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OXFORD LOCAL PLAN 2040

PREFERRED OPTIONS
September 2022



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POLICY OPTION SETS

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0.1 INTRODUCTION

Oxford Local Plan 2040

0.1.1 Oxford City Council is producing a new Local Plan which will shape how the city develops. The Local Plan 2040 places a strong emphasis upon the concept of the 15-minute city whereby our city is planned in such a way as to optimise the opportunity for people to be able to reach a wide range of facilities that they need to live well and healthily within a 15-minute walk of their home. This provides the opportunity to build strong local communities that enable residents to thrive. The Plan seeks to accelerate the move to net zero buildings and introduces measures such as an Urban Greening Factor to ensure the city is ready to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The delivery of new homes continues to be a priority for this plan, whilst ensuring that we deliver and support mixed and inclusive economic development across the city. The Local Plan 2040, once adopted, will be used in determining planning applications for a wide range of development. We want to ensure that Oxford continues to be a successful attractive city where people enjoy living, working and visiting.

Preferred Options Stage – How it works

0.1.2 The Preferred Options document contains a series of proposed policy approaches or options which cover a range of topics including housing, economy, communities, and design and heritage. In addition, there is a development sites and infrastructure chapter which sets out proposed sites that may require a site allocation in the plan. All the options are considered at this stage and have been presented as a preferred option, an option, an alternative option or an alternative option (considered detrimental). With each set of options, a short commentary has been included, setting out the potential positive and negative consequences of the approach. The document does not contain draft policies and the options do not contain all of the detail that will be included in the final policy. This Preferred Options document is an important step in policy development which transitions from the issues presented

at the previous consultation stage to the draft plan which will be consulted upon next year. Some of the options recognise that they may work best when in combination with another option and if that is the case that has been indicated in the option tables. We have also set out where certain options may require additional technical work to determine their full scope or scale.

We would welcome your views on the Preferred Options Document

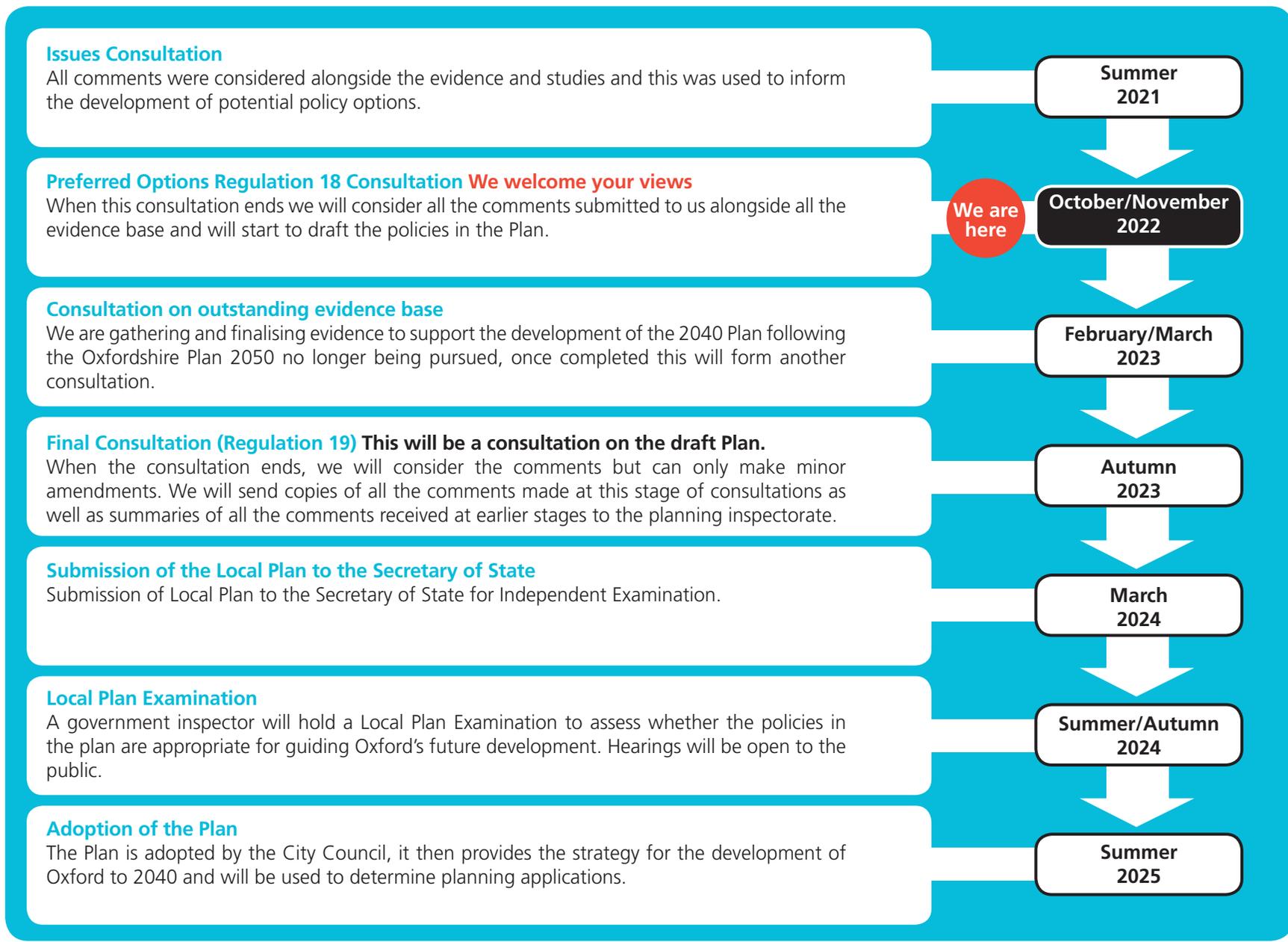
0.1.3 We are seeking comments on this document for 6 weeks between Monday 3 October 2022 and Monday 14 November 2022. We have produced a leaflet and questionnaire to help you respond.

0.1.4 The consultation document is supported by several focused background papers, as well as a Sustainability Appraisal and Health Impact Assessment. There are questions in the questionnaire which will allow you to record your feedback on these documents also.

0.1.5 We are looking forward to hearing your ideas and views about the options in this document.

What happens next

0.1.6 This is the second stage of public consultation in the development of the Local Plan 2040. The full detail of our timetable for developing the new Local Plan is set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS) on the website, but the stages are also summarised here:



CHAPTER ONE
VISION AND STRATEGY

OXFORD
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WHERE WE ARE

- 1.1 The Issues consultation in summer 2021 highlighted matters that are important in Oxford in order to achieve sustainable development. Threats to achieving quality of life were also identified, which include the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the climate emergency. They have brought into sharp relief the need for strong communities, local access to services and facilities including green spaces, the need to limit impacts on the climate through reducing our use of carbon and also to adapt and build resilience to more extreme weather events and ensure that the longer-term impacts on biodiversity are minimised and mitigated. A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) identifies Oxford's Specific Situation - the things that need to be addressed and the strengths that can be consolidated.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Strengths

The city hosts significant habitats and biodiversity and has publicly accessible open space with many functions, including outdoor sport.

- **117** playing pitches
- **35** allotments
- **248,200** trees
- **22.3%** of the city has canopy cover
- **12** Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- **15** historic parks and gardens



Weaknesses

Fragmentation has occurred over time which can weaken ecosystems. Some parts of the city have less access to public green spaces nearby than others. Limited opportunities to create new green, open space.

Opportunities

Green Infrastructure is essential to adapting to climate change, for example as flood storage and by creating shade. Green Infrastructure is multi-functional – able to contribute to many other objectives essential for sustainability e.g. health and wellbeing, carbon sequestration, setting for heritage, economic growth. Development will provide opportunities to recreate nature connections, enhance biodiversity and to bring more green infrastructure into brownfield sites.

Threats

Climate change is likely to impact species and ecosystems. Some ecosystems are sensitive to the impacts of development. Development pressure and a growing population could put increasing demands on the city's open spaces.

- **5,000** homes at risk of flooding
- **10%** increase in extreme weather by 2050



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Strengths

Oxford has a rich and valued built heritage of strong and distinctive character. The city is compact with very good access to local centres and the city centre by sustainable modes.

- Buildings from every period since 11th Century
- **10** scheduled monuments
- **18** conservation areas
- **1500** listed buildings



Weaknesses

Despite the quality of the built environment in some areas, there are other parts of the city where developments have not made the best use of land or have not created successful places. Some areas do not enable easy and safe access to services and facilities. Traffic congestion can be high, which can make the environment feel less safe for cyclists and pedestrians and make public transport less reliable, as well as creating more air pollution and wasting time. There are some barriers to moving around parts of the city, such as watercourses and busy roads. Much of our current building stock will require improvements or retrofitting to meet net zero objectives.

Opportunities

The compact nature of the city and the wide range of facilities and services mean that there are great opportunities for sustainable and healthy lifestyles, which can be enhanced further by improvements to existing routes or new connections, such as new bridges.

Threats

New development that generates car use would exacerbate problems with congestion, undermine the attractiveness of more sustainable modes and how easily and happily people can access goods and services. Additional car traffic would also affect the quality and enjoyment of the streets and spaces.

COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND LIVING

Strengths

Oxford's city centre and distinctive district centres sit at the heart of local communities and ensure good access to important leisure, cultural, healthcare and education facilities. Oxford has diverse communities and a strong identity.

Weaknesses

There is a limited housing stock and high demand, limiting people's access to decent homes in the city. There are pockets of housing deprivation

- **2,852** households on housing register Jan 21

There are wide inequalities in the city. Some of the most and least deprived wards in the county sit side-by-side in Oxford. The recent pandemic has exposed and exacerbated inequalities, which could take a long time to even out.

- **10.5%** households in fuel poverty 2018
- **12%** with limiting long-term illness or disability
- **10** out of 83 areas among most deprived in the UK, **12** in least deprived
- **29%** children live below poverty line
- **12.4** years lower life expectancy for females in Greater Leys than Wolvercote/Cutteslowe
- **38%** increase in mental health referrals 2016-2020



Opportunities

The Local Plan can include policies which facilitate the delivery of affordable housing and support high quality, sustainable design. In combination, these can support health and wellbeing, net zero and biodiversity objectives.

Threats

A growing economy can result in a side effect of putting more pressure on the housing market, exacerbating issues with affordability. The issues in the housing market will be difficult to resolve. Transient communities can be difficult to absorb into wider society. An ageing population puts more demands on healthcare provision, and attention needs to be given to designing the built environment to meet the needs of everyone.

ECONOMY

Strengths

Oxford's economy has strengths in research and development which are helping to find solutions to global problems, such as through development of the Astra Zeneca Covid-19 vaccine.

- Strong economy
- Major research, publishing, health sectors and the MINI Plant Oxford manufacturing plant
- **£7.34bn** contribution to national economy in 2017
- University of Oxford has more spin-outs than any other in the UK
- University of Oxford at the forefront of efforts to understand Covid-19.

Weaknesses

There is a lack of high quality office space in the city centre, where there is high demand. Some employment areas are poor to access compared to most of Oxford and do not make efficient use of land. There is a disparity in education and skills of the population and therefore in access to jobs. The compact nature of the city means that there is a limited housing stock and this can lead to difficulties attracting staff, which affects the running of institutions and businesses.

Opportunities

- **62%** qualified to degree level.

Growth of green economy, more demand for technologies like heat pumps, solar PV could strengthen market, create job roles for people manufacturing, installing these technologies. More focus on 'local' businesses, produce/foods, as international challenges like pandemics, political instability etc. compromise globalised markets and supply chains.

Threats

The links between the universities, the hospitals and private enterprise create opportunities for ground-breaking developments but even greater focus on highly skilled research and development risks disenfranchising some citizens. Greater automation in manufacturing sector, shifts to online retail and changing job profiles/skills requirements (e.g. more digital) risks disenfranchising citizens, reducing available jobs particularly for lower skilled professions.

-
- 1.2 Oxford is a human-scale city with a rich heritage which has the potential to enable residents to live in a healthy and sustainable way, for example because of the possibility of travelling by active modes, such as by bike and on foot, which is why it is such a sustainable location for development, including jobs and housing. Oxford is a place of world-leading science and technology, which should be supported to help provide solutions to some of the issues we all face, such as the climate crisis. Supporting the economy is essential, but it must be ensured that the benefits are widely felt.



VISION

1.3 In 2040, Oxford will be a healthy and inclusive city, with strong communities that benefit from equal opportunities for everyone, not only in access to housing, but to nature, to jobs, to social and leisure opportunities and to healthcare. We will be a city with a strong cultural identity, that respects our heritage, whilst maximising opportunities to look forwards, to innovate, learn and enable businesses to prosper. The city will be supported to continue to make advancements in the life sciences and low carbon sectors, helping provide solutions to global crises. The environment will be central to everything we do; it will be more biodiverse, better connected and resilient. We will utilise resources prudently whilst mitigating our impacts on the soil, water and air. The city will be net zero carbon, whilst our communities, buildings and infrastructure will be more resilient to the impacts of future climate change or other emergencies.

1.4 The Oxford Local Plan 2040 will help make sure our city, our environment and our people all thrive together. People and the natural environment are intrinsically linked and care is given to each to enable a high quality of life as the city develops. Social, environmental and economic aspects are considered together to achieve sustainable development.

1.5 Within the vision we have proposed for the Local Plan, we have drawn out six themes as illustrated in Figure 1-1. These include three themes based on the pillars of sustainability and three themes based on the intersections of those pillars. Taken together, the six themes represent what we consider to be a sustainable future for Oxford.

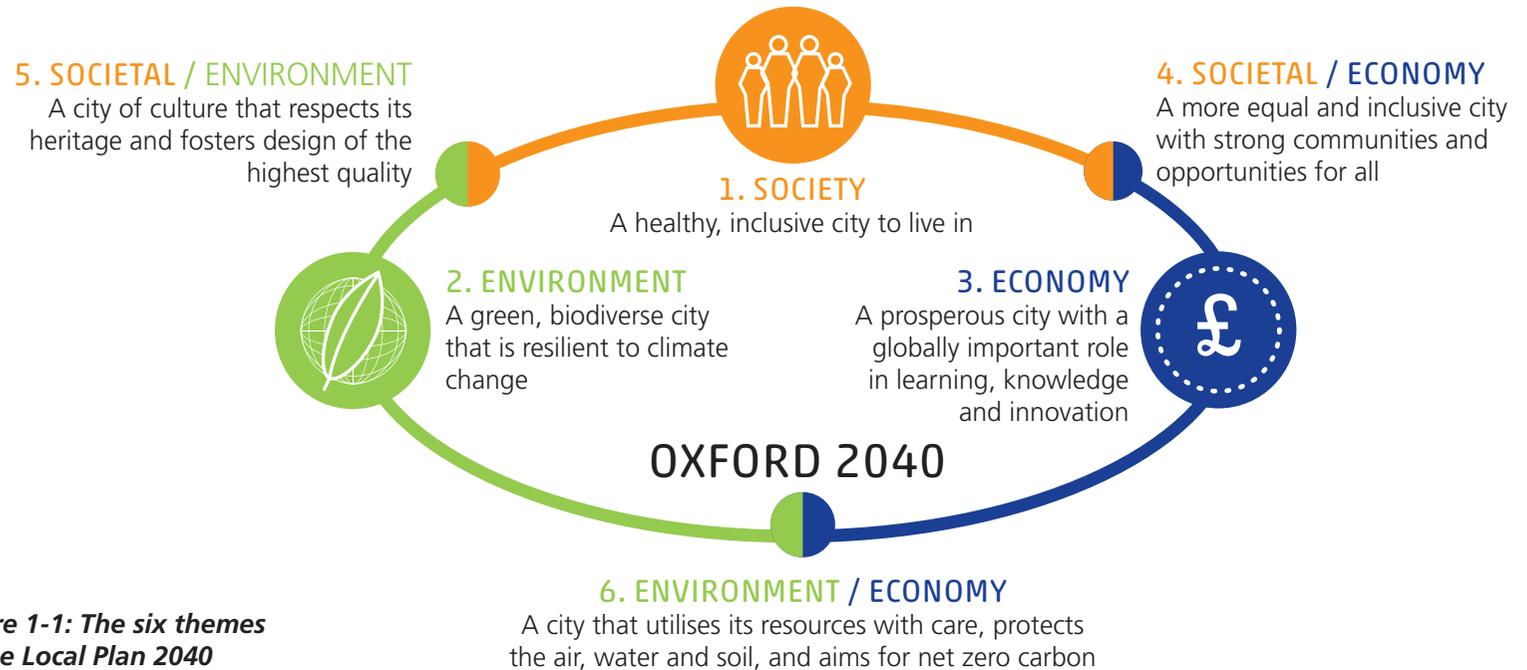


Figure 1-1: The six themes of the Local Plan 2040

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

- 1.6 The objectives for the plan set out in more detail how the plan will seek to achieve the vision for the city in 2040. We have developed several objectives that build off each of the six themes within the vision identified above. There are overlaps between the themes and objectives and most objectives could fit within several themes. The policy options shown in this document are arranged according to theme.
- 1.7 It will be important that the policies of the Local Plan are developed in a way that is guided by the above vision and objectives, to ensure that the city's future is as sustainable as it can be.

A HEALTHY, INCLUSIVE CITY TO LIVE IN

- Access to affordable, high-quality and healthy living accommodation for all
- A built environment that supports and enables people to be physically and mentally healthy.

- 1.8 There is a limited supply of housing in the city which has many negative impacts. There is a high housing need, with 3,100 households on the housing register as of July 2022. The median house price of £400,000 is 11.72 times average earnings and Oxford is one of the least affordable places to buy or rent. Inequalities are exacerbated by high prices and the limited supply of affordable housing. This can result in some being forced into overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation. Many people are unable to access housing in the city, which increases commuting and means that employers have a high turnover of staff and have trouble attracting staff, which can affect their functioning, including of the hospitals.

- 1.9 Addressing this housing crisis is a key priority for the plan. The city is intrinsically suitable for housing, able to provide services and facilities, work, leisure, community and cultural opportunities. All places in the city are accessible by sustainable means, and much of the city is within 400m to a 15minute+ bus service, although there are opportunities for improvement. Other than sites already providing important infrastructure, contributing to Oxford's unique economy and helping local communities to thrive, housing should be the priority use.
- 1.10 It is also important that the right kind of housing is provided to best help meet needs. Homes must be built to reduce running costs and the impact on the environment and be comfortable to live in. A variety of housing types, sizes and tenures should be available across the city to ensure balanced communities and to meet the differing needs of a wide range of people. Balanced communities will be created, suitable for a range of different types of people and avoiding concentrations of any one type of housing, for example only large and expensive units, only small units that exclude people with children and concentrations of student accommodation. However, different site and area contexts will make different mixes suitable. The city centre and district centres are most suitable for high density developments with a wider range of small units.
- 1.11 The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of healthy internal and external spaces and setting standards for these. Both open space where we can be active and meet others safely, but also the importance of space within the homes and offices in which we spend so much of our lives. The pandemic has demonstrated that the home has had to become a space to work, to exercise, and to teach our children. The adjustment has been far more challenging for those without ample indoor space such as those living in overcrowded accommodation, shared houses and homes that have not been built to a standard that can accommodate such use.



A PROSPEROUS CITY WITH A GLOBALLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN LEARNING, KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION

- To build on the city's strengths in knowledge, healthcare and innovation
- To support the city's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and build resilience to future pandemics and economic challenges/shocks
- Opportunities for education, learning and skills development.

1.12 Oxford's strength in knowledge, healthcare and innovation is not accidental and it should be supported and allowed to develop. Oxford's contribution to the knowledge economy stems from Oxford's long history as a seat of learning and is part of what gives the city its identity. The research and development in Oxford, and in Oxfordshire but closely linked to Oxford and the universities, is finding solutions to global problems such as pandemics, endemic diseases and climate change. The universities and hospitals are key to the success of the knowledge economy in Oxford and many of the research and development locations are closely linked, for example at Old Road and on the hospitals themselves, the Science Area and Keble Road Triangle, the ROQ and the city centre. Other well-established areas include the Oxford Business Park, the Oxford Science Park and Headington. Development is in the pipeline at Oxford North and within the West End and Osney Mead area. The city provides a network and the location of areas of employment in locations easily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport and close to other facilities and homes encourages synergies and reduces the need to travel by car.

1.13 There are potential benefits for residents of Oxford being at the forefront of much research and development, in terms of healthcare and further and higher education opportunities and the availability of more well-paid jobs and different entry points to the labour market. However, more will be done to ensure opportunities are broadly felt, for example by ensuring a broad employment base with opportunities for smaller businesses and start-ups, greater sharing of facilities and more links between research and development and education and skills-building opportunities.

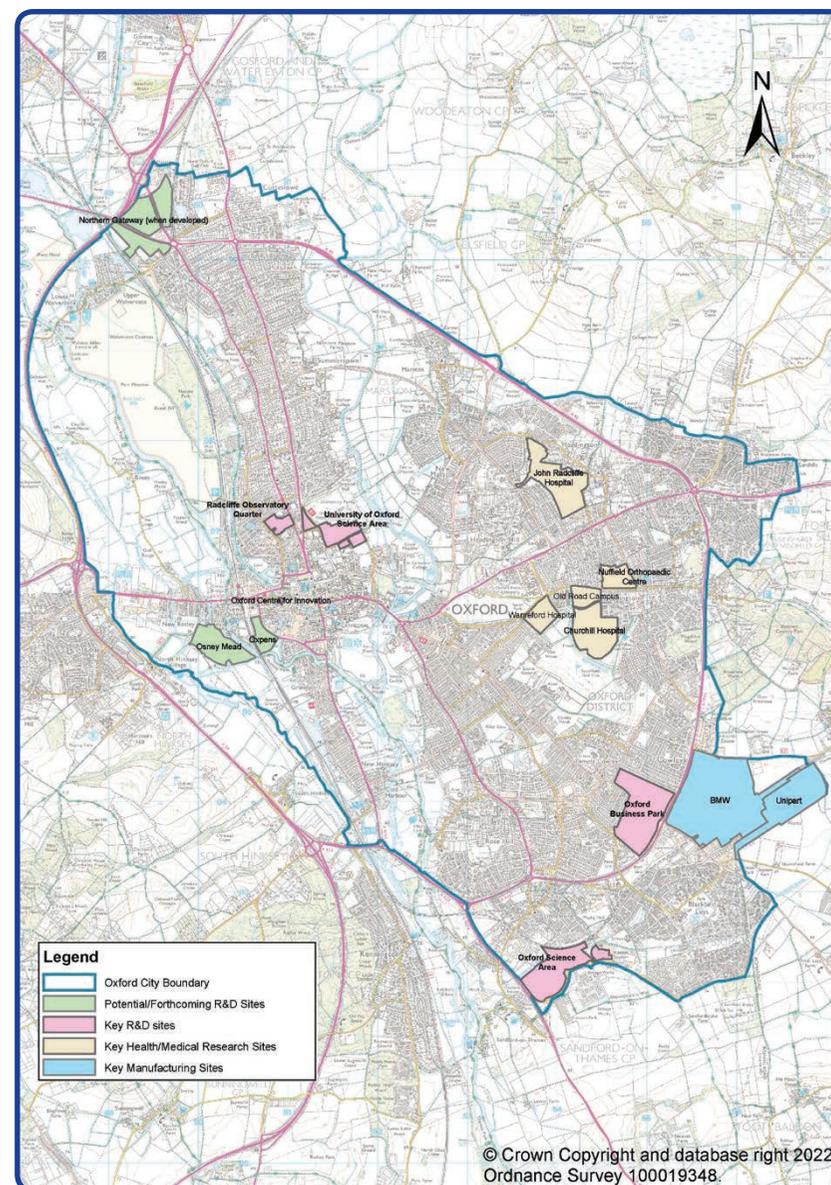


Figure 1-2: Key economic sites

A GREEN, BIODIVERSE CITY THAT IS RESILIENT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

- Supporting strong, well-connected ecological networks and securing net gains in biodiversity
- Ensuring the city is resilient and able to adapt to the impacts of climate change
- A city that is resilient and resistant to flood risk and its impacts on people and property
- A city with a green and blue network that is protected and enhanced
- Accessible open spaces for all with opportunities for sport, food growing, recreation, relaxation and socialising.

- 1.14 Green spaces and green features bring multiple benefits. They are important to mental health and wellbeing, from merely viewing greenery, by being in green spaces and exercising in them, and having space to play and to interact with others. Green spaces help define local character and community, helping bring a sense of place and togetherness. They can offer food growing and flood storage. They provide habitats for biodiversity.
- 1.15 Connections between green spaces are important because it helps strengthen habitats for biodiversity and can provide attractive green routes for people to walk and cycle along. Connections should be protected and enhanced where there are opportunities to. New green spaces should be provided with consideration of continuing and joining habitats. Green spaces should be enhanced.
- 1.16 All new developments should include green infrastructure features so that the opportunity is taken for development to enhance green infrastructure. Green infrastructure should be designed to a high quality, contributing to sustainability of the local area in a range of ways, such as through supporting health and wellbeing, biodiversity and climate resilience (multifunctional).
- 1.17 Adapting to and building resilience to climate change is essential, because it can't be prevented entirely. Green features help lessen and manage the impacts of flooding. They also provide shading in the summer, which will be important as longer periods of hotter days are expected.

A CITY THAT UTILISES ITS RESOURCES WITH CARE, PROTECTS THE AIR, WATER AND SOIL, AND AIMS FOR NET ZERO CARBON

- Ensuring the city is ready for a net zero carbon future
- Ensuring that resources including land, soil, water, and raw materials are used prudently and with consideration of replenishment and renewal
- Air quality and its impacts upon public health is improved
- Protecting the quality of natural resources and ensuring human health is safeguarded.

- 1.18 Resources are finite so must not be wasted. With all the competing development needs, land is a precious resource in Oxford that should be used wisely, with promotion of recycling and reuse where possible. It is also important that the quality of resources is maintained or improved, for example air, water and soil. Pollution that stops ecosystems, and people, functioning well should be avoided, and planning policies have a role in this. Oxford has areas of high biodiversity value that are often sensitive to pollution or changes in surface water or ground water flow. Development must be managed to prevent harm.
- 1.19 Land is a particularly limited resource in this constrained city, so it must be used wisely, for the right uses and at high but appropriate densities. Development should be well-designed so it stands the test of time, which means it should be flexible enough to respond to changing needs. Re-using land will also be important. Sometimes this will mean sites are more difficult to develop, because of the value of existing uses, contamination and other constraints, and this means policies should manage this process to ensure safe developments.
- 1.20 Air quality is already poor in parts of Oxford. This can have significant negative impacts on health and consideration is given to the impacts of new developments and on the users of new developments.



- 1.21 It is vital that every effort is made to reduce the impact of development in Oxford on climate change, as well as ensuring we are resilient to climate change. Actions which seek to reduce and prevent greenhouse gas emissions (climate change mitigation) will be important for contributing to achieving the UK's legislated goals of being net zero by 2050, and the city's own target of net zero by 2040. The planning system is ideally placed to help deliver action on climate change and national policy is clear that this is vital to good planning.
- 1.22 Climate action is now central to everything that the City Council does and the Local Plan is one of the tools to help us achieve the City Council's vision to achieve net zero carbon Oxford. The City Council joined many other local authorities in declaring a climate emergency in September 2019 and the City Council has set ambitious zero carbon targets for its own estates and operations and the wider city¹.

A CITY OF CULTURE THAT RESPECTS ITS HERITAGE AND FOSTERS DESIGN OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY

- Well-designed buildings and public spaces that feel safe, that are sustainable, and that are attractive to be in and travel to
- Valued and important heritage is protected and enhanced.

- 1.23 Oxford has a distinctive sense of place. Its built heritage reflects the way it has evolved over time, as a significant seat of learning, and as a seat of government, local and at times national. Industry has been important, with the factory of Morris Motors for example. Healthcare and developments in treatments have also been important in Oxford. Parts of Oxford were originally small rural settlements, and this history is still clear in its built form and interrelationship with green spaces. This development is reflected in the built environment and recorded in the archaeology.
- 1.24 The landscape of Oxford and its relationship to the built environment of Oxford city is of great significance. It is recognised worldwide for its distinctive buildings, skyline of domes and 'dreaming spires'; interweaving rivers and meadows set within a rural framework, are contained by wooded ridges. The Oxford landscape consists,

however, of more than these 'iconic' features and the evolution of the urban form, cultural associations, relationship of the public and private realms, the density and massing of buildings, the architectural dialogue and vitality, and the way humans have interacted with it through time, all make an important contribution to the character of the city's built-up areas.

- 1.25 It is not only the historic environment that is significant in Oxford; there are many modern buildings of high quality and distinctive design that adds to Oxford's story. New development must respond to this context, adding to and enhancing it, being designed to suit what it is to be used for, to last, to fit its context and tell its own story. The Local Plan can encourage adaptations and allow thoughtful improvement/retrofitting of existing buildings so that they can better respond to climate change and net zero objectives.

A MORE EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE CITY WITH STRONG COMMUNITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

- Our neighbourhoods have all the facilities we need to support our daily lives and are within fifteen minutes' walk from our doors
- People are well-connected digitally and enabled to use new technologies to support their jobs, social lives and meet their everyday needs
- To have thriving local centres that support a variety of uses and foster activity throughout the day and night
- A city that continues in its role as a national and international destination for tourists and workers alike
- Valuing diversity whilst fostering greater inclusivity within our communities
- Supporting modal shift, to more sustainable/active forms of transport, including by limiting the need to travel.

¹ These targets include:

- Zero emissions council by 2030, or earlier
- Net zero city by 2040 - put forward by, and adopted by, Oxford City Council and 20 other major local organisations in the newly formed Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership. (Includes 5-yearly interim targets).



- 1.26 The Covid pandemic has shown us the importance of our local areas and the various services and spaces that are just on the doorstep. The benefit of having access to local amenities, like shops and pharmacies and open spaces in which to exercise and meet other people, without needing to rely upon a car, have become apparent for many. Yet this proximity is not always equal, and a lack of access to such spaces and facilities has unfortunately become even more apparent for others.
- 1.27 Concepts like the 15–20-minute neighbourhood, whereby communities have access to all of their daily needs within a 15–20-minute walk or cycle ride, have become increasingly popular approaches to the way we think about the planning of our local areas. Because of the accessibility and compactness of Oxford and that cycling is not practical for a lot of trips for many people, we are using a 15-minute walk distance as a measure. To have most of our shopping, jobs, health, socialising and recreational needs within a short walk or cycle would not only reduce the negative impacts of future pandemics, but also promote healthier and more active lifestyles as well as reduce our impacts upon the climate and the natural environment. Such functioning neighbourhoods offer the opportunity for communities to have a sense of belonging and more investment in their community.
- 1.28 This is very achievable in Oxford, but there are areas without such good access. In order to overcome this, we will consider whether there are opportunities to enhance connections to existing facilities or to enhance infrastructure provision within an area of deficit.
- 1.29 Oxford city centre has a very particular role as a primary focus for a wide range of shopping, employment, leisure, education and cultural activities, as well as being a major tourist destination, and it is vitally important to the overall success of Oxford. It draws visitors in from all over the city, the county, and much further afield. Managing visitors in a way that still enables a good visitor experience is important, so that the success of the centre is maintained, and facilities can thrive. Ensuring a city centre that is relevant to local residents is a key aspect of the

City Centre Action Plan and it is important that there is the right mix of activities and attractive and accessible public realm for people to meet and linger.

- 1.30 The pandemic has also necessitated an increased reliance on digital technology and the internet. Not only have we relied on video calling technologies to make connections with others, either for work or for socialising, but more of us have also turned to using the internet for shopping, for ordering food, and consulting with doctors or learning. The digital divide has become starkly highlighted, and those without adequate access to technology, or with poor connectivity, have struggled far more to adapt to the changing world than those who do have access. Digital connectivity has become just as important to the way we live as physical connectivity and needs to be secured through the Local Plan.

OVERARCHING THREADS

- 1.31 There are three particularly important threads which are wound throughout the options document, these relate to key issues and/or challenges facing the city which require a multi-faceted response which cannot be separated neatly into any one of the six themes discussed above. Some of the policy options sets presented in this document contribute to addressing these key issues directly, meanwhile, others have a more indirect but supporting role in addressing them.
- 1.32 The first thread is that of addressing climate change. In terms of reducing our emissions (climate change mitigation), there are policy options that set out our expectations for net zero development and supporting retrofitting of existing buildings, meanwhile policy options that address good urban design, parking, and bike storage should all enable people to live lower carbon lifestyles. Equally, a diverse range of policy areas can support adaptation and resilience to the expected impacts of climate change, from resilient design and construction (which includes concerns around overheating), to flooding, green infrastructure and health impact assessment.

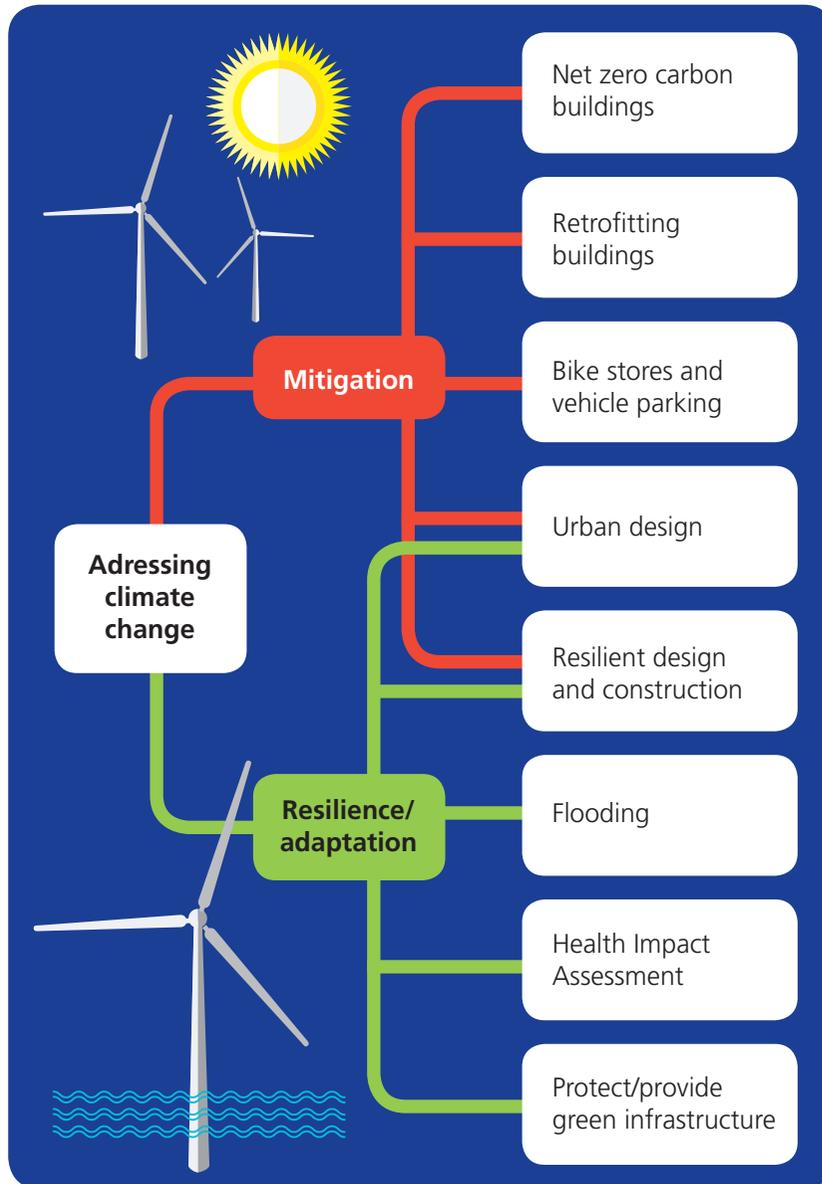


Figure 1-3: How the policy options sets seek to address the issue of climate change

1.33 The second overarching thread which the various policy areas are trying to address is that of reducing inequalities in the city. We have included policy sets which are aimed at supporting access to affordable housing, as well as a good mix of housing, in order to help address housing inequality. Equally, we have included policy sets aimed at addressing unequal access to employment and training through options for policies requiring employment and skills plans as well as provision of affordable workspaces. Policies that relate to protecting, enhancing and providing new green infrastructure should also help to improve the natural environment across the city, whilst health impact assessment is aimed at ensuring that health and wellbeing (including health inequality) is considered in new developments over certain thresholds.

1.34 Meanwhile, the third overarching thread which runs throughout the document is that of 15 minute city and ensuring that local residents have access to all their daily needs within a 15 minute walk of their home. There are a variety of sets of policy options which tie into this overarching thread, in particular, the strategic policy options including the overarching spatial strategy which sets out where types of development ought to be focused in the city. Equally, there are options which focus on more specific aspects of our neighbourhoods including town centre uses, community assets and green infrastructure (e.g. green spaces). The areas of focus and infrastructure needs chapter considers key infrastructure needs in different areas of the city which will be equally important to ensuring the sustainable growth of our neighbourhoods and supporting the development coming forward.

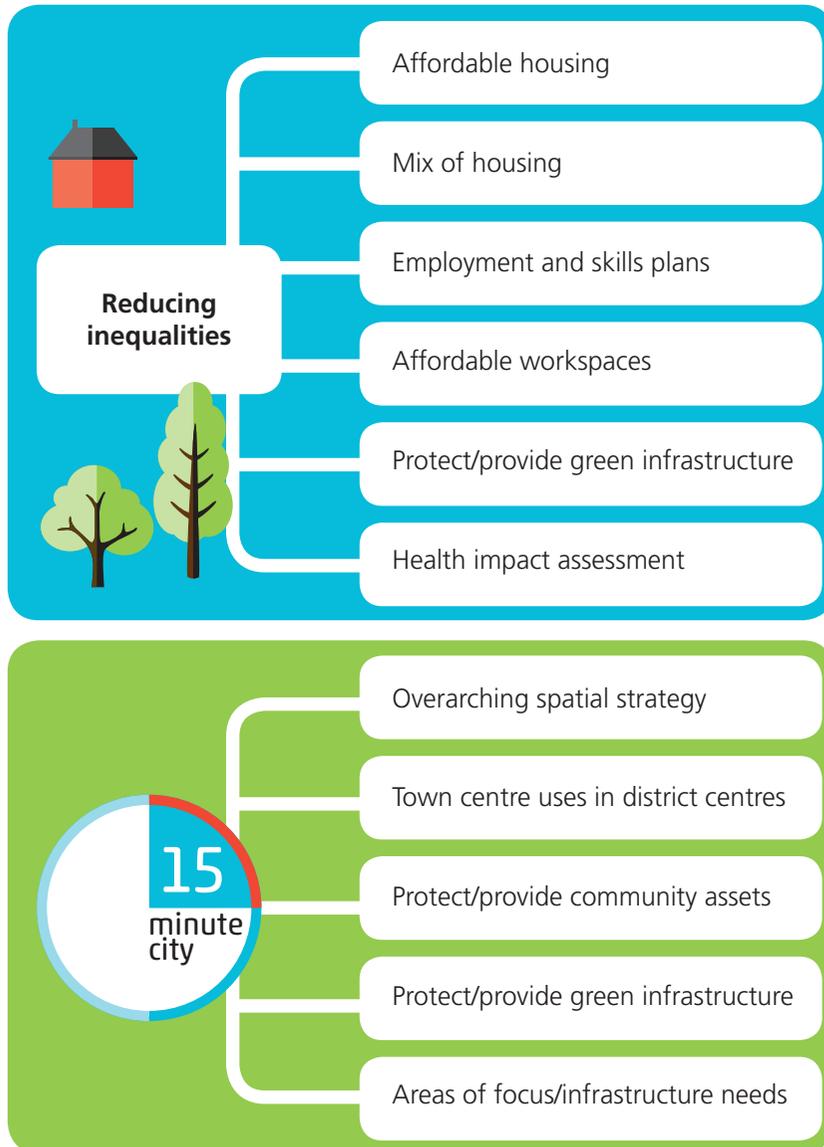


Figure 1-4: How the policy options sets seek to address the issues of reducing inequalities and supporting 15 minute city

STRATEGIC POLICY OPTIONS

STRATEGIC SPATIAL STRATEGY

Directing new development to the right locations

- 1.35 Fundamental to achieving the vision and objectives of the Plan will be directing the right types of development to the right locations. Considering the declaration of a climate emergency, the importance of promoting and enabling travel by walking, cycling and public transport rather than the private car is clear. We expect that strong local communities with facilities, services and green spaces in proximity will continue to be something people value highly. The idea of the 15-minute city is a good template for making strong local communities that enable residents to thrive. Having facilities and developments that attract people available locally and concentrated at public transport hubs, so that people can access them in joint trips, quickly and easily without the need to drive, helps to achieve the objective of reducing car use and promoting healthy lifestyles and strong communities.
- 1.36 Oxford is fortunate in having a very strong public transport network, with hubs at the district centres and the city centre. There is generally a good availability of employment, facilities and services, again focused on district centres and the city centre, as well as some other large key employment sites on the edge of the city such as the Science Park and MINI Plant Oxford.
- 1.37 Significant needs for housing and employment use have been identified in Oxford, and limited land means that these need to be prioritised. Encouraging new developments in the right locations is key to meeting these needs sustainably. Uses that attract people should be located at existing hubs that are already well served by public transport. This also helps to ensure that facilities people need continue to be available locally, in walking distance of homes. Any further scattering of uses that attract people would be detrimental. Prioritising housing outside of these areas will help get further to meeting the significant need for housing.





STRATEGIC POLICY OPTION SET S1: DIRECTING NEW DEVELOPMENT TO THE RIGHT LOCATIONS

Option for policy approach

Include an overarching spatial policy which sets out a strategy for where different types of new development can be located, for example employment, leisure, housing and student accommodation. Set out broad principles for locating development. Key principles are likely to be strengthening local hubs (city centre, district centre), achieving 15-minute cities (facilities clustered in centres, accessible by public transport and walking and cycling), meeting housing need, neighbourliness/amenity, supporting Oxford's national and international role in research and development. Detailed policies relating to each type of development may be included in the themed chapters of the plan.

+ Potential positive consequences of the approach

This enables the aims and objectives of the strategy to be captured and expressed in a policy that is clear and upfront about suitable locations for different types of development. Setting out these broad principles should very clearly show the considerations that are important in locating new developments of various types. This should be followed in allocating sites but will also then be clearly set out to enable assessment sites that come forward which have not been allocated, to see whether they meet the strategy.

- Potential negative/neutral consequences of the approach

This could be unnecessary because details will be in thematic policies. There will need to be a clear justification for allowing certain types of development only in certain locations. Also, this could restrict the potential for certain needs to be met if the locations are too restricting. Whilst it will be necessary to prioritise uses and ensure a balance, there cannot be unreasonable restrictions that prevent other aims of the Plan and NPPF from being met.

Related options, conclusion

Preferred Option

Defined district centres, city centre and local centres

- 1.38 Hubs need to be defined to provide the focus for development which attracts people who can benefit from their wider range of uses. The hubs aim is to maximise access by foot within 15 minutes. This can be ensured and supported with policies that maintain the vibrancy of the hubs and consider potential access improvements. It is important to consider the potential for new areas to act as hubs and to therefore be included in a policy protecting them. As well as the city centre, Summertown, Headington, Templars Square, Blackbird Leys and Cowley Road act as district centres, with excellent public transport links and a range of shops and other facilities and work places such as offices, libraries, community centres and parks. The map in Figure 1-5 shows the areas within 15 minute walking distance of one of these centres (measured from a centre point, as true walking distances).
- 1.39 Most of the city has very good accessibility to a centre. However, there are clearly a few areas outside of this 15 minute walk. In addition to district centres, there are local centres, which have a much smaller range of facilities, and which are often slightly less well connected by public transport. These may not be suitable for a full range of facilities such as hotels, student accommodation and so on, but they are important to protect as they can act as a community hub and ensure essentials are within a 15-minute walk of more people. A number of local centres are protected in the Oxford Local Plan 2036. This list has been reviewed and it is proposed that Underhill Circus is added to the list of local centres to be protected, see Figure 1-6. Boundaries have been reviewed since those in the Local Plan 2036 to ensure they include all the key facilities for people that are in the centres, including parks and schools. Nearly all the city has 15-minute walking access to one of these district centres or local centres.



Figure 1-5: The areas within 15 minute walking distance to the city centre or a district centre

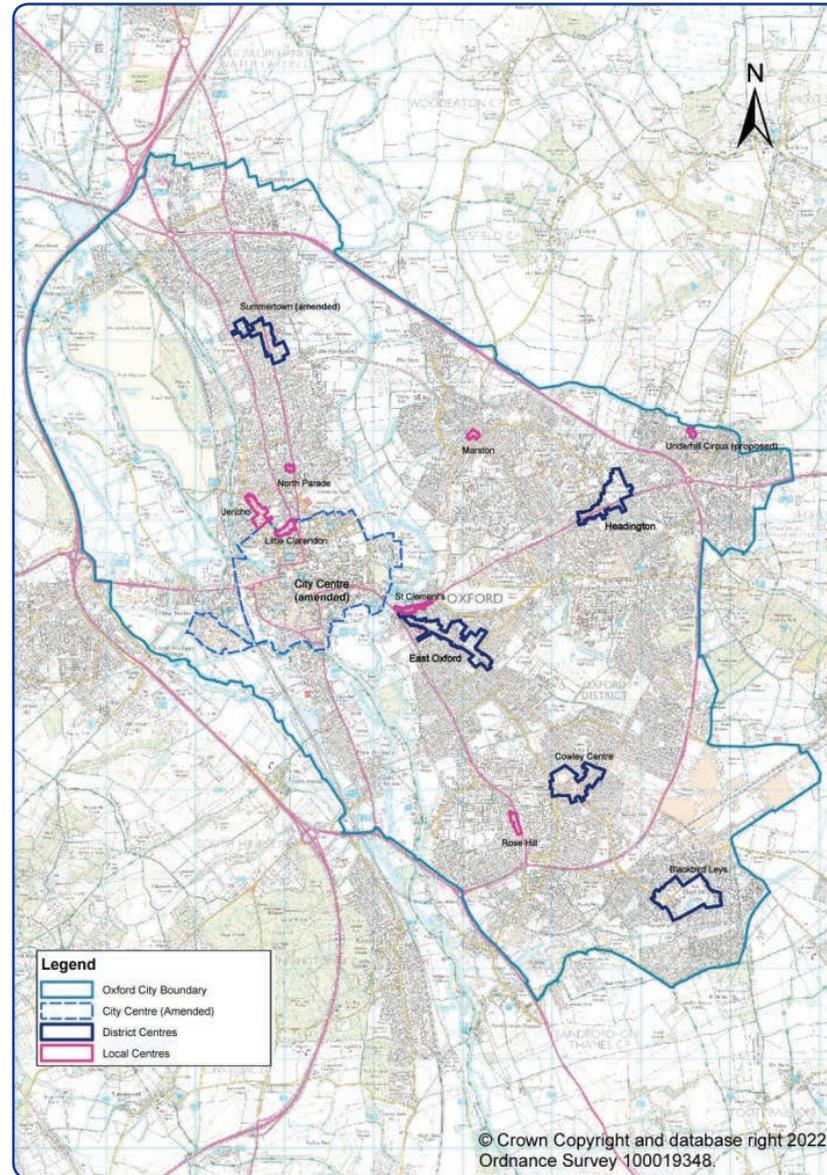


Figure 1-6: City centre, district centres and local centres



Approach to greenfield sites

- 1.40 All greenfield sites have been assessed as to their appropriateness for development to ensure those that need protection are protected but not to result in a blanket restriction on development if land is suitable for development. Such an approach ensures proper consideration of both greenfield and brownfield sites and highlights the importance of the value of green spaces and thus the need for their protection whilst demonstrating that every attempt has been made to identify all possible development sites whilst ensuring protection of sites that should be protected.

STRATEGIC POLICY OPTION SET S2: APPROACH TO GREENFIELD SITES

a Option for policy approach

Assess all greenfield sites and set out reasons for their protection. Direct development away from protected greenfield sites. However, do not have a blanket protection of all greenfield sites. Do include policies to maximise efficient use of land on brownfield sites. This will include a review of the Green Belt to assess whether there are any sites in the Green Belt that could come forward, that are not biodiversity sites or flood storage and would not have an unacceptable impact on the integrity of the remaining Green Belt.

+ Potential positive consequences of the approach
This approach allows careful consideration of all sites whilst recognising brownfield sites are the most appropriate for development. Setting out the importance of green spaces and reasons for protection strengthens those protections. This approach shows that we are attempting to meet our needs by identifying all possible development sites, whilst at the same time ensuring strong protection of sites that should be protected.

- Potential negative/neutral consequences of the approach
With this approach, it is likely that some greenfield sites will be developed, and even if they are assessed as being of lower quality and not worthy of protection, or possible to re-provide, they will have some function and value to local people.

Related options, conclusion

Preferred Option

b Option for policy approach

Allow development on greenfield sites only if no brownfield sites are available and needs are not being met on brownfield sites.

+ Potential positive consequences of the approach
This maximises use of brownfield land. All green spaces have some value.

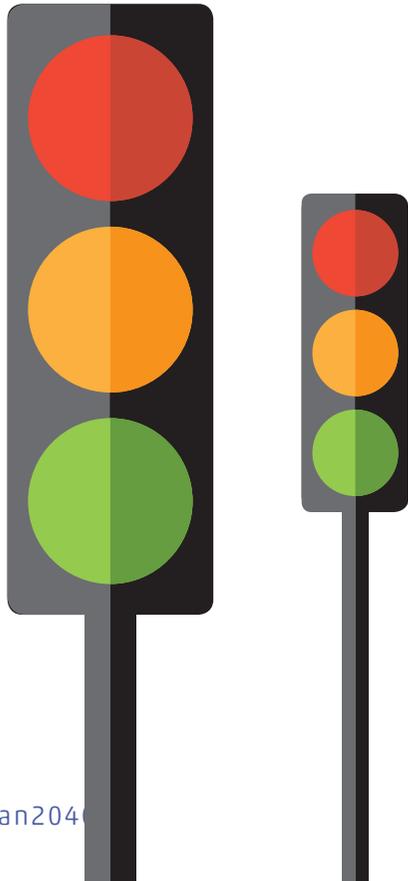
- Potential negative/neutral consequences of the approach
It is unlikely this approach could be justified in Oxford where so many needs are unmet because of the limited amount of land. If needs are not met in Oxford then they will need to be met in surrounding authority areas, where there is also limited brownfield land and where that is likely to result in greenfield site allocations. Not all green spaces will have a value that outweighs the benefits of development. Whilst the NPPF sets out the importance of protecting green spaces and focusing on brownfield land, it does not set out a brownfield first approach.

Related options, conclusion

Alternative Option

DELIVERY

- 1.41 It is important that the policies of the Plan are deliverable. The following strategic policies are proposed which would set out how infrastructure and contributions will be secured and how viability will be considered.



Infrastructure considerations in new development

STRATEGIC POLICY OPTION SET S3: INFRASTRUCTURE CONSIDERATIONS IN NEW DEVELOPMENT

Option for policy approach

Set out that infrastructure (physical, social and green) will be required to support new development, and that measures will be secured by means of planning obligations, conditions attached to a planning permission, funding through the City Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or other mechanisms.

- + Potential positive consequences of the approach**
This approach makes it clear that contributions to infrastructure will, in many cases, be needed and shows the mechanism by which they may be secured.
- Potential negative/neutral consequences of the approach**
These mechanisms will exist whether or not they are outlined in a policy.

Related options, conclusion

Preferred Option



Viability considerations

1.42 As the options are developed into more detailed policies it will be necessary to appraise the whole plan viability. This will help bottom out details of percentages, thresholds and so on that the options currently can only give examples of, often based on what is currently set out in policy. The current climate means that building materials and labour are hard to obtain and expensive, which will inform thresholds and levels of policy requirements. However, in addition sometimes sites do face exceptional costs that could not have been anticipated in a general whole-plan viability assessment. Setting out the basis for negotiations relating to viability as part of the Plan helps to be clear on priorities and expectations for evidence.

STRATEGIC POLICY OPTION SET S4: VIABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Option for policy approach

Include a policy that sets out that if an applicant can demonstrate particular circumstances that justify the need for it, a viability assessment may be carried out and submitted by the applicant as an open book exercise. Where affordable housing is included on the site and it can be demonstrated that the affordable housing requirement is unviable, a cascade approach should be worked through to lessen the burden of affordable housing, and this cascade will be set out. Other policy requirements that are likely to be costly and which could therefore be adjusted to help achieve viability are zero/low car parking and carbon efficiency, and these will also apply for developments that do not have affordable housing. Relaxing standards for first car parking and then carbon efficiency will be considered if justified through a viability assessment, required because of site-specific circumstances, and a cascade would be set out.



Potential positive consequences of the approach

The policies of the local plan will be drafted in the context of a wholeplan viability report and set at a level that will be viable. However, there is always potential for site-specific changes in circumstances resulting in development occasionally becoming unviable. In these circumstances, negotiations will need to take place so that development can go ahead in a way that ensures maximum compliance with planning policies. This approach enables priorities to be set out clearly from the outset, and can show what will not be negotiable.



Potential negative/neutral consequences of the approach

Including a viability policy could result in key aspirations of the plan to be lost in particular the City Council's ambition to reach Net Zero by 2040. In addition it could result in the reduction in the delivery of affordable homes across the city which is a key council priority. Reducing the opportunities for car free homes could result in more congestion across the city at a time when the County Council is seeking to introduce more measures to tackle traffic congestion and deliver more infrastructure to support walking and cycling across the city.

Related options, conclusion

Preferred Option



Presumption in favour of sustainable development

- 1.43 The Preferred Options document reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development. There is generally a positive approach to development where it has positive benefits in terms of sustainable development and is in compliance with the development plan or National Planning Policy Framework.

STRATEGIC POLICY OPTION SET S5: PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Option for policy approach

Include a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This would set out that planning applications that accord with Oxford's Local Plan (and, where relevant, with neighbourhood plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision, then permission will be granted if benefits outweigh risks and if in accordance with the NPPF.



Potential positive consequences of the approach

The intention of this policy is to make it clear that there will generally be a positive attitude to development where it has positive benefits, is sustainable and complies with the development plan (or NPPF if there are not up-to-date policies). Being explicit about this sets a generally positive tone for the Plan.



Potential negative/neutral consequences of the approach

This approach does not add anything beyond what is already set out in the NPPF and beyond what is expected.

Related options, conclusion

Preferred Option

