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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

OXFORD LOCAL PLAN 2040

Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

June 2021

Table of contents

1. Introduction 1
1.1 Background to Oxford City 1
1.2 The Oxford Local Plan 2040 2
1.3. Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) 3
1.4 Sustainability appraisal 4
1.5 Links to the Habitat Regulations Assessment 5
1.6 Structure of this report 5
2. Task A1: Policy context 6
3. Task A2: Sustainability context 11
4. Task A3: Identify key sustainability issues and problems 16
5. Task A4: Develop the SA framework 22
5.1 SA framework for plan objectives, alternatives and policies 22
5.2 SA framework for sites 24
6. Alternatives 30
7. Next steps 31

1. Introduction

1.1 This Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping report accompanies the consultation on the background and issues for the Oxford Local Plan 2040. This chapter discusses the emerging Oxford Local Plan 2040, SEA and SA, and the structure of the rest of this scoping report.

1.1 Background to Oxford City

1.1.1 Oxford City Council is a District Council at the heart of Oxfordshire. It has a total area of about 46 km^2 (17.7 miles^2), with parts of the urban area very densely developed. The built-up area extends to the administrative boundary around much of the eastern side of the city, but the river corridors of the Thames and Cherwell penetrate as extensive green wedges into the heart of the city. This gives Oxford a distinct physical form, with much of the residential population concentrated to the east of the city centre (Figure 1.1).

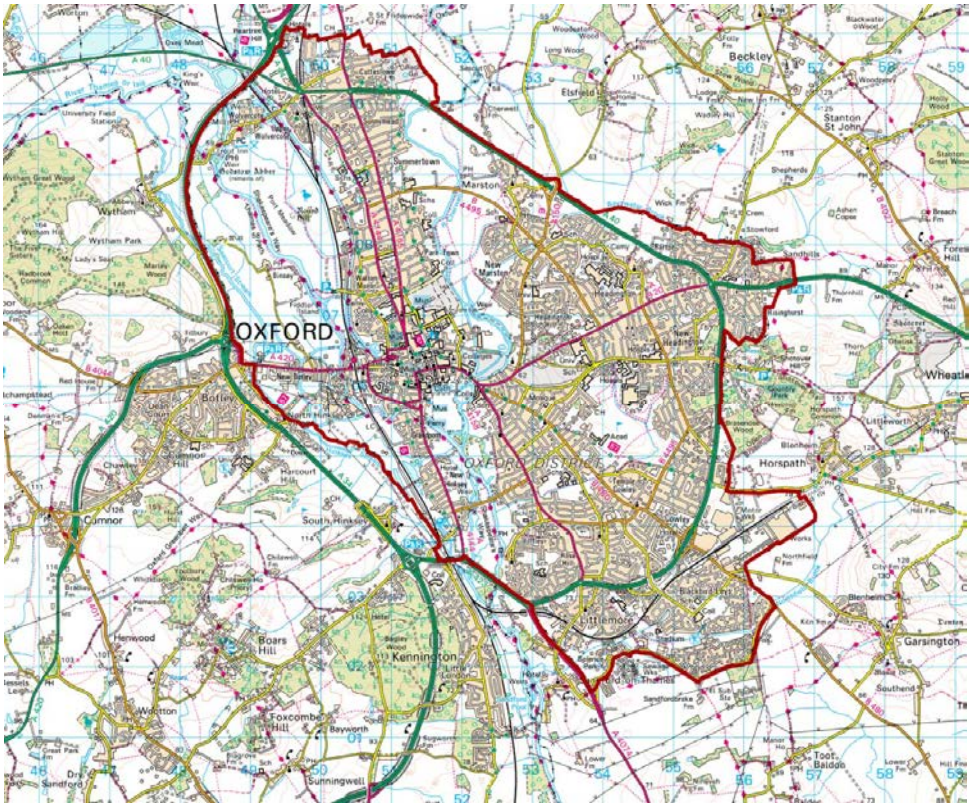

Figure 1.1 - Map of Oxford Map © Crown Copyright and database right 2016. Ordnance Survey 100019348.

1.1.2 Oxford's population is approximately 151,584[1] and is set to rise to around 180,000 by 2036[2]. One-third of the population is aged between 18 and 29. Oxford is home to 42,000 students, and 5,000 businesses providing 129,000 jobs. There is a high level of in-commuting in the City: more than 40% of the city's workforce lives outside Oxford.

[1] ONS UK mid-year population estimates 2020(published June 2021): https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland

[2] Future projections will be updated as part of the work on the new Local Plan. It is based upon analysis underpinning the Oxford Local Plan 2036 (GL Hearn Oxford City - Objectively Assessed Need Update 2018): https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/5606/hou5_-_oxford_city_-_objectively_assessed_need_update

1.1.3 Oxford is a compact city with a unique and world-renowned built heritage. Its original Saxon street pattern and some of the earliest buildings and monuments still survive. Around 27% of Oxford is within the Green Belt which, unusually, not only constrains development in the outer cordon of the city, but also through the city's centre. Oxford sits at the confluence of the Thames and Cherwell rivers and is quite flat, so it is prone to flooding from a range of sources. The historic city parks and nature conservation areas create pockets and corridors of green within the administrative boundary; several have national and international nature conservation designations, further constraining development.

1.1.4 Oxford is one of the most unaffordable place to live in the country. In recent years, Oxford has experienced a booming housing market with rising house prices. This has led to open-market housing becoming expensive and difficult to obtain. It has also limited the supply of affordable housing, and there is now a huge need for affordable housing. There are severe pressures on the housing stock, with concentrations of Houses in Multiple Occupation, many homeless and vulnerable people, and areas of deprivation with relatively high crime rates, health deprivation and poor educational achievement.

1.1.5 Oxford has remained economically very successful despite the global recession of the 2000s, Brexit and the Covid pandemic. The government sees Oxford as playing a key role in the 'Ox-Cam Arc', with high future housing and economic growth.

1.2 The Oxford Local Plan 2040

1.2.1 The Oxford Local Plan 2040 will carry forward and update policies set in the Oxford Local Plan 2036. It will also allocate sites for housing, employment and other uses such as retail. It will provide policies for the management of development in the city, including for the preservation and enhancement of the historic environment, the conservation of nature and biodiversity, urban design, achieving the city's net zero targets and flood risk management. It will be used in determining planning applications and to guide investment decisions across the city.

1.2.2 The Oxford Local Plan 2040 will go through a number of stages of development as highlighted in Table 1.1. This consultation forms part of our early non-statutory engagement as we set out to identify the key issues and scope of the new Local Plan. Following this, the Regulation 18 consultation will set out policy options and is scheduled for the summer 2022. Engagement on the pre-submission draft of the Local Plan will be then be in summer 2023, with the expectation to submit the plan for examination by the end of 2023. Once submitted for examination, the timetable is not within the City Council's control. Based on the timescales for the examination of the Oxford Local Plan 2036 we expect the examination period to be around 15 months, from submission to adoption meaning that the Local Plan is expected to be adopted in March 2025.

Table 1.1 – Stages in development of the Oxford Local Plan 2040

Stage	**Expected date**
Early engagement – Issues Consultation	July 2021
Options (Regulation 18) consultation	Summer 2022
Pre-submission (Regulation 19) consultation	Summer 2023
Submission of the Local Plan for examination	End of 2023
Expected adoption of Local Plan (subject to timings of examination)	March 2025

1.3. Strategic environmental assessment (SEA)

1.3.1 The European Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive requires planning authorities to carry out an environmental assessment as part of the preparation of land-use plans (e.g. Local Plans). SEA predicts and assesses the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan, and of other options considered while the plan was being developed. It aims to ensure that sustainable development is integrated into the plan making process. The Directive was transposed into English law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 SI No 1633 ('SEA regulations').

1.3.2 The SEA regulations state that SEA must assess the likely significant effects of the plan or programme on the environment, namely:

- Biodiversity
- Population
- Human health
- Fauna
- Flora
- Soil
- Water
- Air
- Climatic factors
- Material assets
- Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage
- Landscape
- The inter-relationship between the above

Table 1.2 shows the SEA process.

Table 1.2 – The requirements of the SEA Directive and where they are covered in the SA/SEA for the Oxford Local Plan 2040

SEA Directive Requirements	Where covered
a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme…	Briefly in Sec. 1.2 of this report. Will be done in more depth in the SA/SEA report, once the plan has been further developed
… and relationship with other plans or programmes	Sec. 2 of this report, and in individual Topic Papers
b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme	In individual Topic Papers
c) the environmental characteristics of the areas likely to be affected	Will be in the SA report, once possible development sites are identified
d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	In individual Topic Papers, and summarized at Sec. 4 of this report
e) The environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	In individual Topic Papers
f) The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the	Will all be in the SA report at the Preferred Options consultation

above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	
g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	
h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with...	
… and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	
i) a description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10;	
j) a non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.	
Consultation: authorities with environmental responsibility, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report (Art. 5.4)	This scoping report is the report put out for consultation at this stage
authorities with environmental responsibility and the public shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2).	Will be done with the SA report
other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment of that country (Art. 7)	Not applicable
Taking the environmental report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (Art. 8)	
When the plan or programme is adopted, the public and any countries consulted under Art.7 shall be informed and the following made available to those so informed: • the plan or programme as adopted; • a statement summarising how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental report pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 have been taken into account in accordance with Article 8, and the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and • the measures decided concerning monitoring (Art. 9 and 10)	Will be carried out after plan adoption
Monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the plan's or programme's implementation (Art. 10)	

1.4 Sustainability appraisal

1.4.1 In addition, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires all local planning authorities to carry out a sustainability appraisal (SA) of their Local Plans. Sustainability Appraisal is an iterative process to assist in the development of a Local Plan. It is used to appraise emerging options against the three elements of sustainability; the social, environmental and economic dimensions. It assists in selecting the options deemed to be the most sustainable for the area, and in fine-tuning the policies in the Local Plan.

1.4.2 Table 1.3 shows the requirements for SA. This SA report also fulfils the legal requirements for SEA; where reference is made within this document to sustainability appraisal, it also implies where appropriate strategic environmental assessment.

Table 1.3 – The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Process
Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope
Task A1: Identify other relevant policies, plans and programmes and sustainability objectives
Task A2: Collect baseline information
Task A3: Identify key sustainability issues and problems
Task A4: Develop the SA framework
Task A5: Consult the consultation bodies on the scope of the SA report
Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects
Task B1: Test the Local Plan objectives against the SA framework
Task B2: Develop the Local Plan options including reasonable alternatives
Task B3: Evaluate the likely effects of the Local Plan and alternatives
Task B4: Consider ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects
Task B5: Propose measures to monitor significant effects of implementing the Local Plan
Stage C: Prepare the SA report
Stage D: Seek representations on the SA report from consultations and the public
Stage E: Post adoption reporting and monitoring
Task E1: Prepare and publish post-adoption statement
Task E2: Monitor significant effects of implementing the Local Plan
Task E3: Respond to adverse effects

Current state of Oxford Local Plan 2040 SA/SEA

1.5 Links to the Habitat Regulations Assessment

1.5.1 Oxford is home to part of the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is a site of international nature conservation importance because of its lowland hay meadows and creeping marshwort (*Apium repens).* The site has benefited from the survival of traditional management, which has been undertaken for several centuries, and so exhibits good conservation of structure and function. Port Meadow is the largest of only two known sites in the UK for creeping marshwort.

1.5.2 As part of the development of the Oxford Local Plan 2036, the City Council carried out a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) in close consultation with Natural England. This showed that air quality is a significant issue for the SAC, notably on its northern end where it is crossed by the A40 and A34. Recreational disturbance can also affect the integrity of the SAC. An HRA will be prepared alongside the next stage of the preparation of the Local Plan, and will inform this SEA/SA.

1.6 Structure of this report

1.6.1 This scoping report was prepared by Oxford City Council with support from Levett-Therivel sustainability consultants. The aim of this SA scoping stage is to provide background evidence for subsequent stages of assessment. It comprises the first four 'Stage A' steps shown at Table 1.3:

Task A1: Identify other relevant policies, plans and programmes and sustainability objectives: "policy context"

Task A2: Collect baseline information: "sustainability context"

2. Task A1: Policy context

2.1 Oxford's Local Plan 2040 will be influenced by a range of policies, plans, programmes and sustainability objectives. The key policies, plans and programmes that affect the entire plan are discussed below. The sustainability objectives and other policies/plans that affect individual topic areas such as air quality and deprivation are discussed in the individual Topic Papers of Task A2.

Oxford City Council Our Strategy 2020-2024

2.2 The City Council's vision is to build a world-class city for everyone. The strategy sets four priorities for 2020-2024:

- Pursue a zero carbon Oxford
- Support thriving communities
- Deliver more affordable housing
- Enable an inclusive economy[3].

Oxford declaration of climate emergency

2.3 In January 2019, Oxford City Council declared a climate emergency. In December 2019, the council agreed, amongst other points, to become net zero as a Council in 2020, and "Respond directly to the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly through raising the energy efficiency of new homes and community buildings, cutting transport emissions, boosting renewable energy installation, expanding biodiversity across the city, and increasing public engagement with recycling."[4]

2.4 In March 2021, the City Council set out its first Action Plan for bringing about a net zero carbon city by 2040, or earlier—ten years ahead of the Government's national legal target. This ambitious target will require radical to secure emissions reductions action across all sectors including buildings, transport and waste.

The Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge 'knowledge arc'

2.5 Oxford is part of a 'knowledge arc' between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge being promoted by the Government. The National Infrastructure's 2017 report 'Partnering for Prosperity'[5] suggests that 1 million new homes and jobs can be developed in the 'Ox-Cam arc' by 2050. The National Infrastructure Commission supports an East-West rail line as a key element of this arc. Originally the Commission also supported an expressway between Oxford and Cambridge, but this was cancelled in early 2021 as it was not perceived as being cost-effective. However, Government aims to continue to provide localized road investment within the arc[6]. The government has committed to producing a Spatial Framework for the OxCam Arc, which will focus on strategic opportunities for growth and environmental

[3] https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20328/our_strategy_2020-24

[4] https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/1275/city_council_responds_to_oxford_citizens_assembly_on_climate_change_and_outlines_19m_climate_emergency_budget

[5] https://nic.org.uk/app/uploads/Partnering-for-Prosperty.pdf

[6] https://highwaysengland.co.uk/our-work/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway/

improvement that cross administrative boundaries and require more joined up thinking across the area. The Arc Spatial Framework is being led by Government and in February 2021 an 'Introduction to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework' was published.

Oxfordshire Growth Board strategic vision

2.6 The Oxfordshire Growth Board comprises the six councils of Oxfordshire (Figure 2.1) and key strategic partners. In March 2021 it published a new strategic vision with outcomes that to be achieved by 2050:

- Our natural environment will be in a better state than that in which we found it
- We will already be carbon neutral and accelerating towards a carbon negative future
- Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved
- Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive
- Our county will be a more equal, fair and inclusive place for everyone
- Our vibrant historic and cultural offer will be rich, diverse and enhanced
- We will have energy efficient and affordable homes in the right number, location and tenure
- Our county's connectivity will be transformed in ways that enhance wellbeing
- Our diverse and vibrant communities will thrive with a strong sense of identity[7]

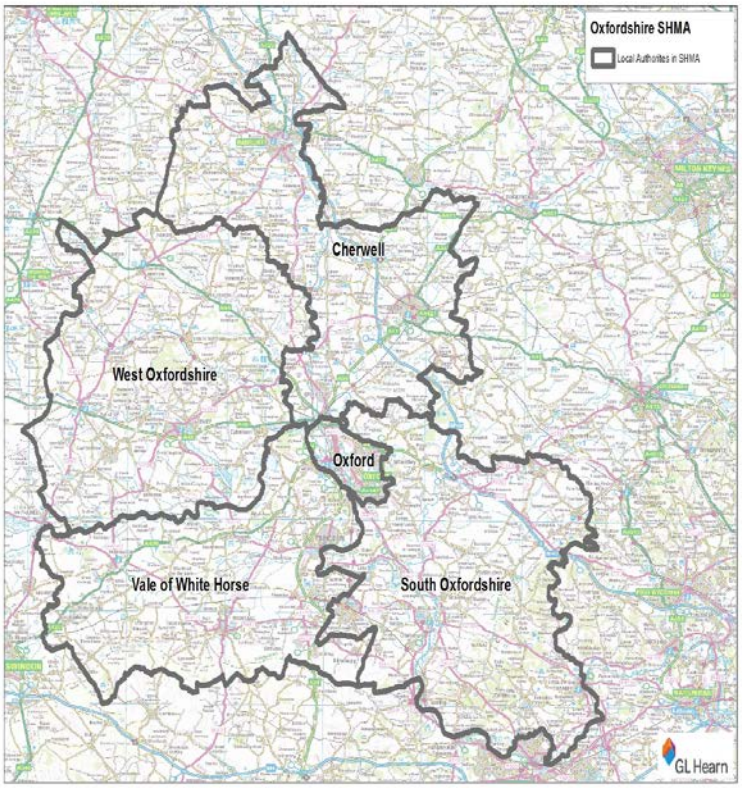

Figure 2.1 Districts adjacent to Oxford

Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal

2.7 In November 2017, all of the local authorities in Oxfordshire signed a Housing and Growth Deal, whereby the authorities will receive up to £215 million of central government funding

[7] https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/projects/oxfordshire-strategic-vision/

in return for delivering 100,000 homes by 2031. This requires achievement of a series of milestones, with funding contingent on the achievement of each milestone. One milestone is the submission for examination of all of the Oxfordshire authorities' Local Plans by April 2019, and submission of a joint statutory plan ('Oxfordshire 2050'). The Oxford Local Plan 2036 was submitted and adopted within this timeframe, but some of the milestones were set back as a result of changes in local authority leadership, programme reviews, and the pandemic.[8]

2.8 One of the main cross-boundary matters in Oxfordshire is housing provision. Housing need within the city is higher than the city can accommodate within its administrative boundary ("unmet need"). Joint work across Oxfordshire's authorities resulted with an agreed apportionment of Oxford's unmet need (Table 2.1). All Oxfordshire authorities' Local Plans have now been adopted, including allocations that make provision for Oxford's unmet housing need outside the city's boundaries.

Table 2.1 Apportionment of Oxford's unmet housing need

Council	Amount of Oxford's unmet housing need
Cherwell DC	4400
South Oxfordshire DC	4950
Vale of White Horse DC	2200
West Oxfordshire DC	2750

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

2.9 Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is being developed in tandem with the Oxford Local Plan but considers planning issues over a longer period (up to 2050) and on an Oxfordshire-wide basis. The plan will set out strategic policies to cover the county addressing a variety of topics that are not naturally restricted to any one local authority's administrative boundary such as climate change, biodiversity, transport, and green belt. The Oxfordshire Plan will also look to identify housing need across the county and assign a broad spatial strategy for how that housing ought to be delivered. The Plan is due to go out for a Reg 18 preferred options consultation over the summer.

The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS)

2.10 The Oxfordshire Growth Board published the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy in November 2017. This sets out ambitions for new and improved infrastructure to 2031 and beyond. Regionally and county-wide, the strategy supports an East West rail link between Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes and Bedford; rail improvements between Oxford and Didcot; redevelopment of Oxford Station; and upgrades to the A34. Within Oxford, proposed projects include:

- Several rapid transit lines e.g. Marston Ferry Road to Hollow Way, Blackbird Leys to city centre, Thornhill to city centre
- Super Cycle Routes along key arterial routes including the Abingdon Road and Woodstock Road
- Expansion of the Seacourt, Peartree and Redbridge P&R sites
- A range of road improvements
- A zero emission zone, first in the city centre and then city-wide

[8] https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/housing-and-growth-deal-home/

- A primary school for Barton Park, and a secondary school (Swan School)[9]

2.11 A new OxIS is being developed which considers infrastructure requirements up to 2050, and will be the Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. The new OxIS is being prepared in two parts: Part 1 will look at infrastructure from the end of the local plan periods to 2040, and Part 2 will look at infrastructure needs to 2050 resulting from growth proposed in the Oxfordshire Plan. At the time of writing, Part 1 is still in draft: the public consultation on the document is due to be aligned with the Oxfordshire Plan consultation from July – September 2021.

Other Key Plans, Programmes and Environmental Objectives

2.12 The most influential document on sustainable development at the international level is the **Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change** which commits parties to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In December 2015, as part of the 'Paris Agreement', European Union Member States committed themselves to a binding target of at least 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990.

2.13 The European Union has also produced several documents influencing planning policy in the UK, including the **Habitats Directive** (92/43/EEC), **Air Quality Directive** (2008/50/EC) and **Water Framework Directive** (2000/60/EC). Although these are currently still implemented in the UK, over time these are likely to be superseded, and possibly changed, by the emerging Environment Act.

2.14 The **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF) was published in March 2012. It sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are to be applied. It is supported by an online National Planning Practice Guide and the National Design Guide of October 2019[10]. Key NPPF requirements relating to Oxford are to:

- Deliver a sufficient supply of homes
- Build a strong and competitive economy
- Promote sustainable transport
- Achieve well-designed places
- Protect Green Belt land
- Meet the challenge of climate change and flooding
- Conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment[11]

2.15 The **Localism Act** 2011 introduced the right for communities to shape development in their areas through the production of Neighbourhood Plans, Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders. Currently Oxford has four designated Neighbourhood Forums: Headington, Littlemore, Summertown/St. Margaret's and Wolvercote. The Headington and Summertown/St. Margaret's Neighbourhood Plans were 'made' in July 2017 and April 2019 respectively. In May 2021, residents voted in favour of adopting the Wolvercote Neighbourhood plan, but the plan has not yet (in June 2021) been 'made'.

2.16 **The Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4)** of 2015, '*Connecting Oxfordshire*' sets out Oxfordshire County Council's policy and strategy for developing the transport system in Oxfordshire to 2031. LTP4 aims to:

- support jobs and housing growth and economic vitality;
- reduce transport emissions and meet our obligations from Government;

[9] https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/oxis_stage2.pdf
[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide
[11] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

- protect, and where possible enhance Oxfordshire's environment and improve quality of life; and
- improve public health, air quality, safety and individual well-being

2.17 LTP4 includes an area strategy for Oxford as well as other strategies, including a bus strategy which sets out how improvements will be made to the county-wide bus network as well as developing rapid transit services along the busiest routes. A vision document for a new 'Local Transport and Connectivity Plan' (LTCP) went for public consultation in February 2021, and consultation on a full LTCP is anticipated in Autumn 2021[12].

Brexit and Covid

2.18 In 2011, 11% of the city's population and 11% of its students were from elsewhere in the European Union[13,14]. Sectors with particularly high numbers of non-UK European workers, and which could be negatively affected by Brexit, include biology, mathematics, the universities, BMW Mini, the NHS and the service sector. Of Oxford's residents who voted in the EU referendum, 70% voted to remain in the EU. Brexit may change things significantly for Oxford. A decline in students and skilled staff as a result of greater restrictions on EU nationals coming to the UK could affect the city's knowledge-related businesses, with wider effects on the Oxford-Cambridge growth arc. It could also reduce the pressure on housing in the city and adjacent local authorities[15]. The weaker pound could attract more tourists to Oxford, although in the short term this will be more than counterbalanced by restrictions on travel as a result of Covid.

2.19 The Covid-19 pandemic has, as in the rest of the UK, significantly affected Oxford. From a planning perspective, this has included a major reduction in retail and great restrictions on retailers' activities, pressure for the provision of more homes with gardens and/or near green areas, a reduction in commuting, increase in home deliveries, increased space requirements to accommodate social distancing, and much greater requirements for good broadband connectivity (in part spurred by a significant shift to remote working and learning). It is not yet clear how many of these trends will continue in the longer term.

[12] https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/connecting-oxfordshire/policy-and-overall-strategy
[13] https://www.oxford.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1076/country_of_birth.xls
[14] https://www.oxford.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2179/student_statistics_census_2011.xls
[15] Oxford City Council 2017. LGA Call for Evidence: The impact of EU exit on places.

3. Task A2: Sustainability context

3.1 The sustainability context to the Oxford Local Plan 2040 – the current situation and likely future situation if a new plan was not prepared - is provided in 16 topic papers. Table 3.1 lists these papers and shows how they relate to the sustainability appraisal objectives which will be discussed at Section 4.

3.2 Each topic paper can be accessed directly by clicking the links in the table below, or from the consultation webpage: www.oxford.gov.uk/localplan2040

Table 3.1 Topic Papers, SA objectives and SEA topics

Topic Paper	SA Objective
1. Carbon reduction	1. To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero **carbon emissions** by 2040.
2. Flood risk	2. To build **resilience to climate change**, including reducing risks from overheating, flooding and the resulting detriment to well-being, the economy and the environment.
3. Green Belt	3. To encourage the **efficient use of land** through good design and layout, and minimise the use of greenfield and Green Belt land.
4. Housing need and supply	4. To meet **local housing needs** by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home.
5. Housing affordability	
6. Student housing	
7. Health and wellbeing	5. To reduce poverty, social exclusion, and health **inequalities**.
8. Community and cultural facilities	6. To provide accessible essential **services and facilities.**
9. Grey and digital infrastructure	
10. Retail	
11. Green infrastructure and biodiversity	7. To provide adequate **green infrastructure**, leisure and recreation opportunities and make these readily accessible for all; and to conserve and enhance Oxford's **biodiversity.**
12. Air, water and land quality	8. To reduce **traffic and associated air pollution** by improving travel choice, shortening journeys and reducing the need to travel by car/ lorry. 9. To achieve **water** quality targets and manage water resources.
13. Transport	
14. Urban design, placemaking, heritage and archaeology	10. To promote **good urban design** through the protection and enhancement of the **historic environment** and heritage assets while respecting local character and context and promoting innovation.
15. Employment, economy, education and skills	11. To achieve sustainable inclusive **economic growth**, including the development and expansion of a diverse and knowledge-based economy and the culture/leisure/ visitor sector.
16. Tourism	

3.3 In the absence of a new Local Plan 2040, the Local Plan 2036 would continue until 2036 and then the National Planning Policy Framework would take over as a default. Table 3.2 summarises, based on the Topic Papers, the current situation and likely future situation without the emerging plan.

3.4 The following colour coding system will be used throughout this sustainability appraisal:

Very positive	++	Negative	-	No direct link	
Positive	+	Very negative	--	Depends on implementation	I
Neutral	0	Unclear	?		

Table 3.2 Current situation and likely future without the plan

SA topic	Current situation	Likely future without plan	Sustainability problems and issues
1. Carbon emissions			Per capita carbon emissions in Oxford have dropped by more than 40% since 2005, but are still much above the net zero carbon emissions that Oxford City Council aims to achieve by 2040. The Local Plan has limited powers, for instance with respect to requiring more energy efficiency measures for existing homes. Greater energy efficiency and renewable energy requirements can also conflict with other priorities, such as proving affordable homes. Outside of planning, there will be an ongoing need for significant retro-fitting of existing development, and behaviour change.
2. Resilience to climate change			Between 2,000 and 5,000 homes are currently at flood risk. This is likely to increase with climate change. A flood alleviation channel is proposed for the west side of Oxford. Given constraints on development in Oxford, there will be increased pressure to locate development in areas of higher flood risk, although the Local Plan 2036 will help to ensure that new developments are climate change resilient.
3. Efficient use of land			The Local Plan 2036 made a range of site allocations in the Green Belt. Increased housing pressure means that there will be more pressure on undeveloped land. Without a new plan, housing densities are likely to grow further, albeit balanced with other considerations. Further Green Belt land may be required for the Local Plan 2040. Soil quality, development density and protection of undeveloped land have been good to date. Higher costs associated with dealing with any remaining contaminated sites could increase pressure to develop greenfield sites.
4. Housing Need and supply			House prices in Oxford are already very high, and likely to rise further with increasing demand. Housing to rent on the open market is also unaffordable to a significant proportion of people. The Local Plan 2036 puts a cap on student numbers living outside student accommodation.

SA topic	Current situation	Likely future without plan	Sustainability problems and issues
Affordable housing			The provision of affordable housing has been low in past years, but should increase as a result of new development and the city council's own house building programme. However new government policy on First Homes will affect the amount of social housing that can be secured and provision of affordable housing for those most in need.
Students and student accommodation			Future housing need will be determined through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Some of Oxford's housing needs may need to be met outside the city. Without further large development sites being identified, the number of small infill sites is likely to increase, and could increase pressure on the existing infrastructure.
5. Inequalities and health Inequality			There are sharp inequalities across the city in terms of opportunities, wellbeing and health. Action needs to be taken to address these inequalities to enable all parts of Oxford's communities to experience a good quality of life.
General health			The health of Oxford's residents is generally good, but there is great variation: for instance, men in wealthier parts of the city live more than 8 years longer than men in more deprived parts of the city. This disparity needs to be reduced. Oxford residents' higher-than-average levels of activity and healthy weight need to be maintained and increased. The Local Plan can help to address wellbeing and mental health by improving housing quality, access to open spaces and building communities.
Health and housing			
6. Services, facilities and infrastructure Community facilities			Availability of services and facilities plays a key role in quality of life. The pandemic has meant that some community and cultural facilities are likely to close, and others may struggle to remain viable. With an increase in population, it will become even more important to protect and enhance these facilities, and ensure that they are easy to access by walking, cycling and public transport.
'Grey' infrastructure			Wastewater treatment and energy infrastructure are likely to be adequate for the plan period. Transport is covered under 8. (Traffic and air pollution), and water infrastructure is covered under 9. Water.
Digital infrastructure			The pandemic has increased and highlighted people's reliance on the Internet. Broadband coverage in Oxford is generally good and increasing.
7. Green infrastructure and biodiversity Outdoor sports and recreation			Oxford has a wide range of green spaces which are generally of good quality. However as Oxford's population increases there will be more demand for outdoor sports and recreation, and increasing pressure on Oxford's green spaces. It is unlikely that

SA topic	Current situation	Likely future without plan	Sustainability problems and issues
Biodiversity			new large open spaces will be created, although smaller spaces could be, and existing open spaces can be enhanced. Green spaces will need to respond to climate change, providing long term flood protection and adaptable habitats. Biodiversity is plummeting worldwide and in Oxfordshire. The Environment Bill is likely to include a requirement for at least 10% net gain in biodiversity in new development. Nature conservation areas such as Oxford Meadows SAC are currently relatively well protected. This may change with increasing development pressure and changes in government environmental legislation.
Nature conservation areas			
8. Traffic and air pollution Air quality			Congestion on Oxford's main roads is endemic even though Oxford has very good bus services and higher levels of cycling and public transport use than elsewhere. All of Oxford is an Air Quality Management Area for NO_2, and there are air quality 'hot spots' at many major road junctions. Most of the city centre air pollution comes from buses. The pandemic lockdown sharply reduced traffic, but traffic levels have since grown to be greater than pre-pandemic. With the population and job growth envisaged for Oxfordshire, a continuation of existing levels of car use would threaten to over-burden the transport network. The Oxfordshire authorities are focusing on improving walking and cycling infrastructure and public transport, and restricting cars e.g. through low traffic neighbourhoods and zero emission zones. The national phasing of petrol/diesel cars and shift to electric vehicles will help to improve air quality.
Traffic levels and congestion			
9. Water Water resources			Oxford is in an area of serious water stress. Water resources are currently adequate but may not be by 2040. This will be exacerbated with increased demand for water from a growing population. Water quality in the Thames catchment is mostly moderate. Run-off from increased development could worsen this.
Water quality			
10. Urban design and historic environment			Oxford has a high quality landscape and historic environment. High levels of development and tourism continue to put a strain on natural and historic sites and Oxford's landscape and townscape.
11. Employment and economy Employment			Oxford has a very strong economy, with high employment, low unemployment and high Gross Value Added. The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, and the Oxford - Milton Keynes – Cambridge 'knowledge arc' will further strengthen this.

SA topic	Current situation	Likely future without plan	Sustainability problems and issues
Unemployment			It is unlikely that significant new employment sites will be identified in Oxford: the focus at present is on redevelopment and renewal of existing sites. Ensuring the right balance of employment and housing growth is fundamental to ensuring sustainable growth in Oxford. Oxford's population overall is highly skilled, but 22% of people of working age have low or no qualifications. This disparity is strongest in the most deprived areas of the city. State schools across Oxford, and particularly in deprived areas, generally under-perform compared to regional and national averages. Skills mismatches increase in-commuting, exacerbating congestion problems. Employment growth in Oxford is likely to be in high-skill sectors: without appropriate skills and training, these jobs will not be accessible to local people. The diverse nature of Oxford's economic base has helped the city to be resilient in the face of recession, but Oxford's overall prosperity masks localized areas of deprivation. There are plans for improving the existing areas of regeneration in the city. Physical regeneration interventions need to be supplemented with social, economic and environmental changes.
Education, skills and employability/ training			
Regeneration and economic revival			

3.5 Table 3.2 shows that some sustainability improvements are expected even without a new Local Plan 2040. These include the increasing use of electric vehicles, the Environment Bill's expected requirement of at least 10% biodiversity net gain for new developments, tightened building regulations leading to more energy-efficient new homes, and many aspects of Local Plan 2036 (e.g. cap on student numbers, requirements for affordable housing, promotion of electric vehicle charging points).

3.6 Some reductions in sustainability are also likely without a new Local Plan 2040. These include increasing pressure on green spaces, increased stress on water resources, and the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit on employment, student numbers, the need for social distancing, and the economy more widely.

3.7 The Oxford Local Plan 2036 preceded Brexit and Covid-19, the Environment Bill, and the changes to permitted development which now allow, for instances, offices to be turned into housing. It also preceded the Government's promotion of the Ox-Cam arc; and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which will determine housing numbers and the broad spatial structure of development in Oxfordshire. A new plan is needed to deal with these changes, and with ongoing sustainability issues such as provision of green infrastructure, provision of affordable housing, and design of development.

4. Task A3: Identify key sustainability issues and problems

4.1 The policy context of Task A1 and sustainability context of Task A2 identified a range of issues and problems that could inform and affect the development of the Oxford Local Plan 2040. Table 4.1 summarises these.

Table 4.1 Sustainability issues and problems for the Oxford Local Plan 2040

SA objective	Key sustainability issues and problems
1. To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero **carbon emissions** by 2040	• Oxford is still very far away from achieving its 2040 target of net zero emissions and Local Plan cannot deliver it alone. • Retrofitting existing developments will be a significant challenge • New development must not further contribute to climate change • Policy should embed principles of energy hierarchy into the design of new buildings (fabric first, reducing energy use, mitigating remaining emissions) • Embodied carbon is an ongoing challenge to be addressed as part of the construction process • There is potential for supporting larger scale renewable energy generation across city, and for supporting mitigation of emissions from the existing built environment outside of the planning system
2. To build **resilience to climate change**, including reducing risks from overheating, flooding and the resulting detriment to well-being, the economy and the environment.	• Between 2,000 and 5,000 properties in Oxford are at risk from river flooding, and additional properties are at risk of groundwater, surface water and sewer flooding. The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is expected to reduce this number • The Local Plan 2040 will need to take long term flood risk into account, including the impacts of climate change and how this could change flood risk in the city • New development should not exacerbate flood risk or overheating, such as through hard surfaces increasing surface run off into sewers, or exacerbation of the urban heat island effect. • There are links between flooding/overheating and human health (physical and mental) particularly in areas of the city that are most deprived or highly urbanized/lacking in green infrastructure. • There will be residual risks of flooding after applying the sequential approach to locating development and incorporating defence measures
3. To encourage the **efficient use of land** through good design and layout, and minimise the use of greenfield and Green Belt land	• The plan must aim to utilise suitable Brownfield sites and other underutilised land as a preferred option for development. • Consideration should be made whether there should be an uplift in minimum housing density requirements where a sufficient level of infrastructure is present. • Prioritising brownfield land for development may reduce opportunities to repurpose the sites for public amenity or as green infrastructure with a focus on ecological/biodiversity functions. • The cost of new development is likely to be higher at contaminated sites. In turn, these higher costs increase pressure to develop greenfield sites • The City Council should only release land from the Green Belt or alter the boundary in exceptional circumstances.

SA objective	Key sustainability issues and problems
	• The plan should consider whether a more comprehensive approach to Oxford's Green belt should be completed.
4. To meet **local housing needs** by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home	• Housing need for Oxfordshire is in the process of being determined through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. • Housing costs in Oxford are very high, land available for housing is very limited, and affordable housing has historically been difficult to provide. • Oxford has limited capacity to deliver new homes within its boundary and has been unable to meet housing need in full without support from neighbouring authorities. • A continued reliance on smaller sites is likely to increase pressure on existing infrastructure. • The type of affordable housing delivered in Oxford is likely to be impacted upon by changes made through national policy, i.e., requirements for First Homes. • The pandemic raises uncertainty in terms of housing delivery in the medium- to longer term. • The Plan should assess and respond to the need for student accommodation: The links between provision of student accommodation and other types of housing should be considered when developing policies. • The potential implications of student location in different locations, for students, neighbourhoods and in terms of delivering sufficient housing of the right type should be considered.
5. To reduce poverty, social exclusion, and health **inequalities**	• Oxford has high levels of health inequalities across the city. • Covid has likely exacerbated inequalities and harmed health for many. • Oxford's higher-than-average levels of activity and lower-than-average levels of obesity need to be maintained and improved. • The Local Plan can help to improve mental health and wellbeing through, for instance, improving quality of housing, improving access to open spaces, and focusing on building communities, particularly learning from the coronavirus pandemic. • Climate resilience measures will be essential for reducing impacts on health and wellbeing as the city moves towards a net zero future, particularly for the most vulnerable communities.
6. To provide accessible essential **services and facilities**	• The pandemic has led to the closure of some community and cultural facilities. Post-pandemic there may be changes in the way some services are delivered and facilities are run. Protection of facilities may become more difficult, given changes to government policy on permitted development. • With high pressure for housing, it will be important to make a case for the importance of the facilities that support this housing. The plan will need to meet the infrastructure needs of additional development in the city over the Local Plan period. • New infrastructure must address the climate emergency (low carbon, climate resilient). Natural solutions will be important in ensuring the resilience of infrastructure. • Infrastructure needs to help people to live healthy, active lives (e.g. walking/cycling, GP surgeries).

SA objective	Key sustainability issues and problems
	• The city generally and its infrastructure should be adaptable to future changes in technology (self-driving vehicles etc.). • The retail and service sector plays a crucial role in Oxford's economy, providing job and leisure opportunities to local people. • The city must offer a diverse range of retail uses and services. • The city must seek to bounce back positively and innovatively especially in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
7. To provide adequate green infrastructure, **leisure and recreation** opportunities and make these readily accessible for all; and to conserve and enhance Oxford's **biodiversity**	• The Oxford Meadows SAC is already negatively affected by air pollution and is threatened by recreational pressure. Air pollution from increased vehicle movements also impacts other sensitive sites. • Three SSSIs out of the twelve in the city are in unfavourable condition and two are partly in unfavourable condition. • Development pressure on, or near to protected sites could result in direct loss of habitat or species, fragmentation of ecological networks, as well as indirect impacts e.g. from noise, light, air pollution. • Unequal access to, and distribution of, green infrastructure across the city exacerbate wider health inequalities. There are priority areas which would benefit particularly from increased greening. • Infill development within the city, particularly on garden land, can provide some habitat for wildlife. • Climate change is likely to impact habitats and species distribution. • Increased recreational pressure and water quality impacts (run-off from roads etc.) as a result of new development puts pressure on green infrastructure and biodiversity. • Off-site areas for biodiversity net gain stemming from development will probably be needed in response to the Environment Bill.
8. To reduce **traffic and associated air pollution** by improving travel choice, shortening journeys and reducing the need to travel by car/ lorry	• Although Oxford is known for its high levels of walking, cycling and public transport use, Oxford's roads are still congested, with high levels of commuting by car. • All of Oxford is an Air Quality Management Area because of NO_x, which mostly comes from cars. Tackling emissions from domestic and non-domestic sources is likely to improve air quality. • Past transport policy has focused on carrots: improving facilities for walking, cycling and public transport. However current policy is also to discourage car use, for instance through restricted parking, zero emission zones, and reallocation of some road space to sustainable forms of transport. • Restrictions in car use in the city must be supported via a strong and affordable public transport infrastructure network. • Improvements in renewable transport provision and the restriction of cars in the city centre will help to achieve a zero carbon Oxford. The uptake of low and zero emission vehicles should be encouraged, in particular buses and taxis which will continue to need to access the city centre. • Improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure must be inclusive and the benefits shared by all of Oxford's residents. • Improved public transport connections between the city and surrounding areas will improve the integration of settlements throughout Oxfordshire.

SA objective	Key sustainability issues and problems
9. To achieve **water** quality targets and manage water resources	• Oxford is already in an area of serious water stress. • Increased demand for water is likely to put more pressure on water resources. Additional water efficiency measures will need to be investigated at through the plan-making process. • Climate change, particularly incidences of hotter, drier summers may exacerbate water supply issues and create increased water shortages. • Nutrients from wastewater could impact local water bodies, causing eutrophication. This may have knock on implications in terms of the Water Environment Regulations, and the city's ambitions for bathing water status for parts of the River Thames.
10. To promote **good urban design** through the protection and enhancement of the **historic environment** and heritage assets while respecting local character and context and promoting innovation.	• Potential impacts of new development proposed in the plan on areas of archaeological and historical value should be considered. • Development pressures continue to put a strain on natural and historic sites and landscape/townscape features of Oxford. A good understanding of heritage value will be required to ensure continued development pressure does not adversely affect heritage assets, important townscape features and local character. • Local design guidance informed by local communities should reflect special characteristics and needs of different parts of the city. • Green spaces and features should be woven into the urban fabric. • Mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change will require good design. This is a particular challenge for heritage assets. • Good design should focus on people within the spaces, how they move, interact and socialise; and should engender feelings of safety and security.
11. To achieve sustainable inclusive **economic growth**, including the development and expansion of a diverse and knowledge-based economy and the culture/leisure/ visitor sector	• Employment in Oxford is high and likely to continue growing, but is constrained by the availability of appropriate housing. Ensuring the right balance of employment and housing growth is fundamental to ensuring Oxford's growth. • State schools across Oxford, and particularly in deprived areas, generally under-perform compared to regional and national averages. • Employment growth in Oxford is most likely to continue to be in the key sectors of healthcare and STEM, especially those involving R&D. Without appropriate skills & training, those jobs will not be accessible to local people. • Ensuring expanded and robust digital infrastructure is available in as many settings as possible in order to align with the expectations of flexibility to work and study anywhere. • Expanded ability to work remotely could put work and educational opportunities in closer reach to a wider range of people overcoming locational constraints and financial/environmental costs associated with travel. • It is unlikely that significant new sites will be identified for employment. The focus will more likely be on redevelopment and renewal of existing sites. • Dramatic changes, accelerated by the pandemic, are likely to the makeup of city and district centres, shifting from retail dominated to other uses. Employment and education uses may have opportunities to

SA objective	Key sustainability issues and problems
	fill in gaps in the form of co-working spaces, R&D spaces and other forms. • Small scale brownfield development across the city is more likely to put pressure on existing school places, and will not in itself provide new school sites.

4.2 The SEA process also requires an analysis of existing problems at areas of particular environmental importance, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). SPAs and SACs are internationally important nature conservation sites designated for, respectively, birds and habitats/species (see Section 1.5).

4.3 There are no SPAs in or near Oxford, but there are three SACs within 20km of Oxford:

Oxford Meadows SAC is a 267ha site which lies within the city boundary. It is designated because of its lowland hay meadow and creeping marshwort *Apium repens*. In December 2015, the last year of analysis by Natural England, it had excellent overall ('global') value for its hay meadow and creeping marshwort. However it is highly threatened by human induced changes in hydraulic conditions, pollution to surface water and invasive non-native species.

Cothill Fen SAC is a 43ha site located 7km from the city boundary. It is designated for its lowland valley mire, which contains one of the largest surviving examples of alkaline fen vegetation in central England. In 2015 the alkaline fens were of good overall value, and the alluvial forests were of significant global value. The SAC is highly threatened by pollution to groundwater and human-induced change in hydraulic conditions.

Little Wittenham SAC is a 69ha site located 19km from the city boundary. It is designated because it contains one of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK. In 2015 it was of good overall value, but it is highly threatened by non-native invasive species.

4.4 Oxford also has several Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSIs). Their condition is shown at Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1. The information on SSSI condition is normally 5-10 years old, so their condition may have changed since it was assessed.

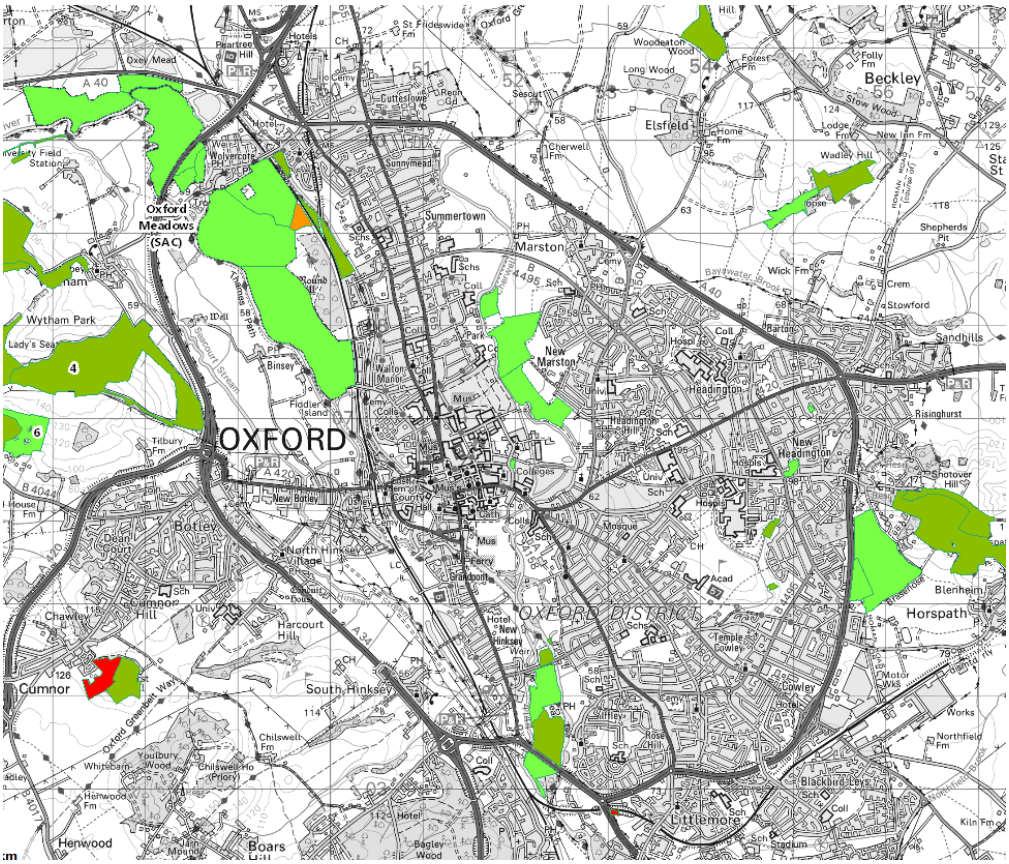

Figure 4.1 Location and condition of SSSIs in and near Oxford

Table 4.2 SSSIs in Oxford		
Site of Special Scientific Interest	**Size (ha)**	**Condition**
Cassington Meadows	6.9	Favourable
Hook Meadow and the Trap Grounds	11.3	Unfavourable, Unfavourable Recovering
Iffley Meadows	36.1	Favourable, Unfavourable Recovering
Littlemore Railway Cutting	0.5	Unfavourable Declining
Lye Valley	2.3	Unfavourable Recovering
Magdalen Grove	0.4	Favourable
Magdalen Quarry	0.4	Favourable
New Marston Meadows	44.7	Favourable
Pixey and Yarnton Mead	86.4	Favourable
Port Meadow with Wolvercote Common and Green	167.1	Favourable, Unfavourable Recovering
Rock Edge	1.7	Favourable
Wolvercote Meadows	7.1	Favourable

5. Task A4: Develop the SA framework

5.1 A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Framework provides a method by which the sustainability effects of a plan can be identified, described, analysed and compared. Development of the Local Plan 2040 will involve two types of decisions: on the plan objectives, alternatives and policies (general directions for the plan); and on sites (specific locations for development). Assessing the impacts of the plan objectives, alternatives and policies involves a more general analysis against an overall framework of SA objectives. That is quite different from assessing the impacts of sites, which involves analysing the site's location and future ability to support sustainable development. As such, two different appraisal frameworks have been used.

5.1 SA framework for plan objectives, alternatives and policies

5.1.1 The SA Framework of Table 5.1 consists of SA objectives and issues. The **SA objectives** provide a method by which to test whether the Local Plan will yield the best possible outcomes in terms of sustainability – its environmental, social and economic effects. The SA objectives therefore cover a full cross-section of sustainability issues.

5.1.2 The **issues** are points which help expand the focus of the SA Objectives. They are used to ensure that all the issues are considered as part of the assessment process and to address any ambiguities that may arise. They are not considered as a definitive list when conducting the SA.

Table 5.1 SA framework for plan objectives, alternatives and policies

SA Objective	Issues covered	SEA Themes
1. To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero **carbon emissions** by 2040	• Building standards, energy efficiency • Renewable energy • Active travel, public transport • Waste reduction • Sustainable construction practices	Climatic Factors, Air
2. To build **resilience to climate change**, including reducing risks from overheating, flooding and the resulting detriment to well-being, the economy and the environment.	• Flooding • Building design and layout • Overheating	Water, Climatic Factors
3. To encourage the **efficient use of land** through good design and layout, and minimise the use of greenfield and Green Belt land	• Building densities and layout • Greenfield land • Green Belt • Biodiversity generally • Biodiversity designated sites	Soil, Material Assets, Biodiversity
4. To meet **local housing needs** by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home	• Housing numbers • Housing size • Affordable housing • Specialist accommodation, e.g. care homes, gypsies/travellers, homeless shelters	Material Assets, Population, Human Health

SA Objective	Issues covered	SEA Themes
	• Student accommodation	
5. To reduce poverty, social exclusion, and health **inequalities**	• Regeneration • Geographical spread of new development • Accessibility of areas of deprivation • Availability of services and infrastructure in areas of deprivation	Population, Human Health, Material Assets
6. To provide accessible essential **services and facilities**	• Daily needs met within a short walk/cycle ride ('15/20 minute neighbourhoods') • Thriving city/local centres • Retail/shops • Community facilities, health care / GP, schools • Facilities for young people, children's play areas • 'Grey' infrastructure: wastewater treatment, transport, energy etc.	Material Assets, Human Health
7. To provide adequate green and blue infrastructure, **leisure and recreation** opportunities and make these readily accessible for all; and to conserve and enhance Oxford's **biodiversity**	• Green and blue infrastructure • Leisure facilities • Playing fields and public open space (for all of the above, distribution/ location as well as sheer quantity) • Habitat Regs Assessment, esp. air quality and recreational disturbance • SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves etc. • Biodiversity more generally (e.g. hedges, un-built up areas) • Biodiversity net gain	Landscape, Biodiversity, Flora, Fauna, Human Health
8. To reduce **traffic and associated air pollution** by improving travel choice, shortening journeys and reducing the need to travel by car/ lorry	• Walking, cycling • Reducing reliance on the private car • Public transport, incl. train station and branch line • Commuting and housing/ jobs balance • Parking • Electric vehicle charging points, zero emission zones, • Air quality and links to transport • AQMA	Air, Climatic Factors
9. To achieve **water** quality targets and manage water resources	• Water use • Water quality • SuDS, buffers on streams etc.	Water, Biodiversity
10. To promote **good urban design** through the protection and enhancement of the **historic environment** and heritage assets while respecting local	• Listed buildings and archaeology • Setting/curtilage • Conservation areas • Good design, beauty • View cones • High buildings	Cultural Heritage, Landscape

SA Objective	Issues covered	SEA Themes
character and context and promoting innovation.		
11. To achieve sustainable inclusive **economic growth**, including the development and expansion of a diverse and knowledge-based economy and the culture/leisure/ visitor sector	• Jobs, incl. knowledge-based jobs • Visitor economy • Locations for start-up ventures • Jobs for local unskilled residents, apprenticeships • Keeping the high street alive amidst changing shopping habits, changes to permitted development etc. • Cultural provision	Population, Material Assets

5.1.3 The SEA process requires the Environmental Report to include information on the likely significant effects on a specified list of environmental factors. Table 5.2 shows how the SA Objectives relate to these factors.

Table 5.2 Links between SEA Directive issues and SA objectives

SEA Directive issue	SA objectives
Biodiversity	7, 8, 9
Population	4, 5, 6, 7
Human health	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11
Flora	7, 8, 9
Fauna	7, 8, 9
Soil	3
Water	2, 9
Air	8, 1
Climatic factors	1, 2
Material assets	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11
Cultural heritage (incl. architectural and archaeological heritage)	10
Landscape	7, 10

5.2 SA framework for sites

5.2.1 More site-specific appraisal criteria will be used to assess the impact of proposed development site. Many of these relate to the location of the site, which is a key determinant of its sustainability: how easily would users of the site be able to access a range of facilities (more sustainable), and how close is the site to sensitive environmental areas (less sustainable)? The site-specific criteria is shown below:

SA Objective 1: To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero **carbon emissions** by 2040

See SA Objective 8 for decision-making criteria.

SA Objective 2: To build **resilience to climate change**, including reducing risks from overheating, flooding and the resulting detriment to well-being, the economy and the environment.

Decision-making criteria: Is the use proposed suitable given the flood zone of the site?

Category	Flood zones
--	Site is partially or wholly in Flood Zone 3b

-	Site is partially or wholly in Flood Zone 3a or Zone 2
0	Site is in Flood Zone 1

Category	Flooding of land surrounding site for access/ egress
--	There is no safe access/egress to/from the site
-	Access/egress from the site is over moderate to low hazard land
0	There is safe access/egress from the site – area surrounding site is FZ1

SA Objective 3: To encourage the **efficient use of land** through good design and layout, and minimise the use of greenfield and Green Belt land

Decision-making criteria: Will the site make use of previously developed land/ buildings?

Category	Previously developed land
--	Site is protected open space
-	Site is unprotected open space
0	Site is previously developed land (with buildings in use on site)
+	Site is previously developed land (with vacant buildings on site)
++	Site is previously developed land (cleared)

Decision-making criteria: Will the site be on Green Belt land?

Category	Green Belt
--	Site is on Green Belt land
0	Site is not on Green Belt land

SA Objective 4: To meet **local housing needs** by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent affordable home

Decision-making criteria: Will the site provide significant quantities of net new housing?

Category	Housing provision
-	Site would decrease the amount of net new housing
0	Site would provide no net new housing
+	Site would provide up to 10 new homes
++	Site would provide more than 10 new homes

Decision-making criteria: Will it improve the availability of decent affordable housing?

Category	Affordable Housing provision
-	Site is allocated for housing but would provide no affordable housing
0	Site is allocated for use other than housing or is not allocated
+	Site provides up to 50% affordable housing
++	Site provides more than 50% affordable housing

SA Objective 5: To reduce poverty, social exclusion, and health **inequalities**

Decision-making criteria: Will it improve opportunities for people in the most deprived areas?

Category	Regeneration Areas
0	Site is not in or adjacent to a regeneration area
+	Site is adjacent to a regeneration area
++	Site is in a regeneration area

SA Objective 6: To provide accessible essential **services and facilities**

Decision-making criteria: Will it increase the provision of essential services and facilities?

Category	Community facilities
-	Allocation leads to a decrease in community facilities
0	Site not allocated for community facilities OR amount of community facilities remain the same due to the allocation
+	Community facilities provided on site
++	Allocation leads to a significant increase in community facilities.

See also SA Objective 8.

SA Objective 7: To provide adequate green and blue infrastructure, **leisure and recreation** opportunities and make these readily accessible for all; and to conserve and enhance Oxford's **biodiversity**

Decision-making criteria: Will it increase the provision of public open space?

Category	Public open space
-	Allocation leads to a decrease in public open space
0	Site not allocated OR amount of public open space remains the same due to the allocation
+	Site allocated for housing – 10% public open space provided on site
++	Allocation leads to an increase in public open space greater than 10% of the total site area

Decision-making criteria: Will it protect and enhance existing flora, fauna and habitats?

Category	Ecology and Biodiversity
--	Contains an internationally or nationally protected site: Oxford Meadows SAC or SSSI
-	Contains or is adjacent to a locally protected site. Within 100m of a nationally/ internationally designated site. Potential for legally protected species to be present.
0	Within 100m of a locally protected site or 200m of an internationally/nationally protected site
+	Contains no nature conservation designations but has potential for nature conservation interest. Can improve wildlife linkages or habitat continuity
++	Contains no nature conservation designations but has potential for significant nature conservation enhancement

SA objective 8: To reduce **traffic and associated air pollution** by improving travel choice, shortening journeys and reducing the need to travel by car/ lorry (also SA objective 1: To achieve the city's ambition to reach net zero **carbon emissions** by 2040)

Decision-making criteria: Will it encourage walking cycling and use of public transport?

Category	Sustainable Transport links (bus stop)
-	> 400m from a bus stop
+	< 400m from a bus stop

Category	Sustainable transport links (rail station)
-	> 1600m from train station
0	1200-1600m from train station
+	800-1200m from train station
++	< 800m from train station

Category	Primary Schools
-	>800m from the nearest primary school with spaces
+	<800m from the nearest primary school with spaces

Category	Secondary Schools
-	>800m from the nearest secondary school with spaces
+	<800m from the nearest secondary school with spaces

Category	GP Surgeries
-	>800m from the nearest GP Surgery
+	<800m from the nearest GP Surgery

Category	Post office
-	>800m from the nearest post office
+	<800m from the nearest post office

Decision-making criteria: Is the site within an Air Quality Management Area?

Category	Air Quality
--	Site is within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)
-	Site is adjacent to an AQMA
0	Site is not within an AQMA

SA Objective 9: To achieve **water** quality targets and manage water resources

Decision-making criteria: Does the site contain, or is it near, a water body?

Category	Water
--	Site contains a water body (e.g. lake, pond, stream)
-	Site is within 30m of a water body
0	Site is not within 30m of a water body

SA Objective 10: To promote **good urban design** through the protection and enhancement of the **historic environment** and heritage assets while respecting local character and context and promoting innovation.

Decision-making criteria: Does the site contain any historical, or archaeological features?

Category	Archaeology
--	Site contains a nationally important archaeological site (Scheduled Ancient Monument)
-	Site provides the setting to a nationally important archaeological site OR site has known archaeological sites or potential (e.g. close to 'Sites and Monument' symbol or in local area of archaeological importance)

0	Site contains no known archaeological sites or has limited or uncertain archaeological potential

Category	Conservation Areas & Register of Parks and Gardens (RPG
--	Site lies in a conservation area or the site is on the RPG
-	Site lies on the edge of a conservation area or of a site on the RPG
0	Site is not in or on the edge of a conservation area or site on the RPG

Category	Listed Buildings
--	Site contains a listed building
-	Site forms the setting of a listed building or contains a locally listed building
0	Site contains no identified historic building constraint

Category	View Cones
-	Site lies within a view cone
0	Site lies outside of a view cone

Category	High Buildings Area
-	Site lies within the City Council's locally designated high buildings area.
0	Site lies outside the City Council's locally designated high buildings area.

SA Objective 11: To achieve sustainable inclusive **economic growth**, including the development and expansion of a diverse and knowledge-based economy and the culture/leisure/ visitor sector

Decision-making criteria: Will it support key sectors that drive economic growth?

Will it increase the quantity and quality of employment opportunities?

Category	Employment Opportunities
0	Do not allocate/ allocate for employment use
++	Allocate site for employment use

5.2.2 Table 5.3 summarises the site-specific criteria and shows how these link with the SA objectives of Table 5.1. The same colour coding scheme will be used for site appraisal as for policy appraisal.

Table 5.3 Site appraisal criteria v. SA objectives

SA objectives / Site assessment criteria	1. Carbon emissions	2. Resilience to climate	3. Efficient use of land	4. Local housing needs	5. Inequalities	6. Services & facilities	7. Leisure, biodiversity	8. Transport & air	9. Water	10. Design, historic env.	14. Economic growth
Flood zone		■									
Flooding of land surrounding site		■									
Type of land			■								
Affordable housing provision				■							
Regeneration area					■						
Provision of community facilities						■					
Provision of public open space							■				
Ecology and biodiversity							■				
Sustainable transport links: bus stop	■							■			
Sustainable transport links: train station	■							■			
Distance to primary school	■							■			
Distance to secondary school	■							■			
Distance to GP surgery	■							■			
Distance to post office	■							■			
Air quality								■			
Water									■		
Archaeology										■	
Conservation area, parks & gardens										■	
Listed building										■	
View cone										■	
High buildings area										■	
Employment opportunities											■

6. Alternatives

6.1 The identification, assessment and comparison of 'reasonable alternatives' is a key stage in sustainability appraisal (SA). This SA scoping stage does not legally have to consider alternatives, but some information is already available about the alternatives that might be considered.

6.2 Some alternatives will not be possible and will be 'scoped out' early in the SA process. For instance, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will determine housing numbers for the Oxfordshire authorities, so the number of homes that will need to be provided within Oxford will be predetermined. Similarly, national policy is clear that planning policies cannot put demands on new development that are so onerous that they would make developing a site unviable, so some combinations of requirements on new developments will not be legally permitted.

6.3 However other alternatives that are likely to be considered as part of the plan development include:

- In terms of housing provision, commuting impacts, and achievement of national and regional economic ambitions: prioritisation of maximum housing v. maximum employment provision, and choice of preferred sites for future development;
- In terms of the location for housing: the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will determine the amount of housing needed, but there are alternatives in terms of providing Oxford's housing need on brownfield sites, although this might mean very high densities and tall buildings v. providing some of Oxford's housing need on greenfield land;
- In terms of climate change mitigation: options for retrofitting existing developments as well as requirements for the energy efficiency of new homes;
- In terms of keeping development viable: prioritization of maximum affordable housing v. carbon neutrality/negativity v. provision of community facilities etc.;
- In terms of social and environmental ambitions: protection of open space and biodiversity v. provision of social and leisure facilities;
- In transport terms: support for electric vehicles (maintaining current transport patterns but with reduced emissions) v. strong prioritization of walking and cycling.

7. Next steps

Do you have any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal scoping document?

7.1 Comments on this Sustainability Appraisal scoping report can be made via the issues paper questions on our online consultation portal, (there is a specific question seeking feedback on this SA report), which can be accessed at: www.oxford.gov.uk/localplan2040. Alternatively, a Word version of the comment form can be downloaded for printing and completing. These can be returned by email to planningpolicy@oxford.gov.uk, or by post to Planning Policy, St Aldate's Chambers, 109-113 St Aldate's, Oxford, OX1 1DS. We will also accept letters and emails.

7.2 The scoping report will be amended to reflect any comments received. The scoping information will also be updated to reflect the results of additional studies carried out as part of the plan-making process.

7.3 Table 1.1 earlier in this paper shows the next stages of plan-making. The subsequent SA stages will be carried out alongside the plan-making process, and will inform plan-making. The identification of reasonable alternatives, and their assessment and comparison through the SA process will inform the choice of preferred alternatives/options for the plan (Regulation 18). Following the choice of preferred alternatives, the SA will assess the draft plan in full, and will recommend mitigation measures – avoidance, reduction, offsetting – for any significant impacts of the plan. Any subsequent significant changes made to the plan will also be assessed. After plan adoption, an 'SEA statement' will explain how the SA informed the plan-making process.

7.4 The Habitats Regulations Assessment will also be carried out alongside the SA and plan-making, and will inform both processes. A Stage 1 HRA 'screening report' will be carried out before the consultation on alternatives. It is likely that a Stage 2 HRA 'appropriate assessment' will be needed, given the existing and likely future pressures of car transport (air quality) and new housing (recreation) on the Oxford Meadows SAC. This will be prepared before the consultation on preferred options.