

Oxford City Council
Planning Policy Team
Town Hall
St Aldate's
Oxford
OX1 1BX

20th December 2023

Oxford Local Plan 2040 – Proposed Submission

Dear Planning Policy,

Introduction

Background- no need to transfer into database:

CBRE is instructed by Nuffield College to submit a response to Oxford City Council's (OCC) current Oxford Local Plan 2040 – Proposed Submission consultation.

The main focus of this response is how the planning framework bears on redevelopment of what the Local Plan 2040 refers to as the 'Nuffield Sites'. These include the 'Island site' (the area bounded by Park End Street, Hythe Bridge Street, the Wareham Stream and Frideswide Square), the Worcester Street car park site, and the South Frideswide Square parade and Becket Street (adjacent to the well-known Jam Factory). All three sites lie within the West End Area of Change as identified within Oxford City Council's Local Plan (2020) and the Island site and Worcester Street car park site are specifically allocated under Policy SP1.

As a major landowner in the West End, Nuffield College wishes to continue to work with OCC and other stakeholders to see the area's potential realised, and it welcomes the opportunity to engage with OCC on the emerging 2040 Local Plan for Oxford.

The College is in the process of bringing forward a sustainable mixed-use employment-led Masterplan for its sites. It wishes to contribute to enabling a transformation of the area, benefitting all who work, live, socialise, and visit, securing wider social and economic benefit for the city, helping to bring about creation of a new Innovation District, and improving this important gateway to the city and the region. These aspirations are all in line with the adopted West End and Osney Mead SPD (2022).

Following your review of our policy comments below, we would very much welcome the opportunity to work with you to address any queries you may have, to ensure the 2040 Local Plan is a positive document that is conducive to delivery of the ambitions set out for an important part of the city.

Oxford Local Plan 2040 – Proposed Submission

This section is 8 reps for the 8 policies as set out:

Chapter 3: A Fair and Prosperous City with a Globally Important Role in Learning, Knowledge and Innovation

Draft Policy E1: Employment Strategy

Following review of Policy E1 it is considered that it should be made clearer that upgrading and re-use of existing buildings, notwithstanding being a supported approach, is not the only route to securing successful delivery of new employment development. In some instances, where demonstrated as acceptable, a comprehensive development approach will be required to ensure the best and most efficient use of land / premises. Such schemes should be required to demonstrate how they positively promote, incorporate and respond to delivering sustainable development and climate change policies. Suitable wording should be inserted into the policy to reflect this.

Policy E3: Affordable Workspace Strategy and Affordable Workspace Provision on Commercial Sites

It is noted that Nuffield Sites are expected to deliver affordable workspace as part of their Masterplan and that details of the size, marketing, servicing and the management of these spaces should be set out in an affordable workspace strategy.

We note that the definition of affordable workspace states that such space is to be available for rent set at an agreed rate below the commercial rent. It is understood, based on the current drafting of the Local Plan that the percentage reduction below the commercial rent is not defined and is to be agreed with OCC as part of the planning process. We note that within the definition of affordable workspace a rent reduction reference of 'e.g. 50% of market rent' is included. It is considered inserting an example percentage reference in the definition is unhelpful as it sets an untested marker which could be misapplied, this should be removed. Our understanding is that any commercial rent reduction will need to be based on the ability of any scheme, i.e. in this case Nuffield Sites, to present a proposal that is capable of being financially deliverable and therefore be able to absorb such costs as part of any viable scheme. It should be recognised that such considerations will be fundamental in determining the affordable workspace strategy for Nuffield Sites, notwithstanding Nuffield College support for inclusion of such spaces.

Chapter 5: A City that utilises its resources with care, protects the air, water and soil and aims for net zero carbon

Policy R2: Embodied carbon in the construction process, part a) states, '*re-use of any existing buildings on a site has been robustly explored and demonstrated to be unfeasible before resorting to demolition*'. The reuse of existing buildings is supported as a starting point to review the feasibility of achieving a deliverable scheme.

It is considered that a supporting paragraph should be introduced to go alongside part a) of the policy to reference that any such assessment pertinent to addressing the requirements of part a) is proportionate to the assets being reviewed and in the context of other planning policies, such as those which promote transformational change and encourage redevelopment to deliver optimum outcomes. As part of this, emphasis should continue to be placed on adopting the highest standards to achieve sustainable development and climate change objectives as key priorities for such site proposals. Introduction of such supporting text ensures that development outcomes on brownfield sites with existing buildings are optimised where a retention approach renders development undeliverable.

Chapter 6: A City that Respects its Heritage & Fosters Design of the Highest Quality

Policy HD1: Conservation Areas. It is noted that the draft policy states that '*substantial harm to or loss of significance of a conservation area should be wholly exceptional*'. It goes on to state that '*where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or loss of the significance of a conservation area, planning permission or listed building consent will only be granted if all of the criteria in paragraph '201' can be demonstrated*'. It is considered that the word '*wholly*' should be removed from the policy drafting as this is not consistent with the wording of paragraph 201 of the NPPF and should be brought in line with this for consistency.

Policy HD9: Views and Building Heights states '*Planning permission will not be granted for development that will not retain the special significance of views of the historic skyline, both from within Oxford and from outside*'.

It should be made clear within the policy that a view is not itself a heritage asset and does not have significance in the same way a heritage asset does, as defined in the NPPF. It is considered that replacing 'special significance' in the first and sixth paragraphs of the policy with 'important characteristics' would appropriately respond to the guidance set out in GLVIA 3rd edition.

It is also considered that the word 'bulk' should be removed from the following sentence '*Development above this height must be limited in bulk and must be of the highest design quality*'. The meaning of the word bulk can be overly interpreted and it is considered unhelpful to include within the policy wording. Removal of the word 'bulk' does not

dilute the intention of the policy due to the supporting explanatory paragraphs and text which sit alongside Policy HD9.

Chapter 7: A Liveable City With Strong Communities and Opportunities for All

Policy C2: Maintaining Vibrant Centres under Active Frontages, it is noted that for City Centre Secondary Frontages 70% of frontage should be retained in Class E use. We note that no provisions/ guidance is provided around this in the NPPF. Following consideration, it is proposed that this policy should apply to locations which sit outside of site allocations where site specific circumstances determine an alternative, more flexible approach to enable delivery of active frontages but also wider plan objectives. It is considered that wording should be inserted into the policy to reflect that unless otherwise agreed with the local planning authority on the basis of site specific circumstances, the provisions set out under the active frontages can be considered flexibly. In such instances, any proposal would be required to demonstrate that active frontages have been maximized and incorporated in the most appropriate locations to promote the overall vitality and activity at ground floor level. With respect to Nuffield Sites, it is considered that adopting this approach will enable the delivery of successful active frontage through positive masterplanning and place making exercise.

Policy C3: Protection, alteration and provision of local community facilities. It is noted that draft Policy C3 seeks to protect small scale shops that are considered/ defined as community assets in the use class order. It is considered that an abstention of this policy should apply to sites proposed for redevelopment, where protection of such spaces would prohibit successful development coming forward comprehensively where identified as such in the Local Plan i.e. in this case Nuffield Sites. To enable delivery of defined site allocations within the plan, wider policies in the plan need to be set in context to enable all palpable planning benefits to be delivered.

Policy C5: Protection, alteration and provision of cultural venues and visitor attractions. In line with the above approach, it should be made evident in the policy that flexibility should apply with regard to the application of this policy against wider plan policies to enable development to be delivered to meet the ambitions of the Local Plan and in particular with reference to the Nuffield Sites. It is suggested that supporting text is incorporated which supports a flexible approach toward protection and retention of cultural venues where site allocations are supported for comprehensive mixed use redevelopment, as well as an additional bullet point included in the policy itself regarding the list of circumstances where the loss of cultural venues is supported. This additional bullet point could be incorporated / read as follows:

- *Or forms part of comprehensive, mixed use development scheme.*

Chapter 8: Development Sites, Areas of Focus and Infrastructure

This section focuses on the West End and Botley Road Area of Focus and the Nuffield Sites section of Chapter 8.

We note that the **West End and Botley Road Area of Focus** includes Oxford's West End and the Nuffield Sites. As is acknowledged in paragraph 8.337, Oxford's West End is a critically important part of the city and in particular a key arrival point. Much of the area is currently underperforming and underdeveloped. In particular, the area between the station and the historic core currently fails to act as a cohesive, distinctive place, a place people want to spend time, and a place that positively connects with the wider city. Paragraph 8.337 recognises the '*potential for the West End of Oxford to be transformed into a vibrant city quarter through the successful development of a number of key sites in the area*'.

A key objective for the Nuffield sites is for the Masterplan to be a commercial led proposition which has the ability to revitalize the route from the station to the City Centre and to make a significant contribution to the creation of a wider Innovation District in the West End. It is noted from paragraph 8.339 that the West End and Botley Road Area of Focus '*is an appropriate location for employment-related development opportunities which seek to build on Oxford's key economic strengths that link research, education and social enterprise in areas such as life sciences and energy. Given*

the high demand for commercial research and development space and specific developer interest, it is likely that this sector will be the main driver of development across the area'. It goes on to state that 'there are also opportunities to accommodate a range of other sectors and uses, such as the creative and digital industries, as well as affordable workspaces for start-ups, co-working spaces, or even community uses where feasible across the wider area that this Area of Focus covers'. This is supported, as is reflected in comments specific to Policy SPCW6 below.

We also note that the West End and Osney Mead Supplementary Planning Document seeks the 'transformation and redevelopment of the West End and Osney Mead area will see significant change in one of the busiest parts of Oxford. The City Council and its partners wish to see the area transformed from an underperforming, underdeveloped edge of city centre location, to a liveable quarter of the city where innovation as part of Oxford's knowledge economy is integrated with a strong community and a vibrant mixed use quarter'.

The Nuffield Sites are fundamental in supporting the delivery of an Innovation District in this key part of the city and assisting to realise the potential of Oxford's West End by supporting Oxford's knowledge economy, provision of commercial space and providing opportunities for a variety of occupiers from SMEs and startup businesses, research and development/ life sciences occupants to head quarter office spaces.

With respect to paragraph 8.374 it is noted that the infrastructure interventions for the Nuffield Sites include improvements to the location of bus stops and pedestrian crossings. The location of bus stops, pedestrian crossings or any associated highway interventions, are outside of Nuffield College control and rest with Oxfordshire County Highways department, albeit support is given to aspirations for such improvements. Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the wording should be updated to reflect that infrastructure interventions in the control of Oxfordshire County Highways department cannot be delivered by Nuffield College.

Following review of paragraph 8.378, it is considered that the wording should be rephrased. As presently drafted, the paragraph lacks emphasis and in particular should ensure that it is clear that the masterplan overall secures the minimum number of dwellings. The text should be revised accordingly and in particular the final sentence.

Policy SPCW6: Nuffield Sites. The proposed mix of uses across the Nuffield Sites is supported along with active frontages at ground floor level. We urge officers to review comments regarding active frontages set out above, to enable the Nuffield Sites to come forward in a positive planning policy framework. Moreover, it is considered that due to the existing plethora of uses, the Nuffield Sites policy should not require justification for the loss of such uses but serve to ensure that any mixed use development proposed delivers a successful blend of uses and quantum to achieve positive place making for this critically important arrival space within the City.

It is proposed that the reference to the minimum number of dwellings should be extended to state 'The minimum number of dwellings to be delivered is 59 as part of a masterplan (or if delivered as student rooms, the number of rooms that equate to this when the relevant ratio is applied)' for clarity and to align with comments noted above with respect to paragraph 8.374.

The following text should be removed from the last sentence of the first paragraph of the policy under 'open space, nature and flood risk' as we note this is a duplication of subsequent wording in the policy. Wording to delete: *The Castle Mill Stream runs through the site and opportunities should be taken to improve access to it.* Wording to be retained which follows on from the above sentence: *Opportunities should be investigated to demonstrate how access can be improved to Castle Mill Stream from the Worcester Street Car Park site.*

We note that the policy includes reference to the Hinksey Hill view under the Urban Design and Heritage section of the policy. We do not consider this view to be the relevant view for consideration pertinent to Nuffield Sites and request that revised text is incorporated which acknowledges the need for views to be assessed but which allows a review process to take place to enable relevant views to be agreed with OCC for assessment.

Summary

Given the importance of the new Local Plan in establishing the planning policy framework and policy platform for the Nuffield West End Masterplan, it is important to ensure the 2040 Local Plan is sufficiently defined on site specific aspects whilst providing the necessary flexibility when applying wider Local Plan planning policies to such site proposals, to ensure they are able to successfully deliver employment growth in the form of a new Innovation District at the Nuffield Sites and all of the other important benefits mentioned above.

As noted, we would very much welcome the opportunity to work with you to address any queries you may have, to ensure the 2040 Local Plan is a positive policy document which will help deliver the ambitions set out for Nuffield College's sites in Oxford's West End.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Tero
Executive Director