

# Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options

## Housing Mix background paper

### 1. Introduction

Oxford has acute housing pressures that need to be addressed. The city has an urgent need for more housing, and it is widely recognised that demand continues to outstrip supply. However, it is not only delivering enough housing that is important; specific needs also need to be considered and met as far as possible. Particular groups have particular housing needs, including students, those who need extra care, gypsy, traveller and boaters. In addition, the mix of housing sizes also needs to be considered, as some will need smaller (1-bed) units and others larger homes to accommodate a large family. How to manage particular housing types such as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) is also important.

### 2. Context including feedback from Issues consultation

#### 2.1 Summary of 2021 Issues Consultation

The Council published its initial issues consultation for the new Local Plan in the summer of 2021 and as part of the consultation we included topic papers which addressed the issue of housing need and supply, as well as housing affordability. The paper set out the relevant national, regional and local policy context for this topic, then went on to set out the key issues of relevance to the city, before highlighting some potential approaches that could be pursued in developing new policies. This paper should be considered as a continuation of that topic paper. As such, other than the summary below, it does not repeat content here.

The 2021 topic paper set out the requirement of the NPPF to identify and provide for housing need. It noted that the standard method is to be used to calculate housing requirements unless evidence suggests a need for a different approach. Circumstances in Oxfordshire may justify consideration of an alternative approach. The Inspector's Report into the Oxford Local Plan 2036 was quoted, which stated that *'Oxford stands out among cities as having unusual housing problems which point towards a higher level of housing need than that derived from the standard method calculation.'* The Paper also recognised that Affordable Housing need remains significant, and the Housing Need and Supply Topic Paper set out that there are currently 2,852 households on the housing register as of January 2021. The Barriers to Housing and Services Indices of Multiple Deprivation shows a significant variation across the city. The 2017 Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment showed no current or future need for additional pitches to 2036.

The paper set out a number of options that we might want to consider as we develop options for new policies including:

- Mix of unit sizes (i.e., Numbers of bedrooms)
- Requirement for accessible homes

- Housing to meet needs of particular groups, e.g., students, gypsy and travellers

## **2.2 Feedback received from the 2021 Issues Consultation**

Feedback from the summer consultation was varied, with a wide variety of other comments covering a broad range of issues and concerns including:

### Student accommodation

- Some thought the growth of students has worsened the housing crisis;
- It was commented that excluding research students from the thresholds of those who could be living outside of university-provided accommodation worsened the conflict with market housing;
- It was noted that student accommodation still places heavy demands on local services like doctors;
- Some said student accommodation is important but there is too much, others just said there is too much, or too much in particular areas. Some thought there should be a cap on the number of students in the city;
- The transient population of students destroys communities;
- Housing students should be part of an overall plan to have a vibrant city that would include students, families, retirees, young adults, key workers, etc. - it leads to the diversity that is a city;
- Some said the universities have a responsibility to house their students and supported that they are building more because it takes pressure off other rentals;
- It should be possible increase the capacity of student accommodation or build new facilities on it.

### HMOs, subdivision of housing and housing mix

- It was commented that the number of HMOs in East Oxford threatened achieving a safe and diverse community;
- Residential sub-divisions can make housing affordable by reducing the unit cost and meet the housing needs of the elderly (the only way to meet housing needs within carbon budgets is by enabling the heating and insulation of space and fabric being occupied and reducing the need for new build);
- It was noted that a big proportion of adults live alone or live alone in shared housing shared with other households. Equating 'families' with 'worthwhile people' should be avoided, as people who live in all kinds of households have valuable contributions to make to society.

### Boat dwellers

- Need to consider adaptation measures including nature-based solutions;
- The Boat Dweller Accommodations Needs Assessment for Oxford suggests the need for 41 new residential moorings. The Canal and Rivers Trust's mooring policies do not now support online residential moorings (although there are some historic online residential moorings in Oxford by Hythe Road Bridge and at the Agenda 21 moorings). Moorings in basins, laybys and offline marinas would be within the scope of the Trust's mooring policies and may be possible subject to meeting the relevant criteria. However, there are few (if any) sites on the Oxford Canal in Oxford that

would be suitable for residential moorings. One possible site that has been looked at previously is on Castle Mill Stream (adjacent to the Oxford Canal). The provision of any new residential moorings should consider the need to future proof them for climate change and to reduce emissions that contribute to poor air quality, in particular ensure that shore-based power is available for any new residential moorings.

#### Elderly persons accommodation

- There should be good accommodation for retirement- private and public. The availability at the moment is very poor or too expensive;
- Elderly people stay in houses that are too large because they don't want to change locality. Build for older people in good quality developments. The right type of housing is needed so people could down-size locally.

### **2.3 Updates to national/ local policy since 2021 Issues Consultation**

Nothing to update.

## **3. How are current Local Plan 2036 policies performing?**

### **3.1 Analysis from 2020/21 Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)**

#### **Student accommodation**

In the 2020/21 monitoring year 712 (net) units of student accommodation were completed in Oxford. Using the national ratio of 2.5 student rooms being equivalent to one dwelling, this equated to 285 C3 equivalent dwellings to Oxford's housing market

#### **Care Homes**

In 2020/21 the only completed care home development was the loss of an 11-bed care home which was the subject of an approved planning application that permitted a change of use from use class C2 to a single dwelling, use class C3. Using the national ratio this equated to a loss of 6 C3 equivalent dwellings to Oxford's housing market. Over the 2020/21 monitoring period there were no applications submitted for older persons or specialist / supported living accommodation.

#### **Community-led housing**

Community-led housing is a key element of the government's agenda to increase supply and tackle the housing crisis. Community-led housing projects can include both group self-build and co-housing. Community-led housing requires meaningful community engagement throughout the process, with the local community group or organisation ultimately owning or managing the homes to benefit the local area or community group. The approach of the current Local Plan 2036 Policy H7 is to help encourage sufficient self-build and custom housebuilding to come forward to meet demand, to support community-led housing, and to guide applications that come forward for these housing types. Over the 2020/21 monitoring period, the Council did not receive or approve any applications for community-led housing.

#### **Self-build housing**

Over the 2020/21 monitoring year there was an increase of 25 individuals on the Oxford Self and Custom Build Register. Overall, there has been an increase of just over a third in the total number of plots required. The number of associations of individuals on the Oxford Self and Custom Build Register Total number of plots required 126 individuals 1 Association(s) (20 association members) in April 2022.

### **Residential moorings**

Local Plan policy H13 sets out criteria against which potential new residential boat moorings will be considered. Over the 2020/21 monitoring period, one application was received which involved residential moorings. This application was for a Certificate of Lawfulness for a maximum of 5 boats moored on the Eastern bank of Castle Mill Stream as permanent residential moorings (ref. 20/02292/CEU).

### **3.2 Summary of key feedback from DM and Specialist discussions**

Discussions with members of the development management team, who have experience of applying the existing policies, as well as specialists within the housing team of the City Council, have highlighted several wider issues for the new Local Plan to address including:

- The housing list shows the greatest need currently is for 1 and 2 bed affordable units.
- There is generally less interest for shared ownership 1 bed units than other sizes.
- There does need to be a range of sizes coming forward
- There has been an increase in care homes coming forward since the requirement for affordable housing was removed, so opportunities for affordable housing are being missed.
- There are a predominance of flatted schemes coming forward which are generally 1 and 2 bed.
- Larger units tend to be houses and these are coming forward most on edge of city schemes.

## **4. What does all this mean?**

It is clear that a range of types and sizes of accommodation are required to meet various needs. This includes specialist housing types such as extra care accommodation, student accommodation, accessible accommodation, homes for boaters and a range of dwelling sizes.

Preferred approaches strike a balance between different needs, with a focus on ensuring accommodation is in suitable locations. Evidence will be collected to inform the drafting of detailed policies. This will be necessary to set thresholds and to support decisions about locations of different types of accommodation.

### **Student accommodation**

The consultation responses are balanced between a feeling that there is too much student accommodation and that it is dominating and an acknowledgement that it can bring vibrancy to the city. The NPPF is also clear that local plans should attempt to meet all accommodation needs, including for student accommodation. Currently, in the Oxford Local Plan 2036, the locations where new student accommodation is allowed are limited to the city centre and district centres and existing campuses. In order to demonstrate the

soundness of the plan at examination for the 2036 plan, it had to be demonstrated that the available sites in suitable locations would provide enough accommodation to meet needs. As the details of the policy for the 2040 plan are drafted, this process will again need to be followed. However, initial data about student numbers and available sites suggests that there will not be an issue with continuing to limit the locations for student accommodation. This is considered still to be the preferred approach because these locations are the most suitable for students, limiting any negative impacts on amenity for existing residents, and allowing a balance with other forms of housing which come forward outside of site suitable for student accommodation.

### **Specialist housing needs and elderly persons accommodation**

For the Oxford Local Plan 2036, background evidence suggested no need for additional elderly persons extra care accommodation in Oxford. No requirement for this was introduced into that plan, although there was a generally supportive approach, with some criteria to ensure this accommodation was in suitable locations that would avoid residents becoming isolated. The County Council has suggested a greater need for affordable specialist care accommodation for this period, but evidence and data to identify the level of need is not yet available. That will inform the final detailed drafting of policies. The City Council's housing team have not identified a need for affordable specialist housing care resulting from those on the housing list that cannot be met within available accommodation. Delivery of this housing type is challenging in Oxford. Any requirement for an element of affordable housing to be for specialist care could significantly impact the availability of other forms of affordable housing, including social rented. Also, in order for it to be possible to manage the accommodation, it needs to be in one block of a certain size. With the profile of site sizes in Oxford being so heavily focused on small sites, delivery models appropriate in the other districts are not necessarily appropriate in Oxford. The final policy will very much depend on the further data collected about need, but also giving consideration to delivery, whether there is already sufficient accommodation and whether sites on the edge of Oxford may be more appropriate for meeting any need.

### **Accessible and adaptable homes**

Currently, Policy H10 requires that: *Proposals for residential development should ensure that all affordable dwellings and 15% of general market dwellings on sites of 10 or more dwellings are constructed to the Category 2 standard as set out in the Building Regulations Approved Document M4. 5% of all dwellings for which the City Council is responsible for allocations or nominations on sites of more than 20 dwellings should be provided to Category 3 (wheelchair user) standards.*

Wheelchair accessible dwellings can only be required for housing where the City Council is responsible for allocations or nominations. It is important some of these homes are wheelchair accessible. The Housing team has found that these dwellings are not always as useful as they could be, so the preferred option is for the policy to be more specific about how to ensure the dwellings are fitted correctly for those who are going to use them, ready for when they need them. There have been some reported issues with the implementation of the requirement for 100% of affordable dwellings to meet the M4 standard. This is the

case in lower blocks of flats (2-3 storeys particularly). That is because a lift is then necessary. It is not possible to site all affordable units on the ground floor because for servicing needs, they are often better in one block, and because there is a such a high proportion required. Installing and maintaining a lift for the very few flats it would service in a lower block is not realistic. Therefore, the preferred option is to introduce some specific exceptions.

### **Gypsy, traveller and boater needs**

A new need assessment was being undertaken as part of the Oxfordshire Plan, which means the background information on need is not yet available. However, based on previous assessments, it is very likely that no or very small need will be identified for gypsy and traveller accommodation in Oxford. Therefore, the preferred option is just to have criteria in a policy to assess any proposals that do come forward against. It is likely a need for boater accommodation will be identified. However, potential to accommodate this in the city is very limited and it will require work outside of the local plan. Again, a criteria-based policy is the preferred option.