015)

In 2015 the Government introduced new national optional technical housing standards, intended to streamline and simplify the various standards for housing developments, replacing the Code for Sustainable Homes and other guidance. There is now a suite of technical housing standards, including nationally-described space standards².

Local planning authorities have the option to set additional technical requirements, exceeding the minimum standards required by Building Regulations in respect of access, water, and space standards, where justified and appropriate. This must include considering the impact on viability from any additional requirements. Where a local authority wishes to require an internal space standard, it should only be done so in the Local Plan and it justified taking into account need, viability, and transition time for developers to factor the revised standards into land acquisitions³.

Oxford City Council Housing Strategy 2015 - 2018

Oxford City Council's Housing Strategy 2015-2018 includes objectives to meet the housing needs of vulnerable groups, to support growth of a balanced housing market, and to support sustainable communities.

There are around 18,000 people (12.4% of the population) in Oxford with a long term health problem or disability⁴. Some of those will need specialist adaptations to their homes, such as level access or wheelchair accessibility. Until recently, requirements to build new properties to Lifetime Homes standards helped to ensure that properties could be adapted to meet changing needs. This has now been superseded by the national technical housing standards.

Oxford City Council Review of Older Persons Accommodation (2016)

The City Council's Housing Strategy 2015-2018 included an action to undertake a review of accommodation for older people in Oxford. Public consultation was undertaken and a review report was published in February 2016⁵. The review considers the need/demand and supply of sheltered and other housing options for older people aged 55+ in Oxford alongside the competing pressures of: high housing costs; high levels of general housing demand; reduced budgets (County Council and Oxford City Council) and a complex and changing legislative and policy framework (the former Housing and Planning Bill, and Care Act 2014).

City Council HMO licensing strategy (2015)

Oxford has the 14th highest number of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in England and Wales. Only the metropolitan and unitary authorities and some London boroughs contain more. This means that they form an unusually high percentage of homes in the city: an estimated 1 in 5 of the resident population live in an HMO.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-housing-standards-nationally-described-space-standard>

³ NPPG Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 56-018-20150327 and Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 56-020-20150327 Revision date: 27 03 2015

⁴ Oxford Housing Strategy 2015-2018

⁵

<http://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/documents/s28908/Appendix%201%20Review%20of%20Older%20Persons%20Accommodation%20V4.pdf>

High demand for properties in Oxford means that some landlords offer lower quality properties because they can still be confident of finding tenants. In 2005 the Council carried out a survey and found that HMOs provided the poorest homes in the city and that 70% were unsafe to live in. HMOs also generate around 2,000 service requests/complaints a year associated with issues that affect the neighbourhood such as rubbish and anti-social behaviour.

In response to this the Council now requires landlords for all HMO properties to obtain an annual licence to ensure that minimum standards are being adhered to. Requiring a licence is different to most parts of England and reflects the uniquely high concentrations of HMO properties in Oxford.

Current situation

Housing mix (types and sizes)

Generally the mix of dwelling sizes in Oxford differs from the surrounding more rural areas. The mix in Oxford tends to be higher density development and typically smaller homes, with a higher than average proportion of 1 and 2 bed properties at 43%, compared to 34% across the Oxfordshire Housing Market Area (HMA), or 38% across the South East⁶.

It was identified that this was leading to a mismatch between need and supply, so the City Council adopted planning policies to steer the mix of sizes in developments, the Balance of Dwellings Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2008). Currently the SPD sets out a prescribed mix of dwelling sizes for developments depending on their location and scale. The mix varies for different parts of the City but generally the emphasis is towards 3-bed units, to address the identified need for family dwellings. Housing mix was also considered in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (see Figures 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 below) which suggested a mix not dis-similar from the ranges in the SPD and emphasises the need for 3-bedroom dwellings particularly in market housing.

Figure 6.3.1 Dwelling size mix (market)

Sub-area	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4+ bedrooms
Cherwell	6.2%	23.1%	46.2%	24.6%
Oxford	10.7%	24.9%	38.9%	25.5%
South Oxfordshire	5.7%	26.7%	43.4%	24.2%
Vale of White Horse	5.9%	21.7%	42.6%	29.8%
West Oxfordshire	4.8%	27.9%	43.4%	23.9%
OXFORDSHIRE	7.0%	24.4%	42.9%	25.7%

Source: Housing Market Model

Extract from SHMA Table 65, Estimated dwelling requirement by number of bedrooms (2011-2031) market sector

⁶ SHMA para 2.20

Figure 6.3.2 Dwelling size mix (affordable)

Sub-area	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4+ bedrooms
Cherwell	28.3%	31.0%	36.9%	3.7%
Oxford	29.0%	32.7%	32.2%	6.1%
South Oxfordshire	32.6%	35.5%	29.3%	2.7%
Vale of White Horse	27.3%	35.1%	33.6%	3.9%
West Oxfordshire	23.3%	43.7%	30.4%	2.6%
OXFORDSHIRE	28.4%	34.7%	32.7%	4.3%

Source: Housing Market Model

Extract from Table 66, Estimated dwelling requirement by number of bedrooms (2011-2031) affordable sector

As well as the number of bedrooms, it is also important that new homes are sized appropriately and that internal spaces are usable and accessible. Minimum standards are now generally set nationally⁷ and apply to new build properties as well as conversions or sub-divisions of existing properties into flats or smaller dwellings as is often the case in Oxford. The exception to this is where conversions are carried out under permitted development rights through a ‘prior approval’; In such instances the local authority has no power to seek particular standards or conditions so the space standards do not apply to those types of developments. The standards set a minimum floorspace required according to the number of people and number of storeys, as well as a requirement for built-in storage.

Housing mix (tenure)

The proportion of Oxford households who own their own home has been declining in recent years, so has the proportion of people who live in social rented properties. In the meantime the proportion of households living in private rented homes has almost doubled.

In 2011 more households rented than owned their home, with nearly 16,000 households renting their home in the private sector by 2011. Whilst this general trend is not dissimilar to the rest of the country, the percentages in Oxford are still much higher than elsewhere. In 2011 28% of households in Oxford rented their home, which is much higher than the 17% national average, and 47% owner occupation was much lower than the 64% national average. 21% of households lived in socially rented homes.

⁷ Technical housing standards – national described space standard (DCLG, March 2015)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524531/160519_Nationally_Described_Space_Standard_Final_Web_version.pdf

Figure 6.3.3 Housing tenure of Oxford households 1981 - 2011

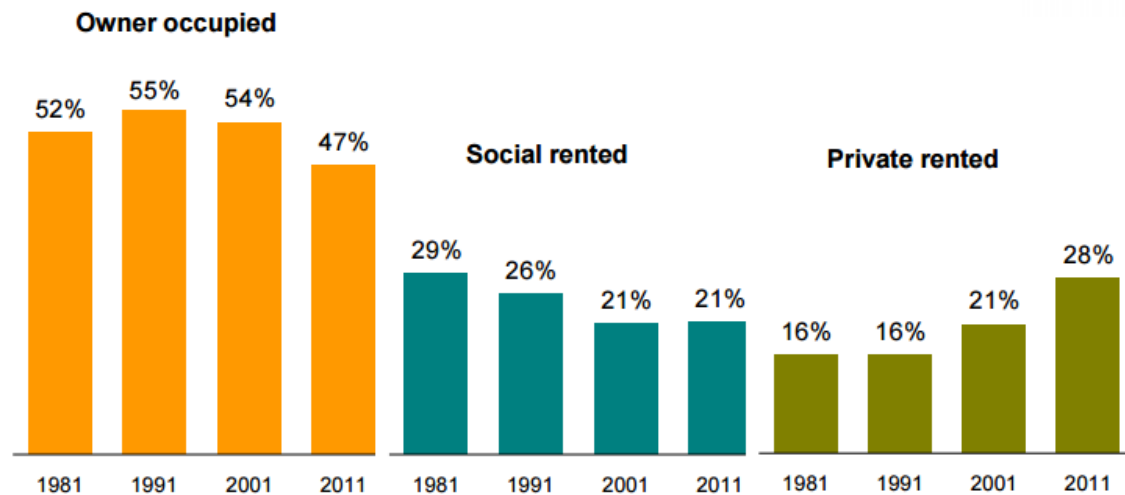
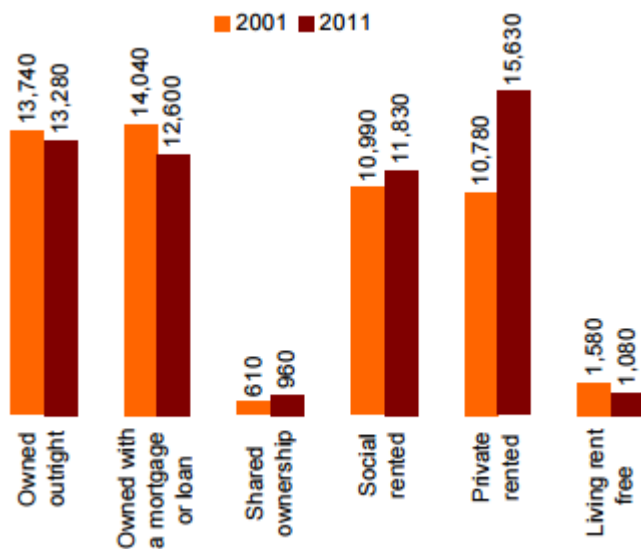


Figure 6.3.4 Households by housing tenure, 2001 to 2011



Source of both tables, 2011 Census data

Key worker housing

Key employment sectors in Oxford are already facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff as a result of the lack of affordable housing. Many of these groups of workers may not qualify for social rent but are classed as ‘key workers’⁸ who would qualify for intermediate housing options such as shared ownership if there were properties available.

With such high house prices and private rents in Oxford, it means that even government schemes designed to assist such households with house buying such as the 20% first time buyer’s discount, the proposed ‘Starter Homes’ initiative, and extended Right to Buy, would still be far out of reach for

⁸ Defined in Sites and Housing Plan A2.30 as including NHS staff, teachers in state schools, academic staff at the Universities, police officers, and specified occupations within local authorities.

many key workers, and even further out of reach for those seeking to move on from social rented tenures⁹.

The City Council already offers key worker support through Oxfordshire Homechoice¹⁰, and has further identified it as a priority¹¹ to work with partners to develop a greater range of housing options, such as co-housing, shared ownership schemes, and housing for key workers including a continuation of the equity loan scheme for teachers. There may also be alternative delivery models to reflect the changing funding available to local authorities and the scarcity of land in Oxford. For example there may be opportunities for some employers, as landowners, to deliver key worker housing in addition to the usual developer contributions required.

Houses of Multiple Occupation

Oxford already has an unusually high percentage of HMOs. With an estimated 20% of the population living in an HMO they play an important role in meeting housing needs in Oxford. For many people including young professionals, they offer a more affordable solution than renting individually or buying a property where prices are so high in Oxford. The City Council through its licencing scheme already has a very proactive approach to ensuring that these properties are well-managed both in terms of the tenants and the potential impacts on surrounding communities¹².

Continuing trends of family-sized dwellings being converted into HMOs also adds pressure to the supply of 3-4 bedroom homes available for families across Oxford.

Housing for older people

Whilst Oxford's population is relatively young compared to its neighbouring districts, people are living much longer and overall it is expected that over the Plan period there will be an increase in the number of older people resident in the City.

'Older persons housing' covers a range of housing types, such as: designated 55+ older person accommodation, sheltered housing (council or registered provider), extra care housing, residential care and nursing homes, and general needs housing with adaptations¹³.

Suitable accommodation plays an important role in helping older people to live independently for longer, but the housing needs and aspirations of older people can vary significantly depending on age, health, finances, transport needs, and availability of support from family or other networks. Providing suitable housing can also help to reduce under-occupancy and free up family-sized homes for those that need the larger properties.

The Oxford City Council Review of Older Persons Accommodation (2016) identifies that there is a good range of sheltered and designated 55+ accommodations in Oxford, and even potentially an

⁹ Starter Homes: Will they be affordable (Shelter, 2015)

https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1183790/Starter_Homes_FINAL_w_Appendix_v2.pdf; and http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7694909/NEWS

¹⁰ <https://www.oxfordcitycbl.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/5321.aspx>

¹¹ Oxford City Council Corporate Plan 2016

¹² www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20113/houses_in_multiple_occupation/374/houses_in_multiple_occupation_background

¹³ Oxford City Council Older Persons Accommodation Review 2016

over-provision of sheltered and designated 55+ accommodations in Oxford with relatively low take-up and some schemes unpopular due to the need for refurbishment/modernisation. The need/demand for sheltered schemes and Extra Care Housing (ECH) appears to be generally low, with small waiting lists for ECH in Oxford and sheltered housing carrying voids at times and current supply meeting demands. The 75+ age group is most likely to need access to Sheltered and ECH. ECH is also provided on a county-wide basis and Oxfordshire County Council records show over 700 units across the county, some of which could help meet Oxford needs.

The review notes that addressing future need is about more than simply building new accommodation but will be about remodelling of existing schemes, changes to the Council allocation policy and which groups it prioritises for certain properties. It is also important to ensure appropriate infrastructure to support people alongside the homes, especially with local authority budget cuts impacting on day centres, transport, and warden visits.

Housing for other specialist needs

Gypsy, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople also have specific housing needs to consider. Whilst there are several sites very close to the edge of Oxford, there are currently no pitches or plots (authorised or unauthorised) within Oxford. There are some people from the Gypsy & Traveller community living in 'bricks and mortar' homes within Oxford but it has not been identified that they wish to move to caravans. It is not anticipated that there will be much change in the provision for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation in Oxford during the Plan period because no new need has been identified in recent assessments.

Residential moorings are another element of housing in Oxford along the canals, with around 60 permanent authorised moorings¹⁴. Much of the boat-dwelling community in Oxford relies on the existence of residential moorings, which are defined as having planning permission for long-term mooring in a fixed location, and for occupation as a household's sole or main residence. There is also a need to balance provision of permanent residential moorings with short-stay visitor moorings which are important in promoting tourism.

Likely trends without a new Local Plan

Housing Mix (types and sizes)

Despite the identified need for more family-sized dwellings, in recent years there has generally been a trend towards provision of smaller dwellings and flats, in response to market factors (such as developer profit) and high land values, which mean that developers may seek to maximise the number of units on a site.

Another significant factor that influences the type and size of dwellings delivered is that many developments in Oxford are conversions and garden land developments which lend themselves towards smaller-sized residential units. In 2014/15 nearly 80% of new homes were 1 or 2 bedroom properties. Even with current policies that seek to steer the housing mix¹⁵ in place, many developments either fall below the Balance of Dwellings policy threshold (the policy only applies to

¹⁴ Jericho Wharf Trust Survey of Residential Boaters, 2012

¹⁵ Annual Monitoring Report 2014/15, Indicator 16 Mix of Housing

developments of 4 or more dwellings,) or are exempt from the current policies because they are developed under Permitted Development Rights or Prior Approval applications. Larger sites such as Barton Park therefore remain important in helping to deliver significant numbers of larger properties for families.

With very few large sites to accommodate a mix of sizes, and future delivery likely to be reliant on urban renewal and brownfield infill sites this trend is likely to continue.

Housing mix (tenure)

Whilst the proportion of people who live in social rented property has been declining, the proportion of households living in private rented homes has been increasing, with more people in Oxford now living in privately rented homes than owner-occupied. As housing affordability looks likely to continue to worsen this trend looks set to continue.

Planning policies in recent years¹⁶ have prioritised social rent tenures (of the 50% affordable housing provision, policy has sought 80% social rent and 20% intermediate forms of affordable housing). This approach is facing challenges in the light of changes to national policy away from social rent tenures. For example the Housing & Planning Act introduces measures such as the requirement for Starter Homes, and this coupled with welfare reform changes which cap rental incomes and housing benefit, and increased Right to Buy, then it will be increasingly challenging to deliver and retain social rent tenure properties in Oxford.

The Local Housing Company set up by the City Council in 2016 will help with direct delivery of affordable homes but it is too early to determine yet what tenure those would be.

Key worker housing

It is reported that lack of access to housing is already directly impacting on key local employers' ability to attract or retain workers for key services and economic sectors including the NHS and state schools. Without intervention this situation is likely to continue and may worsen.

Government schemes of recent years designed to assist key workers and other households in the intermediate sector with house buying, tend to have had very limited effect in Oxford because the prices are so high that even discounted or shared ownership homes are still far out of reach for many key workers.

There may be alternative delivery models, for example there may be opportunities for some employers, particularly those who are also landowners, to deliver key worker housing directly, for staff to either rent or purchase at subsidised rates.

Houses of Multiple Occupation

Shared properties can help to meet housing needs, although the conversion of family homes to HMOs can also lead to a shortfall in family accommodation. In 2014/15 applications were approved

¹⁶ Core Strategy and Sites and Housing Plan

for 30 new HMOs across Oxford. In the context of increasing house prices, this trend is likely to continue to increase as more people turn to this as a more affordable way to live in Oxford.

Housing for older people

Whilst the increase in the older population in Oxford is not expected to be as high as that estimated for the other Oxfordshire districts, it is likely to affect the demand for and delivery of services, including housing, and care and support¹⁷. The SHMA considers the expected increase in the older person population (Table 69 of SHMA) and anticipates that it might rise to 36% in Oxford by 2031.

Housing for other specialist needs

It is not anticipated that there will be much change in the provision for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation in Oxford during the Plan period because no new need has been identified in recent assessments. There are no indications that this situation is likely to change but will continue to be monitored through the bi-annual caravan counts and updates to the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

No specific need has been identified to increase the provision of residential moorings.

Sustainability/Plan Issues

- There may be a tension between maximising the number of dwellings on sites and providing dwellings in a range of sizes to meet different needs.
- Provision of family-sized homes is increasingly challenging. With such high land values and competition from HMOs, developers often seek to maximise the numbers of units on sites.
- Affordability issues have led to more people living in Houses of Multiple Occupation in recent years, this looks likely to continue.

¹⁷ Oxford City Council Older Persons Accommodation Review 2016