

# West End and Osney Mead SPD Scoping Consultation

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## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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### Contents

<b>1. The West End and Osney Mead area</b> .....	2
<b>2. This consultation</b> .....	3
<b>3. Next steps</b> .....	4
<b>4. The Supplementary Planning Document</b> .....	4
<b>5. Vision for the future</b> .....	6
Local Plan policy .....	6
Innovation District .....	7
Movement, transport and public realm .....	9
Character and design .....	9
Reduced carbon .....	9



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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### 1. The West End and Osney Mead area

- 1.1 The West End and Osney Mead present an exciting once in a generation opportunity to bring transformational benefits to this area and integrate it into the city centre.
- 1.2 The area already contains a wide variety of buildings and uses including retail, residential, community, cultural and evening economy uses, City of Oxford College, University of Oxford colleges and the Said Business School, offices, a community centre, and the city's key areas of public transport provision and interchange, including Oxford Station and Gloucester Green bus and coach station. The area must continue to provide these facilities and functions, whilst also maximising opportunities for regeneration.
- 1.3 The West End Area Action Plan 2007-2016 was adopted in 2008 but has now expired. The design code it contained is still relevant, but it needs updating as some developments have taken place and some aspirations have changed. Developments such as the Westgate Centre and public realm improvements at Frideswide Square and Castle Mill Stream have already started to bring improved connectivity and enhance the quality of the area. The Oxford Local Plan 2036 contains recent policies relating to the area (including an Area of Change policy which is outlined in the SPD section below).
- 1.4 Whilst the West End is a large area that covers part of the core city centre area, the greatest potential for regeneration and transformational change is in the western part of the area and at Osney Mead (see figure 1 below). Policy SP1 of the Oxford Local Plan 2036 supports mixed use development across the West End, aiming to deliver at least 734 homes across five named sites: (a) Oxford Station / Becket Street; (b) Student Castle, Osney Lane; (c) Worcester Street Car Park; (d) Land between Park End and Hythe Bridge Street known as the 'Island site'; and (e) Oxpens. In addition, Policy SP2 allocates Osney Mead Industrial Estate for a mixed use development including employment and academic uses, as well as affordable housing, employer-linked affordable housing, open market housing, and student accommodation.
- 1.5 Proposals for these sites by individual landowners are progressing at differing rates. A masterplan is being developed for Oxford Station, which will also come forward as an SPD, which may be incorporated into the West End and Osney Mead SPD. Early consultation will take place on that document in the summer. Pre-application public engagement exercises are likely to take place later this year for Oxpens and later for the Island Site. The



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

SPD will provide an overarching framework, helping to co-ordinate public realm improvements, infrastructure and design.

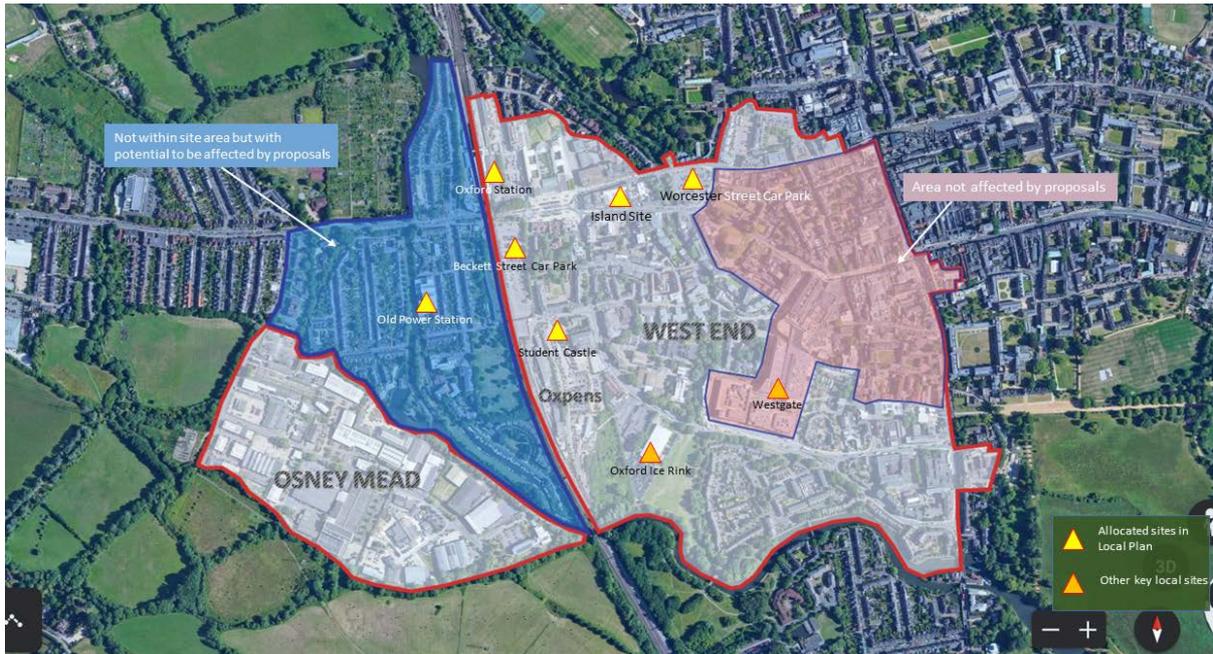


Figure 1: Map showing the West End and Osney Mead site allocations, key sites within the area and showing the area of focus for new development.

## 2. This consultation

2.1 The City Council is producing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to set a framework for future developments in the West End and Osney Mead area of Oxford. This project is still in the early stages. Below we set out a vision for the area to transform it into a globally recognised Innovation District and vibrant mixed use area including new homes, and we go on to set out our initial thoughts on what we should include in the SPD in order to best guide development in the area, which gives an impression of what we think the content and structure of the SPD will include.

2.2 ***We have produced a questionnaire to use alongside this document and the responses will help shape the SPD.***



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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### 3. Next steps

- 3.1 We will collate comments we receive through the questionnaire and publish a consultation report in early summer. We will use your responses to help inform the draft document, and we will consult on that draft early in 2022. We have appointed consultants to work with on this SPD and they will be engaging with key stakeholders, landowners and others as they undertake their work, including ongoing meetings with developer teams and a workshop intended to take place towards the end of May. In addition, developers of specific sites in the area will be carrying out pre-application public consultation exercises to inform their designs throughout 2021. A first public consultation about the Oxford Station masterplan SPD is expected to take place in the summer.

### 4. The Supplementary Planning Document

- 4.1 Oxford City Council is producing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the West End and Osney Mead. The principal aim of the SPD will be to help ensure development takes place in a cohesive way that contributes to the vision for the area.
- 4.2 The West End and Osney Mead is a large and sensitive area on the edge of the city centre with a great deal of potential. The West End is capable of accommodating significant additional development, which would help transform the area, but there are challenges to achieving successful development in the West End. These challenges result from the fact that the West End and Osney Mead is a large area with a variety of landowners, as well as it needing to continue to provide city-wide functions such as Oxford station and significant through-routes for traffic and buses.
- 4.3 Furthermore, redevelopments in the area are at various and differing stages. This SPD offers the opportunity to ensure these different developments, by different landowners, are not designed in isolation and that they all contribute to the transformational benefits for the area that are part of the vision. The potential of the area, the importance of its existing uses and its significance to the city means that it is vital that any redevelopment of the site is carefully managed from the outset. The SPD is a way of managing these developments, helping to unlock development sites and to ensure development that is piecemeal nevertheless comes forward cohesively, within a clear framework.
- 4.4 The Oxford Local Plan 2036 was adopted in June 2020. Producing an SPD gives the opportunity to expand on the policies of the Local Plan in relation to this area. It will give



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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more steer for developers producing planning applications, bottoming out issues such as requirements for infrastructure (such as public realm enhancements) and helping to ensure that the planning application process will run smoothly and quickly.

4.5 The SPD will show developers what should be on the sites, giving a degree of certainty. This includes indications of the type and quantity of different uses, infrastructure pieces to contribute to, the quality expected and how uses will be distributed across the area.

4.6 The City Council has appointed consultants Levitt Bernstein to undertake work on a spatial framework for the West End. This will be a key piece of evidence to inform and support the SPD. The next paragraphs sets out what the SPD (and spatial framework) will provide and provide a summary of the benefits of producing an SPD for the West End.

4.7 The SPD will:

- Set out a spatial framework that will:
  - Consider current movement patterns within and across the area and how these relate to the public realm
  - Identify priority routes for buses and taxis and consider how that should influence the design of the public realm
  - Set out the appropriate street structure and connections for the largest sites and between sites to ensure good transport, access and movement into and around the area (and the wider city)
  - Show how the land use elements already set out in planning policies as desirable in the area should be distributed. This will be done by giving thought to necessary overall amounts, the best relationships and interactions between different land uses and how suited they are to busier or quieter locations
- Establish and enable the delivery of infrastructure needs to support development in the West End. Infrastructure needed might include, as some examples, measures to alleviate flood risk, improved paving and road surfacing, a new school, new leisure or community facilities.
- Define scheme options for public realm informed by and to inform sites coming forward.
- Include a strategy for enhancing green infrastructure in the area.
- Promote sustainable economic growth, including future employment, retail and business needs and consider how the vision for a West End Innovation District set out in the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) can best be realised spatially.
- Set out a design framework in a design code to ensure high quality, cohesive design.
- Include a masterplan for the Osney Mead site.



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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### 4.8 The intended benefits of the SPD are as follows:

- It will help to unlock sites by identifying infrastructure needs generated by the cumulative developments of the area and setting out how they can best be delivered;
- It will provide a design framework that ensures high quality design across the area;
- It will build upon the significant amounts of work already undertaken;
- It will join the dots between different pieces of work and strategies that are already in place and different pieces coming forward at pace as part of development proposals.
- It will inject continuity;
- It will bring agreement with key landowners and other stakeholders such as the County Council;
- It will provide certainty for developers;
- It will set out how the ambition to create an innovation district can be realised;
- It will help decision makers access planning applications in terms of their contribution to achieving the vision for the area of change in Policy AOC1;
- It will enable development at Osney Mead by meeting the Policy requirement for a masterplan for the site.

## 5. Vision for the future

5.1 The transformation and redevelopment of the West End is an exciting project that will see significant change in one of the busiest parts of Oxford. The City Council and its partners wish to see the West End transformed from an underperforming, underdeveloped edge of city centre location, to a globally recognised Innovation District that is integrated with a strong community and a vibrant mixed use quarter. The City Council and partners are working to refine a vision for the area, building on that in the Local Plan and the Local Industrial Strategy. This early consultation will also help to inform the further development of the vision. The following summarise our thoughts on the vision.

### *Local Plan policy*

5.2 The Oxford Local Plan 2036 reflects the aspiration for the West End and Osney Mead to become an innovation district. It includes Policy AOC1, which guides development in the area towards achieving this vision:

*Planning permission will be granted for new development within the area of change where it would take opportunities to deliver the following, where relevant:*



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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- *Create high-density urban living that makes efficient use of land*
- *Maintain a vibrant mix of uses*
- *Has regard to the framework set out in the West End Design Code*
- *Maximise the area's contribution to Oxford's knowledge economy*
- *Enhance public realm along the waterways*
- *Enhance connectivity throughout the area, including along and across waterways*
- *Enhance the pedestrian and cycling experience*
- *Ensure that the heritage of the area informs and guides new development proposals*
- *Create easy and attractive transport interchange*
- *Reduce car parking*

### *New homes and a strong community*

5.3 The council does not wish to see the West End developed exclusively for commercial or academic uses. The West End area includes the residential communities of St Ebbe's and St Thomas', with a diverse existing population including families. We wish to strengthen and grow this community, and the development of the area will therefore contain high quality housing at an appropriate density that responds to the historic and environmental context of the West End. The innovation district will be supported by accommodating a resident population, and the area will also make an important contribution to Oxford's high housing needs. Housing will be provided that meets a variety of needs. Policies in the Oxford Local Plan require that at least 50% of housing should be affordable, including a total of 40% of housing being provided as social rented housing. Student accommodation will also help to meet needs in this location, where it is particularly well suited.

### *Innovation District*

5.4 Innovation Districts are a relatively new concept for creating research and development spaces. These uses have often tended to be concentrated in inward-facing business parks peripheral to cities and city centres. Innovation Districts seek to reverse this trend, recognising that innovation in technology happens when professionals in different fields collaborate in pleasant working environments. These were first pioneered in the U.S.A., but have since been developed in various locations across the world, including in the U.K. They seek to create an environment where leading-edge anchor institutions and companies cluster and connect with start-ups, business incubators and accelerators. They



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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are also physically compact, transit-accessible, and technically-wired and offer mixed-use housing, office, and retail.<sup>1</sup>

5.5 The vision for the West End and Osney Mead area to become an Innovation District would mean this area in the heart of the city would concentrate on one of Oxford's strengths in innovation and research, alongside the retention of existing assets and delivery of new housing and other city centre uses. Oxford and Oxfordshire have a strong track record in knowledge-based economic growth including biosciences, cryogenics, aerospace technology, and motorsport engineering. Oxford is home to a third of the county's jobs and the city is a focal point for higher education, research, and science.

5.6 We therefore wish to see the West End blend a variety of complementary uses across the area to create a vibrant extension to Oxford's city centre. The **innovation district** will:

*“provide a flagship, gateway development into the innovation ecosystem, providing a new district for business growth and innovation as an extension of Oxford's city centre encompassing A-Grade office space and R&D HQ facilities for spin-out companies and inward investment across multiple sites, so forming the largest scale mixed use development project in generations. This project is focused on delivering a sustainable, integrated and connected district encompassing Osney Mead, Oxford National Railway Hub and Station, Oxpens, and other development sites with retail, hotel, university, lab and office, and residential spaces.”*

(Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy Investment Plan, August 2020)

5.7 This innovation district will provide new research and development space across the area, capitalising on Oxford and Oxfordshire's existing strengths in the knowledge economy and relationships with the two universities. It will provide an environment for large, leading edge institutions (such as the University of Oxford) to cluster and connect with start-ups, business incubators and accelerators.

5.8 The innovation district will need to provide spaces for social interaction however, maximising the opportunities for collaboration across different fields. These could be formalised areas such as shared workspaces (e.g., the Engine Shed in Bristol), coffee shops or food halls; childcare; public open space; or leisure facilities. These uses will also ensure

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<sup>1</sup> [The Rise of Innovation Districts \(Brookings Institute\)](#)



## Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD

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that the West End remains a vibrant extension of the city centre outside of standard working hours, providing services and attractions for residents within and nearby the area.

### *Movement, transport and public realm*

5.9 The West End is also strategically located on several movement corridors, notably occupying a significant portion of land between the station and main retail centre. Introducing a mix of uses, including residential, will help create an area that is active beyond the working week and make these routes more attractive for pedestrians and cycling. It is important that the area can be easily accessed, and also that it can be enjoyed. A public realm strategy should help ensure that rather than it being experienced as just a transport corridor, opportunities are realised for an enhanced public realm and green infrastructure network, making it an area in which to wander, stop and relax. These new uses will be supported by a transformation of the public realm and key infrastructure in the area. Oxford Railway Station will have expanded to include a western entrance building and improved interfacing with the west of the city, new platforms, and redesigned forecourt and station building. A public realm strategy will be implemented that transforms the currently unattractive routes through the West End and provides for good wayfinding throughout the area. These will connect a series of new public open spaces with opportunities to find tranquillity and access to rivers and the natural environment. These open spaces will also contribute to net gains for biodiversity and form part of the area's and city's climate change adaption and mitigation strategy.

### *Character and design*

5.10 New development must be of high quality design. It will be sensitively designed to conserve the rich historic environment of the area, and wider skyline of Oxford. Policies in the Oxford Local Plan already provide a general toolkit to ensure high quality design that is informed by the local context. However, the SPD will provide very specific guidance for the area, to make sure that it works as a whole and has an identity, whilst also reflecting the local character. In particular, it will ensure that new offices and other workspaces are not large blocks that turn their backs on the surrounding area.

### *Reduced carbon*

5.11 The council is committed to addressing the effects of, and reducing our contribution towards climate change. In 2019, the council declared a climate emergency and has committed to a series of actions. The most relevant to the West End project are: raising energy efficiency of new homes and community buildings; cutting transport emissions;



### **Vision and scope for the West End and Osney Mead SPD**

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booting renewable energy installation; and expanding biodiversity. They will complement the wider development's approach to climate change, taking advantage of local energy or heat generation opportunities, sustainable construction techniques, and minimising the need to travel. For more information please see: <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/climate-emergency>

